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# LA CONCHA

Newsletter of American Pilgrims on the Camino  
December 2018

## An Autumn Experience on the Vía Podiënsis: Le Puy to Moissac

by Robert Deming, Fredericksburg TX

When walking the Vía Podiënsis in France, start with the friendly Pilgrim Blessing at the Cathedral in Le Puy after the 7:00 a.m. Mass. On the trail, you will stay in gîtes, which are hostels with dinner and breakfast. Some are purpose-built, but others are private homes. At Gîte a le Ferme la Bayssade, a few miles northeast of Moissac, farmers Claudette and Patrick offer nine beds in their farmhouse and serve home-cooked meals in their kitchen for €35. The wine is from nearby Cahors, and the milk for your bowl of coffee is poured through a sieve, delivered straight from their cow. Claudette makes the wonderful vegetable soup Patrick serves in their kitchen. Dinner the night I stayed also included pork in sauce over pasta, a plate of cheese, and apple crumble. The meal was almost entirely from their farm.

There are fewer pilgrims on this trail, and I was walking at the end of the season in September and October 2018. I always called ahead to make sure a gîte was open. I found few people spoke English and used Google Translate extensively. I saw a dozen pilgrims on the trail some days, but on other days there were none.

The *Miam Miam Dodo* app makes it easy to call or email the next gîte, which vary from just



*The Pilgrim Blessing at the Cathedral in Le Puy.*

a bed or two to up to 30. Many nights I was the only pilgrim, but no matter the size, all were quite nice. The Abbaye at Conques is a remarkable place to stay, and the dinner, organ concert, and light show were fantastic.

Couvent de Malet, the old convent in Saint-Côme-d'Olt, is like a fancy hotel; our room had three beds and a private bathroom with shower. At the Ulteia gîte in Moissac (across from the train station), Rom and Aideen are as genuinely warm and helpful a couple as I've ever met. Kind and gentle, Michelle runs a donativo gîte in Soulié outside Espeyrac, where guests help cook the memorable evening meal.

Every single day I was thankful to be on the trail in such a marvelous country, where

the people are friendly, the villages amazing, and the food extraordinary. Dinner with other pilgrims was the highlight of each day. I will return someday to complete the walk into St. Jean Pied de Port. ♦

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## Message From the Chair

Dear Members,

As the days grow shorter, I begin to reflect on the past twelve months and contemplate the coming year. When I think about the accomplishments of American Pilgrims in 2018, I always start with our mission statement: We foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by supporting its infrastructure, by gathering pilgrims together, and by providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims. We celebrate every credential mailed to prospective pilgrims, every local chapter event held, every hospitalero trained and every grant made. And, of course, we celebrate our mission at the annual Gathering.

In 2018, your board of directors focused on building a strong basis for the future. We completed our organizational values and worked on a new vision statement. I'm profoundly grateful for my fellow board members' commitment to this very important work. We've renewed our commitment to the American Pilgrims' mission. And we have a greater focus on working with you, our members, to foster a vibrant Camino community.

As I complete my second and final year as board chair, I want to express my gratitude not only for my past and future Camino experiences, but also for all the people who have supported me along the way and for the opportunities I've had to share my experiences. I am grateful for my current and past board colleagues who have consistently approached our work with passion, humor and a dedication for living our mission statement.

I am grateful for all of you who have demonstrated your ongoing support for American Pilgrims on the Camino by your membership, your

volunteer hours and your participation in local chapter events as well as in the National Gathering. Thank you to all of the chapter coordinators who consistently and warmly welcome others into our Camino community.

And speaking of welcome, I want to express a warm 'bienvenidos' to Sara Gradwohl,

who brings to your board of directors a wealth of technological skill and a willingness to "figure it out." You'll be seeing changes in our website and other communications soon. I want to express my thanks to your incoming board chair, Dave Donselar, who has agreed to serve for the next two years. I'm very excited to watch Dave's leadership skills in action during my final year of board service. He has vast experience working with diverse teams and the practical skills that can turn our mission, vision and values into actions that strengthen our Camino community.

