

FIRST WOMAN TO WALK APPALACHIAN TRAIL

LAST summer "Peace Pilgrim" walked the Appalachian Trail and afterwards gave a broadcast interview with Steve Allison (who used her Christian name, Mildred) over Radio Station WPEN in Philadelphia. The following is an extract

Steve: I want you to meet Mildred. This summer she walked the entire length of the two thousand fifty mile long Appalachian Trail, and she is the first woman to have accomplished this feat. In case you don't know, the Appalachian Trail is a rugged wilderness footpath which follows the Appalachian mountain range from Maine to Georgia. Well, Mildred, was it an enjoyable experience or was it a trying experience?

Peace Pilgrim: Oh, it was a very enjoyable, educational and a very inspirational experience. I don't mean there were no hardships. There were some, of course. But they were just a part of the whole wonderful experience, and it wouldn't have been as wonderful without them.

Steve: You spoke of it being an educational experience. In what way would you consider it educational?

Peace Pilgrim: In many ways, Steve, but let me mention one thing that I think is important. Life on the trail, which is not insulated from nature as life in the city is, tends to make you realize what the actual essentials of physical well-being are—such as warmth when you are cold, a dry spot on a rainy day, the simplest food when you are hungry. Since you carry your food, sleeping equipment, and so forth, on your back, you learn very quickly that unnecessary possessions are unnecessary burdens. This is a lesson that I hope all hikers will carry home with them, because it is true in every-day life as well as on the trail, that material possessions much in excess of need tend to become burdens.

Steve: Mildred, you mentioned in one of your letters that, since you live in voluntary poverty, you make your contribution to society in service. I was wondering how all the varied knowledge which you gained this summer could be used to serve society.

Peace Pilgrim: Well, Steve, I don't want to sound like a pessimist—because I'm really an optimist—but the peoples of the world are devoting their time and their treasure to the manufacture of weapons of destruction—"a million fiendish things they have invented, each one more deadly than the one before it"—our cities do display air-raid shelter signs, our papers do carry estimates that about seven million people in the United States will probably be homeless.

If you'll allow me to read a sentence from my little bulletin, I think I put the world situation in a nut-shell when I said "Humanity, with fearful, faltering steps, walks a knife-edge between abysmal chaos and a new renaissance, while strong forces push toward chaos." In a world situation like this, I think one who wishes to be of service might well learn a little about out-of-doors living, simple nutrition, and so forth.

Steve: Getting back to hiking, Mildred, as wonderful as you say your experience was, I don't think you'd consider doing it again, would you?

Peace Pilgrim: I wouldn't consider doing the Appalachian Trail again right now, Steve, but I would consider doing some more hiking. In fact, I have another hiking trip all planned—and this time it's definitely on the optimistic side—it's a peace pilgrimage. There is hope . . .

I think that those of us who have found the way to peace should be shouting it from the housetops, and with this thought in mind, I undertake my peace pilgrimage. Starting Jan 1, I shall walk from Los Angeles to New York and then to Washington, D.C., and talk to everyone who will listen to me about the way to peace. I'm even planning to wear a sign, the back of which will read "Walking Coast to Coast for Peace" and the front "Peace Pilgrim."

Steve: Leaving the subject of hiking for the moment, Mildred, let me ask you this question. What is the way to peace?

Peace Pilgrim: I guess you expect me to give you a long talk on very important things like world government, economic adjustment, disarmament, and so forth—and of course on my peace pilgrimage I'll be glad to discuss these things with interested people—but what I shall emphasize most is the simple, basic essentials of peace. Again let me put it in a nut-shell—"Overcome evil with good, and falsehood with truth, and hatred with love."—The Golden Rule would do as well.

Please don't say lightly "Those are just religious concepts—not practical." Those are laws governing human conduct, which apply just as rigidly as the law of gravity. If we insisted on attempting to disobey the law of gravity, chaos would result, and if we insist on disobeying these laws governing human conduct, chaos will result.