

## A Beacon of Hope: the 15-Year Peace Vigil Over the Mississippi

By Marie Braun

It was in the spring of 1999, in response to the U.S. bombing of Yugoslavia, that members of Women Against Military Madness (WAMM), Friends for a Nonviolent World, the Twin Cities Campaign to End Sanctions (on Iraq), and a number of local faith communities started the weekly vigil on the Lake Street/Marshall Avenue Bridge spanning the Mississippi River between Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, which continues to this day. We gathered in solidarity with people in Yugoslavia who were standing on their bridges in the belief that the U.S. would not intentionally kill large numbers of civilians.



*People have been resisting war every Wednesday for 15 years on a bridge over the Mississippi River between Minneapolis and St. Paul.  
Photos this page by Tom Bottolene.*

The WAMM End War Committee has been committed to this vigil for these many years because we believe it is important to have an ongoing public witness against war. Though our numbers may be small at times, we gather on the bridge every Wednesday to remind ourselves and others that the United States is at war and that we must speak out against the atrocities that our country commits in the name of “our national security.” It is also an opportunity to stop, for a short time each week, to remind ourselves of the plight of the people, especially children, who live with the suffering and deprivation that war brings and to join together to say, “War is not the answer.”

For several years, the vigil focused on opposing the sanctions on Iraq and the wars on and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, but vigilers have frequently raised their voice relative to other issues: threats of war against Iran, North Korea, Libya, Mali, and Syria; torture; attacks on civil liberties; and U.S. support for the occupation of

Palestine, calling on our government to fund human needs, not war. We have also focused attention on the weapons of war—most recently on drones, our government’s current weapon of choice.

The numbers at the weekly bridge vigil have varied from seven persons on a freezing January day to 1,200 on the day that the BBC filmed St. Paul residents Mary and Nick Eoloff, adoptive parents of Israeli nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu, during one of the vigils. Other actions on the bridge included a three-day fast against sanctions, which drew more than 60 fasters and a bishop from both the Lutheran and Catholic faith communities. We have been gratified to learn that this vigil has been an inspiration to many others who started vigils in their own communities across the state of Minnesota and as far away as Sacramento, California.

Thousands of people from the Twin Cities and many outside the Twin Cities area have participated in the vigil on the bridge. We hope the 15th anniversary of the vigil on Wednesday, April 30, 2014, will be an opportunity to come together to share our stories and to support one another in our continuing struggle to end the war and occupation of Afghanistan, stop the drone bombings in Pakistan, put an end to U.S. threats of war in the Middle East and elsewhere, and focus our government’s attention on issues of jobs, education, housing, health care, and other human needs.

The WAMM End War Committee is especially thankful to those who have stood with us through freezing cold weather, snow, rain, excessive heat, and gloom of night since 1999, never missing a Wednesday, even on special holidays. You are truly dedicated peacemakers.

Marie Braun co-founded the Twin Cities Peace Campaign after traveling to Iraq during the Sanctions Period. She is a longtime member of Women Against Military Madness and chair of the End War Committee. Marie and her husband John Braun have been organizers of the Bridge Vigil for the past 15 years.

