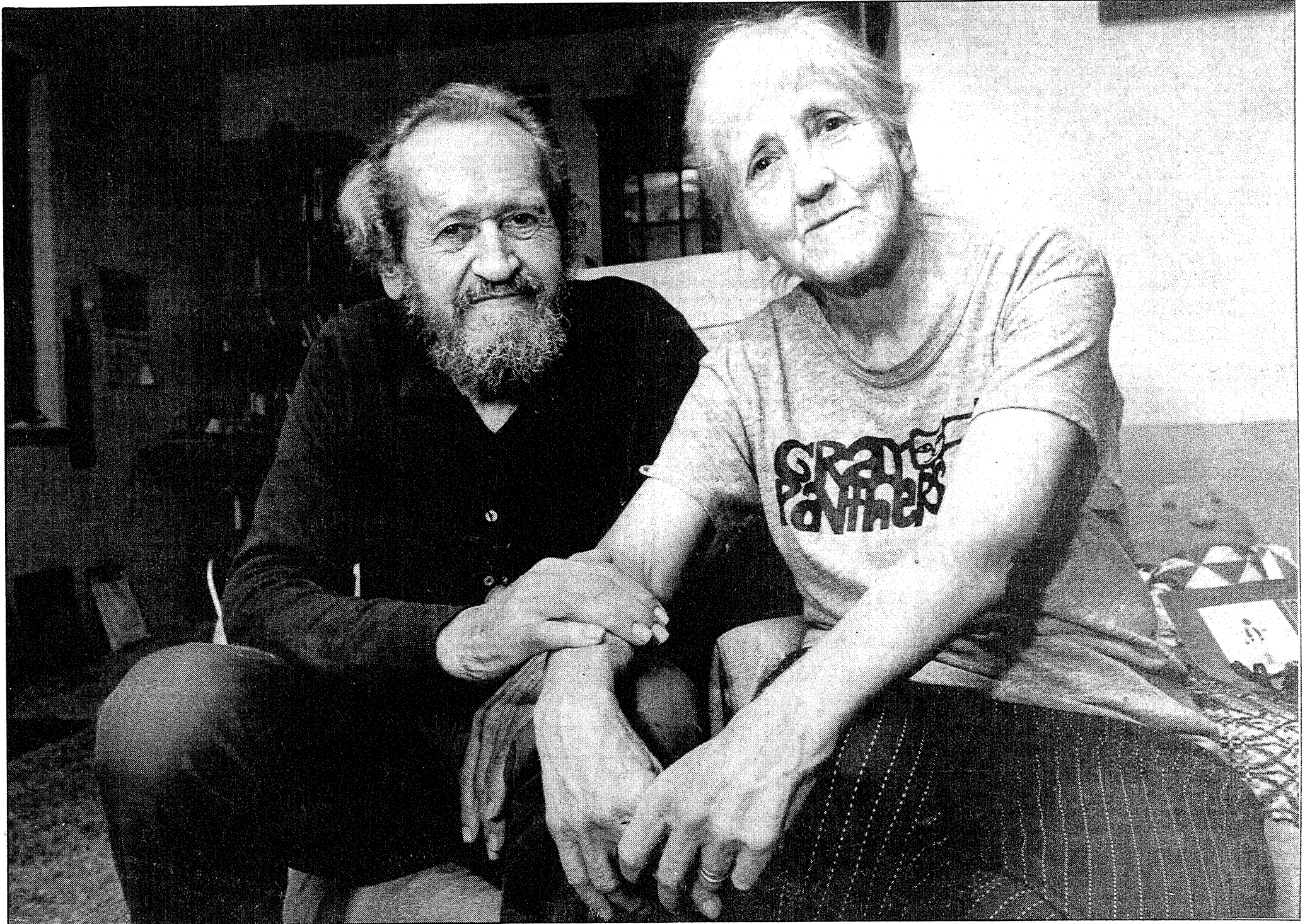


The Zwickels' pilgrimage:

A 40-year walk for peace



Abraham and Jean Zwickel met on a peace pilgrimage in the early 1940s and have been walking for peace together for the past 40 years. Their shared philosophy of life, which they describe as eclectic — "We steal the best from

all religions" — gives them a quiet courage and strength that inspires them to continue their work for world peace.

