

95 Stories:

Auschwitz to Hiroshima,
(plus, On Turtle Island)

One year, two pilgrimages



By Skip Schiel



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...to acknowledge and deeply reflect on the history of military expansion, to pledge never again to enter into a war, to enlighten the troubled world with the beautiful precept of Not-to-kill, and to create a peaceful world through adopting direct non-violent practices.

(Gassy, from the invitation)

(Revised edition, April 2020, during the era of the Novel Coronavirus)

Introduction

I've had the good fortune to have made a major portion of an international, interfaith peace pilgrimage, Auschwitz to Hiroshima. Walking nearly 3,000 miles in constant prayer and reflection for nine months, we numbered between 25 and over 600 pilgrims. We marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War Two—1995.

On a second pilgrimage in the same year, I was also able to walk in the eastern section of North America, named Turtle Island by many native peoples, to learn from Iroquois people how their Great Law of Peace was originated and how it continues to operate.

To convey some of this experience to you, I offer you all of my writings to date (December 1997). These include:

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I also offer a reading list (p. 63). This makes a total of 19 writings, not far along the road to 95 yet.

I write to gather in my experience, to roll it around in my fingers, feel its texture, maybe for the first time, to taste it and observe very closely its exact odors, and then to cook it awhile and serve it. May it nourish and sustain you.

I am grateful for my community's support and encouragement. I'm working now on printing the black and white negatives (about 150 rolls) and editing the color slides (another 50 rolls). I'm offering slide shows, photo displays, and talks. Please contact me if you'd like to arrange for a presentation. And I helped edit a collective book, *Ashes & Light*, while working on one of my own.

May we all continue strong on our personal and group pilgrimages, each step a bridge, a prayer, a demonstration of our wish for peace and justice. May we find pilgrimages to make in our own neighborhoods, visiting sites made sacred by suffering and hope. May we be awakened to the prospect of a better world, found by ardently searching for a better way to be human.

(March 1998)

(Special thanks to Louise Dunlap and Patricia Watson for their editing of my letters from Cambodia, also to Louise for her assistance in writing my stories. And to Jonathan Vogel-Borne for his counsel and equipment during the formatting of this writing.

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are by Skip Schiel.)

What memory repudiates controls the human being. What one does not remember dictates who one loves or fails to love. What one does not remember dictates, actually, whether one plays poker, pool, or chess. What one does not remember contains the key to one's tantrums or one's poise. What one does not remember is the serpent in the garden of one's dreams. What one does not remember is the key to one's performance in the toilet or in bed. What one does not remember contains the only hope, danger, trap, inexorability, of love—only love can help you recognize what you do not remember.

James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*

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INTRODUCTORY

To Walk, To Witness, To Photograph My Hope to be Part of the 1995 Pilgrimage

(Written several months before the Pilgrimage began)

..we are called upon to deeply reflect on the history of our century and to strengthen our determination to abolish war and violence within ourselves and on our planet.

(from the call to the Auschwitz 1994 Convocation which begins the pilgrimage)

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.

(George Fox, 1656)

Lord Buddha expounded the Law (of Right Living in the Lotus Sutra) to relieve humanity from being annihilated in the Era of Declined Law. Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo was left as the good medicine to be taken for this purpose. It requires us to have faith in the virtue of adherence to the principle of Not-to-kill and to act to protect it. Humanity must return to a spiritual way of life in which the desires of the individuals give way to trust

(Rev. Gypten Yoshida)

Violence, loss of spirit, and pilgrimage

We live in what Buddhists term The Era of Declined Law, a phase of existence when the Law by which we might flourish is broken. In this phase we harm the ecology, have little respect for others, use violence as an acceptable mode of operation, advocate mass murder under the guise of love of country, and profit from making instruments of death. The Valdez oil spill in Alaska, the Savings and Loan bank scandals, the Los Angeles police department's treatment of people of color, the Persian Gulf war, and General Electric's designing and manufacturing weaponry are all testimonies to the assertion that we live in The Era of Declined Law.

Many face this reality and express despair, saying, "What can we do? The problems are enormous, out of control. I am lost." And do nothing. Others turn to study. Others to publishing and public speaking. Others to civil disobedience. There are many helpful responses to the grievous situation we face. I am particularly drawn to the concept, practice and photography of pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage

Beginning at Auschwitz on December 4, 1994, the nearly 10,000 mile trip, much of it walking, includes Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, and concludes with commemorations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1995. Organized by the Japanese Buddhist order that constructs peace pagodas and organizes sacred walks, joined by a wide array of faith groups, the journey is sparked by our unique historic moment: the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II and the nearly completed 20th century.

The pilgrimage visits locations and communities of contemporary violence—the Balkans, Israel, Jordan, Iraq, India, and Cambodia—as well as sites signal to World War 2 history—the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore. Because of the relevance to both Japanese and U.S. war history, walkers will traverse much of Vietnam. Some of the regions might become future battlegrounds. Hiroshima on August 6, 1995 will be the site of large commemorations and symposia. Here the pilgrimage ends, fifty years after the dropping of the first nuclear bomb.

Going to sites made sacred by massive killing, preparing with prayer and reflection, traveling in a reverential mode, sacrificing comfort and security, searching for well grounded hope, and concluding with the mystery of making and sharing art—all part of pilgrimage—fit well with ageless teachings and traditions. By going back—remembering—we have the opportunity to go forward—to envision and enact a better way of living.

Why I'd like to make the pilgrimage

I'd like to go on this nine month, nearly 10,000 mile-long, pilgrimage—to witness at the sites of some of the most ferocious violence of this century, to bodily share the fears of the thousands who suffer terror, to enact the power of sacrifice and prayer, and as a photographer to interpret and portray the pilgrimage experience.

Leyte Gulf, Bataan, Berlin, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Nagasaki are all pivot points in my memory—the world's memory as well. They are each vivid illustrations of World War II's means of settling conflict. Baghdad, Sarajevo, Jerusalem, Phnom Penh, Hanoi are also sites which are inscribed deeply in our collective contemporary psyche. I feel a great need to visit these sites, to sense and share the pain there. These visits will prod me to contemplate war, to photographically interpret and portray my experiences on the road, and to foster a new vision—the abolition of war.

I will make a slide show or photographic exhibition about the pilgrimage, its history, meaning and participants, the communities it travels through, the land and how people relate politically and socially to the land, and how faith operates in people's lives, especially when people are sorely troubled and tested. As a Quaker and photojournalist concerned about both global violence and the plethora of images of violence, I dedicate my craft to showing a broad range of emotions and phenomena, hoping to depict struggles for sur-

vival, the efforts of a variety of indigenous faith groups to work for peace, the processes and personalities of reconciliation and healing, as well as sources of hope. I will present the show to schools, churches and other faith communities, and community centers like libraries. It will be a story of nonviolence in action.

I walk to gather strength and to share it. I walk to gain clarity and to allow myself to be more perplexed. I walk to be with others and to be in solitude. I walk fearfully and fully confident that this is a right path for me. I walk sensing the agelessness of pilgrimage and how deliciously new the idea seems.

A pilgrimage might seem a feeble enterprise in light of the global challenge. It might be inconsequential, futile, foolish. A pilgrimage is an act of faith, trusting the mystery of that still small voice inside. I have not have completely planned all the details, nor have I perfectly articulated the rationale. Making that first step is inchoately forming the hypothesis; the undertaking is a test of truth. Who can measure the effects of visiting holy and remarkable sites? Who can say what bonds will form between pilgrims and support communities? How know the spread of the news, whether media will accurately present the story? What guess can we make of the impact?

My hope is to help revitalize our peace movement by demonstrating and depicting an endeavor meant not only to abstain from violence but build peace—peacemaking, reconciling, healing, all in a sacred manner.

An observation about my trade: photojournalism.

This craft and tender art, as usually practiced, reflects the world's obsession with war. From the photographers themselves however talented and humanistically inclined they might be, to their publishers, sponsors, critics, and funders, all consistently focus on showing conflict, carnage, destruction, catastrophe, with the attendant sorrow, despair, despondency. A large preponderance of images made within the past five years have originated in South Africa, Ethiopia, the Persian Gulf, Palestine and Israel, Somalia, the Balkans, and most recently, Rwanda.

How true of the total world experience is the picture presented by this weighting of imagery? What is left out? How often are conversation, teaching, healing, reconciling, and tenderness, trust, creation, love shown? Is the world void of these qualities? Are they any harder to show than the passions of conflict? The history of photojournalism is filled with examples of a more rounded view of experience. Eugene Smith in his series about the country doctor, or a southern Black midwife, or Albert Schweitzer is one example of a much respected photographer delving both deep and wide. Dorothea Lange is another. Her body of work includes the pain of the depression era as well as the joy of her family.

On this journey, should I be part of it, I am hereby dedicating myself to portraying a wider range of emotion and experience, both the ravages and the survival, the demoralization and the hope, the shadow and the obverse of the shadow—a form of spirit, an

ineffable but operating principle in the universe that, when sought, sensed, leagued with, can propel us into a new reality, one based on respect and honoring and love. My mission is to bestir others to an expanded vision.

This great walk is launched to reveal the power of a spiritual civilization over violence of the civilization of technology. This great walk is a non-violent walk which does not bear a single sword for self-protection...This great walk is a walk of sacrifice which offers the pain of flesh. The success of (the walk) shall be evidence to the presence of the Great Spirit, God in Heaven, and the Buddha.

(Rev. Gypten Yoshida, about an earlier walk)

(November 1994)

Pilgrimage, A Meaning

The word is used frequently. What do we mean by it? Maybe: a walk, a journey, a return, a visit, a sojourn.

Christians make pilgrimages to the Holy Land. They visit sites of Jesus' life—where he was born, taught, died, resurrected. They continue a tradition begun by the mother of Constantine, Helena, in the fourth century. She popularized the return to the Holy Land. Many of us know the idea of pilgrimage through Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. These pilgrims—distinctive characters all—traveled to a favorite pilgrimage site of the middle ages. Canterbury was believed to be holy partially because Thomas a Beckett, the archbishop of Canterbury, was assassinated, canonized and buried there. Miracles occur at Canterbury—and had long before St. Thomas.

Muslims travel to Mecca. Each hopes to do this at least once during a lifetime. Why Mecca? Born there, Mohammed received his first revelation on Mt. Hira, near Mecca. He regained the city after being driven out by forces opposed to Islam. And he died there. Mecca entered the English vocabulary to mean the holiest of holies, a penultimate pilgrimage site.

In our own rapidly concluding century, Dan Berrigan flew the "Night Flight to Hanoi" and traveled "From Selma to Sharpsville", each time embedding places and events into a broader tapestry. The peripatetic woman, Peace Pilgrim, walked across the United States well into her 80's. And Dorothy Day titled her column about her journeys and reflections, "On Pilgrimage".

What then is a pilgrimage? Is it the allegorical course to Jesus and God written about by Paul Bunyan in *Pilgrim's Progress*? Is it the sailing of the *Mayflower* bringing English "Pilgrims" to the New World? Is it the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the Normandy Invasion? Is it your sojourn to the special spots of your childhood?

Strictly speaking, the word pilgrimage derives from the Latin *peregrinus*, foreigner, in turn from *peregre*, abroad, combining *per* or through and *ager*, field, country or land. Foreign to what, in what way foreign?

What I mean by pilgrimage is a special journey, usually by foot, often to sites designated as sacred. A journey that is arduous, that might require a sacrifice, yet is filled with a peculiar radiance of spirit. I might be making penance, or asking a blessing, or wishing to awaken hope. Prayer is part of my pilgrimage, whether spoken, chanted, sung, or danced. I expect to be transformed, to return home reborn, having traveled in the foreign land of my often faulty conceptions. To die to my encrusted old ways, and experience a fresh vision. That is my idea of pilgrimage, not meant to be the idea of pilgrimage. What is yours? What is your experience with pilgrimage?

1995 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two—the liberation of the death camps, the bombings of cities inhabited mostly by civilians, the surrender of the vanquished to the conquerors, the beginning of the Cold War. 1995 is also tantalizingly close to the year 1999, the last year of a century notable by its unparalleled violence. And

A Pilgrim's Reflection

just five years from the year 2000, perhaps a new beginning.

I am participating in the Auschwitz to Hiroshima Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life—1995. Organized by the Japanese Buddhists who build peace pagodas and conduct sacred journeys, the itinerary includes the Balkans, Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Eight months, roughly 10,000 miles (not all walking), culminating in Hiroshima on August 6, 1995, exactly fifty years after the atomic bombing.

I prepare for the pilgrimage by taking long walks, through zones like ones I might encounter on the actual walk. I walk till I ache. I walk expecting to fear, and expecting to surmount fear. I read about issues and areas connected with the pilgrimage, I write and speak about where I am going and why, I pray for guidance, strength, resolve. I learn that the pilgrimage I planned to make began long before the physical first step—a great share of the value of pilgrimage comes in its preparation. And the pilgrimage continues long after the last organized step. Perhaps through a method like this we can all find ways to pilgrimage for a healthy world.

What endows sites like death camps and bombed cities with holiness? How can we visit horror, let it stare at us, and not only survive but experience hope? And with hope, a resolve to labor and dance for a new vision: a world without war, quelling the violence, making peace, and bringing into existence a civil world, itself holy and a manifestation of the divine? Please join with me and the other pilgrims of 1995 and beyond as we together strive for a better way.

(November 1994)

The Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life, 1995, organized by Japanese Buddhists, went from Auschwitz in Poland last December to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August. Our route took us through Bosnia, Israel, Iraq, India, Cambodia, Vietnam, the Philippines, to name some—a total of 17 countries, in 9 months, walking nearly 2,000 miles. Our group numbered between 25 and over 600, and included Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, and others on less traditionally defined faith paths.

