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The Living Legacy of Peace Pilgrim ***Marking 50 Years***

by Mary Newswanger

Peace Pilgrim embarked upon her remarkable twenty-eight year pilgrimage for world peace fifty years ago, in 1953. She set forth, giving her life as an active prayer for peace and an example that peace is possible. The year prior to that, in preparation for her undertaking, she became the first woman to walk the entire length of the Appalachian Trail. She wrote, *"I began my pilgrimage on the first of January 1953. It is a spiritual birthday of sorts. It was a period in which I was merged with the whole. No longer was I a seed buried under the ground, but I felt like a flower reaching out effortlessly toward the sun."* (1)

Peace Pilgrim had also been a member of the Wider Quaker Fellowship. Peace's brother-in-law, Eugene Young, was something of an archivist, and over the years he carefully compiled a scrapbook of her pilgrimage. Her WQF membership card is there; the name "Mrs. Ryder" neatly typed and signed by Rufus M. Jones, the founder of the [American Friends Service Committee](#) and the Wider Quaker Fellowship. A copy of the scrapbook now resides in the Swarthmore College Library Peace Memorial Collection, which houses all of the Peace Pilgrim materials.

In a letter to her family January 22, 1953 she wrote: *"When I last wrote you I was Mildred Ryder. Now I am Peace Pilgrim. As far as my affiliation with peace organizations is concerned, I have now no affiliation whatsoever, but I have worked with the American Friends Service Committee, the [Fellowship of Reconciliation](#), and the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#)."*

Out of the tumult of years the American Friends Service Committee was created, 'To try what Love will do.' Out of the tumult of years Peace Pilgrim stepped forth. During the first eleven years, Peace walked 25,000 miles - the equatorial circumference of the Earth. After that she stopped counting miles, but never stopped walking and talking until her death in 1981, when she was killed in an automobile accident while being driven to a speaking engagement. In all those years, her message never varied; her commitment never wavered.

Fifteen years ago (1988), *Steps Toward Inner Peace* was first sent to WQF Fellows (then "members"). Its message is clear and timely, then as now. I was secretary of the Wider Quaker Fellowship at that time, and I received notes of appreciation from many people. I remember corresponding briefly with Serguei Badaev, a young man from Russia, who was especially interested to learn more about her life. Years later I was delighted to learn that, shortly after receiving *Steps*, Serguei had started a little Peace Pilgrim Center in Moscow. He placed a small ad in the newspaper, freely offering Peace Pilgrim materials in Russian, both the book *Peace Pilgrim* and the *Steps* booklet, to anyone who would like to receive them. The ad received a response from 21,500 individuals! With assistance from Friends of Peace Pilgrim in California all these requests were filled.



Serguei Badaev and family

In 1991, I moved to Costa Rica, a country that abolished its army in 1948, over fifty years ago. Costa Rica has actively worked for peace in both politics and education. In 1987, former president [Oscar Arias](#) received the Nobel Peace Prize for his Central American peace plan that helped to end war in the region. The United Nations University for Peace (UPAZ) is also located in Costa Rica. Around the world, the year 2000 saw a flurry of activity promoting peace, with Costa Rica deeply interested and involved. Costa launched an energetic program called *Costa Rica 2000: A new millennium of peace* - designed to send a strong message to the global community that the next millennium should be a time of peace.

[Robert Muller](#), former assistant secretary general of the United Nations and chancellor emeritus of the UN University for Peace, suggested the idea of recognizing Peace Pilgrim's life work for peace by having a life-size bronze statue of her walking placed on the grounds of the University. Instead of honoring military generals, Muller has tried to honor and lift up the work of those who have given their lives for peace.

Fernando Calvo, a well-known Costa Rican sculptor, spent the year creating a beautiful statue of Peace Pilgrim, and preparations were made for the dedication at UPAZ. An actress from the United States, Jemila Ericson, was invited to Costa Rica to play the part of Peace Pilgrim. Years before, Jemila had portrayed Peace Pilgrim for school children in the States as part of a Living History project, and she would do the same in Costa Rica.

The dedication was to be a vibrant event, full of joy and life - not a dusty footnote in history. As Peace Pilgrim would have done had she been alive, Jemila traveled around Costa Rica with Mayte Picco-Kline, who translated the *Peace Pilgrim* book into Spanish. They spoke jointly and

separately to hundreds of school children and to various groups, as well as all the national media. So it was that in the year 2000, Peace Pilgrim was introduced to Costa Rica. With Peace Pilgrim's old shoes and worn tunic - complete with the little comb and folding toothbrush that had been in its pockets at the time of her death - Jemila arrived in Costa Rica a week before the statue's dedication and embarked on a whirlwind of activity. Peace Pilgrim would have smiled. She would have seen the humor and fun in this project.



