

A LIFE SO WELL LIVED (Love Begins with Me)
Heather Podrow

1999 was the year a living, loving hurricane swept through and into my life. I am still in shock to this day from the strength of its force. In fact it turned out that all this energetic activity actually did have a name and quite a curious one at that - Peace Pilgrim II.

I had never encountered a peace pilgrim before but was I ever about to be educated and in his own particular brand of pilgriming; so much so that I actually married him in January of 2000! I was his third wife!

Peace had gotten the huge calling to walk for peace in 1989, literally following in the footsteps of a woman who gave herself the name of Peace Pilgrim. She had walked the United States for 28 years, without a penny in her pocket, never getting sick and relying on food and shelter when offered. Otherwise she slept outdoors and went hungry. Peace Pilgrim II, 63 years of age at the time, was only able to emulate her journey in the same way for the first year of his walk. After 2,000 miles on the road his hips had worn out! Undaunted, however, he continued his pilgrimage with the generous donation of a car, his social security and the addition of two new metal hips. During this time he also developed a number of other health issues but he was a determined man with a focused mission-"a one-issue guy" as he used to like to call himself.

He covered the United States with his message of "Peace begins with Me/Us" eight times visiting 47 states and also traveling three times across Canada. He spoke to thousands in schools, prisons, churches, city halls, governors' mansions, wherever he could get an audience. He admired Peace Pilgrim so much for what she had done and always supported her memory by preceding his talks with her story. He was a riveting and much sought after speaker. Other places he was able to present his message was at the World Parliament of Religions Conference in Chicago in 1993 and the Hague Appeal for Peace in May of 1999. While in Holland he also walked with Mansukh Patel of the Life Foundation to support their work with the World Peace Flame.

Peace Pilgrim II started life in London, England in 1926 under his real name of Ronald Leonard Podrow which he never actually changed. However, he grew up on the Isle of Jersey off the coast of England until he and his family were evacuated just days before the Nazis landed. His family was of Jewish heritage and would have been in a very precarious position had they stayed.

As a result of this change in the family fortunes, Peace received the rest of his early education in England. In his late teens, he was trained in the diamond trade. He married and he and his first wife spent five years in Cape Town, South Africa where their two sons were born. In the early 1950's he moved his family to the Los Angeles, CA area. After his arrival in the United States, he learned all aspects of the jewelry business. Later on he took a position as manager of a diamond wholesale company.

His life may have seemed quite glamorous to some people-being involved with businesses on Rodeo Drive in Beverley Hills; meeting movie stars and flying to Europe to meet international clients. Nevertheless, Peace was not happy with his accomplishments. So in 1960 he started taking workshops and courses to develop other skills. There had to be more to existence than the pursuit of status and money! Tragically, his first wife died of cancer in 1975 but by that time their two boys were on their own. Peace later married again and divorced but remained a close friend and supporter of his second wife until her death.

In the year 1980 he decided he was ready to follow his dreams! So at the ripe old age of 54 he retired-not a common thing to do in those days! And by the end of that decade Peace had acquired much knowledge in public speaking as well as counseling. Moreover, he had always attracted people to him (both male and female-no matter what the age) like bees to honey with his infectious sense of humor, loving presence and propensity for fun. One friend of 50 years standing asked me one day, "Is he still as charming?" (she had not seen him for some time). I promptly replied, "He's worse". She laughed heartily along with me.

Peace had become the ultimate entertainer. Even though this was his joy he had developed a much deeper purpose to his life. In truth, he had initially balked at the idea of becoming a peace pilgrim when he got the calling. Later, he would always credit that decision to be the greatest turn

around in his life.

He never ever wavered from his mission of desperately wanting to save the world with his one and only message, "Peace beings with Me/Us". However, the mention of loving one another was not far behind. He would tell anyone who would listen-wars begin right inside each and every human heart on the planet until, through choices, the behavior becomes the change people want to see in the world. At times, though, he would become despondent when people refused to or could not hear him. To him the answer was so simple: being love brings peace within. To take a phrase from his web site: "We affirm Love to be the basis for the solution of all problems....."

It is difficult to imagine he ever forgot how powerfully he had affected the lives of the thousands of people he had brought his message to over the years. He was constantly receiving dozens of letters of support, press, email, and heartfelt thanks from all over the world. Peace has hundreds of adoring friends. He is no longer here physically but his presence is very much felt in the legacy of his peace work.

When I think of the courage, tenacity and all round love for people, nature and life that this wonderful man exhibited, I am still completely overwhelmed. Whether in his capacity as Peace Pilgrim II or Ronald Podrow, he was never afraid to show his emotions or feelings. He was constantly exposing the whole light and dark of who he was.

For instance, he would cry unabashedly when relating a story, whether at the talk or with friends, about his adventures on the road. It was his most endearing trait. Audiences perpetually responded to him with open hearts! And he was always so grateful for the blessings bestowed on him during his life. As for myself, I'm proud to say that what started out as the hurricane strength force that overtook my life in 1999 also became my greatest blessing.

Peace Pilgrim II (Ronald Podrow) died on December 19 2004 in Burnaby, BC. We celebrated his extraordinary life at the memorial service held in his honor in Vancouver, BC on May 15, 2005. To read more about his message his web site address is: www.pilgrim2.com

Heather Podrow-(forever grateful for the wild, wonderful, wacky five years we had together-we used to call ourselves Two Peas in a Podrow-he was the love of my life!).

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