We sought reconciliation between warring factions, we advocated for peace through non-violent means, we attempted to heal by remembering historic horrors, we spoke of our vision of the sanctity of all creation, the unity of all life. We prayed every morning, offering prayers, songs, messages from various traditions. We prayed constantly while walking, the Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo chant of the Japanese Buddhist peace pagoda builders: all creation is sacred. We fasted periodically in places such as the war-ravaged Bosnian city of Mostar and at the site of over 100,000 civilian deaths in the last hours of World War II in Manila.

I personally experienced the power of place—feet and heart planted firmly where some momentous event had occurred. Auschwitz and Hiroshima and Nagasaki, of course, are examples of that, but so also is the region south of Brno in the Czech Republic where many German residents of Czechoslovakia died in the summer of 1945 as they were forced from their ancestral homes by angry neighbors. And Vietnam! Hanoi, scene of so many civilian casualties, and the former Demilitarized Zone with its barren plains a result of defoliation. Less well known but equally moving were the tunnels of Cu Chi near Ho Chi Minh City, shelter and staging point for resistance fighters, and the beaches near Hue where many had fled by boat the newly—victorious Communist regime after the war.

I learned more about prayer, about rooting my life in faith, not measuring the wisdom of decisions by results, and imagining a peaceful and just reality into being by acting—with others—in such a manner. To be with so many others of different faiths and practices, observing their methods of prayer, their characters, their explanations, and trying what fits, all in the context of being and making peace—how could I not learn something from this?

Balanced against the horrors we experienced—wrecked buildings and lives, graveyards, shelling, landmines, tanks and other military vehicles, soldiers—were the people of peace and reconciliation. We were with the Buddhist monks and nuns of Cambodia who had organized the fourth annual walk, the Catholic clerics and laity of the Philippines supporting those victimized by the current wave of reckless economic development, and the Japanese who not only keep alive the memory of the atomic and fire-bombings of their cities but build from the ashes monuments and stories of peace.

These are some of the ways I've been impacted by this momentous journey. May we all find pilgrimages of our own to make, some as near as our neighborhood. May we all experience the refreshment and rejuvenation of spirit that follows after we've actively remembered violence. May we discover hope and strength to continue our own journeys toward peace, justice, and reconciliation. Each step a bridge, each step a healing, each step helping make peace.

(October 1995)

BALKANS

Split, Croatia

I saw Olga as we left the ferry from Rejeca to Split. She'd volunteered to host some of us pilgrims in her home. I was immediately attracted by something shining in her countenance, also something long-suffering. No question in my mind about who of the ten or so potential hosts I'd ask to share hospitality with.

Robert, I said, time to move! Robert was my buddy in the Balkans—we looked out for each other, helped each other survive what might be war conditions, the winter, the mountains, made sure neither was left behind if one became ill or wounded or lost. Robert, totally blind, committed to the entire walk, Auschwitz to Hiroshima.

We had arrived in the early morning in Split, ferrying along the Adriatic coast all night. I watched the glimmering lights of Italy on the port side, the relatively dark shore of Croatia on the starboard. Although the season was winter—January 1995—and we'd just walked nearly three weeks through Poland, Czech Republic and Austria marking the 50th anniversary of World War II's end, through cold, snow, rain, ice, fog and smog, we were now thrilled by a balmy climate. Lettuce was about ready for harvesting, wild flowers were in bloom, we could sit for hours without jackets sipping cappuccino fifty feet from the Adriatic Sea. Not a bad life for pilgrims on their way to Bosnia.

Olga was short, blond, curvaceous, reminding me of Lynn, my former wife. Olga looked sturdy. I thought she might be pugnacious, hardened by the conditions of war. In Split we were a mere twenty miles from the front, the border of Bosnia and Croatia. Active fighting was that close, even though Split itself, the ancient city founded by Romans, had experienced only one brief attack, leaving no casualties and virtually no damage. Unlike its neighbor, Dubrovnik, under siege for months, and clearly not Sarejevo, where the rate of dying had reached over 1,000 deaths monthly, certainly not Mostar with its blown up bridges, Split seemed an idyl. Earlier, World War II had visited the same region, contributing to a 500 hundred year period of strife, peace, and changing national orientation, cycling, endlessly cycling.

Besides Robert and I, three other pilgrims—Richard from England and the two Germans, Castoen and Amien—raised hands for Olga's hospitality. The five of us piled into her small car for the short drive to her home. She seemed excited, greeted us in English, said the homestays had been coordinated by her religious community, Si Baba, along with the Franciscan monastery. She was eager to tell us about Si Baba, the relatively new religion based in India combining all the major faith traditions, if we wanted to hear. She said she wished to listen to some of our stories. I was intrigued and very attracted by something mysteriously vivacious in her, despite the context of war.

Croatia and its adjoining region, Slovenia, had been the first units of the former Yugoslavia to secede from the nation. War ensued. The full weight of the former Yugoslavian army was arrayed against these seceding sectors, now recognized by many foreign governments as separate nations. Despite the lack of physical damage in Split, we

were to learn of the deeper and more enduring damage to psyches, the internal wreckage so difficult to notice or to heal.

Olga, a radiologist serving on the front, introduced us to her husband, Toni, owner of a small import-export business, and their ten year old son, Marjan, an avid soccer player. Marjan was shy about trying out the English he'd been learning in school. We were to rest four days in Split, before setting off for our walk along the coast, through Makarska, Omis, up over the mountains through Vgorac and Medugorje, crossing into Bosnia and then into what had been the cultural center of southern Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mostar. This was to be a respite from the arduousness of our previous month: Auschwitz to Vienna by foot, and then Zagreb, the capital of Croatia and what faced us in Bosnia. I looked forward to home-cooked Croatian food and a bed rather than a floor. Perhaps also an uncrowded bath, and a leisurely squat on the toilet.

Their home was small, an apartment in a large block of similar units, four rooms, including the kitchen-dining room. One room was Olga and Toni's, one Marjan's, leaving one for us. This was not quite large enough for four men and a woman, so Marjan gave us his room, and shared his parent's.

A stream of visitors appeared: Thomas, a young partner in Toni's business, very handsome and fit, but looking haggard, distraught. I suspected an illness at his core that he couldn't cover with the many glasses of wine he drank while with us; Stevo, Olga's cousin, a physical education teacher in a local high school, robust, affable, generous, very sprightly and outward, with a boyish spirit; and another young man who leaned dangerously far back on his chair while swilling wine.

Over the days, stories emerged. Toni—his income had been reduced from a yearly profit of \$40,000 three years ago, before the war started, to about one tenth that last year. His low income notwithstanding, Toni treated us to coffee, snacks, postcards, and taxi rides. His generosity was boundless. Thomas—formerly a soldier, now loose, wandering, even though partnered in business with Toni. Stevo—his mother Serbian, his father Ukranian, born and educated in Croatia, just as we were visiting Split, gained his Croatian citizenship. It had been delayed because of his suspect origins. This frustration despite serving in the Croatian navy, despite instituting a sports training program for the military and despite his founding and coaching the judo teams for youth which won highest international honors. Olga—her Serbian parents lived in Bosnia. Last year her father killed himself, despairing of the war, and now, because of the conflict separating regions and destroying intercommunication, Olga can not speak with or write to her mother. Her mother has chosen to remain in Bosnia near her husband's grave.

And Marjan—a boy who witnesses all this suffering. not the physical destruction of war when the fighting is nearby, but the devastating effects of living with hatred, division, removal, disappearance, torture, and killing. What will he become? When his seed sprouts, what will his flower be?

Marjan skillfully and with gusto played soccer with Castoen. Proudly he showed us his

school books. He spoke English with us in a solemn tone, not fully sure of himself, and also perhaps mildly distrustful of us. Who were we to wander in, wander through, and soon be gone, perhaps never to be in touch again? As heartbreaking as these quick junctions and disjunctions can be to us adult pilgrims—one of the most painful parts of pilgrimage for me—how much more painful might this phenomenon be for a child, especially one in a war situation? His grandfather had just killed himself, friends of his family were dying or leaving, alcohol pervaded some lives. The guns could not be heard at the distance of twenty miles, but the insidious psychic destruction of war permeated Split, Croatia and the Balkans. War decimates the spirit.

With the war as backdrop, Zagreb had been exhilarating for us. Partly because we were among the first in the last four years to go between various religious communities—Muslim, Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox Christian. Partly because we'd been part of a packed church celebrating an interfaith service in the pilgrimage's honor. A retired Eastern Orthodox priest, Father Nakovitch, spoke, as did the abbot of the Zagreb Jesuit monastery, one of our hosts. Father Nakovitch told us, When we kill, we inherit the unrepented sins of our victims. We sung prayers from Judaism, led by Jews, chanted the Buddhist syllables of our pilgrimage, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, to the beat of Japanese drums, heard a sung Sufi prayer and joined in, Ishkela Maba Lela ("the lover, the beloved, god, all one"), and saw a Native American ceremony honoring the four directions. No one of the Islamic faith appeared that evening, but we had earlier visited a mosque and heard from the mufti (priest).

Now, in Split, Olga invited all of us to a Sai Baba service. Sai Baba is humble, exuberant, accepting—and syncretic. It combines elements from the Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim paths. Its appeal has burgeoned among Croatians, as has participating by others in the Catholic church. Toni attends the Catholic church. Marjan participates in both communities. In Lipik, a small war-ravaged village near Zagreb, Dr. Topic earlier had explained, We are experiencing a spiritual renaissance. In some cases, the war opens the heart; while in others, war closes the heart. Trying to find a nonviolent way out of the conflict and to abandon the instinct for revenge, we are seeking the eternal.

The cafes were loaded with youth sipping coffee or alcoholic drinks. This presaged what we were to see in Mostar. A byproduct of war is boredom. Little music or cinema or theater or visual art, education curtailed, sports limited, all attention goes to the fighting.

500 years ago, the area had been settled by the Romans. In a place called Salonae, place of the sun, about ten miles from Split, the Roman city of thousands thrived for 1200 years, to 700 of the present era (P.E.). It was eventually destroyed by Huns and Mongols. Stevo took Marianne and me to walk through the amphitheater which once held 12,000 people watching the gladiators. Diocletian, a Roman emperor living about 295 P.E., had built his retirement palace in what is now Split. The palace is now an arcade, or would be if not for the war. 1,000 years after the birth of Christ, Christians erected a church inside the palace complex, the first Christian church in the region. At the moment of church construction, Islam was just 200 years old, struggling with Christians for hegemony. This conflict continues to the present moment.

War nearby yet the presence of the soft Adriatic light. It bathes us in its warm glow. We sit for long moments basking in it. We climb the hills of Split, or stroll along the waterfront, never far from the light. All beings are rendered internally lit, or their inner lights are sparked alive by this Mediterranean light. I revel in it, my Quaker heritage of the light within assumes new meaning, I find myself photographing in an inspired manner.

Finally, after four days in Split, we leave for Mostar. And return to Split two weeks later on our way to Budapest where we hope to gain Serbian visas, roundabout because of the war. On our second Split visit we tell stories to Olga, Toni and Marjan, thank them again for nourishing us on our way to Bosnia and now Serbia. Olga had helped heal Claude who was suffering from intense stomach pain. Toni sent us off with bundles of food for the long bus ride to Zagreb. I waved goodbye to Marjan, not sure of his future, he the harbinger of the next generation.

(January 1997)

A Dream of Bombardment

Night. The Studenski Dom in Mostar where fifty of us pilgrims reside compactly in one space, lying sleeping bag to sleeping bag asleep. A strong wind blows relentlessly for the past two days. This is the famed Bora from the north of Bosnia Hercegovina, blowing over Sarajevo, then Mostar, to Dubrovnic, along the Adriatic Sea.

I dream that rockets and mortars and artillery are falling on us. The shells whistle in, explode, flash and boom. Windows rattle, the building shakes. I startle, sit ramrod straight up, sweating, shaking, expecting my fellows to be beginning our flight. I conclude, seeing nothing stirring, either I am the first to awaken, and have the onerous task of rousing the others, or I am the last, my peers have left without me.

If the first, no problem, we are pilgrims, nomads, homeless and jobless, awakening early for morning prayer, quickly packing into our backpacks, and calmly walking out into the morning light. If the second, no problem, I am resourceful enough to locate the pilgrims' trail and join them down the road.

Slowly, as if in a fog that gradually burns off with the rising sun, the whistling shells become the wind whistling through leaking windows, the rattling and shaking is merely the Bora trying to disturb our sleep, the flashing lights are the headlights of cars. I am safe, I can return to sleep. And I have just been given a gift—the smell of war, the taste of fear.

(February 1996)

Tea in Mostar

The day is cold and windy. We had been sitting all day on the west Mostar side of the bridge, in the former parking lot of a former shopping complex. Croatians now lived on the west side, Muslims on the east, a byproduct of the war. We are in the midst of the wreckage. Fasting and praying, we are an odd sight—disheveled, wrapped in blankets and sleeping bags, beating drums, nodding and smiling at the occasional passerby, and chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo into the north wind.

This is our second fast and prayer day in Mostar. The day before we'd been on the opposite side of the bridge, in a town square, surrounded by 40 or so people. Some smiled, gawked, and wept. Twice people threw from our altar the crucifix someone had offered, angered by this symbol of the ravaging Christian Serbian and Croatian powers. The kids—more curious, less vindictive—tried our drums and learned the chant.

Hours pass, masses of chill Bosnia-Herzegovian air pass, a few drivers pass, one soldier photographs us. Unlike the day before in east Mostar, no one greets us (other than police), nor weeps with us, nor try our drums, nor ask to learn the chant, nor pour tea. I feel ignored, forsaken, alone, cold. The admonition, you are called to be faithful not effective, seems faded, irrelevant. I doubt about my role, our presence, the power of prayer.

Next: four people appear. They bring us tea—the Angels of Tea. A woman, short, sturdy, smiling, radiant; a man, agile, muscular, a stubble of beard on his square movie-star face; another man, soft-skinned, sharp-nosed, beaming eyes; and a third, a teenager, with a quizzical countenance. They look related to each other, a family perhaps? Who are they? Why are they here? Of all the 50,000 or so people living in west Mostar, how did they learn of us, what do they think of our vigil?