The Statue and Jemila

Of her experience in Costa Rica, Jemila wrote, *"Of all the incredible things that happened, my favorite was when I returned to my hotel after a full day of performing; at the exact moment I walked up, Helene Young was just arriving from the airport. When she saw me for the first time, her face lit up and she cried out, "Hello, sister! How are you?" Any concern I had about how she might feel seeing me dressed as her sister simply evaporated. I grinned and crowed, "Great!" She threw her arms around me and said, "That's just what my sister would have said."* Jemila entitled her article, [The Power of YES - Working for Peace](#).

Among those who traveled to Costa Rica for the statue's dedication were John and Ann Rush, founders of Friends of Peace Pilgrim, who were recognized for their work of nearly twenty years spreading Peace's message throughout the world; and Bruce Nichols, who created the Peace Pilgrim website, www.peacepilgrim.org, which contains the entire *Peace Pilgrim* book in English and Spanish, as well as many other resources available electronically. The *Steps* booklet has been translated into over twenty-seven languages and the book into eleven.

The keynote address at the dedication was given by Rodrigo Carazo, former president of Costa Rica and founder of the [UN University for Peace](#), who said in part:

"When we make a thought a reality, we realize that all human beings, in one way or another, converge in God. As we prepare to unveil an extraordinary statue of a great peacemaker, we know that utopia is the goal of the visionary. We understand clearly that whoever desires to be a leader must dream. Yes, Peace Pilgrim is here. And she, who never asked for anything, who gave everything, walked throughout the countries, speaking of a new way of peace - saying that in order to overcome evil we need to do good; in order to transform falsehood we need to elevate the truth. She told us that love is the instrument that can contradict hatred. Welcome, Peace Pilgrim. Bienvenida, Peregrina de Paz."



Peace Pilgrim's sister Helene Young, Rodrigo Carazo and children.

Like the legendary American [John Chapman](#), known as "Johnny Appleseed" for freely giving apple seeds to pioneers moving West, Peace Pilgrim has scattered the seeds of peace well. [Elise Boulding](#) is a noted Quaker researcher and author, and has served on the board of UPAZ. In her book, *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*, she notes: "The great humane nurturer-leaders of the past have always come walking. They do not sit either on thrones or horseback but engage in dialogue at eye level. [...And] they have always sought solitude and privacy in alternation with their work in the public arena."

Robert Muller collected soil from Pennsylvania, the U.S. state of 'Brotherly Love', and sand from Santa Barbara, California, from the shores of the Pacific Ocean, the 'Peaceful Ocean', to sprinkle at the feet of Peace Pilgrim's statue on the day of the statue's dedication. He encouraged others to join him, bringing soil from around the world, as prayers for world peace.

A Quaker couple from Canada wrote afterwards, "We are just beginning to reflect earnestly on the Peace Pilgrim and Costa Rican adventure that we undertook. We call it a spiritual adventure, and it was every bit fulfilling in that inner way. The Peace Pilgrim weekend, with the seminar and dedication of the statue, stood alone as a treasured opportunity to be present with all these wonderful travelers and workers for Peace."



Peace's sister Helene at the dedication.

PEACE PILGRIM
1908 - 1981 Let us all be Peace Pilgrims...

Some of Peace Pilgrim's own words:

"Do you know God? Do you know there is a power greater than ourselves which manifests itself within us as well as everywhere else in the universe? This I call God. Do you know what it is to know God, to have God's constant guidance, a constant awareness of God's presence? To know God is to reflect love toward all people and all creations. To know God is to feel peace within - a calmness, a serenity, an unshakeableness which enables you to face any situation. To know God is to be so filled with joy that it bubbles over and goes forth to bless the world." (2)

"No one walks so safely as one who walks humbly and harmlessly with great love and great faith. For such a person gets through to the good in others (and there is good in everyone), and therefore cannot be harmed. This works between individuals, it works between groups and it would work between nations if nations had the courage to try it." (3)

(1) Peace Pilgrim. *Peace Pilgrim: Her Life and Work in Her Own Words*. 1991, Ocean Tree Books, Santa Fe, New Mexico. Page 27.

(2) *Peace Pilgrim*, page 87.

(3) *Ibid*, page 31.