

# PILGRIM: Woman's Journey a Legacy for Peace

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Raised a peace-respecting Quaker, Rush was drafted as a conscientious objector during World War II. It was while he was serving in a forestry camp in Glendora that he met Ann Trueblood at a folk dance. Trueblood's ancestors were among the early Quaker families who settled Whittier.

The two married and had a child. (Ann had two children from a previous marriage.) They moved to the backwoods of British Columbia, on their own "walk" to simplify and purify their lives, Ann Rush explained. They wanted to raise their brood away from the influences of television, materialism and militarism.

In 1957, the Peace Pilgrim passed through British Columbia (in addition to the United States, she walked in 10 Canadian provinces as well as parts of Mexico). She spoke to the Rushes and four other Quaker families who had gathered on the shore of Kootenai Lake.

John Rush recalls: "My attitude then was, 'Why are you traveling around the country like this? You're not saying anything new.'"

The Peace Pilgrim freely acknowledged that hers was not a new message. John Rush eventually came to understand Norman's point that what the world needs is not new ideas, but more diligent practice of the ancient truths taught by all spiritual leaders.

"Today, John Rush says that Norman affected him more than anyone he's ever met. She's the one person he's known whom he felt had achieved what many aspire to: inner peace. "But she didn't just leave it at that (personal contentment)," he said. "It inspired her to do something for world peace. She combined the two (inner and world peace) in a beautiful way."

## Gaining Momentum

Under the Rushes' stewardship, Norman's pilgrimage continues to gain momentum four years after her death. In response to requests, the couple mailed 50,000 copies of her booklet "Steps to Inner Peace" in 1984-'85 alone.

They continue to receive letters from people all over the world who were moved by a chance meeting with the white-haired, blue-eyed vagabond at a truck stop or freeway on-ramp. The letters liken Norman to Gandhi, Martin Luther King, St. Francis of Assisi. . . .

A note from Texas said: "She literally brought heaven onto Earth. She brought the divine qualities into her life here. She

Norman gave away her philosophy, and will send a copy without charge to anyone who requests one. It sells in bookstores for \$6. The address is Peace Pilgrim Center, 43480 Cedar Ave., Hemet, Calif. 92344.

Mildred Norman never revealed her given name, or the facts of her pre-pilgrim life, to anyone, even the reporters who sometimes tried to bully the details out of her. A Newton, Kan., editorial writer who encountered Norman early on her sojourn was convinced the pilgrim's mission was sincere only when she managed to fend off "all the wiles of a dubious newshound barking on the trail of truth."

Although she probably spent more time with the Rushes than any other family during her pilgrimage, even they had to be satisfied with Norman's insistence that it was her message, not her past, that was important. "For all we knew, she came from outer space," John Rush said.

It was only after they received news of Norman's death in 1981, that Ann Rush found out that the New Jersey address where Nor-

*'She had her own  
distinct way of working  
toward peace. . . .'*

man had her mail forwarded belonged to the Peace Pilgrim's sister, 70-year-old Helene Young.

Young told the Rushes that even as a child Norman had a bearing that made other children listen to what she had to say.

She was captain of the debating team at her Egg Harbor, N. J., high school. She fancied makeup and expensive clothes as a young woman, making special trips to Atlantic City to have her shoes dyed to match her hat and gloves. She was a popular dance partner at the local Grange hall dances, Young remembered.

In contrast to her later Spartan vegetarian diet, the young Mildred Norman ate an ice cream sundae everyday for lunch, and she loved meat. Although she would later preach tolerance ("Be concerned that you do not offend, not that you are not offended"), as a youth she disapproved of some of her sister's friends, particularly those of other races and classes.

life," as the Peace Pilgrim would later write. It was not a traditional religious impulse that led her to the woods. Norman had had no religious training as a child, and did not read the Bible until after she had begun to speak in churches as the Peace Pilgrim.

During her all-night vigil, Norman had a revelation that she was to devote her life to service. It would be another 15 years, during which time she worked with emotionally disturbed adults and volunteered with peace groups, before she discovered the precise nature of that calling.

## Appalachian Trail

Standing on a New England mountaintop just after hiking the length of the Appalachian Trail, she envisioned herself on "a pilgrim's journey undertaken in the traditional manner: on foot and in faith."

The war in Korea was on and the McCarthy Era was at its peak on Jan. 1, 1953, when Norman set out. She would later say that any time there is apathy in the midst of great danger, a pilgrim will come forth.

In the early days the Peace Pilgrim was unknown. Yet she never missed more than three or four meals before someone offered to feed her. Shelter also was given most nights. When it was not, she slept in haystacks, drainage pipes, cemeteries, wheat fields, under bridges, by roadsides and once on the seat of a fire engine in Tombstone, Ariz.

Averaging 25 miles a day, and sometimes covering as many as 50 miles, she ranged north in summer and south in winter to avoid the worst weather. Some nights she stuffed newspapers under her thin tunic to keep warm. When it was really cold, she'd walk all night.

There were what other people would call bad experiences along the way; Norman called them tests. She was arrested twice for vagrancy, but found behind bars a receptive audience for her philosophy and songs. Once a disturbed teen-age boy, set off by a thunderstorm, began to beat her, but Norman said she was able to contact "the spark of good" in him, and avoided serious harm.

Norman never claimed to represent anyone but herself when she spoke to college classes, church and civic groups and television and newspaper reporters. There was no Peace Pilgrim organization or cult.

"Some have asked if I accept 'disciples,'" she once wrote. "Of course, I do not. It is not healthy to

it was more fashionable to peace; and people were becoming aware of the need for psychological or spiritual harmony, as we

In the later years of the age, Norman began to receive invitations to speak as many a year in advance. She spent nights in haystacks, and resorted to accepting autographs to keep all her engagements.

Her seeming ability to work without rest was a constant attraction to hostesses who wanted to co-opt the aging pilgrim. On one of her trips through town when the Rushes were living in Whittier, A