—Photo by Lynne Dobson-Keeble

By C. L. BEAUNAE
Ledger Staff Writer

Abraham and Jean Zwickel are a familiar sight at peaceful protests.

Whether it's an anti-nuclear weapons rally or a walk to abolish imperialism, the white-haired, Pittsburg couple can be easily spotted among crowds of young activists, passing out literature and sharing their ideas on peace.

"We are apolitical. We believe the problem of peace is a spiritual problem, not political," Jean said.

Abe, 79, and Jean, 69, met on a peaceful, interracial pilgrimage 40 years ago.

"It was a walk from New York City to Washington, D.C., to protest the Jim Crow laws," explained Jean.

'We met on the lowest common denominator — our feet. We were walking for peace'

The year was 1942, and various laws prohibited blacks from eating in "white" restaurants, drinking from public water fountains and sitting in the front of buses.

"We met on the lowest common denominator — our feet. We were walking for peace," Abe said.

On that pilgrimage, Abe and Jean fell in love. A year later, they were married.

The soft-spoken pacifists have been united in marriage and philosophy for almost 40 years, and the spark of excitement between them is still alive.

"I think that's because we were married on a philosophical basis. The issue binds us together. The issue is peace," Abe explained.

Jean said when she was young, she became a pacifist, and her family thought it was just a stage. "But I challenge young people today, because the older I get, the more convinced I become that this is

the right way," Jean said.

Abe was raised in New York in an impoverished Jewish ghetto. Jean was from an upper class Unitarian family.

"A friend of ours told us when we got married, 'Now, you will be Jewitarians,'" Abe laughed.

"Yesterday, I worshiped at St. Mary's and Jean was with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, but I had a feeling of oneness with Jean," Abe said.

Their shared philosophy of life, which they describe as eclectic — "We steal the best from all religions" — gives them a quiet courage and strength that inspires them to continue their work for world peace.

participated in the Continental Walk for Disarmament and Social Justice. On that walk, they met some Buddhist monks who invited them to be part of a peace walk in Japan the following year.

So, in 1979, Abe, then 77, walked 300 miles across Japan as part of a protest against nuclear weapons. "It wasn't much for me to walk that far, I have big feet," he said with sparkling eyes.

They came to the east county from Los Angeles, seven years ago, he a retired chiropractor, she a retired teacher.

They sing in the Pittsburg 50-Plus Choir — and are also

affiliated with the Central County Chapter of the Gray Panthers and the Mt. Diablo Peace Center.

Working for the latter, they have spent numerous days of protest outside the Lawrence Livermore National Lab and were involved in the recent investigation into the possibility of nuclear weapons being stored at the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

In July of 1980 and January of 1981, they represented the Mt. Diablo Peace Center at the Pittsburg Post Office, offering counseling to 18-year-old men who were required to register with Selective Ser-

vice. Abe spent two years in prison during World War II because of his conscientious objection to war.

"We weren't telling them not to register, we were trying to make them aware of all the alternatives. We suggested they talk to a

weapons are from all economic and political positions," Abe said.

Before her marriage, Jean was also involved with the religious, pacifist group, Harlem Ashram. As part of that group, she got to know Juan Pedro Albizu Campos,

'People are unaware that whatever good they do ties them together'

counselor or a minister and think about what they were doing," Jean said.

In June, the Zwickels traveled to New York to take part in Central Park portion of the nationwide June 12 anti-nuclear weapons rally.

"There were close to a million people there. I think the police count was about 800,000, and that was early on in the day. There were also other rallies around the country in the big cities. Altogether, there was probably close to two million people rallying against nuclear weapons," Jean said.

"The government is going to have to listen to the voice of the people," she added.

They also worked on the campaign to pass the bilateral nuclear freeze initiative (Proposition 12 on the November ballot), and were "delighted" that it passed in eight out of nine states, including California.

In response to President Reagan's statement that communist money was backing the initiative, Jean, said "We are not communists and never have been. We love this country." They say they know of no communists in the movement.

The Zwickels pointed out that many of the people who are opposed to building new nuclear weapons are scientists, religious leaders, physicians and attorneys. "The people opposing these

the fiery spokesman for the National Independence movement in Puerto Rico during the 40s and 50s.

