

PEACEWORKS PRESS FALL 1987

INTERVIEW WITH BRIAN WILLSON & HOLLY RAUEN

Compañeros in Peace & Love

Jacquie Harmes

"I said, 'I'm going to do everything to stop this war,' not knowing what I meant, but knowing that I was serious."



This photo, taken seconds before the train hit, clearly refutes the idea that Willson "let the train hit him." Photo by Andy Perry.

In a September peace action at the Concord Naval Weapons Stations, Brian Willson of San Rafael laid his life on the line in front of a weapons-laden train for peace; as a result, both of his legs were amputated.

Now, as Willson recovers from his massive injuries, both say their peace work is accelerated - and Rauén is a frequent figure at the on-going protests. The following interviews were done in May, 1987, before the protests began and before Holly and Brian married. This is the story of how their peace paths - and hearts - converged.

Brian and his wife Holly Rauén are dedicated peace activists who, earlier this year, walked unarmed in the war zones of Nicaragua in "Veterans Peace Action Teams" which Willson helped found.

Rauén, 34, is a trained midwife with a thriving practice in Mill Valley. She is a mother, and is active in California natural birthing politics. Willson, 45, was one of the four fasting veterans of the "Veterans Fast for Peace" in Washington, D.C. which protested U.S. involvement in Nicaragua.

Both Willson and Rauén had nurtured the idea of world peace "armies" throughout their lives. But it wasn't until November 1986 when they met - and fell in love - that synchronicity enabled them to bring their dreams to life.

Just 2 months after they met, they, with six other experienced activists organized the first "Veterans Peace Action Team," which in January 1987 walked over 70 miles through Nicaraguan war zones, experiencing what war-zone citizens face every day - mortar and grenade attacks and potential mine blasts.

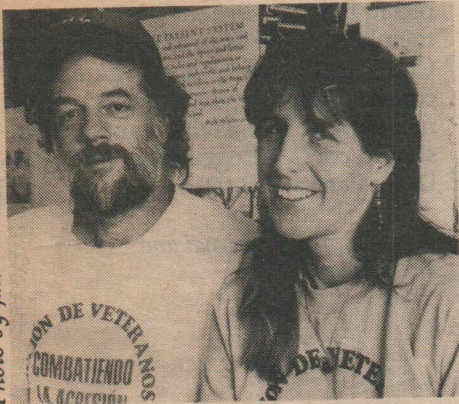


Photo by Ian Bauman

HOLLY RAUEN

Rauén is the self-acknowledged rebel of an an "ultra-conservative" Los Angeles family who at age 16 - the peak of the Vietnam war - wrote a treatise on a Peace Army of men and women wearing newly-embroidered uniforms of past wars who would position themselves in front of guns and tanks.

Her dream remained with her, unfulfilled, as she "passed through every possible trip you can imagine on a level of personal growth and the peace movement," she said. All that changed after she met Willson.

She was visiting Nicaragua as a delegate of the Committee for Health Rights in Central America (CHRICA) and remembers the meeting vividly. She was introduced to Willson and Duncan Murphy (a member of the 1986 "Veteran's Fast for Peace") in a Managuan hotel lobby and had what "I would call it a conversion experience."

"By the time I got to Nicaragua in November, I had reached a peak level of disillusionment with my own personal process, with trying to get more clear myself. I wanted to do more - something real, concrete, down to earth.

"When I heard them talking about putting their lives on the line with the people of Nicaragua ... it was like a million doors flew open all at once.

"They were willing to put their bodies on roads where people are being killed every day in order to demonstrate solidarity and to challenge the people of the United States of America to open their eyes and see that North American citizens - veterans and good, upstanding citizens - are risking their lives because they want to say to our government 'Stop This Policy.'

"I thought to myself, 'This is what I really want to do. I really want to wage peace with my life and my own physical body ... something in me that has never really come alive in me before came alive that day in Managua and I've just been coming more alive ever since because I deepen and renew my commitment over and over again.

"As far as the kind of war that our country is waging, it really reminds me a lot of the medical profession - how it intervenes with women giving birth. I see these young countries like women giving birth and deserving to have a chance to guide their own self through their own process.

