

On Turtle Island (North America)
February—April, 1995

**The story of the Peacemaker and his partner, Hiawatha,
creating a better way to settle disputes than by violence**

On Turtle Island

Back in the United States after two months in Europe (I'd run out of money, had earlier learned of a companion pilgrimage in North America), I joined with other pilgrims to walk 1000 miles on Turtle Island, the North American continent. We walked to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two, an opportunity to visit sites of great violence on the continent and to learn how to make peace. We walked through winter into spring, for 70 days, the ten or so of us core walkers striding an average of 18 miles per day.

Led by a nun, Sister Jun Yasuda of the Japanese Buddhist order, Nipponzan Myohoji, we walked to better learn some of the ways indigenous people made peace. In particular, how the nations now making up the Iroquois Confederacy of the northeastern U.S. and parts of Canada became peaceful after warring within and outside their communities.

I walked also to touch some of the contemporary violence of my nation, violence born from poverty, from racism, from gender conflict, from war and the preparations for war. We became lightning rods for stories of violence: police brutality against native Americans near Plymouth Massachusetts we we started out and an estranged husband killing his wife and her lawyer just as we passed through Spencer Massachusetts.

As we walked through New York state, we learned about social service budget cuts, the reinstatement of the death penalty in New York, a man crushing his infant as he hastily drove his garden tractor in Geneva New York, U.S. Army Captain Lawrence Rockwood court-martialed for investigating human rights abuses in Haiti, the



stockpiling of munitions at the Seneca Army Depot. And in Canada: the military planning war at the Canadian War College near Kingston Ontario and a young man colliding with and killing a Mohawk woman while he was driving a stolen truck on the Mohawk reserve near Deseronto Ontario. Finally, back in the States we prayed at the sites where three men had been killed just the day before during a power struggle at the Seneca nation...all as we

walked through the different regions.

How to understand the proliferation of violence? Buddhists call this period the Era of Declined Law, a time when killing and torture and violence of all kinds are rife, when people have forgotten or ignore the indigenous wisdoms and the ancient teachings of how to live—that all life is sacred, that all beings are interconnected.

We visited Iroquois elders and leaders to hear from them the story of a time similar to ours, a time of violence and

the quelling of violence. We learned that many centuries ago in what we now call New York state and the province of Ontario—some say five centuries, some say many more—the people living then, of the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Oneida nations, were in continual war. They fought nation to nation, community to community, and within families. Some even practiced cannibalism.

A man was born north of this area, on the northern shore of Lake Ontario, in the village of Deseronto. He was born to a virgin. Her mother was shamed by this apparently unhusbanded conception and tried five times to kill the infant. At an early age he had a vision of bringing peace to the people living south of him. Called by his

community, crazy, absurd, ridiculous, he carved a canoe from white stone and successfully launched it. Arriving on the south shore of the lake, he realized he had the idea but not the language for making peace. He stuttered.

Soon, he met a great Mohawk orator who'd recently been plunged into severe grief by the deaths of his wife and five daughters. The man's name: Hiawatha. Together, Hiawatha and the man we now call Peacemaker, went to Indian leaders, one by one, to talk to them about the ways of peace, to convince them by argument and demonstration that peace was desirable and possible. They were often tested by the threat of death to determine the extent of their conviction and the strength of their powers.

For instance, Peacemaker was invited to ascend a tree overhanging a waterfall. Indian men chopped the tree down, throwing Peacemaker into the churning river. He survived. On another occasion, he climbed to the top of the lodge of a notoriously destructive Onondaga leader who was at the time stirring a pot of human stew. The man noticed what he thought was his reflection in the liquid—in reality Peacemaker's reflected face peering down at him through the smoke hole above—and thought, how good spirited I look. With such a wise and compassionate nature, how can I eat another human? He disposed of the body, vowing not to practice cannibalism, when he met Peacemaker and was convinced to make

peace not war.