This is a very exciting time for us all. I'm grateful for American Pilgrims and for all of you who make it possible. ♦

Buen Camino!

*Jeff Stys*

Board Chair



*Jeff Stys*  
*photo by Joan DeFeis*



**Happy Holidays**

## WELCOME to this issue of La Concha

We're grateful to our many members who contributed material for this issue highlighting our American Pilgrims' value of Gratitude. You'll find their work throughout the issue, along with a story about the Camino Ignaciano and another about one pilgrim's winter Camino. You'll read of hospitaleros' experiences and find a book review, poetry and further details about the March 2019 Gathering in Black Mountain, NC.

Our March newsletter will focus on our value of Service. The Camino depends on the service of others, from hospitaleros in albergues to volunteers in communities and in the Santiago Pilgrim Office. How have you incorporated the value of service in your life? What forms does service take in your

chapter, your community? Send us your work at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org) by February 21, 2019. Please follow the submission guidelines on the American Pilgrims website.

Know that we would be most grateful to have your help. If you're a wordsmith eager to edit or a designer willing to take over the design and layout of the newsletter, please let us know at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org). ♦

Gratefully,

*Team La Concha*

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## The 2019 Gathering is Just Around the Corner

### 22nd Annual Gathering of Pilgrims - Cultivating Camino Connections

We are looking forward to welcoming you to the 2019 Gathering, Cultivating Camino Connections, March 28-31, 2019, at the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, NC, just outside of Asheville. We have a jam-packed schedule covering diverse topics such as the true story of a 17th century pilgrim of African descent, bread and culture on the Camino, and the ecology of pilgrimage. And much, much more. We'll also have several sessions geared toward the first-time pilgrim ranging from what to pack to Camino first-aid. We also will have fun social and cultural activities... a scintillating Spanish guitar duet, a Muiñeira de

Chantada presentation, the screening of *Strangers on the Earth*, and a beautiful photography exhibit! Finally, we are also bringing back our infamous Camino Cabaret.... So please come prepared to share your talents! The Gathering is the perfect opportunity to cultivate friendships with pilgrims from all over the country and abroad to make new connections.

Registration will open the first week of January. Look for registration information on the American Pilgrims on the Camino website: [www.americanpilgrims.org](http://www.americanpilgrims.org). Register early to ensure your spot! ♦

AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO  
22ND ANNUAL GATHERING OF PILGRIMS

CULTIVATING CAMINO CONNECTIONS



MARCH 28-31, 2019

YMCA BLUE RIDGE ASSEMBLY  
Black Mountain, NC



# What Does Gratitude Mean to Me?

*by Richard Meyers, Ewing NJ*

Gratitude is being thankful for what one already has.

I am grateful for my loving and supportive wife and for having wonderful family and friends.

I am grateful for my home and for sharing it with my wife.

I am grateful we have employment we enjoy, that challenges us and provides the means to travel and experience culture.

I am grateful for my church and how it has enriched my life and the community.