They pour a cupful of tea for me, then another, and a third, doing this for all who wished. They pour from small insulated containers, having a seemingly endless supply of hot sweet fruit tea, an Eastern European staple. They do not offer food, evidencing knowledge of our fast. They appear from the cloud-strewn sky, hover, descend, and alight. Then they sweet away, as mysterious to me as a flock of robins landing in my New England home in the winter. They are gone, we are present, and remain till darkness. We offer the fast and prayer, they offer tea—for peace and life, 1995.

(December 1995)

CAMBODIA

The Suton Family

As I was walking to our residence after a long day exploring the city, I had no idea a chance meeting with several pilgrims in a cafe would result in my meeting the Suton family. A few pilgrims had met the two young men of the family, Zoren and Sardan, earlier. They'd visited our early morning interfaith prayer service. Pieces of story about the family floated through our community. Zoren a former soldier fighting in Mostar, was now a city policeman. His father, Boris, currently an officer in the Bosna Herceg army, was home on leave.

When I and three pilgrims arrive at their apartment block, all is dark. The electricity had again inexplicably disappeared. Zoren leads us up with a flashlight. This could be a movie theater, Zoren the usher, cheerily showing us to our seats, but warning us, the movie will frighten you.

In the third floor apartment, candles flicker and kerosene lamps burn steadily in the darkness. The room is small and warm, a long sofa on one side, a few chairs elsewhere, and the compact kitchen off to one side. As my eyes adapt to the light I see the faces of the Suton family—the same people who had brought us tea while we fasted and prayed on Mostar's west side.

We talk of that day, the cold, the wind, the isolation we experienced, and how gladened we were when the family appeared with tea. Marija and her husband now bring us tea and cookies. Sorry, she says, dinner has to wait until the we get electricity again. She sells sundries in one of many small stalls dotting the Mostar streets. Boris, her husband, periodically steps onto the porch to smoke a cigarette. He commands 120 men in his duty area north of the city. He soldiers one day in every three, home for the remaining two. Their two sons, Zoren and Srdan, live at home. Srdan, 15 years old, is a student at the electrical polytechnical school. Zoren, older by five years, fought in the local war, now guards abandoned buildings as part of his policeman's duties in the city.

When the war struck Mostar in 1991 they fled to Zagreb to live with friends. Two months later they returned to Mostar. Why, we asked, with the destruction and fear here? They replied, It is our home, we could not stay away. Before the war, Boris assembled airplanes at the local Boeing factory. Srdan would like to be just like his father, employed as machinist or electrician in a factory. Zoren once aspired to become a doctor, but now is unsure of his path. Will the war flame up again? None could answer. It sleeps like a monster with one eye open, infecting all in its presence with its power.

Monica had warned me that neither Boris nor Zoren liked talking about their war experiences. So I do not ask questions. Instead, I offer a recent dream about being under bombardment "Yes," they exclaim, "that is exactly how it was, the whistling shells, the flashes of light, the rattling windows and shaking buildings, that feeling of horror and helplessness, twenty four hours a day."

They speak of both the smell of war and their hatred for the extreme nationalist Serbs and Muslims whom they hold responsible for the ravaging of Mostar. Zoren's woman friend, a Muslim, was forced with other Muslims from her residence in west Mostar to the

A Letter from a Pilgrim in Cambodia

east sector. They have not seen each other. Despite my not to raise painful memories, Zoren and Boris, son and father, step nearer and nearer that black hole of suffering and despair. They are drawn by the powerful magnet of memory. Step too near and you fall in, never to climb out. Feel the overwhelming power of fear and hatred. The desire to kill.

Then we sing. They sing us Croatian love songs, we sing them North and South American songs of struggle and solidarity. All of us together sing—or chant—our prayer for peace: *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. And laughed and laughed, and hugged. They offered me a bath, my first in weeks, and pleaded with us to remain overnight. “You are here with us for such a short time, let’s make the most of it.”

(February 1996)

...13 days into a 24 day walk across Cambodia, probably now past the active war zone. Little sign of mines (except for the mine awareness display our organizers install at every lunch and overnight stop), no more shelling sounds, yet a continuing government army presence...

We rise as early as 3, leaving by 4, or as late as 6, to walk in the relatively cool hours. Dawn walking is among my most preferred, the light slowly seeping into the sky. We pass many people kneeling at roadside in candlelight, incense-heavy, awaiting the water blessing. Then a long break for lunch (after breakfast around 7), to rest 3 or so hours during the most intense heat (up to 115 degrees F) Another 2—4 hours walk to reach the next wat (a temple complex), a meal, and within one hour, night has surrounded us as we finish our laundry and shower (water from a small bucket poured over head and body) This is the routine...

...Last night at our wat I sought the quiet and darkness of the road (many people gather to greet and watch us—not much solitude). The sun had almost set, the sky was gray with many shades, the air cool,. The country seemed at peace. I felt joy. Five young men joined me, out of the darkness, one speaking very broken English. Flashing through my brain was, “This is an abduction by the Khmer Rouge, they’ve got their foreigner, I’m bound for deep in the jungle, perhaps never to be heard from again.” He said, “Can we speak English, my friends here want to speak to you. I will translate.” His English was not too good. He says, “I love America.” And I ask why? He looks dumfounded. I repeat the question and from the other side of the darkness comes, “Because people have lots of things. Because of freedom.” This man, slightly older, tells me he is the supervisor of the other fellows on a road repair crew. We’d noticed the sharp transition from pocked gravel to fairly smooth asphalt. These six young men are responsible for incrementally extending the blacktop. They work when the government sends money, otherwise not. They stop during the rain, which is becoming more frequent. (monsoon’s on the way)... As simply as I can, I try to explain: “Yes, many have much, and many more have little. Yes, there is freedom—to speak—but you might never be heard. And skin color—yours, for example (he was very dark as most Cambodians are)—might keep you from getting a job as a road building engineer even though you are qualified. They insisted, “We love America. We’d like to live there.”

Stories, and impressions and dreams concatenate. Many images: young orange-robed monks joking and smiling, aging white-clothed nuns walking in silence, their sandals or thongs shuffling through the gravel, more white-attired figures. These, the “precept-takers,” men and women who undergo the suffering—and joy—of the *dhammayietra*...

And now, on a rest day near Phnom Penh, four of us guys ensconced in the AFSC residence and office, enjoying the shade, the shower, the quiet, the solitude.

We have just left Phnom Penh—so recently fully depopulated and now a screaming city of some 2 million. Motor bikes, cars, and a few trucks and buses and all with regularly used horns, jam the roads. I can hardly hear the drums and chanting. The rivers *Toule Sap*

and Mekong (Phnom Penh is sited at the confluence of these rivers) provide a respite with a wide long palm tree-lined park. Now we walk parallel to the Mekong for awhile on our way to Vietnam.

The monsoons are due soon. We've had a few brief heavy showers, usually in midafternoon. often with lightning and thunder, always dramatic and bold. Being outside continuously, I note the evolution: clear sky, slight haze, maybe some soft cirrus, then the thunderheads form from the cumulus. More and more 'til the sky is peppered with them and crash, dump, drench! Later a slight cooling, much humidity, a clear sky...

We eat well, always food prepared in large quantities by communities local to the wat, or collected as gifts along the road. Always white rice, sometimes as gruel, or as sticky sweet banana-flavored rice, always salty dried fish, sometimes boiled fish (very delicious), a spinach-like green regularly served, along with about five other greens, sweet potatoes, a crushed roasted peanut garnish. And for confections, a sweet purple gelatinous material, crackers spread with fluffy white sweet sauce, and fruit. Mangoes are just past season. Lots of bananas and fruits I've never had. Like one all prickly and pale blue outside with a soft mushy pear-flavored interior, then a nut.

Many pilgrims (westerners) are sick, the usual problem is diarrhea, sometimes with fever. Some maybe with typhoid. In some cases hospitalization is needed. Some have food poisoning. Some are extremely fatigued, just sag into inertia. Heat is a major factor, of course as is the strenuous exercise. Temperatures up to 115 F but averaging a high of 95. Distance is between 14 & 28 Km. 2 rest days in 24 days.

The monks spray water on the waiting people using branches they dip into buckets provided by the greeters. I've seen shock, then joy and gratitude, in the faces of those blessed. They could be bullet-sprayed, not water-blessed. And the jasmine petals we drop on the children could be bombs. The line is narrow for Khmer people since they are so often visited by war.

Today we crossed the Mekong River at a town heavily bombed by the US in the early '70s. The area we enter to the Vietnam border was carpet-bombed then. I look for craters. And hope to keep track in my mind of this history—to deepen my prayer and reflection and to help us all experience compassion.

I shall enclose for you a lotus petal. They are in season. Vast ponds of lotus float before us.

I'm very glad to have been part of Dhammayietra but the long walking, threats from military, illness, heat and humidity, insects and general noise and tumult of the wats try my soul. Plus our group is scattered...far different than what we were in Europe. But we completed the walk and I feel we've made a slight contribution to bringing peace to a much hurt land and people.

(May 1995, edited by Louise Dunlap and Patricia Watson, reprinted from Peacework, July-August 1995)

The Night Before

I returned to the pilgrimage specifically to walk across Cambodia. This is where a peace-maker ought to be, I believed—in a zone of conflict, possibly helping through prayer and presence. I hadn't face the reality of that belief until landing in Thailand, one week before we were scheduled to enter Cambodia. On the first evening back, I heard a presentation from Yeshua, one of the organizers of the Dhammayietra, Walk of Truth. His presentation was grim and concentrated on fear—our first remembered fears, an occasion when we surmounted our fears. Doubt crept into my otherwise confident demeanor.

Later we were asked to find a buddy with whom we'd share responsibility for survival. We were informed that equipment such as cameras and tape players or recorders were likely to be stolen by insurgent troops. That we should not carry anything olive green or camouflage-colored since this might draw fire. To divest of most of our gear because the trucks available were small and few, we might have to carry our equipment part of the way. And we were required to fill out an emergency and death form: who to contact, who would pay for medical and evacuation expenses, what to do with the corpse?

Some talked of avoiding the first week of the three, meeting the walk later at Phnom Penh, after the walkers had spanned the zone of tension. I thought this might be a good idea for me. Why risk the peace and justice and photo work I could do later in my life by subjecting myself to artillery and rifle fire and mines?

Last year's Dhammayietra had been caught in a crossfire between Khmer and government troops. One monk and one nun were killed, a score or so were injured, and most of the westerners had been abducted by the Khmer Rouge. Happily, due largely to the cool and humorous head of one of the organizers, Liz Bernstein, and her Khmer fluency, they were unexpectedly released unharmed, losing only their gear. Most abductees never return.

People spoke of our chant, Na mu myo ho ren ge kyo, along with the drum, as being our protection. And of fully embraced nonviolence as our only weapon. And monks such as Brothers Sasamori and Marukami as seasoned and trustable leaders. The western organizers, Liz, Bob, and Kevin were conflict-tested. The Cambodian leadership, Maha Ghosananda and Venerable Nhem Kim Teng, were wise and experienced. The pilgrimage had been in tense areas before—notably Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Middle East—but never with such active fighting. The Vietnam vets among us spoke of us undergoing a form of combat training as preparation.

Of the fifty or so pilgrims in Thailand, about twenty decided not to enter Cambodia, but to find other venues for their peacemaking, and another ten chose to meet the walkers after the first week. I reminded myself that from the beginning of learning about this pilgrimage I'd assumed I'd go to Cambodia. I'd found money to return to the pilgrimage partly by saying to people, "Cambodia, I'll be there."

How could I not go?

Two nights before we were to cross the border, I had resolved my uncertainty, decided I'd walk all the way through Cambodia, from the Thai border on the west to the Vietnam

border on the east, 650 km, and include in my itinerary the region from Poi Pet to Battambang, an area of some strength for the Khmer Rouge, and one of the most heavily mined places on earth. 200-300 people monthly are injured and an unknown number are killed. We were warned to never walk off the road, even to crap.

I slept soundly that night, believing I'd made the right decision. I felt relieved and uplifted, proud of my courage.

The next evening, our last in Thailand, we had a long outdoor meeting by candlelight, in the center of a Buddhist temple complex, the pilgrims and organizers sitting in a large circle, talking candidly of their fears and hopes. We called such a meeting a "process meeting", where people are encouraged to speak from their hearts. Some were exuberantly committed, some half-heartedly willing to go, some confused and leaning toward not going, some certainly not going. I was silent, thinking I'd both decided and spoken enough privately.

That night I didn't sleep at all. I was once again riddled with uncertainty, confusion, fear. I was certain only that I'd be injured or killed if I walked through Cambodia. I felt trapped by my publicly declared aim to walk across Cambodia and by my fear. I'd forgotten pilgrim Dan's words in the circle: last year, admittedly, some were killed and some injured, but most were not, most survived.

All night I observed the flight of the moon, and the whizzing of mosquitoes. I noticed nuances of the nighttime sky for the first time in my life. I charted the emerging dawn, how the light changed color and brightness so gradually, the increasing number of bird calls, how the insects shifted their sounds. I listened to and studied the varieties of snores. I heard animals shuffling about, sometimes farting. I'd occasionally drift into a light, dreamy consciousness and could visualize my community and friends horrified by my efforts to make peace in a war-ravaged land. Some were berating me for my choice to walk, some for my choice not to walk, some applauded my decision, either one—all simultaneously.

Finally, after this mixed agony and revelation, I slid into a deep and surprising calm state, a well-centered place.

Next morning, as much from a combination of drowsiness and excitement as from conviction, I felt ready to walk. I had a good buddy, Robert, who, though blind, was strong and brave and tested. We'd buddied through Bosnia. I had been selected as a photographer, the only one with permission to carry camera equipment. The other photographers had either chosen or been requested not to enter the country. I had filled out my emergency and death form, not sure at first who to write in as recipient of my body, torn between my former wife and my current quasi-partner. Or maybe my sister would be the most appropriate. I could visualize one of them receiving my remains.