Peacemaker and Hiawatha brought peace not only by speaking individually with each leader but by fostering a new form of governance and decision making. They created the clan system, a form of brotherhood and sisterhood across nation boundaries that made war less likely. They created the clan mother system, where specially selected wise women were given the authority to remove chiefs not performing in the best interests of the community. They taught a new form of decision making based on discussion not physical

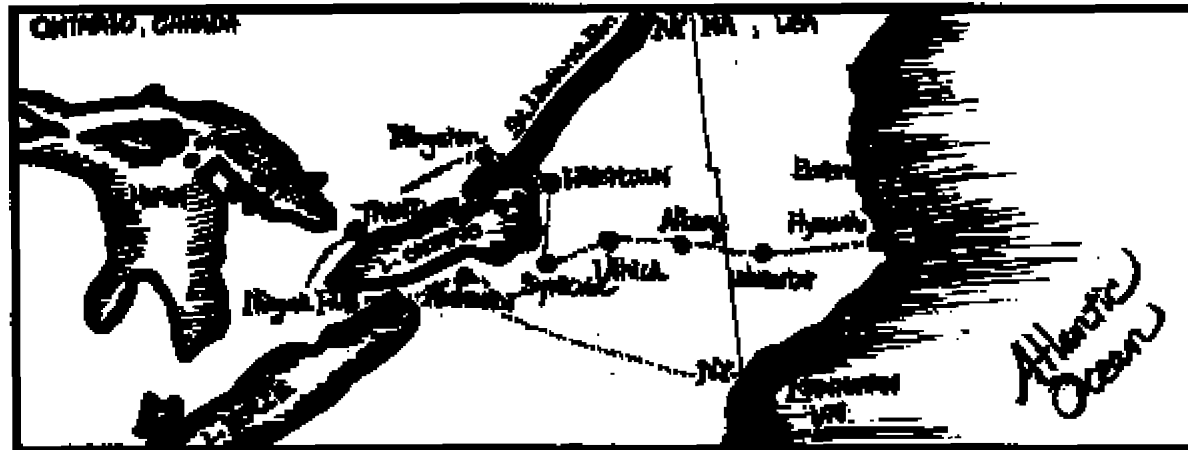
power. And finally, they created powerful images of peace such as the Great Tree of Peace.

The white pine, they said, with its roots of peace extending out in all directions, offers shade and protection for all

nations who choose to live under it. In its crown sits an eagle, eternally vigilant for any threats to peace. Now pull the tree out by its roots and notice the river running beneath. Throw your weapons of destruction into this river, let them be washed away forever, and now replant the Great Tree of Peace. And live peaceably.

The nations then formed the Iroquois Confederacy which survives to this day.

On the Turtle Island Pilgrimage, we met Iroquois leaders at Deseronto in Ontario, the Onondaga nation near Syracuse New



York, and other native communities to hear various versions of the Peacemaker story. The entire story, we learned, requires ten full days for its complete telling. It is recited each year by one of the three remaining elders who know it in its entirety. We vowed to absorb as fully as we could its teachings and bring a distillation to our final stop: the United Nations in New York City, then reviewing the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. We fasted and prayed for three days in front of the U.N., hoping to be a presence in the deliberations for

peace—the abolition of all nuclear weapons. End the violence, begin the peace.

Our chant, *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, to the beat of our drums, we believe, is an encapsulation of the ancient teaching of Buddha as recorded in the Lotus Sutra—all life is sacred, all beings are interconnected.

—*Skip Schiel*



North America

In our way of life, in our government, with every decision we make, we always



Opening ceremony, Plymouth Massachusetts, Massasoit statue

keep in mind the Seventh Generation to come. It's our job to see that the people



Tom Porter, Mohawk
Community, New



Melinda Holm, pilgrim, conversing with
member of Mohawk community

coming ahead, the generations still unborn, have a world no worse than ours—



Danielle Leonard,
high school senior,

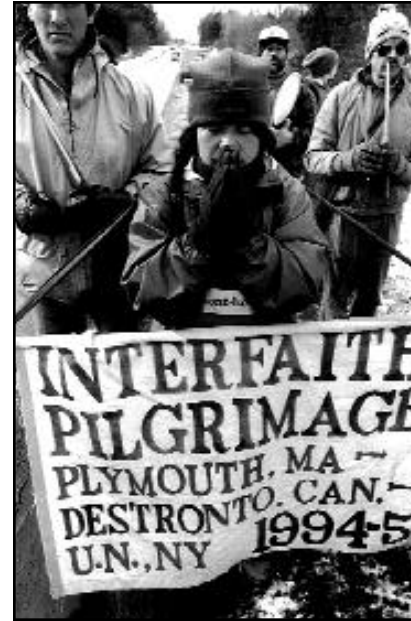


Sister Jun Yasuda, founder
and leader of the Turtle
Island pilgrimage

and hopefully better. When we walk upon Mother Earth we always plant our feet



Pagan



Albany NY

carefully because we know the faces of our future generations are looking up at



Prayer vigil overlooking West Point Military Academy, Hudson River Valley



Captain Larry Rockwell, court-marshaled for an act of conscience during a Haitian peace-keeping mission, speaking at a public gathering sponsored by the pilgrimage

us from beneath the ground. We never forget them. (Oren Lyons, Onondago Faith Keeper)