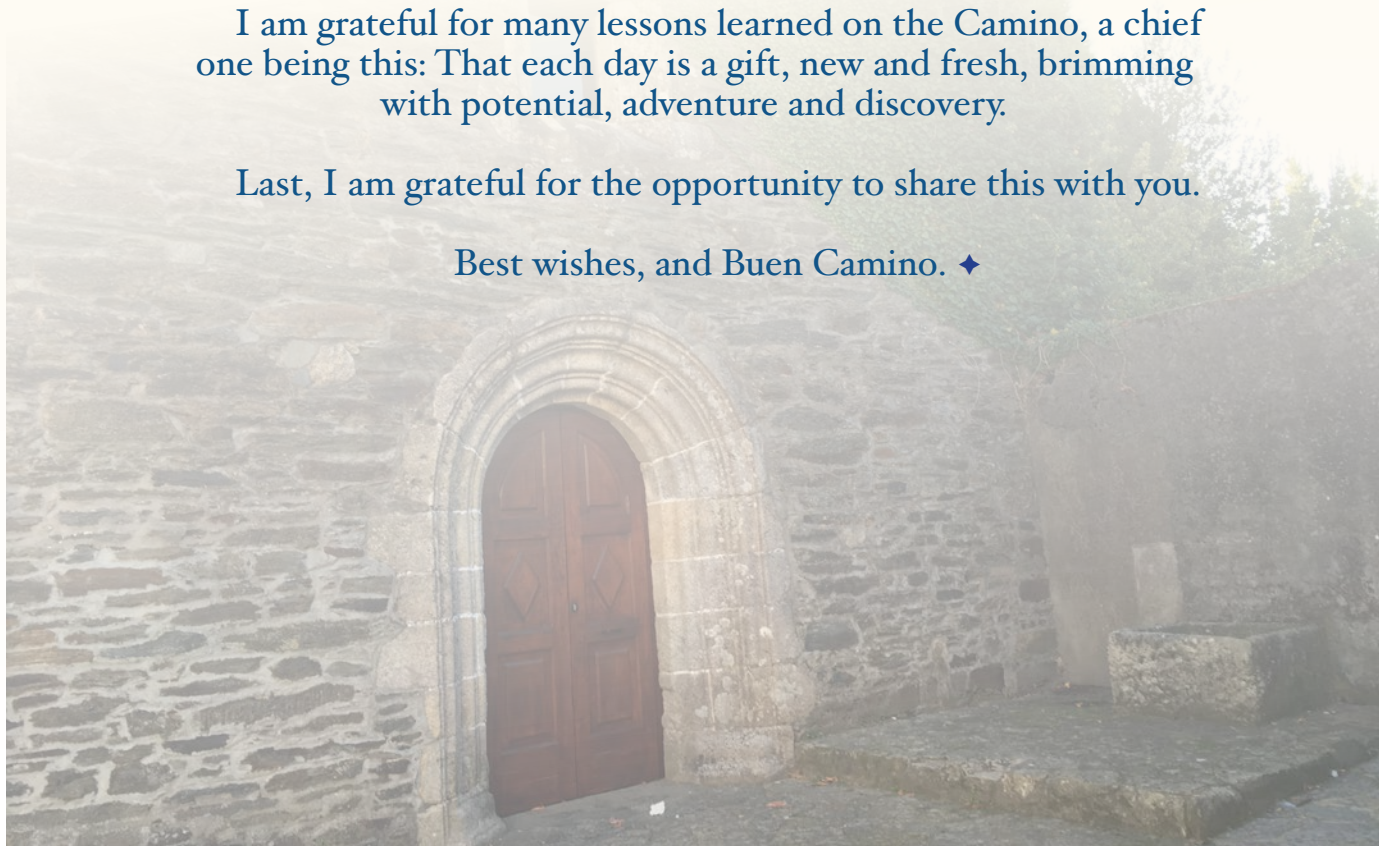
I am grateful for family and work associates who always support us, even after we tell them we're going to "do" the Camino Francés!

I am grateful my wife and I walked the Camino this year and learned for ourselves why it is so amazing.

I am grateful for many lessons learned on the Camino, a chief one being this: That each day is a gift, new and fresh, brimming with potential, adventure and discovery.

Last, I am grateful for the opportunity to share this with you.

Best wishes, and Buen Camino. ♦



*Along the Camino Francés from Ponferrada to Santiago. photo by Bobbye Underwood, Brunswick GA*

## FB Gratitude

We owe our Facebook volunteer moderators our Thanks. If you are a member of the American Pilgrims on the Camino Facebook group, you know what a treasure trove of information it offers. You can answer questions from prospective pilgrims, request recommendations about routes, albergues, backpacks and more, and find photographs from a myriad of pilgrimages on a variety of routes. The volume of posts from our 19,000 members is staggering.

What you don't see is the behind-the-scenes work of our volunteer Facebook moderators. These folks use their talents to screen blatant sales pitches, deter nasty commenters, keep the discussions civil, and watch for maybe erroneous information that can spread like wildfire on social media. In addition, they provide valuable information about American Pilgrims



and its services, from membership and chapters to credential requesting.