Most of the pilgrims, regardless of their decision, journeyed to the border. I sent a hurried fax to my sister in Alaska, trying to soften the language, but saying, I am clear about pilgrimaging here but feel some fear. As if it were a baby. I hold it and nurture it and pray that it—the fear—will transform into something positive.

Through the streets of the Thai border town, Ban Aranyaprathet, I whooshed by pedicab to find a fax machine, while other pilgrims stocked up on toilet paper and sweets. Hilarious, I thought, as our last step before our possible demise.

At the border, the not-going pilgrims gave the going ones a rousing sendoff. Corrine gave each of us a tiny card, picked at random, with a picture of an angel and one word on it, a predictive word of what role we'd play. Mine: Communicate. We stepped across the border, drums in hands, chanted Na mu... together and set off, joining the 600 or so Cambodian Buddhist monks and nuns and others on their fourth annual Dhammayietra.

As one pilgrim put his belief:

Peace begins with me. Not through somebody else! As a person believing in nonviolence, I must do the peaceful act. What I do will have an influence on others too. First my family, then friends, then on to a wider circle. Our walk, in itself, will not bring peace. But our actions as individuals will, through our friends, families and acquaintances. Through all our efforts peace will be coming very soon.

(September 1995)

Amputees Don't Meet the King

Why not? Hard to answer, since King Sihanouk—"the king who reigns but does not rule"—agrees that landmine manufacture and use should be banned, in Cambodia, universally. Despite his declaration, I observed the following, one rainy day in May in Phnom Penh.

The fourth annual Dhammayietra (Walk for Peace and Reconciliation) had arrived in the capital city. We excitedly anticipated our audience with King Sihanouk. We waited as the red carpet was rolled out, the canopies put in place, the lecterns and sound system installed. Media people took their places. Rain fell, a storm—this is the beginning of the rainy season. Rain at last!

Monks and nuns, lay people, and international walkers lined up, in the rain, opposite the speaker platform. We numbered over 600 persons by this point, our journey nearly halfway across the country, west to east, on a walk to bring rival factions together in negotiations. Inspirer of the walk and about to speak for us is Maha Ghosananda, the Supreme Buddhist Patriarch in Cambodia, a regal man in his early 70's, gallant and smiling as he strides along whipping water into the faces of roadside people asking for the water blessing. Patiently waiting, he purses his lips in a disarmingly benign manner, and himself appears the epitome of the sovereign.

What brought us here was a common concern for the Cambodian people, who have suffered from poverty, corruption, environmental depredation, foreign interference, and the three decades-long war. Both government and Khmer Rouge personnel have illegally cut trees, largely to finance their wars. Periodic floods—partly exacerbated by the deforestation—and droughts have decreased the rice crop. The nation has no sewage treatment plant, even in the capital, with its over two million inhabitants. The government is corrupt. In this century, first the French, next the Japanese, then the American, and most recently, the Vietnamese governments have either occupied, bombed, or destabilized the country.

As a young man standing between crutches on one leg said as we passed, Last year I had hoped to see the Dhammayietra but I was sent to the jungle to fight. I lost my leg there to a mine. Now, he said, looking down at his bandaged stump, I am able to see my first Dhammayietra.

The King admits the problems of landmines, poverty, and deforestation as he speaks to us. Maha Ghosananda replies with his timeless message:

The Cambodian people have suffered deeply. From suffering comes compassion, from compassion, a peaceful heart, which makes a peaceful person. A peaceful person creates a peaceful family, that family a peaceful community, the community a nation, finally the world, and the universe. Peace begins in one's own heart.

A major share of that suffering has been borne by civilians, often farmers, often chil-

dren. Landmines! More per hectare than anywhere else on the globe. Injuring 200-300 persons monthly, and, because of reporting difficulty, an untold number of deaths. Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and peoples' organizations have rallied in a campaign to ban the production and use of landmines worldwide. Our peace pilgrimage includes displays and lectures about landmines, also a postcard campaign.

A major incentive for me traveling to Cambodia is the photographic work of the Boston-based, Bill Burke. He's published several books concentrating on victims of landmines in Cambodia. Amputees, the blind, the disfigured. With statistics about widows, children, elderly, the relative costs of planting a mine (\$3—30) versus removing the mine (\$300—1000), the numbers of mines in other countries like Afghanistan, Mozambique, Angola, Iraq and former Yugoslavia, and the recent rapid increase in landmine use.

I've vowed to include amputees in my photo series while in Cambodia, but not to over-emphasize them, to show them balanced pictures of victims with pictures of landmine opposition.

The first person I see that might be suitable for this series is a young man in a temple complex, missing one leg, standing with crutches. I brought out my camera, stood in front of him about ten feet away, waited till he saw me, smiled, lifted the camera away from my body but not in front of my face—as a gesture to ask his permission. He smiled and nodded yes.

I lined up the photo, pressed the shutter, and noticed the shutter had jammed. The first time ever on my Nikon. I struggled futilely with my equipment and soon quit. Wondering, is this a sign?

By the time I calmed down, found a quiet spot to examine my camera, banged it judiciously, miraculously unjamming the shutter, and returned to where I'd seen the man, he was gone. And no other suitable figures appeared until days later when we were in Phnom Penh, waiting for the King.

As I scouted the crowd, observing faces in the rain, people lining up as if posing for a group photograph, as I made photo after photo of the monks, nuns, lay people, and international walkers, and of the preparations for the visitation, I discovered a man in a wheelchair. Two legs gone. Probably the result of a landmine. And again I decided to photograph this person, and again asked permission by miming, again was granted it. And this time before I could use my camera, the King had appeared, and was greeting the walkers, himself ambling down the line, grinning and reaching his hand out to personally shake hundreds of other hands.

As the King came closer, another double amputee in a wheelchair joined the line, and both men attempted to place themselves where they'd be seen and greeted by the King. Suddenly, three other men materialized, in tight-fitting suits, with sun glasses—the fabled North Korean bodyguards of the King. They roughly pushed the two wheelchair-bound men to the rear of the line. The King passed them by, never shook their hands, perhaps never saw them.

VARIOUS

But maybe he did see them, they weren't more than five meters from him. Others tried to get the King's attention, shouting words about the amputees.

Happily, this time my shutter did not jam. I photographed the entire scene, and shall present it much as I am here, without drawing any conclusions.

Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering by all means, including personal contact and visits, images, sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.

(Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Buddhist monk, teacher, author)

(September 1995)

Crossing Borders—Thailand to Cambodia to Vietnam

We bused from the Thai town of Ban Aranyaprathet to the border, all 40 or so of us pilgrims and organizers, and a few well-wishers. Hot day, dry, the height of the summer season. Rains not falling, but expected two weeks into our journey across Cambodia. Some pilgrims hadn't yet fully decided whether they were crossing, to pilgrimage through Cambodia for reconciliation between violently opposed factions, risking physical danger, or remaining in Thailand, or finding some other pilgrimage site for the month of May. I'd decided—not with great self-assurance, but with some calm—to walk. I'd said yes, had committed, and felt ready.

Corrine had passed out her angel messages to sustain and guide us: a single word as if spoken by the drawn angel on each card to each of us, picked by each pilgrim at random. Mine said, communicate. She and her husband, Eric, and 16 year old son, Beyond, a family of Quakers from California, felt they could be more useful at places like Egypt or Morocco, rather than in zones of conflict.

Michizo, the middle-aged Japanese journalist who'd slogged through months of pilgrimage, sometimes appearing grumpy, withdrawn, ill, grumbled to me, "The organizers won't let me into areas of combat, and refuse to say why." I guessed the blockage was because of his demeanor and erratic health. Olga, from Chile, never a strong walker, was denied entrance by the organizers, probably because of her lack of endurance. Claude, one of the two Vietnam vets with us, decided not to go, for reasons I didn't hear, and his good friend and colleague, Bill, also a vet who'd seen much combat 25 or so years ago, was told he couldn't enter Cambodia. The reason: the leaders felt he was too individualistic, not able to join fully with the walking community. And he had a tendency to be jumpy in threatening situations.

Other pilgrims, hearing about Billy, decided at the last minute to not enter. They said they were in solidarity with Billy. So Maea, Sook, and one or two others stayed behind. Later, Maea sent Robert a letter saying, I didn't go, not only because of Bill, but I realized I didn't have the strength and courage needed.

That left about 15 of us, from the 25 or so core group of pilgrims. Marianne told me later she felt that deep inner calm which comes from making the correct decision. Christine has an indomitable spirit, as does Heidron, and knew as peacemakers they had to be in Cambodia. Robert also, and Joe. I shared this rationale. How could I not go through Cambodia, the site of the killing fields of the 1970's, a government earlier destabilized by U.S. connivance as part of the Vietnam war, a land also carpet-bombed then by the U.S. to deny Viet Cong their sanctuary. Cambodia was invaded by Vietnam in 1979, purportedly to drive out the murderous Khmer Rouge, and then occupied until the Peace Accords of the early 1990's. For 30 years—relentless war.

And today, 1995, an ongoing guerrilla war between the Cambodia army and the Khmer Rouge, heating up in May just before the rainy season would curtail fighting. We planned to walk through one of the strongholds of the Khmer Rouge—marked by Poi Pet, on the Thai

border, and Battambang, about 130 km east.

Crossing the border, finally, after all our pilgrim disputes and confusions, all decisions sorted out, goodbyes and blessings uttered, gifts given, promises made, prayers whispered or shouted, the sun blinding us, we walked across the nondescript border. To be met by the over 600 Cambodian Buddhist monks and lay people, a very colorful assemblage, the brown and orange regalia of the monks, the white fabric of the laity who'd taken precepts, and the mottled clothing of the few westerners. The leaders had split off the monks into one group, the rest into another, put them in two lines, and had them join, monks first, as the walk began. The pilgrims were ushered up near the front, just behind the lead monks, including Maha Ghosananda, one of the primary inspirers of the annual Dhammayietra, Walk of Truth.

Three weeks and 650 km later: the Vietnamese border What a relief! We'd survived the walk, though each of us had gotten sick, some with typhoid fever, some with dysentery, most with "walkers' sickness"—fever, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea. Our suffering was slight compared with that of the Cambodian people: several were killed by an artillery shell in Poi Pet the day before we arrived, and more died the day after. The region is the most heavily mined in the world, 200-300 are injured each month by mines, while an unknown number are killed. The rice harvest and supply were down because of a combination of flooding and drought. Deforestation is rampant.

As Maha Ghosananda says, The suffering of the Cambodian people has been deep. From suffering comes compassion, from compassion a peaceful heart, then a peaceful person, and on to a peaceful world.

Our walk was to reconcile not only factions inside Cambodia, but the Vietnamese with the Cambodians. After much hesitancy and vacillation, the Vietnamese government finally granted the pilgrims' visas. Even more epoch-making was the granting of Maha Ghosananda's visa, the first to a Cambodian Buddhist leader in decades. Another modest border, not the gate and fence I'd expected, but a narrow road, without trees or other vegetation, a few markers indicating a new country, some sheds or stalls for officials to check documents, and more of the hot plain that we'd been stepping on for the past three weeks. Unremitting sun, dry heat, windless, as we waited for the ceremony to begin.

Brother Sasamori had asked me to speak public thank you words, accompanying our usual peace cranes. I had six strings in my hand, awaiting the moment when I might thank Maha Ghosananda, the three central organizers, and a few other key people. Maha Ghosananda spoke briefly, another senior monk and Dhammayietra leader spoke, several others gave their remarks, while all stood in the flaring and unforgiving sun. The high point of a three minute prayer of silence for victims of all wars, as insects buzzed and ravens cawed. And then, in a rush, we crossed the border into Vietnam—no appropriate moment to say thank you.

To a greeting by the waiting Vietnamese officials, including the counterpart of Maha

Ghosananda, the Venerable Thich Minh Chau. And Mr Winh, of the Peace Committee, who was to host us for our two weeks in their country.

Also awaiting us were several westerners who either were rejoining us or initiating their participation in the Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life, 1995. Included were two Vietnam vets from the U.S., the wife of one of them, and a young, dedicated woman from Australia. From the arduousness of Cambodia to the relative ease of Vietnam, we were about to be escorted and shepherded by the Vietnamese government—not by foot, but by bus and train, “The Reunification Express.” Perhaps walking was felt to be too threatening. We were the first international peace group to enter the country in recent history, the “face of the peace movement,” as one pilgrim put it.

Sister Clare Carter, of the Japanese Buddhist order that organized the walk, Nipponzan Myohoji, has observed that crossing borders is among the most difficult parts of an international journey. Culture shock, climatic change, and language and currency differences are among the most obvious challenges. But reaching further, I notice that although borders perpetually shift, there is also a permanence about them. They contain and embody long-lived historical differences. And they deny unities. The Thai and the Cambodian peoples have been for eons different. The historic Khmer once ruled a vast section of what we now call Southeast Asia, subsuming present day Thailand and “Cochin-China” or the Mekong River delta. To this moment, Khmers live in the southern section of Vietnam.

As we neared the Vietnam border, we noticed the Cambodian cuisine was changing, ultimately becoming Vietnamese. Had we been linguistically astute enough we probably would have noticed a similar transition in language. For a long distance in Vietnam, the clothing, architecture and agricultural practices matched those of Cambodia. But more profoundly, each person was human, each was sacred, and each was connected with the others and with all creation. Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Christian, Native American, Native African, aboriginal, indigenous...I am each, I am none, I am a person, nothing human—nothing of life!—is alien to me.

Can we imagine a world without borders? As is beginning to happen in Europe with the European Union, and has already happened to the former British Colonies now known as the United States of America. Do we wish such a world?

(September 1995)

Trees to Logs to Tissue Paper

Walking through Cambodia with the Dhammayatra, Walk of Truth, we pilgrims noticed the lack of trees. We walked on a seemingly endless and unremittingly hot plain, the sun shaded only occasionally by scattered palms. We learned this region had been once a rain-forest. Until the end of World War Two, approximately 70% of Cambodia’s land was in forests. But in the last twenty years, both the government and the insurgent Khmer Rouge had cut trees to finance their war. The forest now covers only 14% of Cambodia.

