

Peace Pilgrim's Job: Disrupt Apathy

In 24 years of travel, the Peace Pilgrim has developed a job description for herself that is as old as ancient Greece.

"A pilgrim's job is to rouse people from apathy and make them think," says the self-styled pilgrim who has been walking around North America since 1953.

Her mission has become so much a part of her identity that she has abandoned her own name and refers to herself only as the "Peace Pilgrim."

This week she visited the Grand Rapids area for the third time since her odyssey began.

In the late 1930s, she began to discard her personal possessions, her money and finally, her name. That was the beginning of her spiritual growth. "It took me 15 years to mature" says the Pilgrim, whose animated gestures belie her advanced years.

She carries few possessions as she travels with the seasons. "I just wait and see what happens," she says of her travel itinerary. "I don't take money. I'm given a bed by total strangers three-quarters of the time and I seldom skip more than three or four meals in a row."

Her style is reminiscent of an earlier pilgrim, the Greek philosopher Diogenes.

For much of the fourth century, B.C. Diogenes opted for the wandering life, carrying with him as little as possible to show his peers how few were man's needs. He dressed simply in a tunic, cloak and carried a walking stick.

Diogenes described himself as a "citizen of the world." His school of philosophical thought maintained that happiness could be achieved only through virtue.

In spite of those lofty ideals, Diogenes maintained a cynical streak. He is said to have combed Athens with a lamp in broad daylight futilely searching for a "good" man.

