

Nonagenarians Still Saying No to War

By Gregory A. Barnes

Peace is hardly equated to passivity in the case of George and Lillian Willoughby. Their message to Canadian Friends and the world is that not all U.S. Quakers rolled over quietly in the face of the Bush administration's war-making. Here's the record of the peace actions of these two 90-year-olds, since the threat to the Iraqi people began.

In September 2002, when George Bush requested authorization from Congress to invade, Lillian and other Quaker women in Philadelphia assembled in front of the Liberty Bell for a "hair-peace action": they would shave off part of their hair each time the U.S. moved closer to war. On September 26, Lillian had the left side of her head shaved to show her grief.

October brought Congressional compliance with the administration's demands. On October 18, Lillian gave up the hair on the right side of her head. The next day, she joined 150 Quaker women in Washington to conduct a vigil at the Pentagon. She sat in her wheelchair for five hours, occasionally holding signs with anti-war messages.

Meanwhile, her husband, George, was en route to India, where he was to accept the Jamnalal Bajaj International Award for his own peace activities, such as sailing in 1958 toward the Pacific nuclear test zone, for which he was imprisoned in Honolulu. Lillian and he had made frequent trips to India to absorb and apply the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and, as he noted at the Bajaj ceremony, she was equally deserving of the award.

One Gandhi innovation was the *shanti sena*, a peace army that would interpose itself in areas of conflict. George had been part of several peace army efforts, from the World Peace Brigade of 1963 that organized a Delhi-Peking march, to Peace Brigades International (PBI) that worked principally in Central America to escort endangered peace activists about their duties. On the 2002 trip, he fostered PBI efforts both in India and in Sri Lanka. Another task was to help found the

Nonviolent Peace Force, a more professional version of PBI, which would in fact send a team to Sri Lanka a few months later.

Back home in Philadelphia, the Willoughbys joined in the various peace marches and vigils. Heedless, the United States invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. That day Lillian, in her wheelchair, joined 106 others in a blockade of Philadelphia's Federal Court building, and was arrested. On March 29, she had her head shaved bald at the Liberty Bell.

A long delay ensued as she awaited her summons. Meanwhile, George and she joined in the rebirth of A Quaker Action Group II (AQUAG), the anti-war group in which they had participated during the days of the Vietnam war. AQUAG staged two-hour "speak-outs" in prominent city locations. The members offered an open microphone: all were welcome to speak, including any who wished to contend with the Quakers' anti-war stance. George usually paced around, talking with passersby, while Lillian handed out flyers from her wheelchair or took the microphone.

At last her summons to trial came. She knew she would be given the options of a \$250 fine or a week in jail, and she had no intention of paying the fine. In court, she accepted imprisonment willingly and handed the judge the War Resisters League 2002 peace calendar, subtitled: 52 True Stories of Nonviolent Success.

This was in September 2004. Both Willoughbys went back to the AQUAG speak-outs in Rittenhouse Square until winter closed in. In October—three months from her ninetieth birthday—Lillian served her time in jail. Upon her release, George drove her home, where they could contemplate their next peace actions. ♡

Greg Barnes is completing a biography of the Willoughbys. Like them, he is a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting.