

# Pushing world peace — it's a living

By Beverly Creamer  
Advertiser People Editor

She cuts an eccentrically charming figure — the sneakers, the ponytail, the blue walking suit, each piece a gift from a different friend in a different part of the country.

In the expansive pouch pocket around her middle she has stowed all her possessions — a plastic comb missing a tooth, a collapsible toothbrush, a pen, slips of blue paper that bear her message of world peace, and a bundle of letters from friends all over the country.

"I always wear everything I own," she says, reaching into the pouch and digging around for the letters which she has tucked at the back. On cold nights when she's had to curl up on the edge of a highway somewhere and sleep under the stars — her favorite way to sleep she says, sans sleeping bag — she'll tuck her mail under her blouse to keep her back warm.

For the past 27½ years this woman who calls herself Peace Pilgrim has been criss-crossing America mostly on foot, spreading the message of peace. For the first 10 years she counted miles, she says, and by 1964 had covered 25,000 on foot. She finally couldn't stand counting anymore but kept walking, turning her major attention to informal speaking engagements — at colleges, at truck stops, in churches.

For all of those years she's had no money, won't accept any and hasn't bought a thing — nothing — since she became a wandering pilgrim.

"I was investigated during the McCarthy era to see if I was a vagrant or a religious pilgrim." McCarthy decided she was the latter and let her go. "I'm a deeply religious woman," says Pilgrim. "I'm just not denominational."

In all of that time no one has harmed her. "Of course not," she says, amused by the question. "I live completely on faith." It's never let her down. The longest she's gone without a gift of food is three days.

She hasn't had a doctor's check-up, doesn't worry about getting sick and says she hasn't had an ache or a pain or a headache or a

cold in all the years she's been on the road even though she's been trapped in snowstorms and occasionally has slept in empty packing crates, in parked cars, empty jail cells, on conference tables, and once on the front seat of a fire engine in Tombstone, Ariz.

She won't tell you what her original name was. And she won't tell you how old she is, partially because she's forgotten (although she admits she could figure it out if she really wanted to which she doesn't) and partially because she doesn't relate to things like birthdays and mortgages.

But she's got to be 80, says her good friend, the Rev. William Kautz, a pastor of the United Church of Christ in Honolulu. At least.

At 9:30 Sunday morning Pilgrim will speak at a discussion group at the Church of the Crossroads at 1212 University Ave. An hour and 15 minutes later she'll speak at the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church at 638 N. Kuakini St. She'll talk about the same thing she talks about wherever she goes — the golden rule.

Does she love everyone she meets? Again the amusement. "Of course," she says. "How could I fail to? Within everyone is a spark of God. People look to me like shining lights. . . ."

Pilgrim says she's seen some progress toward peace in her almost three decades of criss-crossing her mission, America. "A pilgrim's job is to rouse people from their apathy and make them think." The grey ponytail vibrates as she talks. She cuts it herself, by holding it up and hacking off the end. Keeps it neat, she says.

"There was great apathy when I started my pilgrimage. It was at the height of the Korean War and the McCarthy era . . . Just the time for a pilgrim to step forth . . . in the beginning people thought war was a necessary part of life, with no alternative. Now they believe there are alternatives possible and they're looking for them.

"When I started," she continued, "there was no interest in the inner search." Now, she says, "the crisis of the time has pushed us into inner search . . . I'm still trying to make people think about their own potential and live according to that

potential."

Pilgrim says it took her 15 years to take the first step, to come to a gradual realization that she needed to give away everything and become a wanderer. She'd been successful financially, she says, and lived in Los Angeles in fine apartments, with fine clothes. But 42½ years ago it started seeming empty, and her friendships started feeling hollow, and she realized there was something else she had to do with her life.

"I never started on my pilgrimage until I found inner peace."

As she says this the weathered brown hands shoot up, fingers pointing skyward. Her wide watery blue eyes sweep to the ceiling and back again. It was then, she says, that she got "plugged into the source of universal energy . . . universal supply . . . and universal truth . . ."

When she needs new clothes someone always offers them. When she needs food, it is freely given. When she lost a filling once, even that was forthcoming.

Pilgrim does not snow her audience with rhetoric, does not spout book learning in fancy words. Far from it. Her message is simple and contained on slips of blue paper she hands out to all as a kind of quick introduction. Part of it says "Peace Pilgrim's Magic Formula:

"There is a magic formula for resolving conflicts," it reads. "It is this: Have as your objective the resolving of the conflict — not the gaining of advantage . . ." And this: "Be concerned that you do not offend — not that you are not offended."

All of this certainly does not mean Pilgrim is without problems. Far from it. She just looks at them differently. "Problems are opportunities for spiritual growth."

One could say her unorthodox lifestyle probably ensures a full advantage for such growth. Consider this, her second trip to Hawaii. She led an independent educational tour of 15 people on what she calls a two week "camping trip" to the Islands. The airlines don't really like such tours, but they're allowed under Federal Aviation Administration rules and enable her to get a free ticket as tour guide, she says.

"They first tried to tell me to go to a travel agent," she says, smiling a toothy grin. "Well you see," she told them "I can't do that because I'm a wanderer, a pilgrim."

"You're a WHAT?" said the agent.

Pilgrim smiles. "I finally said 'Think of me as a travelling speaker.' They could relate to that."

Pilgrim's little group spent two weeks traveling the islands, sleeping on beaches in parks and cooking over campfires. She ran the tour like she runs her life.