The Facebook group began in March 2009 and became a closed group in June 2018 so that people have more privacy when posting in the group. Our moderators are Andy Byers, Geoff Davies, Jim Martin and Rosa Torres-Tumazos. As they see potentially problematic issues, they steer the conversation in a positive direction. In addition, they work as a team consulting with one another to eliminate any personal biases when making decisions.

Next time you visit our Facebook group, be grateful for the work these volunteers do on your behalf. And if you'd like to join them as a volunteer moderator, please contact us at [facebook@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:facebook@americanpilgrims.org) with Facebook Moderator in the subject line. We'd be grateful to have you contribute to this important work. ♦

## Beds: Bugs Need Not Apply

by Robert Scheckenback, Commack NY

The camaraderie and fraternity are alluring, addictive and inspiring. The shared vision and mission, disarming. The history is humbling, and the landscapes are breathtaking. The food is so good, you must walk 30kms a day just to stay the same weight.

BUT...it's the beds...the beds that make a somewhat unnoticed, yet significant impact. Something I take for granted at home. Something that some people in other parts of the world do not have at all.

There is an exhilaration in being assigned your bed for the night. Beds and accoutrements that I would be disappointed with anywhere else are a

luxury. Even those rubber mattress, rubber pillow set-ups, where you're handed those hair-net-material sheets and covers to put on, bring some comfort and a promise of a night of peace.

Regardless of how it looks or feels, or even where it is, a bed affords a little dignity, and acknowledges a little normalcy. Even in a room with 40 bunk beds, with snoring loud enough to peel 300-year-old paint off the wall, a bed not only reminds us that we're part of something greater, but reminds us that we're a part of something, at least, somewhat civilized.

So, I can look back at the many beds and be grateful.

P.S. Two Caminos and no bites! ♦

# The Best Camera is the One You Know How to Use

by Sara Gradwohl, Mooresville IN

It is often said that “the best camera is the one you have with you,” but I’ll go even further and say the best camera is the one you have with you and know how to use.

Many pilgrims consider a small camera to be an essential item in their Camino backpack. We know that we’ll want to document our journey so that we can later look back through our photographs to relive our experience and share it with friends and family. We want pictures of the new friends we meet, the sights we see, the places we stay and the foods we eat.

That’s why it’s good to plan ahead.

Many of us now leave the digital camera at home and rely solely on a smartphone (iPhone or Android). With just one small electronic device, we can document the journey, track our daily fitness, send emails and text messages, upload pictures to social media, make phone calls, use mapping apps, listen to our favorite music, and even have guidebooks and novels in e-book form. You have all of those capabilities with no increased weight except if you add a waterproof case and screen protector.

The day you’re struggling over the Pyrenees is not the best time to discover that you don’t know how to use your phone’s camera. Or worse yet, to get home and see only blurry pictures of that gorgeous sunrise or sunset, adorable baby goats, and the wonderful communal dinner and kind pilgrims you never saw again.

If you keep in mind the following easy tips and practice using your phone’s camera before you leave home, you’ll return from the Camino with some of the best photographs you have ever taken, and you’ll be proud to show them off. Perhaps you’ll even submit them for publication here in La Concha!

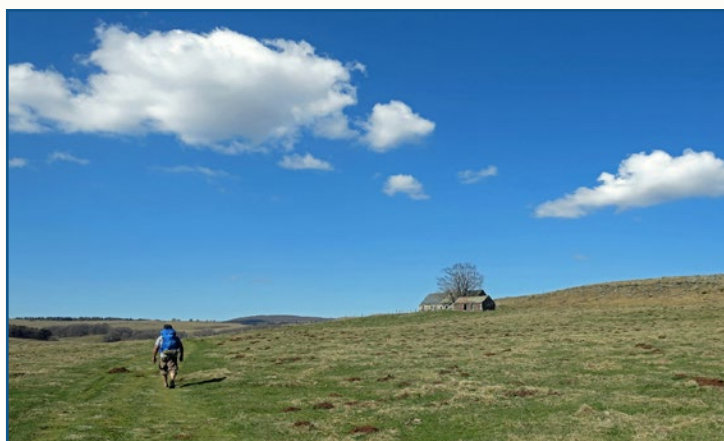
- Turn off the flash.

