

From Boston west with a message

# An extraordinary woman treks a peace path

I'll fear not what men say,  
I'll labor night and day,  
To be a pilgrim.

— John Bunyan

Those China-blue eyes are her most striking feature. Her hair has passed from silvery to snowy, but the eyes are still clear, still piercing. Her speech is polished, clear, intelligent, rational, if fervent.

The tunic she wears, with the words "Peace Pilgrim" printed on the chest and "25,000 Miles On Foot For Peace" on the back, types her at first as a zany, one of those peripatetic preachers of lost causes who walk the streets of American cities. But an hour of conversation with her reveals that she is, if somewhat eccentric, quite sane.

Once, one assumes, she had another name: today, Peace Pilgrim is all she answers to. She set out 25 years ago from Los Angeles, that fertile spawning ground of marchers-to-a-different drummer, and has walked the latitude and longitude of the nation six times.



preaching her gospel of inner peace. Last week, she came to Boston.

"When I started my first pilgrimage my hair had already turned to silver," she recalled. "My friends thought I had taken leave of my senses." Fifteen years before that first pilgrimage, Peace Pilgrim had begun a program of giving away her worldly goods: for fifteen years she had been disposing of everything she owned, working as a typist only long enough to earn a subsistence income and spending her free time on what she calls her "path of service." On Jan. 1, 1953, her belongings liquidated, she took her "path of service" one step farther, and set out to walk back and forth across the continent for the rest of her life, urging peace on a war-like people.

"I teach peace within ourselves as a step toward peace in the world," she explains.

"I believe that a peace department is needed in our government. It should be established with some fanfare, and we should urge other countries to establish peace departments of their own to study ways to put an end to war."

For the first few years, she crossed the nation without program, walking until someone offered her shelter, crossing occasionally into Canada and Mexico, speaking to any groups that wanted to listen. Once, she says, she walked along the Tournament of Roses parade route in Pasadena a short while before the procession began; every national television network interviewed her that day, she remembers.

She approaches nobody, but waits "until they are interested or curious enough to ask me," then she explains her belief in inner peace and hands out a leaflet with her "Magic Formula," which urges: "Have as your objective the resolving of the conflict — not the gaining of advantage;" and "Be concerned that you do not offend — not that you are not offended."

Nowadays, she designs her itinerary

in response to invitations. Last night she spoke at the Christian Community of Boston, on Commonwealth Avenue.

But this morning she is off again, heading west, with all her belongings in the pockets of her tunic and with a solemn message of peace in her heart.

A Freudian might say she relates poorly to reality, and many lay people might suspect she is just a bit bonkers.

But she has idealism and a dream and the horrendously innocent notion that human beings are capable of living at peace with themselves, and with others.

She is pursuing this dream of peace, this charming, innocent, grandmotherly lady; and she thinks that some day her dream will turn real.

I wish her all the luck in the world.

Michael Ryan's column appears on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in The Herald American.