"The way I see us messing with Nicaragua is the same way I see a lot of doctors messing with women trying to give birth to their babies. I think most women, given enough love and sup-

port, can delivery a baby totally naturally, without any intervention. But once you start intervening in the process, it just more and more complicated," Rauén concluded.

Of her relationship and work with Willson, Rauén said:

"I think Brian had especially given up hope of ever having a relationship with a woman and still be able to be as active as he is. We both move at very much the same pace and our commitment goes deep. To put it in the Nicaraguan terms, we are good compañeros, we are partners. And that's the best way I know how to describe our relationship. We love each other very deeply and we have a juicy love connection for sure, but there's revolution at the base of our relationship that turns us on and off in different directions and lots of creative ways.

"We really complement each other - I'm a hard worker and Brian is real visionary and to get the vision into action is a process that we're finding is working out quite well, especially with our team around us.

"It's something everybody wants and most of us say it's impossible. You can have a relationship and you can have your work but to try and do it together is too hard. But I find the only way I can be in a relationship is to be full-on partners in what we're doing," Rauén said.

BRIAN WILLSON

Willson's path to peace activism has been a tortuous, yet rewarding one. A native of rural New York state, Willson went to Vietnam with the U.S. Air

Force in 1969 where he underwent a profound paradigm shift.

He came back to go through a myriad of further change: His planned career path in mental health law, criminal law and penal law disintegrated after two years when he realized he could not adapt to the "chronic and continuous reality of injustice in the system" and his complicity in that, he said.

He became a partner in a successful "New Age" dairy business and left after concluding his heart - physically and spiritually - was telling him to take another path. He became director of a Vietnam veteran's outreach center in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

During the two years in Massachusetts, 12 veterans in western Massachusetts committed suicide. "I was really dealing with what Vietnam meant to the society through the lives of all these veterans I worked with - getting really viscerally deeply in touch with my own Vietnam experience more than ever," Willson said.

"I was having a real awareness explosion - a rapid period of time in which I was coming to grips with a lot of the truths and lot of things I had learned in Vietnam ... I was getting more and more clear dealing with these vets, that this society was so empty and still didn't want to deal with Vietnam - we were still dealing with it by ourselves - and realizing that this society of ours did not want to share the burden of Vietnam, did not really want any kind of catharsis or reconciliation because that is revolutionary," Willson said. "There are lots of people in this society who are quite ready, actually, and quite prepared to be honest. But the generic North American society was closed to any feeling, any true experience of feeling really reckoning with serious questions about why we spent 10 years and \$400 billion and killed 4 million people 10,000 miles away. Why did we do that? If we can't answer that question, we're not prepared for any growth or the pain that's involved in growing.

anger and the opposite side - the healing - which is reconciliation, forgiveness, real affirmation of life against death.

"I frequently say that I had a transformation in Vietnam and a resurrection in Nicaragua, where - I don't have words to describe it but - it was like my head and heart synchronized. I said 'I'm going to do everything to stop this war,' not knowing what I meant, but knowing that I was serious. I was getting liberated from the conflict, so that's what ultimately lead to the fast and where I'm at today. I haven't had a "regular" job since I left the military. I've been doing what I want to do which is developing this whole concept

of veterans becoming very honest and bold and very clear in our expression of revulsion for U.S. policies of intervention."

Of the Concord protests, he said: "I think people are waiting - more than they realize - for some boldness to take our power back. This is going to be an opportunity to lay out an initiative and say, OK folks, we're inviting you to come: if you can't put your life on the tracks, there's other ways you can support this effort.

"You can support us financially, you can support us with PR and getting your local media interested, you can come for a short period of time or a long period of time and just be part of a support community for those of us who are going to be on the tracks every day. We need people on the tracks every day in order to block the trains every day. So that this is not a one-day action or a two-day action," he said.

"Sustained is the key word: sustained, non-violent action. And we would hope that this would become a sufficiently developed example that can be emulated elsewhere around the country by people who live in other areas. Even though we are going to be putting out a call for people to come to California and all over the country, just as we are going to put out a call for them to go to Nicaragua. We're putting out two calls," Willson said.

Donations to Brian Willson can be sent to "The Brian Willson Fund", c/o Larson & Weinberg, 523 Octavia St., San Francisco, CA 94102.