

## Peace Artist: 6,000 Miles of Art & Humanity by Audrey Lin

□ It all began with gratitude.

□

□ ...And maybe some sneakers and paint.

□

□ He goes by the name Peace Artist, and he spent the past year running 6,000 miles from Seattle to San Diego to Savannah, Georgia. He ran until given shelter, fasted until given food. He carried no money, only art supplies, to create and gift original works of art along the way. He never asked for anything, yet he received so much in return.

□ In the entire year of his journey, Peace never missed a single meal. Sometimes, that meal came in the form of raspberries or dandelion greens growing by the side of the road, or apples from a tree. But more often, he was approached by strangers, curious and intrigued by his blue apron and white lettering that read, "Peace Artist." They offered him food, clothing, shelter, and care. Time and time again, his conviction that people are good would be affirmed. Time and time again, his faith in the wholeness of the world would be strengthened.

□

□ After completing his cross-country pilgrimage, he reflects:

□

□ "I say this wholeheartedly: everything that is done from compassion will be met with success. The nature of the universe is love."

□

□ The Seed of an Idea

□

□ It actually began in college. One day, Peace Artist was sitting in a café when a good runner friend of his remarked, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to just run around the country?"

□

□ And the idea was born.

□

□ From there, they got a map (this was pre-Internet days, so an actual map), and traced out the route they thought they'd take. Then, they put it aside. The map sat on the shelf for 20 years.

□

□ A deeply personal experience pushed Peace Artist to begin searching for something greater, something more out of life.

□

□ "I think that all of us, in our daily lives, we experience normalness of ups and downs. But at one point, you kind of ask yourself: "What is life all about? Why are we here? Where are we going? What is the purpose of life?"

□

□For me, I got to a place where you encounter something of such a magnitude, that you realize, Oh there has to be something greater than this.”

□

□The map came out again.

□He purchased a jogging stroller and, one day, decided to take it out for a run. Along the way, he saw a woman jogging with a backpack and joked, “You should get one of these.”

□

□□“You know, you could run around the country with that,” she replied.

□□

□□Caught off guard, Peace learned that this woman jogging alongside him had actually run across the country for peace! She and her team took turns running 10-mile legs from Washington D.C. to San Francisco, all in the name of peace. Then she told him about Peace Pilgrim.

□□

□□He had no idea who Peace Pilgrim was, but after learning more about her life and the spirit from which she walked her talk, he thought to himself: Wow, this is really it.

□□

□□“We will either learn to live together in peace or die in mutually assured destruction,” he remarked.

□□

□□With fierce resolve and gentle warmth of heart, Peace Artist decided to use his life to put these teachings, and those of the greatest teachers and avatars, to the test.

□□

□□“There is an idea that you don’t need more than you really actually need. And one of the things I tested is: Don’t worry about today or tomorrow. Don’t worry about what you’re going to wear or what you’re going to eat.”

□□

□□Facing the Tests

□□

□□When asked if he’s ever been tested on his ideals, about challenges along his pilgrimage that caused him to reevaluate what he stood for—he humbly responds, “Ohhh yeah! Well, where do I begin? Day 1.”

□□

□□When Peace first left Seattle, he was surrounded by the warm support of family and friends. They had packed him PB&J’s and warm hash browns.

□□

□□Then, as soon as he waved goodbye and turned the corner, he saw a couple of homeless people in front of him.

□□

□□“I had more than I needed; I had two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, an apple, and two hash browns. Who am I to worry about today or tomorrow? Here are these two people who have nothing... So I gave them the hash browns.”

□□

□□Day turned to night, and Peace needed shelter. He found it among the expanse of the Olympic Forest, but then found himself wondering: Will I be attacked by bears? Are there bad people out here waiting to hurt me?

□□

□□To rest his fears, he began to do a mindful breathing exercise, breathing in pain, and breathing out love. He filled his heart with care, as he thought of the people closest to him, and extended it outwards. He felt more at peace.

□□“That very first night was the only night I worried. I never worried after that.”

□□

□□ Except for the night when he was woken by baby piglets while sleeping in a ditch in the middle of California. He scared them all away, and then thought: Where's their mother?

□□

□□ At other times, Peace has run 25 miles a day with hemorrhoids in the heat of Dallas, Texas, gotten shin splints and poison oak, been told he would go to hell, and been shown the finger by a disgruntled driver. And in each moment of negativity, he responded with faith in human goodness—with an inner compassion that emulated from the inside-out.

□□

□□ On that memorable first day of his pilgrimage, a man flipped him off. Without a second thought, he waved more empathetically and called out, "I love you!"

□□

□□ "That was my first reaction," he notes, "It was kind of cool."

□□

□□ Have You Ever Doubted Gravity?

□□

□□ Though there were moments when he's questioned whether the pilgrimage was the right thing to do, Peace Artist has never questioned the possibility of peace. When Kanchan asks him where his deep conviction comes from, he replies, simply: "Have you ever doubted gravity?" and then explains:

□□

□□□

□□

□□□ Have I ever not felt love? I've felt people not manifesting love, sure. But love exists all the time. You can do experiments on it, just like you can with gravity. Throw out a kindness to somebody else—just like you throw a ball in the air. Go out and make food for an elderly man. Talk to a stranger in the park. Take care of some kittens. Anything kind that you can think of. Try it. Go out and experiment.

□□□

□□□ I can only speak from my own experience, but my experience guarantees that the experience will come back. If the intention is for love.

□□

□□ It's one thing to talk about peace, but it's another thing to live it. To really put it to the test. Peace Artist spent the past year of his life seeing the humanity in all whom he encountered. Whether it was a disheveled homeless man or a mayor who built his own home from recycled lumber, he gave them his heart. And he continues living in that spirit today.

□□

□□ More than the gift of a painted portrait or a piece of artwork, what he really shares is a piece of himself.

□□

□□

□□

□□ He spends hours listening to people's stories, without judgment, and with a striking presence and care. Then he shares these snapshots of their lives on his website, so that we can all glean insights on the human spirit, and perhaps become inspired to approach others in that same spirit.

□□

□□ He says that everywhere he goes, he finds kindness. He finds love.

□□

□□ From the way he talks about others, I can't help but feel that he simply receives what he so generously gives. Listening to him is like experiencing the pulse of humanity through his eyes—his incredible heart reflected in all around him.

