

A pilgrimage along the path of peace



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She started walking a long time ago — almost a quarter of a century, when American boys lay newly dead in Korea, and Vietnam was a name that most of us had never heard.

In the years since she has walked 25,000 miles, and how much more than that she does not know, for she quit counting when she had walked that far.

She says she will continue walking, going where the seasons take her, resting at nightfall wherever she happens to be, eating what is given to her, until "mankind has learned the way of peace."

SHE IS PENNILESS — deliberately so. Once a woman on easy street, with the fancy clothes and the fine apartment as proof, she gave away all she owned when she set out upon her pilgrimage.

The sun-faded clothes upon her back, a ball point pen, a folding toothbrush, a comb and a road map, kept in the pocket of her homemade tunic, are the extent of her earthly goods.

She has no need or desire for more.

She has traveled to each of the 50 states, to 10 provinces of Canada, to parts of Mexico.

And everywhere she goes, this friendly, happy, white-haired woman with the blue eyes that sparkle, she speaks of peace — peace between nations, peace between organizations, peace between individuals, peace within oneself.

That is the mission she undertook on New Year's Day of 1953 — and the mission she vows to continue until the world has found the elusive peace it has sought so vainly for so long.

It is, admittedly, a tall order — but she sees signs that are promising.

"WHEN SOMETHING becomes a matter of survival," she said, "then even immature people — stupid, selfish people — find ways to accomplish it.

"I needn't remind you that nations that have barely spoken to one another for years now are getting together, discussing their problems.

"I'm an optimist, and I see the possibility — not the probability, mind you; the possibility — of outward peace throughout the world within 10 years.

"The inner peace that we all so yearn for — that will take longer."

She calls herself Peace Pilgrim, and that is the only name she will give, even when you practically demand, for the sake of journalistic completeness, her "real" name.

She is equally vague on her background, saying only that she was born on a farm on the outskirts of a small town, and



aged at all since I started my pilgrimage in 1953. I've seen pictures taken then and I still look the same. And I haven't been sick, either, even for so much as a headache or cold."

So much for name, age, place of birth and other related trivia.

Going wherever she is invited, her itinerary roughly outlined into the mid-1980s, she speaks on every possible occasion — to church and civic groups, on college, university and high school campuses, at gatherings in people's homes.

On one memorable Sunday in Wyoming she made seven different speeches, always spreading her message of peace.

And she will speak in Evansville tomorrow — at 5:30 p.m. in a second-story meeting room at Central Library, under sponsorship of the Evansville Peace Fellowship. Many of the people who plan to attend will bring a sack lunch to eat; you may wish to do so too. I'm on a diet, and so will take a carrot. A lousy carrot.

Mostly, she said, she is offered a place to sleep by friends in the town she is visiting; sometimes she is not.

She has slept in bus stations, in truck stops, curled up along the road with a newspaper to cover her — which she recommends quite highly, by the way, as a quilt substitute.

AND MANY TIMES, with no place to sleep, she has walked the night through, to keep warm.

Once, caught in a numbing snowstorm, she almost froze to death. Then she found a large cardboard box under a bridge and spent the rest of the night in it.

I wondered had she ever gone hungry, since I worry a lot about going hungry.

"Well," she said, "I sometimes miss meals, if that's what you mean. But I've