She introduced him to Abe, and the seed was planted for another concern: independence for what they call a 20th century colony.

The energetic, charismatic couple will be leaving for Puerto Rico on Monday. While they are there, they will be reunited with "the monster" — their Chevrolet camper-van — and drive around the tiny country, exploring the attitudes of the people toward independence.

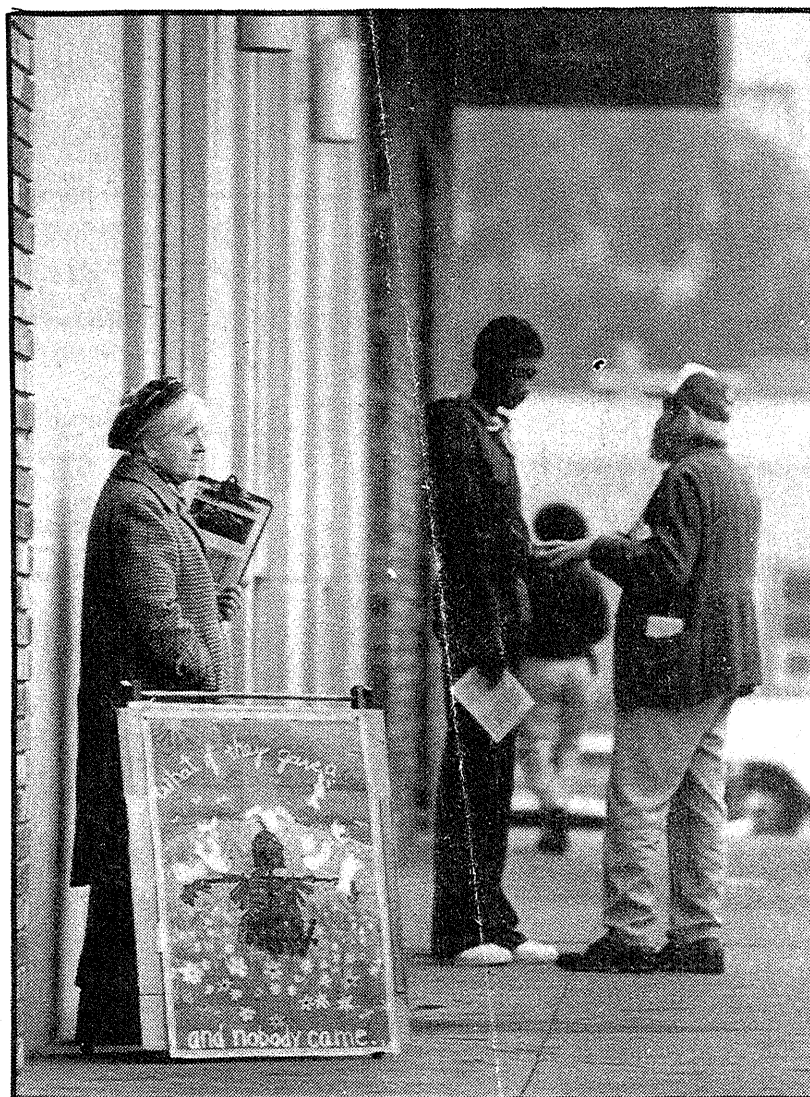
"Lately we have been concentrating our energies on our trip to Puerto Rico. There are many people there interested in independence. Our purpose there will be to study and learn and talk to people and bring back what we know to share with our friends," Jean said.

They will be staying on the island of Vieques, six miles east of Puerto Rico. The island is used by the United States as a military base, specifically for war games. "We (the U.S.) have no right to have a colony," Jean said.

Where do they get their energy?

"We just see these things that need to be done and we do them. This is the fun of living," said Jean.

Now, in what they tenderly refer to as their "last decade," the Zwickels' work for peace continues.



— Ledger file photo

The Zwickels were at the Pittsburg Post Office in January, 1981, offering counseling to 18-year-old men who were required to register with Selective Service. "We weren't telling them not to register, we were trying to make them aware of all the alternatives. We suggested they talk to a counselor or a minister and think about what they were doing."