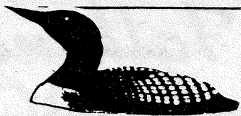


North Country Notebook



George Vukelich

Peace Pilgrim

by George Vukelich

Who was the woman known to the world only as Peace Pilgrim?

For three decades, until her death in 1981, she crisscrossed this country, walking more than 25,000 miles, carrying in her blue tunic a comb, a toothbrush, a ballpoint pen. Her message was simply: This is the way of peace: *Overcome evil with good and falsehood with truth and hatred with love.*

She talked about peace between nations, peace among groups and people, and, most importantly, inner peace. I met her years ago and thought then that she was the definitive Little Old Lady in Tennis Shoes. I also thought she was a saint.

Five of her friends have now collected her writings in a new book, *Peace Pilgrim, Her Life And Work In Her Own Words*. The publisher is Ocean Tree Books of Santa Fe. This book, the publisher says, is the full story of "one of the most remarkable women of the twentieth century." She reminds you a lot of the great walkers: Thoreau, Gandhi, back to the beginning when they were all barefoot. If you're talking distance, this one could stay with them all.

"When I started out," Peace Pilgrim writes, "my hair had started to turn to silver. My friends thought I was crazy. There was not one word of encouragement from them. They thought I would surely kill myself, walking all over, but that didn't bother me. I just went ahead and did what I had to do. They didn't know that with inner peace, I felt plugged into the source of universal energy, which never runs out. There was much pressure to compromise my beliefs, but I would not be dissuaded. Lovingly, I informed my well-meaning friends of the existence of two widely divergent paths in life and of the free will within all to make their choice.

"There is a well-worn road which is pleasing to the senses and gratifies worldly desires, but leads to nowhere. And there is the less traveled path, which requires purifications and relinquishments, but results in untold spiritual blessings.

"There is a spark of good in everybody, no matter how deeply it may be buried. *It is the real you.* When I say 'you' what am I really thinking of? Am I thinking of the clay garment, the body? No, that's not the real you. Am I thinking of the self-centered nature? No, that's not the real you. The real you is that divine spark. Some call this the God-centered nature, others the divine nature and the Kingdom of God within. Hindus know it as Nirvana; the Buddhists refer to it as the Awakened Soul; the Quakers see it as the Inner Light. In other places it is known as the Christ in you, the Christ Consciousness, the hope of glory, or the indwelling spirit. Even some psychologists have a name for it, the

superconscious. The important thing to remember is that it dwells within you!

"It does not matter what name you attach to it, but your consciousness must ascend to the point through which you view the universe with your God-centered nature. The feeling accompanying this experience is that of complete oneness with the Universal Whole. One merges into a euphoria of absolute unity with all life: with humanity, with all the creatures of the earth, the trees and plants, the air, the water, and even earth itself. This God-centered nature is constantly waiting to govern your life gloriously. You have the free will to either allow it to govern your life, or not to allow it to affect you. The choice is always yours."

"From all the things you read, and from all the people you meet, take what is good and leave the rest. For guidance and for truth, it is much better to look for the Source through your own inner teacher than to look to people or books. Only if something within you says, '*This is the truth. This is for me,*' does it become part of your experience. After you have read all the books, and heard all the lectures, you must still judge what is for you. Books and people can merely inspire you. Unless they awaken something within you, nothing worthwhile has been accomplished. But if you must read books, read many books, so that you will contact as many conflicting opinions as possible. In this manner, you'll be required to form your own opinions after all.

"Think about all the good things of your life. Never think about your difficulties. Forget yourself, and concentrate on being of service as much as you can in this world, and then, having lost your lower self in a cause greater than yourself, you will find your higher self: your real self."

"Some have asked if I accept 'disciples.' Of course, I do not. It is not healthy to follow another human being. Every person must find his or her maturity. The process takes time—the growth period is different for each individual.

"Why do you look at me? Look at your own self. Why do you listen to me? Listen to your own self. Why do you believe in what I say? Do not believe in me or any other teacher, rather trust in your own inner voice. *This is your guide, this is your teacher.* Your teacher is within, not without. Know yourself, not me!

"Walk with me, but don't follow me blindly. Hold fast to the truth, not to my garments. My body is merely a clay structure: today it is here, tomorrow it shall be gone. If you attach yourself to me today, what are you going to do tomorrow when I am not with you? Attach yourself to God, attach yourself to humanity, only then will you be closer to me."

Peace Pilgrim was shorter than the Seven-Foot Nun, but in their tennis shoes they were about the same size.