Immigrant Son Part 9
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IRAQ

Countries go to war for three reasons: national defense, territorial acquisition or protection of threatened resources. No war has been undertaken to save the lives of citizens savaged by a foreign leader (the crusades notwithstanding). In 1991 The UN, under the urging of the US, initiated a war in Kuwait (Desert Storm) that was to be the start of continuing wars in the middle east for the next two decades. The purpose, despite claims to the contrary, was protection of the oil supplies threatened by Iraq's Saddam Hussein. The first war only lasted one year, but it left an estimated quarter of a million people dead or injured – mostly civilians and conscripts in its wake. The second war starting in 2003 under G.W. Bush and his henchmen, Cheney and Wolfowitz, with the help of an obsequious Congress, is still ongoing.

Activist groups from around the US, many of them anti–war demonstrators going back to the Vietnam era, joined a worldwide protest against the middle east war. A number of us in Concord calling ourselves Grass Roots Action for Peace (GRAP) met to organize local protests. We were part of a network of protest groups in fourteen, or so, Massachusetts towns that stretched from Boston in the East to Northampton in the West.

Over the course of the next decade, GRAP members and supporters met in homes and churches – principally Concord's First Parish Universalist church – to plan actions to take in opposition to the US war policy.

We were a diverse group, well-educated – BA and beyond – retirees, and professionals who had benefitted financially from the economic boom following WWII. More importantly we were all dedicated to building a world that bridged the divisions between races, brought an end to the ceaseless ravaging of war, and sought social justice for all who suffered under the imperious rule of dictators and self-interested national leaders, including our own. We were idealists, but idealists who were determined to make our idealism a reality. We had been doing so our entire adult lives.

We had no official organizational structure but a number of us served as a steering committee: Jim West, Carol Dwyer, Judy Scotnicki, Jean Rosner, Ann Victor, Ann Eno, and John Mannheim to name a few

Carol Dwyer served as our major organizer, communicator, and archivist by default. When our energies sagged, Carol would send out a call for a meeting at her house to keep us on the move. She carried on a daily correspondence with leading figures in the anti-war movement, our political representatives – state and federal – and our supporters from one end of Massachusetts to the other.

GRAP devoted much of its time to forums and meetings, but it also carried its message to the streets of Concord all through the warm weather of spring and the snowy days of winter. In early 1991, GRAP started a weekly vigil in Monument Square at the business end of the town rotary. Members and supporters met for an hour each morning, walking slowly around the grassy rotary with its 30-foot pine tree and next to it the equally tall flag pole. The walkers, 20 or so, displayed anti-war signs. Two of them held a banner that read:

“We walk with those who suffer because of war”.

The Middle East wars, started by the Bush presidencies, continue to this day, and so do the Friday morning vigils.

Throughout the nineties, the war industries continued to thrive, despite the fact that the US had the largest defense system in the world – larger than all of Europe combined – missile sites by the dozen at home and abroad that could destroy the planet ten times over; a navy that covered every sea and port in the world; a missile-armed air force with an unlimited range of travel across the globe.

NMI

In Massachusetts, Raytheon in Lexington and Nuclear Metals Inc. (NMI) in Concord were the major for-profit arms makers.

NMI, an MIT spin-off, manufactured metallurgical products, among them, under a US Army contract, were radiological tips made from depleted uranium (a uranium isotope) for armor piercing missiles. The company was incorporated in 1954 and moved from Cambridge to a 46 acre site in West Concord in1958.

GRAP initiated a campaign to stop the DU production. It petitioned the Mass Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) to investigate radioactivity at the NMI site. It found some 400,000 pounds of hazardous waste in the holding basin used for production refuse and ordered a cleanup program.

With the support of 12 surrounding towns, GRAP put a referendum policy question on the 1992 Spring election ballot that asked the legislature to instruct congressional representatives and senators to "take all suitable measures" to enact reductions in military expenditures of at least fifty percent by 1996 and to redirect the funds into the conversion of industry from military to civilian production.

Over the disapproval of every single town committee but one the question passed by a significant margin. Two years later GRAP passed an article at the April Town Meeting calling for the creation of a committee to monitor the clean-up at NMI of residue left over from DU

production. The committee, titled “The 2229 Oversight Committee”, named for the NMI address, was charged with monitoring the clean-up.

In1995, probably in reaction to the growing public concern, NMI changed its name to “STARMET”. The name change did not alter DU monitoring. With the decade coming to an end, and a new millennium about to begin, Concord residents, with the exception of our group of activists, our supporters, and the 2229 Committee, showed little interest in the cleanup of the 46-acre contaminated site in its own backyard. The campaign, however, continued into the next century.