Pilgrim leaves Monday, flying back to Los Angeles and then Bismarck, North Dakota on gift tickets to pick up her pilgrimage course. She alternates between zigzags and loops back and forth across the country, trying to loop through Cologne, N.J. every so often to visit the friend who forwards all her mail. (Her address is Peace Pilgrim, Cologne, N.J. 08213.)

She often gets letters from people who say things like: "Since talking with you I think I should do something for peace too." They write their congressman or make peace with a friend . . . It all adds up," she says.

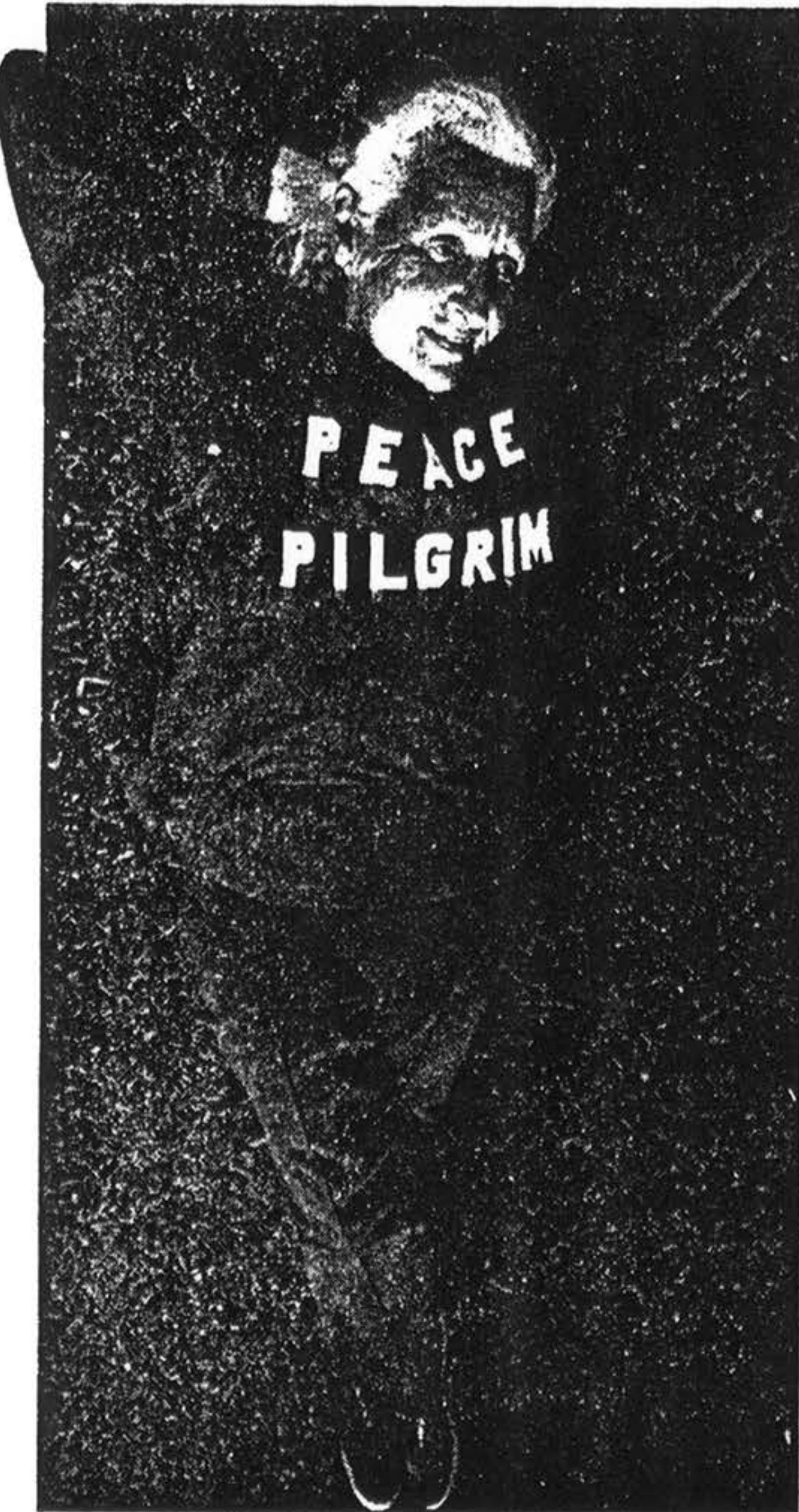
Pilgrim corresponds regularly with 10,000 people she's met, sending them irregular newsletters and letting them know when she'll be by. Invariably she's swamped with invitations to spend a night.

"If you fear nothing and expect good, good comes," she says, moving outside to pose for the newspaper photographer. She lies back on the grass, hands tucked under her head in her traditional under-the-stars-warm-nights sleeping pose.

Then she curls forward, arms crossed, hands tucked in armpits, to show how she sleeps on cold nights, explaining "One foot sometimes gets cold if I don't have a map over it."

Finished, she bounces up off the grass and shakes hands. "Money," she says, "I do not accept. I deal with spiritual truth which should never be sold and need never be bought. When you are ready it will be given."

Does she expect others to do what she's done? "Oh no," she says. "This has never inspired anyone else to walk a pilgrimage."



Advertiser photo by Roy Ho

Peace Pilgrim: 'This is what I'm doing with my retirement years.'