- Know how to get your camera to focus on an object you see on the screen.
- Don’t shoot directly into the sun or in a backlit setting.
- Know how to adjust the brightness/exposure by using the settings on your screen.
- Try not to use the zoom. Instead, get closer to the subject.
- Turn on your camera’s gridlines; they’ll assist with taking level photographs.
- Use those same gridlines to apply the “rule of thirds” when composing a photo for a more balanced, symmetrical and interesting image.
- In a full-body photo of a person or people, don’t cut off their feet.
- Don’t place the subject squarely in the center of the composition.
- Get the names of the other people in group photos.
- Shoot from a lower viewpoint to add visual interest. Most photos are taken at chest height, so try to mix it up.
- Use your camera’s “burst” mode for action shots.
- Use your camera’s “HDR” mode for high contrast settings.
- Familiarize yourself with how to “shortcut” to the camera from your phone’s lock screen so you can take pictures quickly.
- Take at least two or three photos of groups because someone is bound to blink in the first shot.

- Add depth to your photos by using “leading lines” like roads and paths (easy to find along the Camino) and by including something in the foreground like flowers or rocks.

- Take advantage of the “golden hour” (the hour after sunrise and before sunset) for beautiful lighting and long shadows.

- Don’t be afraid to experiment with your phone’s camera. You can take hundreds of pictures



*An example of the “rule of thirds” in composition. Pilgrim Eric Jusino walks the Chemin du Puy in early spring near Aubrac, France. Photo by Beth Jusino, Seattle WA*



for free (just remember to delete them so you don't fill up the phone's memory card).

- If you want to make a few corrections to your photo after you take it, you can edit it in the phone's Photos app, adjusting exposure, contrast, and brightness, and even leveling the photo if you weren't using the gridlines.

If you need help getting started, ask a family member or friend to show you what they know. If you have an iPhone, consider taking a free "iPhoneography" class at your local Apple store. Once you become comfortable taking pictures with your phone, there are a number of third-party apps that can give you even more control and creativity. By the time you begin your Camino, you'll be familiar and comfortable with your phone's camera. The readers of *La Concha* look forward to seeing your favorite photos. We hope you'll share them with us. ♦



*An example of "leading lines" in photo composition, taken at the Monasterio de Zenzarruza on the Camino del Norte. Photo by Beth Jusino, Seattle WA*

## Letting Go

by Laurie Ferris, Oakland CA

While there are many lessons that the Camino has provided me, the greatest one has been to let go, both literally and figuratively. I am filled with gratitude for the lessons.

First, there is the literal letting go of stuff. After my first Camino, I had the urge to purge my closets. I hadn't noticed before that I'd accumulated an embarrassing amount of stuff over 20 years of living in the same house. Now I realized that if I could survive for weeks with just a few items in a backpack, I really didn't need all of these clothes, some of which I hadn't worn in years.

During the "Great Purge of 2016," I divvied up piles and offered them to my workmates, consignment shops, and Goodwill. It felt good to know that someone could use what I didn't need, and the personal reward of having less was that it made my choices easier. Whew! I vowed not to buy more, and I continue to purge on an ongoing basis.

Next to go were some control issues. Yep, I was a bit of a control freak before the Camino. While I loved to set goals for myself, I occasionally veered into other people's lives and tried too hard to

organize for them, too. After the Camino, instead of trying to change someone's behavior, I changed my reaction to it. I took a serious look at my priorities and let go of some toxic relationships, which was painful, but I learned that it's much better to let people find their own way. What a relief that was!

Finally, I learned to let go and let God. When I discovered I needed to have surgery to remove fibroids—another purge of sorts—I had to cancel a trip to India for yoga training. It was clear that God had different plans for me. Instead, I savored the holidays at home with family, went through the surgery, and healed. I was grateful for every breath, every day, and everyone in my life. My church helped me through all the challenges of letting go and provided the kind of spiritual connection I also felt on the Camino. I felt so supported, as if angels were surrounding me! That experience made me decide to get confirmed as Catholic.

