

Death of the Peace Pilgrim Saddens Her Friends Here

Peace Pilgrim, an elderly woman who touched the lives of thousands of Chattanooga area residents and millions of others across the nation, has been killed in a car accident in the Midwest, her friends here have learned. She was to have spoken at several Chattanooga church and peace groups in the fall. It would have been her third visit to this area since she began her crusade for individual and world peace in 1953.

This year a committee of Chattanoogaans nominated Peace Pilgrim, who walked from town to town in a 28-year-long promotion of love, for the Nobel Peace Prize. She was on her seventh pilgrimage, a six-year trek that began in 1978 and was to have ended in 1983 after she had visited 48 states, when the fatal accident occurred. She was riding in a car which wrecked.

Mary Brown Hodge, widow of Methodist Bishop Bachman Hodge of Birmingham, was among the Chattanoogaans who knew and loved Peace Pilgrim.

"She profoundly influenced my life," Mrs. Hodge, now a resident of the St. Barnabas Apartments, said. "I met her in Birmingham in 1956, when my husband was bishop, and I kept up with her her activities all those years. She was a fascinating woman. I wrote to her, and she wrote to me. My husband died in 1961, and I moved back to Chattanooga in 1970. Peace Pilgrim came here to speak in 1971 and 1976."

Mrs. Hodge was a critic of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war, and she frequently speaks out against national policies which threaten to cause war. She is a member of the Chattanooga Center for Peace.

Mrs. Hodge was in charge of Peace Pilgrim's speaking schedule in Chattanooga.

"Peace Pilgrim was on her mission when she died, I'd say," Mrs. Hodge said. "She was in her mid-80s, I'd guess. She used to talk about her death. She called it 'stepping over.' One time I said to her, 'Peace, how will I know when you step over?' And she said, 'You'll know.' Of course, I didn't know the precise moment she stepped over. I found out when Larry Ingle (the Quaker leader) called me."

Ingle got the word of Peace Pilgrim's death from Sara Watson, minister of Unity Center in Chattanooga, who she got the



Peace Pilgrim

word from her friend, Mike Matoin, minister of Unity Church of Chicago.

Peace Pilgrim, who had silver hair and bright blue eyes, was not a member of any church, but she was a Christian, Mrs. Hodge said.

"No one knew what her real name was," Mrs. Hodge continued. "She gave up her name, station in life, her background, a lucrative position and became a wanderer, a pilgrim for peace. When she started her walks her vow was to walk 25,000 miles. She reached that goal in 1964, and she stopped counting. She had no money with her on her travels. She wore a lettered tunic, and she had only a folding toothbrush, a pen, a comb and copies of her peace pamphlet. She spent the night where she was — sometimes with friends, sometimes with strangers, sometimes alone. She fasted until somebody gave food to her."

To get in touch with her, her friends

wrote to her at Cologne, N. J., and a friend there forwarded the mail to general delivery in whatever town she happened to be at the time.

A letter sent by Pilgrim Congregational Church here to her was returned by the post office of Elkhart, Ind. The returned letter was stamped "Deceased." The Chicago Sun Times published a short article on her death, but over the years many newspapers and magazines across the country had written of her peace quest.

In all her travels, Peace Pilgrim was physically attacked only twice, Mrs. Hodge said. Once a deranged youth she had befriended became frightened in a lightning storm and struck her. Another time she was struck when she went to the defense of an 8-year-old girl who was being beaten by a man.

Mrs. Hodge said Peace Pilgrim was to have been in Chattanooga Oct. 31-Nov. 16.

Eight states, including Tennessee, were on her walking schedule this year.

"She went north in the summer months and came south in the winter months," Mrs. Hodge said.

Mrs. Hodge said a memorial service for her will be held in Chattanooga in the fall.

W. Sherrill Milliken of Chattanooga was chairman of the committee which nominated Peace Pilgrim for a Nobel Prize. On the committee were Mrs. Milliken, Mrs. Jean Troy, Robert C. Mildram, Ingle and Mrs. Hodge.

"Peace Pilgrim always kept her appointments," Mrs. Hodge said. "Once when there was snow in Birmingham, I said she wouldn't make it, but she showed up right on time. One time I said, 'Peace, you've gained some weight,' and she said, 'Wait a minute,' and she loosened her tunic and took out letters she had collected along the way and had stuffed under her clothing."

Here are highlights of Peace Pilgrim's message: "This is the way of peace: Overcome evil with good and falsehood with truth and hatred with love . . . There's a spark of good in everybody, no matter how deeply it may be buried . . . I have never thought of myself as protesting against something, but rather as witnessing for harmonious living . . . World peace will not be a reality until enough of us have found inner peace . . . If you really love people, you cannot fear them."

— TRAVIS WOLFE