

The 'Peace Pilgrim'

She's still walking for peace -- 25 years later

By GORDON RADDUE

EL CERRITO — When Peace Pilgrim began walking for world peace 25 years ago she was already a silver-haired senior citizen.

Today, after covering more than 25,000 miles by foot in 50 states, 10 Canadian provinces and parts of Mexico, she radiates good health, inner-directed joy and the wisdom gleaned from a life stripped of all but the bare essentials.

The Women's Fellowship of Mira Vista United Church of Christ was favored recently with a visit from this remarkable human being. The group couldn't have been more inspired, stimulated and entertained if the Boston Symphony and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir had shown up in her stead.

One might expect an elderly woman clad in navy blue slacks and shirt with a matching tunic bearing the words "Peace Pilgrim" on the front and "25,000 Miles on Foot for Peace" on the back to be no more than a quaint, well-meaning eccentric. Nothing could be further from the truth. Plenty of wit but no nonsense comes from this woman who declines to give her true name, birth place or date simply because she feels such information "puts too much emphasis on the person."

After sharing lunch with her hosts, she mounted the speaker's platform with the briskness of a youthful jogger. With one foot planted firmly on the floor and the other bent forward, as if she were about to break into a trot, she spoke for more than an hour, her voice, rich and unflinching, mass-producing profundities in the simplest and yet most meaningful of terms.

She spoke of the leaving of her self-centered life at the age of 16 that marked the beginning of her spiritual growth. She spoke of the importance of the Golden Rule and its offshoots. "If you want to make friends, you have to be friendly . . . If you want to make peace, you must be peaceful . . . Be concerned that you do not offend — not that you are not offended."

How did she get started on her singular career?

"It began on Jan. 1, 1953, in Los Angeles," she said. "That was the time of Sen. (Joseph) McCarthy. The country was full of fear and apathy. People accepted war as a necessary fact of life. There was little interest in the inner search."

Both an optimist and a realist, she senses considera-

ble improvement in the world over the past 25 years, but said the struggle for world peace is far from won. "Now there is an almost universal interest in the inner search," she said. "Nations have found a way to be on speaking terms and, in their clumsy way, they are even getting things to quiet down, as in the Middle East."

"World peace is more than the temporary absence of war. It won't be achieved until the causes of war are eliminated, such as hunger and the arms race," she added.

She advocates the establishment of a "peace department" in the United States government to thoroughly explore the resources available for the achievement of world peace.

Her primary thrust, she said, is "to rouse people from their apathy and make them think. I've never asked for food or shelter. It has always been given. There's a spark of good in everyone, however deeply it is buried. You're in

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a much better position to talk to people when they approach you than when you approach them."

Although a totally independent thinker whose peace pilgrimage was inspired purely from the inner search, she has great admiration for kindred spirits like Mohandas K. Gandhi, assassinated leader of the successful struggle for the independence of India. "He was able to win independence for his land without breaking diplomatic relations with England!" she said.

At times she sounds like a disciple of Dr. Viktor Frankl, founder of the principle of logotherapy, which insists on the unconditional meaningfulness of life. "Every moment presents a new and wonderful opportunity for service," she said. "Life is a series of choices. I have chosen freedom from the enslaving things, like negative thinking. Every moment of life you are creating through thought."

Worry, she said, is "useless mulling over things we can't change and a total waste of time and energy."

"No problem is too great to solve with God's help," she added. "I consider a problem a challenge. You learn and grow by helping to solve the collective problems."