The Camino set these changes in motion. Less is more, life is simpler, and God has my back. For these lessons, I am deeply grateful. ♦

# Walking to the End of the World

by Beth Jusino

Reviewed by Ann Loar, Lewes DE

*Walking to the End of the World* - A must-have on any pilgrim's bookshelf.

What happens when a 30-something, non-athletic Seattle woman with mediocre foreign language skills leaves her life of "postmodern adulating that had burnt (her) to a crisp" and sets out with her more physically fit husband to hike a thousand miles along the Camino de Santiago from Le Puy-en-Velay, France, to Finisterre, Spain? She forms bonds with scores of fellow pilgrims from

## Walking to the End of the World: A Thousand Miles on the Camino de Santiago

by Beth Jusino

Mountaineers Books 2018

272 pages

around the world, learns to let go of limiting self-imposed rules, and discovers just how weak AND how strong she really is – physically and mentally. What happens when that same woman recounts the tale of her pilgrimage in book form? She creates a wry, page-turning story that pilgrims and non-pilgrims alike can savor.

Jusino intersperses her travelogue with informative historical and practical details helpful to any potential pilgrim and fascinating to any travel or history buff. These facts are often presented with droll humor, e.g. How a Jewish guy from Galilee happened to wind up buried in one of the farthest corners of the known world takes some creative explaining.

Like countless pilgrims, Jusino loses her way, loses hope, loses close connections she's made with fellow pilgrims, and "loses" the wrong footwear she

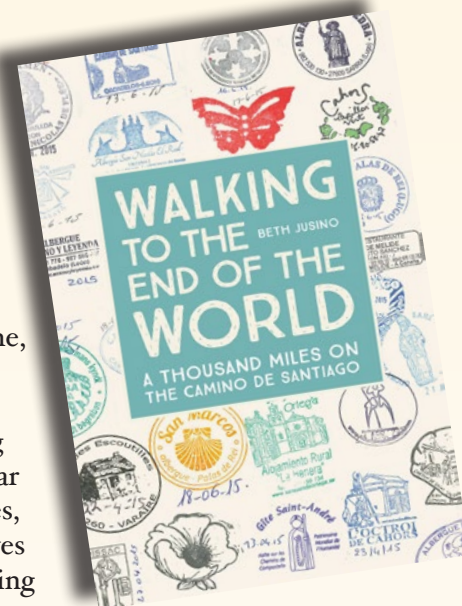
brought with her from home. With the help of *Radio Camino*, Jusino's comical term for the Camino grapevine, she overcomes these losses, including finding the right footwear for her Princesses, the name she gives her burning, aching feet.

Anyone who has ever walked even a day on any Camino has tried to define a "real" pilgrim. Just as I did before my first Camino, Jusino knew that definition before she left Seattle. But when illness and other physical issues arose, when she considered her religious life, when available bunks in albergues didn't magically materialize, she struggled with that definition and opted to be more tolerant of herself and others, concluding that "Real" (is) a dangerous word when it came to pilgrimage."

This tolerant and non-preachy tone alone makes Jusino's book worthy of a prominent place on your bookshelf.

Most of all, though, I recommend reading *Walking to the End of the World* for the pleasure of "traveling" with a witty and honest writer. ♦

**Editor's Note:** Winner of Barbara Savage "Miles to Nowhere" Memorial Award.



❖ "Jusino makes it clear that long-distance trails aren't just for the extremely fit."