In the Philippines, another land once thick with forests, a similar story: legal and illegal cutting devastated the rain forest. Multinational companies contract for timber rights, drive indigenous people further into the mountains for subsistence, who would then, themselves, burn forests for cultivatable land. Meanwhile the companies strip the region’s virgin forest.

We inquired, who buys the wood? Where is the market?

And learned: Japan and the United States of America are among the biggest markets.

As I traveled through Japan I marveled at the ornate temples, pagodas and shrines, the use of lumber in them, and wondered, did this wood come from the countries I’ve just visited? And coming home to the U.S., would I remember the source of the wooden floors I walk on, the wooden plates I eat from, the the wooden cabinetry I store my belongings in, and the wooden trim in the church I worship in? In using the abundant toilet paper in Japan and the U.S., would I keep in mind its possible source? That tissue paper handed out in Tokyo to entice me to buy more, is this ultimately from the Philippines or Cambodia? The mahogany I hold in my hand to make into furniture, did this once live as a Southeast Asian tree? The paper I write on, where from?

In the Philippines, Michael, a Pampangon, who had recently discovered his indigenous roots, told me his people’s belief about trees. Each person has a tree as a companion, for life. The tree’s spirit entwines with the spirit of the person, so that what happens to the tree happens to the person, and what the person does affects the tree. They are interconnected. Both are sacred.

Deforestation crudely defies the Pampangon’s sense of truth. Deforestation could ruin our atmosphere—trees convert the carbon dioxide we exhale into the oxygen we need to survive. Other devastations of the earth, such as floods and mudflows, could be encouraged—roots hold firm the soil. Arrogant, ignorant, and greedy, angry and desperate, many befoul our bed and destroy creation. This I learned walking the Asian earth.

How counter this?

Heed indigenous wisdom (From the Statement of Indigenous Delegates to the Global Forum on the Environment and Development for Survival, Moscow, January 1990):

We are the peoples of the earth. Earth is our place. Let us believe in it; let us take care of the earth, as we take care of our children, of our parents and grandparents. We are people of the earth.

The Philippines: Uncovering History

We must remember that we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children. So now let us begin.

Let us be aware of the tree products we consume, let us limit or end deforestation, let us advocate the renewal of our forests.

(October 1995)

This memorial is dedicated to all those innocent victims of war, many of whom went nameless and unknown to a common grave, or never even knew a grave at all, their bodies having been consumed by fire or crushed to death beneath the rubble of ruins.

Let this monument be the gravestone for each and every one of the over 100,000 men, women, and children and infants killed in Manila during its battle of liberation, February 3 – March 3, 1945. We have not forgotten them, nor shall we ever forget.

May they rest in peace as part now of the sacred ground of this city:
The Manila of our affections.

The Memorare Manila 1945

For many pilgrims, the Philippines was the most difficult leg of the journey. We walked in the high heat of summer, with a schedule in which time and distances were sometimes miscalculated, causing confusions and delays. Many of us knew only a vague history of World War II in the Philippines, dimly related to the United States and Japan (although we were aware that hundreds of thousands had courageously suffered and died during the war here). In our home countries we had little, if any, contact with Filipino people. Many of us were especially disturbed by the environmental ruination we walked through—a result of economic development and the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. I was especially troubled by the seeming lack of a shared sense of national identity. What has happened in the Philippines, we asked, and how am I and my country responsible? Throughout our journey here, however, we were unselfishly aided, cared for, fed and housed by the generosity of the people and our organizers.

We walked for four weeks, some three hundred miles, on the main island of Luzon, starting at Bagiuo, walking south to the peninsula of Bataan, there to walk part of the Bataan Death March route in reverse—The Bataan Life March! Then on to the fortress island of Corregidor, littered with war-ruined buildings, rusting weapons and monuments to the dead amid a surprisingly idyllic and peaceful setting. Finally, we bused to the southern tip of Luzon, Bicol, and walked north to Manila. We fasted and prayed in Intramuros, in the center of Manila, where some 100,000 civilians perished during the last days of the war. We remembered the thousands of U.S. military that had died during World War II, as well as the countless others—Japanese and Filipino, combatants and civilians—that died, not only in World War II, but during liberation struggles dating back hundreds of years.

Filipino organizers put the Pilgrimage themes this way in flyers we passed out to the thousands who came to greet us:

- To call attention to the Philippine internal armed conflict and heighten the con-

cern for and efforts towards its resolution through the peace process. The peace agenda being promoted by advocates as a framework for resolving the conflict will be highlighted.

- To expose and denounce the developmental aggression of transnational and multinational corporations, especially that of Japan and the United States (ironically, the protagonists in the last World War), as this impacts on the South, which suffered the most devastation in the War.
- To focus on the inter-relatedness of peoples, of concerns, issues, beliefs, problems, ideologies, and faiths as a unifying step to confront the scourge of war and in the struggle to preserve life.

A succinct statement of a Filipino perspective in one of the Manila newspapers, *The Expat*, shocked many of the American pilgrims who had little idea of American-Philippine history:

[Just as the Independence Movement was about to succeed] ...the Americans had ideas of their own, and when the Americans defeated the Spanish in a mock Battle of Manila in August 1898, then-President McKinley decided to keep the Philippines, believing Filipinos were not ready for self-governance and afraid other countries would invade the Philippines for themselves.

Aguinaldo and other Filipinos believed otherwise and their guns were soon turned at the Americans, with whom they fought a bloody Philippine-American War for three years, ostensibly ending when Aguinaldo was captured in 1901 by the Americans (there were still pockets of resistance, however, for several years after).

For Filipinos, this history is common knowledge, an integral part of their being. For most Americans, however, it comes as a shock to learn there was a Philippine-American War, and that America, the bastion of democracy, fought another country to keep it under [U.S.] rule.

For whatever reason, the Philippine-American War is not taught in the American educational system, and most Americans are unaware of a vital part of their history.

A major problem in the Philippines—a legacy of U.S. involvement—is child prostitution. Phillip Sherwell wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, a Philippine newspaper:

The South-East Asian archipelago has long been a paedophile haven, where until recently, the worst fate likely to befall a Western sex offender was being shipped home. For 13 years, a lone crusade has been waged by Father Shay Cullen [a Catholic priest] against the sexual predators who abuse the country's

children. Police corruption and apathetic politicians reluctant to publicize to outsiders this less than paradisaical aspect of the Philippines have meant that Father Cullen has often been the only one attempting to monitor suspected paedophiles.

In Olongapo, the town that once hosted the Subic Bay Naval Station, Father Cullen founded the PREDA Foundation Human Development Center. As we pilgrims rested there for several days, he told us about his campaign to stop child sex abuse and rehabilitate abuse victims. Several of us visited a residence for orphaned children whose mothers had worked as prostitutes for the sailors at the Naval Station. The children enthusiastically learned from us how to fold peace cranes—a token that might lessen the overwhelming legacy of the base.

Although the Station is now closed, the United States and Japan, through economic influence, continue to control use of the land. How do Philippine indigenous people interpret this? Michael Pangilinan, a young man from a region north of Manila called Pampanga, writes:

The Kapampangan (someone from Pampanga) is touchy when it comes to the question of land because the question deals not only with an accidental preoccupation but with the deeper question concerning himself, his very being, his soul. When one touches his land he not only touches something he merely possesses; rather, he touches his very being as well.

The Philippines, a land once thick with forests, has suffered untold desecration. Legal and illegal tree-cutting devastate the rain forest. Multinational companies contract for timber rights and drive indigenous people further into the mountains for subsistence. They would then, themselves, burn forests for cultivatable land. Meanwhile the companies strip the region's virgin forest.

We asked, who buys the wood? Where is the market? We learned that Japan and the United States of America are among the biggest markets. A young woman, close to the indigenous teachings, forcefully explained her people's belief about trees. Each person has a tree as a companion, for life. The tree's spirit entwines with the spirit of the person, so that what happens to the tree happens to the person, and what the person does affects the tree. They are interconnected. Both are sacred.

Deforestation exacerbates the problem of lahar—a mix of volcanic ash, sand, and water. I was particularly distressed by witnessing the lahar after it had swamped whole communities. PREDA, the youth service center in Olongapo, was destroyed in 1992 by lahar. Father Shay Cullen guided its rebuilding. Three years later, he wrote in his annual holiday message:

The greatest on-going disaster is the continuous flows of [lahar] from Mt. Pinatubo, the flows destroying huge areas of the provinces of Pampanga and Zambales. The source of the present on-going disaster is the incredible tonnage

of ash and sand that poured from the volcano during the eruption which later settled on its flanks and filled its huge valleys.

When the rains come, there is not a tree to hold back the water but it rushes down the slopes mixing the ash and sand like cement and hurls it towards the flat plains below where it quickly fills the rivers and spreads itself further and



further from the volcano growing higher by the hour. People fled when they could. Some were swept away, others dragged under by the flowing cement, yet others took refuge on their roof tops where they were rescued by helicopters every year since 1991.

When the rains and storms are over, an expansive gray desert lies where once rural towns and villages thrived among the lush green rice fields shaded by towering groves of majestic bamboo. Driving north from Manila, you can still see the roofs of only the tallest buildings protruding from the new desert floor that stretches to the horizon.

We met people displaced by the lahar. We resided overnight in their temporary shelters in resettlement sites, hearing people's stories and sharing songs.

Many of the Pilgrimage themes are contained in a publication by ETHOS, a local environmental organization, calling for a jubilee year in 1998 to respond to the ruination of the Philippine earth. In *The Environment: An Inter-generational Responsibility (A Primer)*, January 1995 they write:

Indigenous people in the Philippine Cordilleras have a tradition called *lapat* which prohibits people from entering or using an area for a certain period of time. Among the reasons is to ensure that a plot of field is allowed to rest or lie fallow in order to regain its fertility.

More appropriate at this time of widespread destruction of the Philippine

archipelagic environment, and the global environment as well, is to call for [a celebration of] a jubilee year (which has four "R" features—Release of prisoners, Return of the land to original inhabitants, Recall of the debt and Resting of the land). Jubilee is a Judaeo-Christian affirmation of all creation's yearning for restoration and healing, including humans, especially the poor among them. ... Jubilee's ecological component—the resting of the land—is an integral, thus indispensable, part of the celebration. Without the return to nature's harmony, renewal would not be complete.

Five months after our Pilgrimage in the Philippines, Frank Houde, one of the pilgrims and a Vietnam War veteran, reflected in a letter to friends and family:

The Japanese monks were very aware of the brutality of their soldiers (in the Philippines) during World War II and with us other walkers [they] listened to the stories of suffering, atrocity and destruction told by dozens of survivors as we traveled. Along the way we... saw and were told of the scarring left by the American military presence at Clark Air Force Base and Subic Bay Naval Base, ... were witness to the effects of economic aggression (that newer form of warfare, sometimes called 'development') particularly by Japan and the U.S.A. ...and were witness to the staggering effect of a hundred years of American colonialism/ imperialism on the Filipino tribal cultures that has left a people searching for their identity.

Despite our initial unease about walking through the Philippines, most of us were heartened by the experience. I was inspired by the local organizers. They walked with us, helped us shop for food and other necessities, explained fine points of history and interpreted the walk to local people. Most importantly, they set the itinerary and redefined the Pilgrimage's mission, providing a more economic and environmental focus. I personally was moved to be with so many young, energetic and joyful people. After what they experienced with us, some of the organizers hope to organize their own pilgrimage in 1998 to commemorate the one hundred years of struggle against occupying powers. The Pilgrimage—the struggle!—continues.

Long after we have completed the tangible portion of the walk, voices echo in my ears. Brennan Delos Reyes, a young man several of us stayed with in a lahar resettlement area, wrote me: "Even though you're far, we can't forget the little hour with laughter, sharing and walking. I want to meet you again someday. We miss you."

Quang Comes East

Of Peace and Silence

Yes, silence reigns in this heart of Bicol land.
But silence, they say, is not always a sign of peace:
the starving children at the foothills of Isarog
are silent.

And so are the farmers of the flooded fields
and the fishers of the murky river
where silenced bodies sometimes drift.

Indeed, silent is the soul that grieves in darkness
the muted lips belying the turmoil from within.

—Gabriel Hidalgo Bordado, Naga City, Philippines

(June 1996)

Me in Vietnam

In June 1995, I was in Hanoi, about to speak to Madame Binh, one of the vice presidents of Vietnam. Thirty of us pilgrims, traveling for nine months from Auschwitz to Hiroshima on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, had just arrived in Hanoi. My Vietnamese nephew, Quang—yes, nephew, adopted by my sister and her husband—had asked me to visit the family of the Vietnamese woman he intended to marry when I arrived later in Ho Chi Minh City. I considered this as we had ridden the famed train, The Reunification Express. Although the train was hot and crowded, noisy and slow train, for two arduous days we had a better view of living in Vietnam. In Ho Chi Minh city later, would I be able to find the family? How would they respond to meeting me? But facing us now, not on Quang's list of places and people to see, yet a fortunate opportunity, was Madame Binh. She finished her welcoming speech and invited us pilgrims to make speeches.

Now in her 70s, looking healthy but somewhat distant, she had been the foreign minister for the National Liberation Front during the war and subsequently the chief negotiator during the Paris Peace Talks. At her urging, I rose to tell the story of my nephew, a carefully selected portion of it. I said, "he's had a rough time since fleeing Vietnam after the war. He's been adopted by my sister and brother-in-law in Alaska, and after years of struggle to settle in the U.S. was now about to marry a Vietnamese woman. He'd met her a few years ago on his first trip back to his homeland. He strongly urged me to visit her family, if my visas, connections and timing work out. A major part of his recovery had been a long retreat at a Buddhist monastery in Europe."

