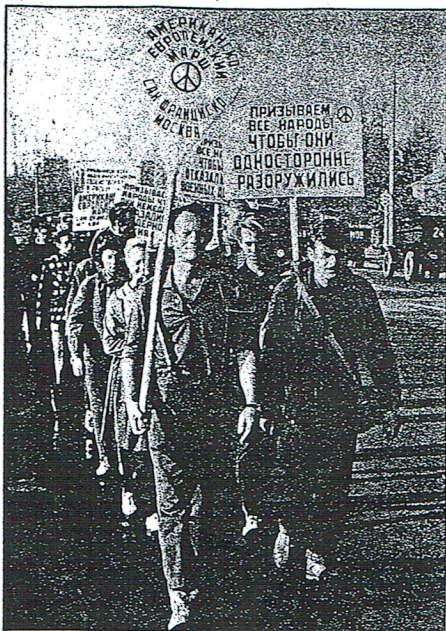


Unlikely Activist: Scott Herrick



Scott Herrick has been involved in nonviolent struggle for forty years. In the late 1950s he was arrested in Manhattan with Dorothy Day and five other Catholic Workers while protesting compulsory air raid drills. The 1960s found him engaged in a three-month-long protest against Polaris missile-firing submarines in Groton, Connecticut. Long before demonstrations were being mounted against the School of the Americas in Georgia, Scott was in Panama doing the same thing at the School's earlier incarnation. Perhaps he is best known for the march from San Francisco to Moscow, a grueling nine-month walk that appealed to all the great powers to unilaterally disarm. But there were also the five voyages to Cuba on his sailboat that challenged the embargo in a number of ways, among them an exchange of artwork between American and Cuban children. (After the first trip his US passport was canceled, prompting him to create, and utilize on the rest of his trips, his own travel document: World Citizen International Identification.) And then there was the demonstration for peace in Moscow's Red Square coordinated with a simultaneous demonstration on the White House lawn. Now, once again, he and his wife Barbara are traveling to Cuba, this time with medical supplies.

So it has gone over the years—sporadically, as Scott emphasizes, with extended dormant periods in between spent in contemplation and exploring other roads to peace.

There was no indication that he would follow this path in his early years. Like the Buddha, Scott grew up in the embrace of opulence: in his case, on New York's Upper East Side. He lived in a vacuum of privilege. When he graduated from boarding school in the midst of

World War II, he enlisted in the Navy, where much to his chagrin he was promptly placed in an officer candidate program. As a result he never saw action. At the war's end he was discharged, thoroughly confused about the direction of his life. Since he was from a Princeton family, he considered attending, as the university had offered him two years of college credit due to his studies in the military. Scott turned down their offer, packed his rucksack, and cutting himself off from family and funds, disappeared for two years. He spent most of that period in the Australian outback where he cut sugar cane and worked at an iron mine. While in Sydney, waiting for a ship to take him to Marseilles, for some unknown reason Scott entered the library and spent three days reading about Gandhi and Buddhism and taking extensive notes.

Upon returning to the US he bought a twenty-three-foot sloop on which to live and took a job as a guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The museum took on the dimensions of another reality, as he wandered the great halls before opening, singing Italian arias surrounded by the sublime and the beautiful, completely divorced from the thoughts of Gandhi and Buddhism that had overtaken him in the Sydney library. But there was no escape. He left the museum, named his boat SATYAGRAHA, the term Gandhi used to express the essence of his nonviolent philosophy, and shortly thereafter joined Brad Lyttle and the Committee for Non-Violent Action in protests against the Polaris submarine.

During the Polaris action the protesters were repeatedly challenged to take their message to Russia. As the project drew to a close, Brad Lyttle came to feel that the challenge was legitimate. Scott and a handful of others were excited by the idea, so out of Brad's imagination and profound commitment grew the San Francisco to Moscow Walk for Peace. Scott was fortunate enough to be able to provide the initial funding, and The War Resisters' League agreed to sponsor the project and raise the bulk of the money. It is out of this long experience of nonviolence that Scott shares his present-day anxieties and hopes.

"Survival is now a race between awareness and catastrophe," he observes.

"Unfortunately, time is running out for us. If we don't move rapidly to bring ourselves into balance with nature and create a more equitable distribution of resources and wealth, the human experiment may soon be terminated.

"For the first time in history, our genius, energized by our insatiable curiosity, has, in the fields of nuclear physics and biology, put godlike powers in the hands of small coteries of people in many lands. As a result, we now have the power to wreak unparalleled devastation on a global scale. We have become the greatest destroyer of life on this planet since a meteorite struck the earth 65 million years ago, ending the Age of Reptiles. Only if we accept these facts will we be able to take the radical steps necessary to save ourselves from ourselves.

"We are at the hinge of history, where the old corrupt systems have proved unworkable and new systems, born of the dormant compassionate, life-affirming aspects of our collective unconscious, are struggling to be born.

"I am convinced that nonviolence in its myriad aspects is the catalyst that can trigger the shift of consciousness essential for our survival. In the area of overt physical violence we must rid ourselves of the concept of 'enemy' by judging the act rather than the person or group.

"There came a time for me when my awareness of human madness and suffering saturated my consciousness to a point where I could no longer retreat into denial. I had passed the point of no return. It became more painful not to act than to act. So I took the line of least resistance and sporadically engaged in nonviolent actions just to relieve the intolerable pressure.

"That is to say, I cannot remember ever having performed a courageous act. I was just trying to keep on my feet while walking the deck of the *Titanic*, trying to warn the passengers and stay sane."

If we are to rise to the magnitude of our task, we too must try, like Scott Herrick and his colleagues, to find imaginative but powerful ways of saying No! to what we know is wrong. Thank God we have the example of people like these, who found new methods to lay before the world the stark alternatives that confront us: life or death.

Dare we?