

PEACE PILGRIM

Peace Pilgrim was born on July 15, 1908 on a small farm in New Jersey. Now, I have already given you more information about her than Peace herself would tell you. She never talked about where she was from or what was her original name. What was important to her was her mission and message—a message of peace—peace in the world, peace among nations, peaceful relationships and, most of all, inner peace, because that’s where peace begins.

She had no religious training as a child or teenager. She grew from modest roots, but like many people, gradually acquired money and things. When she realized this self-centered life had become meaningless and worldly goods burdens rather than blessings, she walked all one night through the woods until she felt “a complete willingness to give her life to God and to service.” She didn’t know where she was being called to serve, but began a fifteen -year preparation for whatever it might be.

During her 15 years of intense spiritual practice, these are some of the things she practiced:

- 1) Stop being an escapist. She stopped blaming others for problems. She began to see problems as opportunities in disguise. Through solving problems with the highest light we have, we grow spiritually.
- 2) Simplification of life. She learned to keep desires down to need level. Unnecessary possessions are unnecessary burdens. Anything we can’t let go of when finished with it possesses us.
- 3) Stop negative thoughts. ”I don’t eat junk food and I don’t think junk thoughts,” she would say. How could she do that? She learned that if she was troubled by what someone said or did, they needed understanding. She realized that if she really understood everything, all her wrong reactions would turn to compassion. Those who evoke wrong reactions in you are out of harmony, and especially in need of love.

“I started to learn how to live to give instead of to get” she said. Every morning I thought of God and thought of things I might do that day to be of service to God’s children. I looked at every situation I came into to see if there was anything I could do there to be of service. I did as many good things as I could each day—not forgetting the importance of

a pleasant word and a cheery smile. I prayed about things that seemed too big for me to handle—right prayer motivates to right action. During this period, she did volunteer work for peace groups and worked with people who had physical, emotional, and mental problems.

After Peace had been doing all these spiritual practices for 15 years, spiritual illumination came. Here is her description of spiritual illumination in her own words:

“I was out walking in the early morning. All of a sudden I felt very uplifted, more uplifted than I had ever been. I remember I *knew* timelessness and spacelessness and lightness. I did not seem to be walking on the earth. There were no people or even animals around, but every flower, every bush, every tree seemed to wear a halo. There was a light emanation around everything and flecks of gold fell like slanted rain through the air... The most important part of it was *not* the phenomena. The important part of it was the realization of the oneness of all creation. The inspiration for the pilgrimage came at this time. Peace first prepared for walking distances by walking the Appalachian trail in the summer of 1952. She was the first woman to walk the entire length.

Peace Pilgrim’s vow was “I shall remain a wanderer until mankind has learned the way of peace, walking until I am given shelter and fasting until I am given food.” Her friends thought she was crazy. They thought she would surely kill herself walking all over. But that didn’t bother her. She just went ahead and did what she was called to do. She said that what her friends didn’t know was that with inner peace, she was plugged into the source of universal energy, which never runs out.

From January 1, 1953 (She was 44 years old) to 1964, Peace walked 25,000 miles and then stopped counting because she didn’t want to have to stick to major roads. Speaking about the way to peace became her first priority, so she started to accept rides to speaking engagements, but continued to walk daily. She was interviewed by all national radio and TV networks as well as on hundreds of local stations across the country. She talked to university classes, high school assemblies, and civic clubs and spoke from the pulpits of a variety of churches.

Peace walked through all 50 states, the 10 Canadian provinces, and parts of Mexico. Never asking for anything—food, shelter, or transportation. She walked without a penny in her pocket. She had no organizational backing. She had only the clothes she wore with pen, toothbrush, comb, and correspondence. The message she gave was: **overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth, and hatred with love.** She talked about peace—peace between nations, peace among people, but most of all inner peace, because that’s where peace begins.

When many people were increasingly afraid to go out on our streets, she walked through “dangerous” parts of cities and slept beside the road, on beaches and in bus stations, when no bed was offered. Through the years, strangers became friends, inviting her into their homes and arranging speaking engagements, often a year or more in advance.

At the time of her death, Peace Pilgrim was crossing the country for the seventh time. She made what she called “the glorious transition to a freer life” on July 7, 1981 near Knox, Indiana. She died instantly in a head-on collision as she was being driven to a speaking engagement. Throughout her long pilgrimage, she had been in radiant health.

One question to ask is: How did a rather small woman walking alone with no money manage to survive as long as she did? One challenge could be weather. She had only the clothes on her back, but walked north in summer and south in winter to adapt to the weather. There was a very dramatic incident she tells in which she was caught in a sudden freak snowstorm. The snow was so heavy that she couldn’t see. She was in great danger at that point but happened to run into a bridge. Underneath the bridge was a cardboard box. She crawled into it and slept through the night.

Then there could be trouble with dangerous people and trouble with the law. She was picked up for vagrancy a number of times. Here is one example told in her own words: “During my pilgrimage through Arizona, I was arrested by a plainclothes policeman while mailing letters at the local post office. After a short ride in a patrol car I was booked as a vagrant. When you walk on faith, you are technically guilty of vagrancy. Yes, I’ve been jailed several times for not having any money, but they always release me once they understand.

They put me in a huge inner room surrounded by cell blocks in which they locked the women, four to a cell for the night. As I walked in, I said to myself, “Peace Pilgrim, you have dedicated your life to service—behold your wonderful new field of service!”

When I walked in, one of the girls said, “Gee, you’re a funny one, you’re the only one that came in smiling. Most of them come in crying or cursing.”

I said to them, “Supposing you had a day off at home—Wouldn’t you do something worthwhile on that day?” They said, “Yes, what will we do?” So I got them to sing songs that lifted the spirit. I gave them a simple exercise which makes you feel tingly all over. Then I talked to them about the steps toward inner peace. I told them they lived in a community and what could be done in an outer community could also be done in their community. They were interested and asked many questions. Oh, it was a beautiful day.

At the end of the day, they changed matrons. The girls didn’t like the woman who came in. They said she was a horrible person and said not to even speak to her. But I know there’s good in everybody and of course I spoke to her. I learned this woman was supporting her children with this job. She felt she had to work and didn’t always feel well and that’s why she was a bit cross at times. There is a reason for everything.

I asked the matron to visualize only the good in the inmates and I asked the inmates to visualize only the good in the matron.

In the morning, I bade farewell to my friends and was escorted by a local deputy to the courthouse several blocks away. I wasn’t handcuffed nor was he even holding on to me. But he had a great big gun at his side, and so I looked at him and said, “If I were to run away, would you shoot me?” “Oh no,” he said grinning. “I never shoot anything I can catch.” In court that morning, I pleaded not guilty and my case was immediately dismissed. They took me to the spot where I had been picked up the day before. It was a beautiful experience.

Here’s another amazing example of what can happen to a woman who has found inner peace: (told in her own words) “Once I was hit by a disturbed teenage boy whom I had taken for a walk. He wanted to go hiking but was afraid he might break a leg and be left lying there. Everyone was afraid to go with him. He was a great big fellow and looked like a football player, and he was known to be violent at times. He had once beaten his mother so badly that she had to

spend several weeks in the hospital. Everybody was afraid of him, so I offered to go with him. As we got to the first hilltop, everything was going fine. Then a thunderstorm came along. He was very terrified because the thundershower was very close. Suddenly, he went off the beam and came for me, hitting at me. I didn't run away although I guess I could have—he had a heavy pack on his back. But even while he was hitting me, I could only feel the deepest compassion for him. How terrible to be so psychologically sick that you would be able to hit a defenseless old woman! I bathed his hatred with love even while he hit me. As a result, the hitting stopped.

He said, “You didn't hit back! Mother always hits back.” The delayed reaction, because of his disturbance, had reached the good in him. Oh, it's there—no matter how deeply it is buried—and he experienced remorse and complete self-condemnation.

What are a few bruises on my body in comparison with the transformation of a human life? To make a long story short, he was never violent again. He is a useful person in this world today.

The legacy of Peace Pilgrim continues through her many friends and an organization called “Friends of Peace Pilgrim.” Friends of Peace Pilgrim” publishes a quarterly newsletter, which I have been getting since the late 1980's. You can order the Peace Pilgrim book, booklets, DVD's, audios, and other materials—all free of charge. Just Google Peace Pilgrim to find out how you can order materials .You can see how the message of Peace Pilgrim has spread throughout the world. Many programs, retreats, and hikes have been held in her honor. In 2014, she was inducted into the New Jersey Hall of Fame. Peace's sister, Helene Young, at age 102, gave the acceptance speech.