

Her tunic says it all — she's the Peace Pilgrim

By JUDITH RATLIFF
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The name says it all.

Peace Pilgrim is a pilgrim for peace. She walks and hitchhikes around the United States praying for and talking about peace.

"I gave up my self-centered life," Pilgrim said. "I lead a God-centered life now. I left that empty life of money and things. I live to give, not to get."

Peace Pilgrim is the silver-haired, radiant old woman's legal name now. She won't tell anyone what her given name was. She says she has no idea how old she is anymore.

She carries everything she owns (a folding toothbrush, a ball point pen, a comb and one outfit of clothes) with her. They are tucked in wraparound pockets at the bottom of her blue tunic. The garment announces her name on its front. It reads "25,000 Miles on Foot for Peace" on the back.

Pilgrim walks until she is given shelter. She fasts until she is given food.

She started her journey on Jan. 1, 1953, by walking along for about 15 minutes in front of the Tournament of Roses Parade. Her friends decided she was "off the beam."

In the past 27 years, Pilgrim has made new friends around the country. They produce a regular flow of letters offering her accommodations on her speaking tours. Her mail is collected by a farm woman in Cologne, N.J., and forwarded in care of general delivery to the various towns where Pilgrim lights for a time.

She travels with the seasons. She plans her routes where there are accommodations waiting some of the time. Often she says she just sleeps by the side of the road.

Pilgrim is concerned with peace between individuals, peace between nations, peace with the environment and above all, inner peace. The topic of her talks (and she will give quite a number in Tucson) is inevitably "Living God's Laws."

"The chaos in the world is all caused because we are living out of harmony with God's law," Pilgrim said. "In this orderly universe there is a solution to every problem. God gives us these problems to grow on. We must find solutions.

"There is a magic formula for resolving conflicts. It is this: Have as your objective the resolving of the conflict — not the gaining of advantage. There is a magic formula for avoiding conflicts. It is this: Be concerned that you do not offend — not that you are not offended."

Pilgrim's peace program has only three actual proposals to it; the rest of the plan resolves around simply bringing peace into the lives of individuals. She believes

this is the best way to set larger-scale peacemaking in motion.

The proposals are these:

- To establish a world language — which language this should be would be left up to language experts who might want to invent a new universal language.

- To establish a cabinet-level department of peace that would adhere to spiritual laws and encourage other countries around the world to do the same.

- To praise good things regularly to strengthen them, as opposed to simply complaining when things are bad.

Pilgrim knows that she appears absurd to many people, but she doesn't care. She lives for the people with whom she can communicate.

People at first got to know Peace only when they approached her, curious about her attire, but now most of them first meet her when she is speaking. These engagements are usually worked out with the help of acquaintances in whatever town Pilgrim is visiting.

Her record is seven talks in one day. She will talk at churches, to any kind of club or group. She has appeared at prisons. It was in Tucson years ago that Pilgrim addressed her first college class. The request came from a professor of psychology.

Preparation for the pilgrimage actually began years before Pilgrim headed over to the Rose Parade. Forty-two years ago she experienced a significant change in her life, she said. She began a spiritual growing at that time. She began to develop inner peace.

"I just developed an inner motivation to begin working with people," Pilgrim said. "I wasn't part of any group. I started working with senior citizens, and then sometimes younger people whose parents I'd helped would confide in me. I spent five years giving away the things I owned. I spent 10 years living a need-level existence before I left on my pilgrimage."

The pilgrimage idea came to Pilgrim like a bolt from the blue. She was out on her daily morning walk — her time alone to pray — when the idea just struck her mind, she said. The idea struck complete with a visual road map of the first route she should take across the country.

Pilgrim is on her seventh transcontinental journey. The crossings take longer and longer because their main emphasis has shifted from walking to speaking.

She hasn't counted the miles she's walked since 1964, so her toga's 25,000-mile notation is woefully out of date. Counting miles and changing the numbers on the garment simply became less important to her than communicating.

Walking was at first a prayer discipline, Pilgrim explains. It kept her focused on her prayer for peace. She says she now prays without ceasing and is able to do other things at the same time.