As I stood there, my mouth not sure how much of the story to reveal, time periods wove crazily into each other. Was it 1965 when I refused to be a soldier in Vietnam, certain the war effort was wrong and futile? Or 1975, the last year of the war, sensing the shame of my homeland at a major defeat? Or 1993 when I first heard about the pilgrimage from Auschwitz to Hiroshima, a chance to be in Vietnam, meet government officials, peace activists, Buddhists, my opportunity to be a warrior for peace and reconciliation, not a soldier of war?

I felt dizzy and unsure of how to speak, how to think, how to tell this amazing story. And I felt I had to be circumspect; my version of Quang's story was less than the truth. Because currently the founder of the Buddhist monastery in Europe that Quang was so enriched by, Thich Nhat Hanh, monk, poet, teacher, is in exile from his homeland. And currently in Vietnam, the monks and nuns of his Unified Buddhist Church are being persecuted. I did not say "Plum Village," the monastery, or "Thich Nhat Hanh", merely, "a certain Buddhist retreat center in Europe." and "a particular Vietnamese monk." Probably the Vietnamese could guess what I meant. I said "I am eager to meet this family, not sure I can find them but I will try. It means so much to my family."

Madame Binh's response: "Ah, this is reconciliation in action."

One week later I met the family, hosting me royally with a banquet of fish, vegetables, and fruits, plus exuberant conversation in halting English, a walk around the neighbor-

hood, and a dashing late evening motorcycle flight through the heart of Ho Chi Minh city. My Sung and her father had met me when I arrived in the city, exhausted, hot, dirty. I'd not expected to meet them after I thought our fax communication had failed.

Quang in Vietnam, the fleeing

Quang was born in September 1972, three years before the war ended. In 1975, the war's last year, in his village of Tra Vinh, 190 km. south of Ho Chi Minh City in the delta while his father's side of the family watched TV, Quang left the family compound to pee at night (as one version has it). A shell or bomb hit the compound, killing some of his family, uncles, aunts, cousins. Not his grandfather or grandmother who were in their beds. Nor his father who was a South Vietnamese mid-range army officer, nor his mother, nor his two brothers—just family member watching TV.

Upon the victory of the Communist regime, the father was put in a "re-education camp," his time there possibly commensurate with his officer's rank. Quang told me he had also acquired a head wound from the war, a section of metal had stuck in his skull.

Apparently he was brain-damaged.

After the war, Quang's family was poor. Raised by his uncle, Quang did not live with his family. Before the war, his father and uncle had been college educated soccer stars and his grandfather had been a local government official. Quang left school after the second grade to earn money, sometimes by tending water buffalo, sometimes by field work. He says he was a good student. A teacher, a member of the Communist party, encouraged him to return to school, helping supply him with school materials. But because of the family's extreme poverty—a result of the war—and also because his father had fought for the losing side, Quang had to leave school after the sixth grade. He had no further formal schooling until arriving in the States, three years later.

In May 1983, he and two older brothers fled by boat. He was then ten years old. They landed on an Indonesian island, were taken to a jail, then to a huge refugee camp (and later, for Quang, to a form of prison). "I stole to stay alive—shoes from in front of temples, clothes, anything I could sell. I was put in the orphans' barracks, separated from my brothers. We had no school. Our weekly quota of food was two packs of Ramen noodles, two pounds of rice, no vegetables, no meat." This was a United Nations relief camp, meant to be a temporary residence, a transition camp. Quang lived in Indonesian camps for three years, from age ten to thirteen. He was not prepared for the harsh camp experience: alcoholism, violence, rape. Add to that the uncertainty of his existence—whether he'd ever see his family again, what would be his final destination, and would he survive?

He had had little contact with his family in Vietnam. Although he had fled with two brothers and a sister-in-law, they did not want to stay together. The war had devastated their family. One of his brothers married in the refugee camp, allegedly beat his wife and joined a gang after settling in the U.S. The other brother did not nurture Quang; in fact Quang, the younger brother by far, was not accepted by many in the family. My sister, Rose, feels he "grew up with such poor parenting, with no clear identity, that while in the

camps—and later—he made up stories to fill in the gaps."

To the United States, adopted by my sister and brother-in-law

Fresh from the refugee camp, he came to Sitka Alaska in 1986. My sister and brother-in-law, Rose and George Watson, married for twenty years, had earlier agreed not to bring more biological children into an over-populated world. George had worked in Seattle with Asian refugees so at a meeting one evening in Sitka, when the presenter asked if any might volunteer to temporarily open a home to two boys from South Vietnam, they found their hands going up. They agreed to sponsor Quang and one brother through an organization, Overseas Aid to Refugees, O.A.R. Quang lived with Rose and George as a foster child. The brother eventually left for southern California, remaining mostly out of touch for many years. Both George and Rose, happily married and in rewarding careers—she a psychotherapist in private practice, he an anthropologist working on Native Alaskan subsistence issues with the state Fish and Game Department—became legal guardians and later adopted Quang. As Rose told me, "we both felt the need to bond with children, bond intimately."

I came on the scene in 1988, just two years after Quang had arrived in Sitka. I'd been telling their story of sheltering a Vietnamese boy, proud of how they've chosen to address the overpopulation question (their first jobs after graduating from college were with the Peace Corps in India, in a family planning program). Quang was now 16 years old. We met. I wasn't sure how to relate to him: nephew, friend, mysterious other, boy, war veteran, traveler, refugee? He was only 16, yet older by his experience, and younger by his few years in the U.S. We went fishing. I photographed him catching a common Alaskan species, Dolly Varden. We cleaned and cooked it together, he offered it to his family. He seemed to flourish in his new home.

In Sitka, Quang tested as a bright boy and caught up to the eighth grade quickly. He did fairly well in middle and high school, more adept at mathematics and science than English or any course requiring English. Initially he didn't speak about Vietnam, but did as he acquired the language. In 1990 I recall going with him to see a film about the Vietnamese-American war, *Platoon*. He spoke in a limited fashion about his experience, telling me about witnessing the deaths of some of his uncles and aunts in the family compound. When he was in his senior high school year, my sister and brother-in-law adopted two more children, Rick from Laos and Ellen from Nepal. As Rose put it, while Quang was in high school and not related to the later adoptions, but an early indication of his distress, "he once became extremely depressed and withdrawn, crawling under the dining room table, not coming out, not speaking, going stiff."

Difficult times for Quang

Times were to grow more difficult for Quang when he left for college—in Rose's view, "because of his confused sense of self." At first, in Fairbanks for two years, he did passably well in all subjects. Wishing a better school and a Vietnamese community, he transferred to a state school in Washington. In December 1993, George brought Quang to Vietnam for

his first visit since fleeing ten years earlier. On this trip, he met My Sung and her family for the first time. He also met his father who was distant toward his son. Maybe the brain injury made recognition impossible. The psychological distance might also be explained by the length of time Quang had been out of country—a Vietnam kieu or overseas Vietnamese—and by the trauma of war, and perhaps also by a tendency of that particular family. Filial distance is definitely not part of the culture.

Adding to the difficulty of that return to homeland, George learned later that his son had been lying about who George was, saying, “This is my foster father, I was raised in an orphanage, received a soccer scholarship, I’m living on my own, now earning plenty of money.” He didn’t admit that George and Rose had adopted him. George learned this through a young woman returning to Vietnam at the same time. She knew Quang from his college in Washington and accompanied them awhile. She could understand the language, George couldn’t. Later, when Quang was confronted about this, he denied lying, and acted very confused. The woman who informed George turned out to be My Sung’s sister.

Returning to college, Quang soon dropped out of touch with his parents for about two months. This was in early 1994, when I was visiting Chicago. There is a large Vietnamese refugee community in Chicago, not far from where I usually reside on the North Side. I had the strongest sensation that the vanished Quang might be living within a few miles of me. I walked the streets, hoping to find him.

For several weeks, Quang wouldn’t write back, wouldn’t return phone calls, wouldn’t visit. Soon, Rose and George learned he had almost been dropped from college because of poor grades; he had stopped going to classes. Because of his experience in the refugee camps, Rose feels he lost all interest in the larger world. I visited my family during this period, and heard how worried they were about Quang. What would be the outcome of this story? Would they ever see Quang again? Would their son ever again be close to them?

Eventually, in the spring of 1994, Quang called. When his parents learned how lackadaisical he had been about studying, they refused to continue subsidizing his tuition. He returned to Sitka, found a job cooking on the ferry system.

Thich Nhat Hanh and the retreat at Plum Village

During this traumatic episode, he attended a Buddhist retreat given by the Vietnamese monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, at Plum Village in France in November 1994. Hanh had been an early opponent of the Vietnamese-American war, gaining the anathema of all sides of the fighting. He was exiled in the late 1960s for this activism, excluded from the United Nations, and eventually nominated by Martin Luther King for a Nobel peace prize. The retreat was not specifically for Vietnamese but they were heartily welcomed. There for six weeks he practiced meditation, learned the Precepts*, enjoyed the countryside, concentrated on breath and felt his “mind quiet and clear up,” as he expressed his experience to me. One morning as Quang was sitting outside in meditation, he met one of his uncles.

The uncle had fled Vietnam, been picked up by a Danish boat, landed in Europe, and was now a Buddhist monk.

Now much healthier mentally, Quang went directly to Vietnam from Plum Village. For two months he courted his friend, My Sung Tranh and lived with her family. His meeting her several years earlier while visiting Vietnam with his adopted father was bearing fruit.

In February 1995, just a few months before I was in Vietnam, and during Quang’s third trip to Vietnam, to visit his betrothed, he introduced his Vietnamese family to My Sung. She felt they didn’t like her, or so Quang surmises. Her family was relatively affluent, her mother’s parents at least; during the war, they had owned a richly-producing farm. By giving food to poor people, they had incurred the displeasure of the Communists. Her grandfather was beheaded, her grandmother harassed, maybe tortured. The grandmother became a Buddhist nun, and, with her remaining wealth, sponsored the building of a temple and lived in it. My Sung’s mother, who proved such a good cook and kind host when I visited, now wishes to become a nun. Whether this means the end of her marriage is not clear to My Sung.

My Sung’s father, who gave me wings to soar about Ho Chi Minh city’s center by speeding me around on his motorcycle, while My Sung and her sister zoomed in close formation next to us (I tried making a picture of this, failed), has a small store selling electronic equipment, and is desperate, as Quang puts it, because of economic problems. My sister told me the family in 1983 tried several times to leave the country—two sisters are here now—and failed. On one of these occasions, they paid the boat men, put the two older sisters on board, and then some trouble occurred, preventing the rest of the family from leaving. When My Sung and Quang met she wanted to remain in Vietnam, but agreed to emigrate to be married in the U.S., the first of her siblings to marry. And the third of the family to leave. Two siblings remain in Vietnam.

Currently

After much machination with visas and other travel documents, impeded by both U.S. and Vietnamese governments, My Sung arrived in Sitka in the summer of 1996 and married Quang (I missed the wedding, too expensive to across the continent, and not good timing.). Two of My Sung’s sisters were there, as was one of Quang’s brothers, and others of the Watson family, plus a few Vietnamese from the Sitka community. They had a traditional Vietnamese wedding at a retreat site on the shore. Photographs, both of the wedding and later portraits, show them radiant and grand. At last, coupling, making a new home.

They live near my sister and her family, in southeast Alaska, in the outskirts of Sitka, in a condominium Quang purchased in June 1996 with money saved from his job on the Alaskan Inland Marine Highway. My Sung arrived in the States in the summer, when the weather is relatively mild, but when I saw her five months later, in November, the weather had been extremely cold, down to about 10 F. She did not look happy, even with the heavy, thick, down, Arctic style, coat that George and Rose had given her.

* Preserve life, honor possessions of others, speak truth, ingest only healthy substances, etc.

She is faring better now—has her driving license, works 40 hours weekly in a supermarket, takes college courses (she had been training in business in Vietnam). She is learning English at an adult education center and a local university. We met some of her co-students: from Philippines, Nicaragua, Bosnia, Russia, and elsewhere, a melange of immigrants, all sharing not being American.

Quang told me he now maintains a small Buddhist practice. He reads the literature and meditates. My Sung also has a practice which includes regular fasting.

In all of 1996, Quang worked on the ferry only about eight weeks. He was out for some three months healing from a shoulder operation, and another one or two months around the time of marriage. Because of low seniority (five years) he wasn't called to work much during the winter. He hopes to return to college—possibly in physical therapy (a vocation he announced recently to me in the presence of Rosy, and later to George, for the first time).

Prospects

What are his prospects for life in the U.S.? He tells me his interest in physical therapy stems from his own shoulder injury. He played hockey and soccer for years, and repeatedly injured his shoulder, pulling it out of joint. So finally, in 1997, he had an operation, and during his recovery, visited regularly by a physical therapist, he came to appreciate the art of physical healing. Now—I speculate—he had seen much destruction during his nine years in Vietnam and three in the Indonesian camp. Could this be a root of his recently expressed wish to heal others? He has the opportunity of blending several strands of his life in his vocation: athlete—injured, recovered; Vietnamese—during the war, in a refugee camp, young boy in this country; and Buddhist—meditating, clearing his mind and growing calm, following the Precepts which include aid life.

Quang, my nephew, is 26 years old, on the cusp of a new life.

Final musings

Reflecting back to our talk with Madame Binh, what thoughts went through her when she heard my story? "Reconciliation in action"—yes, but for how long? Will the entire Tranh family eventually emigrate to the U.S., disgruntled citizens voting with their feet? Will this reopen animosities between people of the two countries?

And the uncle...He would make an interesting side story: fleeing by boat, picked up by a Danish ship crew, brought to Denmark, somehow connecting with Thich Nhat Hanh or the order, becoming a monk, residing at Plum Village, meeting Quang, and now head monk at the center. What family branch was this uncle in, what might have predisposed him to monkhood, what is his story of reconciliation and healing?