South Sound Magazine ❖



## Chapter Snapshots

We now have nearly 50 chapters engaged in the work of gathering pilgrims together. Our chapters are working to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by gathering pilgrims, providing information, and supporting the Camino. If you are interested in getting involved or forming your own chapter, visit <http://www.americanpilgrims.org/local-chapters>. ♦

*Beautiful scenery and Camino camaraderie were in abundance along the St. Johns River during the Jacksonville Chapter First Fall Walk, September 28. Chapter co-coordinator Miriam S. Gallet led the walk. (Official Jacksonville Chapter Photo). ♦*



*On the Vézelay route, Limoges, France, in May 2018. Photo by Susan Alcorn, Oakland CA*

# A Timely Reflection on Gratitude for Pilgrims

by Lisa Morales, Wareham MA

As I write just before Thanksgiving, gratitude is a timely subject. Gratitude and the Camino are far-reaching, all-encompassing topics. The Camino experience, from the inception of one's becoming aware of the pilgrimage to every day thereafter, engenders many emotions and responses. Gratitude is often not the most immediate one.

In my experience as a pilgrim, hospitalera, and now an American Pilgrims on the Camino chapter co-coordinator, the first emotions are often less positive ones: fear, doubt, anxiety. Never have I heard an initial reaction of, "I'm grateful that the Camino exists, and that I can even contemplate making this journey." More often it is: How will I get there, what do I need, where will I eat and sleep, how much will it cost me in time and money?

Incorporating gratitude can begin with those first Camino thoughts as appreciation for those who have gone before and are willing to share their experience, as a thankfulness for those who share their time, talents and money to make donativo albergues possible, and engender the Camino community that pilgrims experience.

As pilgrims walk, especially those first few days, it is very hard to feel grateful for sore muscles, hard beds and painful feet. It is not easy to think about and acknowledge those back home making your time away possible, the new friends you are already making or the family walking beside you. In time, the Camino has a way of helping us turn away from thoughts about ourselves and toward those holding

us up emotionally and physically.

There are concrete practices for manifesting this gratitude. Start a daily gratitude log from the very start, as simple as one written word each day that completes the sentence, "I am grateful today for." Continue your gratitude journal every day of your walk, especially on the most difficult days. Say thank you to everyone who is kind or helpful, in

their language, if possible. Ask new friends how to say thank you in their language!

When you get home, thank those who prayed for your safety and who cheered you on. Write actual thank-you notes to those who watered your plants or drove you to and from the airport.

Most important is to live that

gratitude for the privilege of the Camino experience. We are the ones who have the time, money and fortitude to make this journey, and in making manifest toward others this thankfulness, we are incorporating the Camino experience for everyone we encounter thereafter.

As a fellow native of Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy, once said, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." ♦



*Finistère August 2018.*



# Gratitude

by Kerri Daniels, Sacramento CA

We here at the Sacramento Chapter recently had our annual “Welcome Back/End of Year Potluck.” It was a chance to celebrate those who had returned from their Camino and inspire those who had yet to walk. Our library community room was the setting for the festivities and, with 76 in attendance, what a celebration it was!

People soon started to arrive, arms loaded with huge platters of food. Tables were quickly overflowing with fresh salads and warming crockpots, platters of chicken and ribs... olives and cheeses, lentils and tapas, tortilla de patata and ...Tarta de Santiago! I knew for certain that no one would go away hungry!

There were joyous greetings, warm hugs and budding friendships as one person introduced another to another and then another. People inquired about journeys – favorite parts of the route, whether they stayed at certain special albergues, encountered bad weather, or ate the local specialties. They asked each about what route was up next – knowing there would be a follow-up journey.

Our members reached out to the newest in our group – making sure that they felt welcomed, answering questions, encouraging and inspiring them

to consider their own journey. It is through these personal interactions that our group grows, that bonds within our community deepen. I am grateful. It didn’t take long before Camino camaraderie permeated the entire joy-filled venue.

My co-coordinators, Andy Byers and Bruce Quick, were there, greeting members, sharing their own Camino journeys. I’m thankful for these two. We all live full lives – work and families, commitments and responsibilities – yet each and every month, we happily volunteer our time and experiences to bring our love of the Camino to our local community through talks, hikes and events. We work hard; however, I know that all we give, we receive back tenfold.

