

WILPF and Me

On August 25, 2014

by Martha Jean Baker, WILPF Vice President

<http://www.womenstopwar.org/wilpf-and-me/>

Was it a WILPF bazaar or an all day WILPF outing in the country that is my first memory? It must have been in the early 1950s because fear and hate were in the air. My third grade teacher threatened to wash my mouth out with soap if I ever used THAT word again – communist, or was it communism.

I was afraid of most of the children in my school. Some had parents who KNEW about my parents, or at least heard about them so they were not allowed to play with me or invite me home. Some called me a 'Dirty Jew.' We were the only Jewish family in that school. I was always careful and unsure of new children.

My parents were left-wing activists. Our home was the headquarters of the Rosenberg Committee and our dining room table was the mail room, or so it seemed to me. And I am fond of saying that I licked more envelopes for the [Rosenbergs](#) than any other 8 year old in the world. I wrote letters to Michael and Robert Rosenberg, THEIRsons and about my age.

My Parents held regular meetings and my older sister and I were allowed to sit in with the grown-ups. Sometimes they would argue – not in anger – about Russian Communism v Trotski-ism. It was all good-natured but it WAS serious; I could tell.

Political activists of different kinds would stay at our house in Minneapolis on their way from one coast in the US to the other. Some of them were even famous. I know that because of the way people talked to and about them. My Parents would organise fund-raising meeting in our living room for them and my Father would make the 'pitch' for money after the issues were presented and discussed.



And my Mother was an active member in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). They would have all day events and meetings. Sometimes there would be a bazaar to raise money and sometimes there would be a meeting somewhere in the country, maybe on a farm. And there were always other children.

The grown-ups, mostly women, would gather together and talk. It was very serious, I could tell! It sometimes sounded like the meetings in our living room.

We, the children would explore and play. At first I would be suspicious of the other children, just like at school. And I thought they were suspicious of me too. But as the day wore on, we would start to play

together. It was tentative at first, but as it got later and probably after we all ate lunch together, we started to have real fun and run and hide and laugh like we had never laughed before. But then the meetings would end and my Mother would come and find me and say it was time to go home. By the time of the next WILPF meeting, I would have forgot that the other children were my friends and it would start all over. Somehow I came to know that the children at the WILPF meetings were different from the ones as school and a few became REAL friends, life-long friends. I knew that when I grew up that I wanted to be part of WILPF.