And the Buddhist order itself, led by Thich Nhat Hanh—now that Hanh is opening a retreat center in Vermont, and plans more frequent visits to this country, also opening mindfulness centers throughout the country, what effect will this have on the United States. Should we thank Vietnam for Thich Nhat Hanh—and China for the Dalai Lama—for forcing into exile two such illuminating teachers. Hanh coined the term "engaged

Buddhism," and he and the Dalai Lama both advocate bringing the Buddhist practice out of the temples and into the streets and country side, applying the precepts to the social ills of our times. Because of the decision of my sister and husband-in-law to adopt a Vietnamese boy, and my good fortune to join a pilgrimage going through Vietnam—to mention only two factors that encourage Providence—I'm able to face more directly a portion of history usually only read about or seen on the movie screen. And now happy to share this story with you. Yes, "reconciliation in action," one step at a time, a long journey.

(March 1998)

CONCLUDING

A Story of Asian Toilets

(For Kathryn Schiel)

Please allow me to escort you on a tour of toilets, Thailand to Japan, by way of Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. I made this journey as part of a Buddhist-led pilgrimage for peace and life to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two. This toilet tour is one of the untold stories of travel, the story may reveal a portion of the secret life of the traveler. My apologies to any readers offended by my candor. Detail and specificity are required for telling the complete story.

Please keep in mind the special conditions of my travel. I was an interfaith pilgrim, with limited cash, and a relatively unbending habit of defecation. I also have an anomalous anus, being afflicted with hemorrhoids, so that wiping requires unusual care and a prodigious amount of paper.

Throughout Asia (and Arabic lands and some eastern European regions), the squat toilet prevails—no seat, no chair, no water closet, a simple, practical appliance, yet so strange to the western sojourner. A hole in the floor or ground, round or square or triangular or ovaloid, sometimes with places marked for the feet beside the hole. You squat, not sit, and this is not so hard if you can squat, or hunker, otherwise, you teeter, you strain your lower leg and heel tendons, you cramp your breathing. Best if you grow into this posture, but not impossible if you stretch to it. Squatting is also very good for your back.

If you are to remain truly in the Asian mode, you wipe with water and the fingers of your left hand (eating with your right). How exactly to do this escapes me. I've experimented, always failed, and now, like most westerners, carry my own supply of paper. Flushing depends on the availability of water. Read on for details.

First, Thailand. I shat in wats, or temple complexes, usually in a toilet detached from the main buildings. Water was usually present, never paper, always the squat type of toilet. Most likely, the toilet was clean, not spotless, but not smelly. Adequate. Might be dark at night however, since lights are not everywhere. Bring a flashlight.

Next, Cambodia. I should point out now that in Cambodia I was pilgrimaging with about 600 others, mostly all Cambodians. We stayed each night in a wat, and these wats were clearly not designed for such large numbers. We often exhausted the water supply in the first few minutes. Bring your own water. The toilets ranged from adequate to filthy, filthy as much because of us as that that was the norm. The toilet might be a flush type or an outdoor type. Both stank. Since paper is generally not used, the plumbing couldn't handle our influx of paper. And stuck, overflowed, made a mess.

Personally, I wasn't sure what to do. Carry my paper outside the toilet, finding some other way to dispose of it, or risk flushing? I usually flushed, with sometimes horrifying results. Paper can be bought in markets. Be prepared for the seller's laughing.

The line was often long, so we'd have to time our excretions wisely. I found anticipating the need superior to waiting for the call. Likewise, we couldn't squat and read, or meditate, or do any of our other preferred activities while letting our bowels slowly move. A sharp rap on the door hastened our action. And, theoretically, monks have priority for the facili-

ties, being monks, although this was strongly challenged by some of the women with us. No division by gender otherwise, thank goodness.

You might consider what you are wearing when defecating, since dropping your pants and underwear, or shifting your skirt, can soil your clothing. The floor might be wet, might be coated with mud, or might have mushy feces on it.

In Cambodia, many of us were afflicted with diarrhea, some with constipation. The second were the lucky ones. A diarrheal outpouring might not wait until the toilet is available, so that one place of privacy became for many a place of revelation. Had we once again shat in our underwear while intending only to fart? What would the morning reveal after a long night of sleeping, our sphincter out of our total control?

Occasionally we'd find abandoned dry-type toilets and were able to see how they were constructed. Often these were merely two poured concrete boxes, one above for the squatter, one below for the products of the squat. These were now simple shells, only the concrete remained. Long gone were the feces, mud, stink, washed away by the monsoon. Like a burial vault with the corpse vaporized.

On to Vietnam. Here I can report only on the toilets in hotels and guest houses, since these were our accommodations. Uniformly excellent, usually sit-down-style toilets, plenty of water and paper, clean, comfortable, appealing to the growing number of western American and European travelers. But the picture would have probably been more like Cambodia had we traveled wat to wat or church to church. I was happy to be sitting, to not have to carry in my own water and paper, and to not need to risk the cleanliness of my clothing with each dump. Regrettably, the diarrhea afflicting many of us after our rough three weeks in Cambodia was all the more apparent with what was floating in water in a bowl.

The toilets of the Philippines seemed a curious crossbreed between east and west—approximately half were squat, half sit-down, paper was often provided, but we heard mixed messages about flushing. Some told us not to flush the paper, to carry it out. Others said, no problem flushing. We experimented. Most times the flush worked, about 20% of the time the toilet jammed and overflowed. People informed us that the plumbing was not adequate for paper, and I surmised that like much of Philippine culture, the toiletry is an awkward mixture of Asian and western: providing paper for wiping, but not plumbing with sufficiently large pipes to carry the paper.

The mixed messages and results led to a dichotomy between pilgrims. Some advocated and presumably followed safe paper practice, and toted out to deposit in a trash barrel. Some spoke in favor of flushing and no doubt did. Some like myself, equivocated, not sure what to do, vacillating, saying, "Ok, let's carry out," but often succumbed to the temptation to flush.

In Japan, I finally realized that a country's affluence can be measured by its toilets. Japan has lush toilets. In public places like parks and city halls, toilets are mostly the squat variety, clean, well-watered, stocked with paper, sometimes even with handles on the wall to prevent the defecator from falling over backwards. In some hotels and some homes, toilets might include the sit-down style. On the Super Express trains, the Bullet trains or

Shinkansen, you get to choose, "western style toilet" or "Japanese toilet." Or, if you're a guy, you can go through the door marked "Gentlemen" and use the urinal. Urinals, in fact, are ubiquitous in Japan, and in public facilities are often in with the women's stalls.

Japan features a novel high technology of toilets. Some sit-downs have special seat lids, connected to a vast array of electronic controls. What these do is a mystery if you don't read Japanese, as I didn't when I first encountered such a toilet in a hotel. I pushed the wrong button, saw a little pipe rise slowly from the middle rear of the toilet and then squirt water up at what would have been my ass had I been sitting. I quickly closed the cover. To no avail. The water seeped out the side and ran onto the floor. Even Brother Sasamori, a native Japanese, couldn't figure out how to shut the water off.

We learned the toilet seat was heated, with a variable temperature controllable by the user, and had variable water rates and temperatures. Other controls remained puzzling to us. The toilet "throne" has arrived in Japan.

I write this little message while taking periodic breaks to use my old favorite toilet type. I can sit for hours in a large room dedicated to expelling wastes of the body here, while there, maybe a fifth the area is so dedicated. The materials for the toilet here are about twice what they require there. I can freely use all the paper I need, squander water with flush after flush, flushing even after each pee. Four gallons per flush here, compared with maybe two liters or less there, less than half a gallon. A strand of paper maybe fifteen feet long here, while there, I might use a third that. Before my travels I'd always believed I had frugal toilet habits. I advocated, "If yellow, let mellow; if brown, flush down." Friends thought me excessive, criticized me for my disgusting flushing regimen. Now I try to be mindful of the style, simplicity and economy—the harmony with the earth—represented by the toilets of Asia, but find the Spartan practice difficult to maintain.

Habits die hard.

(October 1995)

On Turtle Island

A second related pilgrimage occurred at the same time, with similar objectives—On Turtle Island. I ran out of money for the Auschwitz to Hiroshima pilgrimage, came home, joined the Turtle Island pilgrimage, and here offer an account to you.

We walked 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-pro-

liferation 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.

(November 1995)

Fifty Years Ago, Fifty Years from Now: Hiroshima Musings

August 5, 1945, a little over fifty years ago, had I been in Hiroshima as an American, I'd be the enemy, imprisoned, perhaps tortured and later executed. I might have been a soldier captured during the battle for Okinawa. I might have been an aviator shot down while fire-bombing Tokyo. Or perhaps I was touring Japan before the outbreak of the war, my travel unluckily timed.

August 6, 1945, fifty years ago to the day I have this musing, had I been in the city, I would probably be either dead or injured or seriously affected.

August 6, 1995, fifty years after the first atomic bombing, I am in Hiroshima standing less than one kilometer from the hypocenter. I am with upwards of 50,000 people, mostly Japanese, waiting for the moment of 8:15 am, exactly fifty years after the explosion. A symphony orchestra plays, the music is soothing, unexpected, not solemn. Chimes sound, in a regular cadence, as if marking time. They do not crescendo, or in any manner become dramatic. They are matter of fact. And then: silence. A long moment of repose, standing under a hot sun with so many others. And then: chattering, as if joyous, or irreverential, a break in the somber mood. And speeches, "May the sin never be repeated...," "Hiroshima to become a city of peace."

In 1995 Hiroshima sparkles. It is a young modern city, planned and built with care. Its peace park with the monuments and statues, its peace boulevard running down the city's spine, its reconstructed tram system and bridges that serve for those of us who have seen the old photos as vivid reminders of the destruction, its reconstructed buildings that survived the bombing, and the only building left as it was after the blast, the dome, all attest to a strongly held desire to end the terror.

Fifty years from now, I will be 94 years old, but most likely dead. Fifty years from now the city may have blossomed further into an inspiration for nuclear disarmament—a true disarmament, no nuclear weapons for any nation, no weapons of mass destruction of any kind. Or, tragically, it may serve as the first in a series of catastrophes, the precedent for those later to suffer massive civilian destruction. Hiroshima-Nagasaki-what next?

Which way, fifty years from now? We decide the outcome.

So long as such (nuclear) weapons exist, it is inevitable that the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki will be repeated—somewhere, sometime—in an unforgivable affront to humanity itself.

(Takashi Hiraoka, Mayor of Hiroshima, August 6, 1995)

(September 1995)

How to End War

Mahatma Gandhi spoke of the peace army, a collection of people dedicated to bringing justice and ending conflict by non-violent means. My proposal for ending war—a modest proposal that needs to be joined with other proposals, the best of them to be enacted—is to improve the imagery of peace and peacemaking, to encourage people to join the army of peace.

Consider war, armies and fleets, soldiers and sailors and aviators, and the images attached to them. Beautifully crafted weapons, some of them works of art. Attractive uniforms. A system of training that is rigorous and thoughtful. The opportunity to be courageous, giving one's life for an overarching principle. Honors that many respect. Research into new ways of combat, making use of innovative technologies and strategies.

Consider peace and peacemaking, its images. The universal peace sign, derived from the semaphore signals for N and D, nuclear disarmament. The peace crane folded from origami paper. The story of the young Hiroshima girl that gave rise to the peace crane story, Sadako. The stellar peacemakers, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Dan Berrigan, Dorothy Day, Jane Adams among them. June 12, 1982, the one million strong peace march in New York City. The peace pagodas of the Japanese Buddhist order, Nipponzan Myohoji. And the history of the peace movement, beginning in the 1840's, cresting in the late 1980's, current condition unclear.

Many of these images of peace are known only to a relatively small number of people. Whereas the camouflage uniform is known universally, as is the automatic rifle. And both probably inspire awe and a form of respect around the world.

My proposal is simply to design and propagate images of peace. Songs, stories, visuals that easily cross national and ethnic and age borders, that permeate consciousness, that inspire and lead. John Lennon wrote "Imagine," the song lives on. Bread and Puppet Theater end their pagents with the huge white flying birds. Eugene Smith, a preeminent American photographer, made a picture of his two children emerging into the light, holding hands—"The Way to Paradise Garden". Another photographer, Edward Steichen, composed the photo exhibit and book, *The Family of Man*, which includes Smith's photo.

Recently, many made pilgrimages to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War Two, reflecting on its violence by being at war-related sites and by meeting people affected by the war. Auschwitz, Southeast Asia, Japan, as well as regions of contemporary violence, the Balkans, Cambodia, Iraq, India, the United States of America. Several hundred made the pilgrimages. Many thousands met the pilgrims, greeting and hosting them. And thousands of others were in support communities for the individual participants. The endeavor serves as a powerful image for peace. One by one, walking, praying, risking comforts and lives in this deep action for peace.

Swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, the tools of war into the tools of life. New images, new ways of being.

(September 1995)

Many Voices, Many Ways to Pray: Learning to Pray on an Interfaith Pilgrimage

(For Horace Seldon)

Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears! For I am thy passing guest, a sojourner, like all my fathers. Look away from me, that I may know gladness, before I depart and be no more!

(Psalms 39: 12-13)

My prayer routine

How did I pray on the Pilgrimage, what did I learn about prayer, what was "interfaith" about our prayer?

Before the Pilgrimage began, my prayer routine had encompassed Quaker (silence, waiting for messages to appear from within, that still small voice), Tibetan Buddhist (mantras or chants, visualizations, and prayers in English), Nipponzan Myohoji, a Japanese Buddhist order (Namu Myoho Renge Kyo), and Native American (prayers of thanksgiving, homage, and exhortation). I had been raised in the Catholic church, learning to pray by rote. As I have aged, assiduously sampling various prayer traditions, some routines have dropped away; some I use regularly, maybe even daily; and others I use only sporadically. Few are ultimately satisfying, most raise questions and disturb my belief.

