

**Marianne Hamilton, Presente! Peace Activist and Co-founder of Women Against Military Madness**  
by Carol Masters

*Her opposition to war and quest for peace, based in Minnesota, ranged across continents and took her from Vietnam to other parts of Southeast Asia and Central America.*

Marianne was gracious, kind, funny, fearless, and persistent—some of the words her friends and colleagues use to describe her. We remember and miss her throaty and reassuring voice, her dazzling smile.

She was a founding mother of Women Against Military Madness (WAMM), described by the *Star Tribune* as “the state’s most enduring antiwar organization” when it celebrated its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. She brought to the organization many gifts, not the least of which was her personal and continuing history as an activist. In a 2007 Kevin McKeever vimeo, she describes herself as the precocious child of socially engaged Catholic parents. Her mother, Sally DeFay, encouraged her in public presentations, dancing, and singing in theaters from a very early age. Her elocution teacher, a nun, would accompany her and she’d earn \$5 an evening for her gigs. As a teenager, she began to sing in nightclubs and later moved from Minneapolis to Chicago, where she met and married Norman Hamilton, an artist.

Norman was drafted and served in World War II; thus began Marianne’s life as a peace advocate. “War is a terrible way to solve problems!” her young husband wrote in a letter to her. She moved back to Minneapolis, where she instituted a G.I. wives club, not a peace group, she said, but a support group for women. When Norman returned, they resolved to do what they could to promote peace. Marianne and lawyer Stanley Platt started a new organization, United World Federalists, which they conceived of as a way to bring law into the world, to “outlaw” war. Ruefully, she admitted, “It’s pretty hard to outlaw war when there are people making money on it!”

“We were never able to do that, unfortunately. So then we started protesting—it was the obvious thing to do, to protest the politicians.” She and her friends and family determined they would be in the streets, write and advocate for peace whenever there was a war or a planned war. Protest she did, to speak truth and press the politicians. Over the years, Marianne traveled to many areas of conflict, including Hanoi during the Vietnam War, to advocate for peace.

She went to Paris in 1970 to meet with several Vietnamese groups during the Paris Peace Talks, joining a group of 30 Americans led by journalist Dianna Johnstone. In 1971 Marianne flew to Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam, with activists Fr. Harry Bury, David Dellinger, Cora Weiss, William Sloane Coffin, and Richard Falk, as well as family members of three prisoners of war, to secure their release.

To Marianne’s joy, among the Committee of North Vietnamese Catholics who met their plane were several of the Vietnamese peace activists she had met in Paris: “Mr. Pham van

Kham, Mr. Nguyen van Dong, Fr. Nguyen The Vinh, as well as Fr. Trinh, Fr. Ho Bien. I kissed them all—it was so marvelous to see familiar faces! Mme. Bui Thi Cam, a lawyer and Catholic Deputy in the North Vietnamese National Assembly, greeted me (and Father Bury) with bouquets! as a sign of welcome.” Later, in conversations with Mme. Cam, Marianne learned that the National Assembly had 125 women: “How many women do you have in Congress?” Mme. Cam asked. Marianne held up one hand: “I can count them on my fingers.”

The Vietnamese led them into their first place of lodging, the Hotel Reunification. “There were so many things called Reunification!” Marianne noted, an indication that the nation did not want the division imposed by foreign governments. Other members of the Committee of North Vietnamese Catholics met them at the hotel, and there was a “friendly protocol of exchanges of greetings and tea. It was less formal because we knew so many—but as at the airport, we were interrupted by an air raid siren. We grabbed our notes and ran to the hotel bomb shelter.”

The weeks of meetings, exchanges, and traveling “under the bombs” had a profound effect on Marianne. Each night, as possible, she wrote meticulous notes in a journal. She was “amazed at the people’s sociability, while the visitors were pained and confused at the ravaged land, they simply went on.... Wherever you looked, there were busy activities or social gatherings.” At Nam Dinh, the North’s third largest city and provincial capital, destruction was everywhere. Seventy percent of the town was in ruins, including the hospital, which had been marked with a huge red cross. A guide took them to an exhibit pointing out “charred rice, melted glass and steel, caused by small mortar fragmentation bombs... there was an exploded guava Honeywell bomb. We explained we came from [the] place they were made. Our guide only smiled at us sympathetically.” (Notes from Marianne’s 1971 diary, in manuscript with Fr. Harry Bury memoir, unpublished.) Marianne visited Vietnam in later years, seeing friends and mourning our country’s seemingly irreversible attachment to wars.

Other countries and conflicts claimed her attention over the years, too: She went to Nicaragua when the U.S. military was trying to overthrow the Sandinista regime, to the Philippines to protest toxic waste being left behind at U.S. military bases, and to Cambodia and Burma.

On Marianne’s passing, Polly Mann, co-founder of Women Against Military Madness, said, “WAMM experienced a tremendous loss with the death of Marianne Hamilton. It was Marianne who already had a history of peacemaking in Vietnam, who recognized the need for an organization to publicize the need for peace and to work and educate others. Her peace message was part of her intrinsic being, and her presence will be missed by all who knew her.”

*Carol Masters is a longtime peace activist, member of WAMM and the Newsletter Committee. She is the author of You Can’t Do That! Marv Davidov, Nonviolent Revolutionary (Nodin Press, 2009); The Peace Terrorist: Stories (New Rivers Press, 1994); and poems and short stories in literary presses.*

