



NJPN Comment

Summer in the City 2019

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I would never have imagined that so many opportunities for deep conversations and peacemaking could emerge over just a couple of weeks. Being retired helps – free to choose where I go and when.

Four students, from Portugal, Belgium and Italy, attending a course on gender and conflict, and a family from France all stopped to take leaflets at the weekly Women in Black (WiB) vigil at the Edith Cavell statue near London's Trafalgar Square. WiB is a worldwide movement of women who oppose injustice, war, militarism and other forms of violence. The London vigils take a theme each week: challenging the arms trade, speaking up for the people of Gaza and the West Bank, promoting the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty. Our visitors were impressed at the weekly commitment. They wanted to know which countries still possessed nuclear weapons and which supported the Ban Treaty. They wanted to talk Brexit – would the world become a more dangerous place, post-Brexit? Why did we gather at this spot? So many strands to follow and so much to say – and all made possible by our simple presence in the middle of London.

Of course, place matters and they were right to ask 'why this spot'. WiB gather around the statue of Edith Cavell, the nurse who treated casualties from all nations in the hospital she ran in Brussels during the First World War. She allowed the hospital to be used by soldiers who were escaping and was tried and executed by the Germans in 1915. In 1923 a postscript was added to the statue bearing the final words attributed to Cavell: "Patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness to anyone". A fitting and urgent challenge for this time in our history.

This statue is also a focal point of the London Peace Trail, created by Valerie Flessati. A few weeks ago we led 22 people on this walk that began at the Ghandi statue in Tavistock Square, and then took us past the Ann Frank Tree, the Edith Cavell Statue and on to the Suffragette memorial in Victoria, then to the 20th Century martyrs memorial at Westminster Abbey. Telling stories on route, exposing plaques, statues and memorials that are hidden to most, is a rewarding way of sharing peacemaking's message through the ages. It's good to talk, to listen, walk and vigil, creating space for meaningful conversations.

Pat Gaffney is former director of Pax Christi, the Catholic Peace Movement. Peace Trails Through London are available via www.paxchristi.org.uk

Women in Black: See www.womeninblack.org