On the Pilgrimage I began to learn other approaches to prayer. We were required to join in interfaith prayer every morning. This consisted of ten minutes or so of chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, the Japanese Buddhist Nichiren chant, followed by about twenty minutes of any messages, songs, prayers, or homages of us wished to contribute from any of our multitudinous traditions. We spanned Sufi ("Ishkele mabu lela"), Jewish ("Baruch adanoi"), Native American (homage to the four directions), African American ("Nobody knows the trouble I've seen"), Christian generally (the Lord's Prayer), Hindu (Gandhi's prayer), Buddhist generally (the five precepts), and various offerings not easily categorized (including silence from a Quaker perspective). Add in the prayers offered by various hosts, the prayer services in various locations, and the constant chanting while walking, and we have an array—a symphony—of prayer methods, beliefs, and approaches. I now seek a resolution of these various streams, a blending, or synthesis. What it will be—whether it will be!—is a question.

Problems with praying

The array was at times to me noisy, scattered, baffling, shallow, and not always convincing. I hit some memorable low points in my Pilgrimage prayer experience. In Mostar, for instance, fasting and praying for two days first in the Muslim quarter, then in the Croatian quarter. While isolated in the parking lot of a bombed shopping center in the Croat sector, no one spoke to us, no one joined with us, no one offered consolation or sup-

port to the cold, forlorn pilgrims. I was losing heart. Why am I here, why am I chanting this inscrutable set of nonsense syllables, how does this prayer in any way contribute to peace and reconciliation among Bosnians?

Then the "Angels of Tea," as I named them, descended, mysteriously arriving, smiling, pouring us endless cups of hot tea, departing. In that simple act of hospitality I understood something of the reason for my existence here: share deprivation in some small way, demonstrate compassion, be peace, express solidarity with those who suffer.

We learned the Angels of Tea were a family and included two Croatian soldiers, Zoren and Boris. Three evenings later, I and several other pilgrims ate with the Sutton's in their home, sang folk songs, chanted Namu with them, and then we all prayed the Lord's Prayer—simultaneously in four different languages.

A second low point was in Hiroshima. I had strongly wished to be at the statue to Sadako, the girl whose story inspired the Japanese Peace Crane tradition. As I reached the statue, I did not know exactly how to respond, what and how to pray. The site was crowded, with both thousands of strings of cranes, and with people from all over the world. I was confused. Sadako had sent out a prayer for peace on the wings of every crane—"please, no more war!"—yet since 1955 when she died we experienced wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Palestine, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Rwanda, South Africa...a detestable litany of violence. At the Sadako statue, cranes and people swarming about me, what was I to do? How would I pray?

Appropriately or not, my response was to photograph, using my camera as a vehicle for prayer.

Objectionable prayer forms

I must confess, I have experienced some objectionable prayer forms on the Pilgrimage. In the Philippines, for instance, we resided at Catholic churches. Often, early in the morning, prayers and music were broadcast over loudspeakers just outside the church, not only harshly awakening us pilgrims but imposing on the entire town the sound. At the Auschwitz convocation, a man insisted we be silent at meals, at least for the ten minutes, imposing his code of mindfulness learned from Thich Nhat Hanh on many unwilling people. Periodically during the journey, a Catholic priest from Japan harangued us with his deeply felt but imperfectly shared messages, often using prayer as a format. These instances tested my ability to accept all offerings, not judge, be mindful and respectful as others pray.

Compelling but unfamiliar prayer forms

Some prayer forms were compelling, but completely indecipherable. In Cambodia we often heard the monks and nuns chanting in Pali, in unison, monotonically, hypnotically. We learned they were chanting sutras. (teachings of Buddha) The sound was enchanting, even if the meaning eluded me. And some prayer traditions or modes were mystifying, yet

held impact. In Vietnam we learned of the tradition of Releasing the Spirits of the Battlefield. Traditional Vietnamese believe that if one dies badly—in war, for example—one's spirit is stuck in the earth. It is released only when a certain ceremony is held. Thanks in part to one of our pilgrims, an American veteran of the Vietnamese-American war, and some teaching from our hosts, we were able to enact the ceremony. With burning incense, our chant of Namu, the veteran's prayer, and help from our hosts we attempted to release the spirits of the battlefield.

Absence of spirit

Some nations seemed empty of prayer or traditional belief, Japan, most notably. Yet it was in countries such as Japan where ceremonies were most evident. Odon, held in mid-August, is a Japanese ceremony connecting those alive with their dead ancestors. Using fire, food offerings, and candles floated down rivers, many people believe they are able to recontact their departed forebearers. Also, Japan is the nation of origin of Nipponzan Myohoji, itself a strong practitioner of prayer (both the chant and the building of pagodas).

And in Vietnam, where the prevailing ideology—until recently communism, and now a mix of capitalism, socialism and secularism—tends to rule out ceremony and theology, graves continue to be placed in fields, not isolated in cemeteries. The dead are kept close to where people live and work. (Military cemeteries are an exception.) In this manner, the spirits are honored and fed, their evil tendencies thwarted.

The prayers of the Nazis, the extreme nationalist Serbians, the Khmer Rouge, the Crusaders

We must bear in mind that many groups who have wrought destruction have also prayed: Nazis (forms of Christianity), extreme nationalist Serbians (Eastern Orthodox Christianity), the Khmer Rouge (an equivalent of religion, extreme agrarian communism), the Vietcong (a form of communism), and Americans (more Christianity, especially during the Persian Gulf War). We need to recall that Christians concocted the Crusades, one of the roots of contemporary pilgrimage. Those medieval journeys to the scenes of Jesus Christ's life—in that period controlled by Muslims—often resulted in barbarities and deaths on a massive scale. What was the prayer of the Crusaders?

What do we make of troublesome or seemingly misguided uses of prayer and ceremony? For some observers, the response is to denounce all forms of religion. For others, the direction might be to examine more closely one's own first-taught religion, to cleanse it of tendencies that increase suffering, rather than help alleviate it. For yet others, perhaps they seek a religion yet to be, of the future, well-tuned to the exigencies of the moment. For instance, in Croatia, we learned of the newly emerging religion of Sai Baba, a syncretic path, bringing together Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Native American teachings and prayers. We engaged with them as they hosted our stay in Split and Zagreb and Lipik. And realized: this bringing together of faiths is not new. All paths merge with older paths, syn-

thesize and adapt. Christianity subsumed so called pagan forms of belief and practice. Buddhism incorporates elements of indigenous religions. Consider Buddhism in India, the land of its origin, and China, Tibet, Japan, and now the west. I hope to be part of this transitioning, this moving beyond old forms, cognizant of a new day dawning—with its new prayer forms.

Translation—beyond translation

I find I translate frequently when listening to various theologies. For instance, hearing someone speak of God, I tend to substitute the word Creator or Great Mystery. Christ for me sometimes is Tankashila, ("grandfather"). And Earth becomes Earth-mother. I do this reluctantly, often subconsciously, because I find something ungraspable, maybe offensive, in the language of Christianity, possibly because it is my first language. I am culturally bound to it. I wonder, when will I become fluent in this new language, not having to translate? What will this new language of prayer and spirit be?

New forms of prayer help me gain fluency. I do not have to translate prayers, I use the presenting language, whether Pali, Khmer, Hindi, Japanese, Hebrew, Arabic, Lakota, Mohawk, English. The tone, the message, the meaning comes through no matter how unfamiliar the language. Alleluia, for example, does not need translation. Nor can it be easily translated. (it contains the word, el, for God, means something like praise ye God). Or amen. What does that translate as? (Maybe certainly, truly) Is translation needed? Or—for Lakota people—aho (OK, good, agreed)

And the primary chant or prayer of the Pilgrimage, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, what does that mean? One school, Nipponzan Myohoji, the organizer of the Pilgrimage, says, "the chant cannot be translated. It has to be experienced." While another school, Nichiren Shoshu, claims, "a precise translation is possible: Harken, or awaken to, the great law of the Lotus Sutra, the final teaching of Buddha." I find both interpretations work for me: I have come to know the or a meaning of the chant by using it repeatedly, in a variety of settings, and the translation resonates by reminding me of the teachings of Buddha, especially his teachings for alleviating suffering.

Learning to pray

I learned to pray during moments of repose, seizing the moment. As when walking in the early dark Cambodian dawn (walking early to avoid the intense heat). These were choice moments, so still, so quiet, so dark, as if I were alone. Here I could at last resume my earlier prayer forms—give homage to my photographic lineage (homage to the craft lineage as taught by traditional African craftspeople); with a hearty "good morning" greet the world, my community, and my family (a morning routine taught by some American Indians); engage in a visualization about a tree of refuge (as taught by Tibetan Buddhists); be silent and still, listening to the voice within (from my Quaker tradition); and practice walking meditation (as instructed by the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh).

From a Japanese Buddhist nun, Jun Yasuda, I learned how to pray in thanksgiving. In turn, she had learned this from Iroquois people, their long, thorough prayers of thanksgiving.

ing—to the creator, earth mother, ancestors, four-leggeds, two-leggeds, finned ones, winged ones... And in my experience with Iroquois people, I have heard stories and observed lives. The validity of the prayer form became convincing to me.

My craft is photography. It is also one of my most used prayer forms. I feel I pray with the camera, contact the divine within and without, become sensitive to unseen forces, spirits, directions, help other be so. I am extremely disturbed when someone asks me not to photograph during a moment of worship (as happens at Quaker gatherings, sometimes at American Indian gatherings). Perhaps presumptuously on my part, I believe I am praying as fervently and sincerely as anyone bowing their head, reciting a prayer, making a request, intoning gratitude. Equally passionately, I try to be awake to signs showing me when not to photograph (as when my camera jammed in Cambodia while trying to photograph a landmine victim). The most affecting "prayers" I've ever experienced about the earth were photographs made by a woman using infrared film showing exquisite light displays in forests. The photos seemed to depict the very spirits of the trees. I aspire to make such revealing photos.

The "zone of mystery"

How do we understand prayer? What is it? One approach is to evaluate its efficacy, delve into its functionality. Is it useful, does it help, has it any impact? We might ask whether our prayers for peace made peace in any of the regions we entered. In Cambodia, the guerrilla war between the government and the Khmer Rouge continues. Three weeks after our Pilgrimage ended, the two forces blew up parts of the road we had walked on, and the Khmer Rouge continued to shell villages, killing tens of people daily. Do we conclude that our prayer failed?

We entered Bosnia during another in a long series of cease-fires. But this one held, led to the Dayton Peace Accords, and at this writing (December 1996), the war has not resumed. Do we conclude that prayer worked in Bosnia? What time scale do we use to make the assessment? Cambodian Buddhists say they will pray and walk for peace and reconciliation until peace and reconciliation comes to Cambodia. If and when it does, do we then conclude, ah, prayer worked? What if war resubmerges Bosnia? Has our prayer been futile?

Another approach to understanding prayer is to inquire, what does prayer do for or to the one who prays? I can see in my own experience that since the Pilgrimage I pray more regularly, with more fervency and faith. I am more accepting of other prayer forms, willing to try them, maybe incorporate them into my practice. I am more sure that prayer is a valid expression of spirit, and less sure that there is any one form that suits all.

I am more and more convinced that about prayer we can not ask, does it work? Prayer is an entry point into the Zone of Mystery, the inscrutable, the realm where faith operates, "the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...(Hebrews 11)". Prayer is not instrumental, it does not bring a result, it is not effective. Prayer is misunderstood

when it is viewed through the lens of the empirical. It is beyond observation, untouched by measurement, and without explanation. It simply is, a pure expression of personhood—like song, like feeling awe.

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.

(John 21: 18)

(January 1997)

A reading list

Auschwitz to Hiroshima, 1995
An interfaith pilgrimage for peace and life

How terribly the rice suffers under the pestle!
But it emerges polished, as white as cotton.
The same process tempers the human spirit:
Hard trials shape us into polished diamonds.

(Ho Chi Minh, A Prison Diary, 1890-1969)

Auschwitz

Ani-Maamin, A Song Lost and Found Again, Eli Wiesel, 1973, "Darius Milhaud wrote a cantata based on the re-telling of a Talmudic tale. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob report to God the atrocities visited on His people. How can You countenance this? Seering."
(Martha Penzer)

Auschwitz: A Doctor's Eyewitness Account, Dr. Miklos Nyiszli (with a foreword by Bruno Bettelheim), 1960, from a unique point of view

Auschwitz, 1270 to the Present, Deborah Dwork and Robert Van Pelt, 1996, a well-researched, brilliantly written history of the death camp and its site

Auschwitz—A History in Photographs , compiled and edited by Teresa Swiebocka, 1990-93, extraordinary photographs providing another dimension to understanding
Auschwitz

An Estate of Memory, Ilona Karmel, a richly detailed novel of life in a death camp

Kingdom of Children, A Biography of Janusz Korczak, Betty Jean Lifton, 1988, that remarkable and courageous man who voluntarily went to the death camp of Treblinka with the children he'd been caring for

Maus, Arthur Spiegelman, the comic book about Siegelman's experiences with his father,
an Auschwitz survivor

Survival in Auschwitz, Primo Levi, translated into english, 1958, a piercing account of his experience, writing to survive

The Texture of Memory, Holocaust Memorials and Meaning, James E. Young, 1993, about remembering the holocaust through monuments, memorials (to victory, to destruction, respectively, as the author uses the terms), commemorations. Stories of design, construction, vandalism, erosion, and forgetting

War Time Lies, Lewis Begley, living through the Holocaust in Poland

The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as told in the U.S. Holocaust Museum, Michael Berenbaum, 1993, with excellent visuals, giving a longitudinal view of

About the pilgrimage, Auschwitz to Hiroshima, a group of the pilgrims made a book, Ashes & Light, available from Nipponzan Myohoji, 100 Cave Hill Rd., Leverett MA 01054 ph: 413/367-2202, fax: 413/367-9369. It contains over 60 photos and numerous accounts written from a variety of perspectives. It sells for \$5.00 plus shipping.



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East Europe, December 1994



Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City
Skip Schiel & cycle driver, June 1995

Take exceeding care lest you forget the things you ever saw, lest you turn aside in your heart. Make them known to your children and to your children's children.

Deuteronomy



Folding Japanese peace cranes in the Philippines, July 1995
On the Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace & Life, 1995
Auschwitz to Hiroshima