Drying out in a laundramat

When the chief of a clan falls—we say “fall” instead of “die”—that clan’s Clan



Alice Papenau, Onondaga leader, Onondaga nation near Syracuse NY



Mother and her family select a new chief. We don't vote—there has to be a



Peace Pagoda,
Grafton NY



consensus. Several names are usually brought up and we

discuss each name. One name will rise and there will be a consensus... The man who is to be chief must have certain qualifications. He must be a man who is honest. He must have "Hoeyianah," or the "good mind," as we say. He must have great concern and do the right thing by his people. He must not be a womanizer... The Clan Mother can remove a chief. If he is guilty of "forcing a woman"—we don't say "rape"—or of stealing or of taking a life, the chief is deposed instantly, even without being forewarned.

(Dewasenta, Alice Papenau,
Onondaga Clan Mother)



United Nations, fasting and
praying for three days

Louise Dunlap's Dream

Last week at the city council meeting I heard reports from all the city offices about what it would mean for us if Newt Gingrich's "Contract on America" (twisting it into the Mafia expression) were to succeed. The loss of federal funding would mean that Cambridge would actually lose its hospital and many many of the services for the poor that we have come to rely on. The picture was very grim. At the same time, I read in *Peacework* both the cover article on the dismantling of the welfare system in this country and my little story about the beginnings of the 1995 Turtle Island Pilgrimage. On Sunday morning, March 4, 1995, I had the following dream.

I was supporting Skip on another pilgrimage in the U.S. This one walked from city to city stopping in each place to help with building and reconstruction. The work was MUCH needed because each city was in ruins. Not from external warfare like Skip witnessed in Mostar but from the orchestrated neglect of the "Contract on America." Public buildings, especially public housing, were crumbling, as were hospitals and schools in all but the wealthiest neighborhoods. Roads and streets were a jumble of deep, deep potholes, broken pavement chunks, and leaky sewers—with the exception of fine new interstate connectors for the wealthy suburbs. People weak from hunger and sick with a variety of diseases including AIDs and TB hung about the city streets like ghosts except in the many places where safety was a problem. As in Mostar in Skip's slide show, various kinds of security guards, police, and even military personnel were much in evidence. The overall picture was very grim, not only the crumbling buildings and streets but the sense that a sick and ruined people lived in them.

The pilgrimage prayed and chanted on the road but stopped for days at a time to help work on projects to benefit the people—meal programs, distribution of medicines, or rebuilding clinics and repairing sewers. I visited as a support person while the group was

working in a broad open space, once a city plaza, where something underground seemed to have fallen in. Perhaps the sewers or the water, gas, or electric lines had fallen apart. The group worked with old-fashioned pick axes and shovels to dig out the problems and with simple old-fashioned cement mixers to repave. The technology—like the practice itself—was a lot like that used in building the Peace Pagodas. It was a monumental task but work proceeded in the spirit of *na mu myo ho ren ge kyo*.

Inoticed that, in the time he had been on Pilgrimage, Skip had changed a lot. He was now able to speak in most of the languages represented in the pilgrimage group—a very eclectic set of people from many European, Asian, and other countries come to help out in this world disaster here in the U.S. I heard for instance a fluent French sentence flow out of Skip. He'd told me the language had just "come back" to him and I remembered how difficult it had been for him to learn to say "Je ne parle pas Francais" on our trip to Quebec just a few months ago. The phenomenon was almost like glossolalia. Whatever needed to be said to communicate with the group of world pilgrims, could be said. The great Spirit would provide the words in the appropriate tongue.

Meanwhile the people on the streets of the city were silent, cowering in the doorways, hiding in crumbling buildings, not able even to offer tea or a sandwich to the pilgrims. At this point conditions in our country had deteriorated far below those in what we now call the "third world."

—*Louise Dunlap, March 1995*

Louise dreamt this while I was walking On Turtle Island, and I conveyed it to Tuscararo people when they asked for words of greeting.

—S.S.