Tesoro mio

On July 23, 1995, I lost my beloved Terry, my companion of 50 years – my lover, my friend, my mentor, my joy, my wife. She was everything I could want in life. Our marriage – sad times and happy ones – was filled with tears, song, and laughter and four children who gave us joy every moment. If ever there was a marriage blessed by a god, it was ours.

Following her death, the family and a few friends met at her grave site in Concord’s Sleepy Hollow Cemetery for the burial of her ashes and a brief service. At my request, the Reverend Gary Smith, senior minister of Concord’s Unitarian-Universalist church led the service. Terry had joined the church a year before her death. She had been swayed by Gary’s moving funeral service of a close friend’s one year old grandson who had died from a brain tumor.

At my request, Gary recited Auden’s short, ambiguous poem, “Funeral Blues”:

“Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.”

As the ceremony concluded, my longtime friend, and fellow musician, Norm Nichols, played the Quaker tune “Simple Gifts” on his mandolin. It was a fitting end to the somber service.

In August, the family met for the emplacement of a small grave marker with etchings by Laraine of a quilt patch and bowling pin in the upper left and right hand corners.



On Sept 30, we held a memorial service at First Parish with Rev. Gary Smith presiding. The children had draped 20 or so of Terry's quilts around the church venue – wall hangings, bedspreads, and appliqués – all of them made of elaborate colored fabrics, most of them hand pieced and sewn. The quilts were hung from balcony rails in the Sanctuary and on easels in the Parish Hall.

The church sanctuary was filled to capacity – some 300 family, relatives, friends and Terry's numerous quilting and bowling teammates.

At my request, my musician friend, Marty Steinmetz, played an arrangement of pieces from the Italian classical repertoire (Verdi, Puccini, Vivaldi …), for the prelude and postlude, a number of which we had performed together over the years. My son, Jim and other musician friends, played mandolin and guitar pieces that had special meaning to Terry and the family.

Jim and Robby sang "Spirit of Life", composed by the noted feminist folksinger Carol McDade – a staple in Unitarian-Universalist hymnal" s around the world.

A few close friends spoke lovingly of their times with Terry over the many years we spent together and I recited a eulogy that covered our life together. Two years later, in her memory and my well-being, I signed on as an official member of Concord's First Parish UU church. It has been my second home ever since.

Terry led a very active life. She participated in bowling tournaments across the US. At the time of her death she had one of the highest lifetime scores for women. She created over 100 quilts, played recorder music with myself and friends throughout her life and together, we visited the wonders of Europe, Central America and the US.

She worked part time throughout most of her life. In her later years, she served as a volunteer senior caretaker, recorded books on tape for the elderly, and joined me in my political activities.

She was an avid reader – from the classics to the contemporary – and took courses in literature at U. Michigan and Framingham college. All this while mothering four energetic children. Quite a remarkable life for a young girl growing up in a poor tenement.

Italia Finale

In August 1998, I arranged a tour of Italy for the Reilly family (my eldest daughter), my last trip to Europe. The tour took us from the beautiful, spacious Lake Como in the North to the Isle of Capri and the Amalfi drive in the South, with stops at Pisa, Venice, Florence, Rome, Pompeii, Sorrento and others. We had a wonderful time viewing all the beautiful sights – the art museums, the ancient forum, the incredible, Roman Pantheon among them.

On our final day in Rome, a number of our party met at the Piazza Navona. It is one of the most elegant and festive in Rome. The huge square, filled along one side with outdoor cafes, was like a grand circus tent. Performers of every sort filled the square: roaming singers, poets, acrobats and clowns. Tourists and locals everywhere.

The centerpiece of the Square is "Fontana del Quattro Fiumi" (Fountain of the Four Rivers) designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in 1651. It is a massive 115 foot sculpture, topped by an obelisk, with water spouting from its base depicting the four great continental rivers known at that time and giant figures of the four river gods.

Four young singers, looking like characters out of "La Boehme", stopped at our café. At my request, they amazed us with a beautifully harmonized quartet from one of my favorite operas, "Rigoletto", I believe. We all stood, applauded loudly and yelled out "bravos". I passed my Greek sea cap around the circle of diners. The singers got a hatful of bills that was probably their biggest prize of the day.

As the 90's came to a close, with Terry's death always on my mind, I found solace from my family, my friends, my music and my social action work. But the world around me was seething in turmoil. The most controversial election in the nation's history to date brought G. W. Bush

into the presidency and an administration of war mongers (Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Wolfowitz) beginning the longest US war since Vietnam. The coming millennium stirred the religious fanatics – some ready to welcome the second coming of the messiah, others certain Armageddon was imminent. The business world went into a frenzy over the anticipated collapse of thousands of databases that were running on outdated software programs. None of the fears outlived the year.