As I wandered around the festive room, I’d drop in on conversations here and there, giving hugs, inquiring about journeys. A highlight: meeting those whom I’d only ever known by email – now, an email address to go with the smiling face before me! As Camino photos scrolled past on the big screen, the room filled to capacity, the ambience warm with friendship, I knew that the Camino spirit was alive and well here in Sacramento ... and my heart was filled with gratitude to all those who make it so. ♦



*Sacramento Coordinators Andy Byers and Kerri Daniels (not pictured, Bruce Quick) at the Welcome Back/End of Year Potluck, November 2018. Photo by Roger Remedios, Sacramento Chapter*



# Walking in Winter

by Linnea Hendrickson, Albuquerque NM

Sometimes, it takes a chapter.

When Brian Morrison returned home from his January 2018 pilgrimage on the Camino Francés, the Albuquerque Chapter held a welcome-home potluck. On a cold February evening, more than 30 people gathered at Brian's home, where he enthralled us with pictures and stories of his winter Camino.

We were an enthusiastic, captive audience with many questions.

He had walked half of the Camino Francés with his brother in 2016 but an unexpected call to return to work forced him to quit.

In January 2018, his schedule allowed him to return to the Camino, this time alone. I had followed his adventures via Facebook, eagerly awaiting his concise, perceptive accounts of his day's adventures. He was one of only three pilgrims in the huge 150-bed albergue in Burgos, where he discovered at the end of a cold shower that there



Author Brian Morrison on a beautiful winter's day in Galicia.

actually was hot water, had he waited long enough.

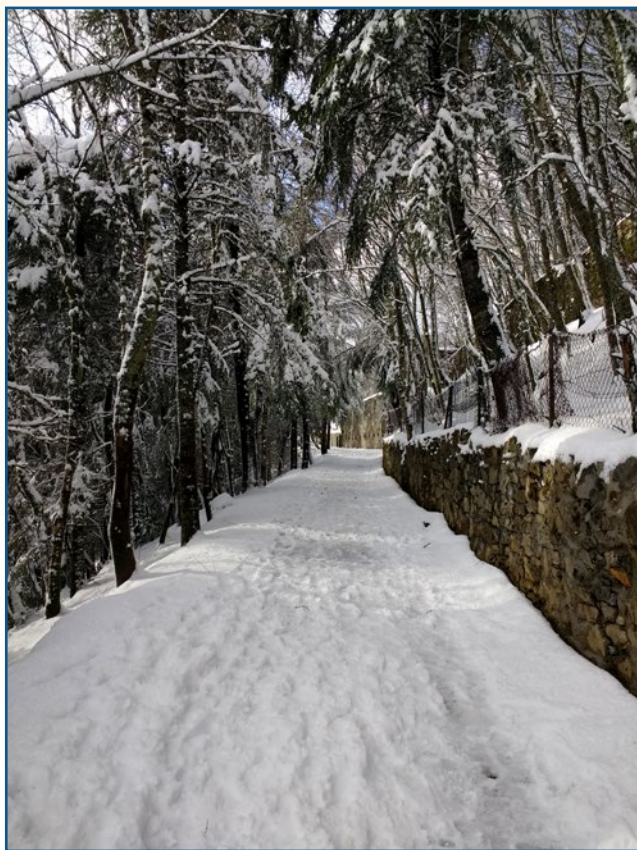
He got lost in the early morning dark and rain, and a Camino angel got out of her car to set him straight. He climbed from Foncebadón to the Cruz de Ferro through eight inches of snow, leaving other pilgrims behind in the warm albergue. He made friends with an Italian walking to Santiago from Rome, accompanied by an Alaskan Malamute.

On some nights Brian was the only pilgrim in the albergue. He learned much about himself during his time alone and through his interactions with others. On his last day he walked an incredible 51 kilometers from Melide to Santiago, inspired by the enchanting landscapes, and his desire to finish the walk.

After the welcome-home potluck, where he shared these stories, I had several more questions for him, thinking that I would write a short piece for *La Concha*. As he had already returned to work in Nigeria, we communicated through email. He responded to my questions quickly and in great detail. He had enough material for a book—let alone a 400-word article!

Brian's beautiful, small book, *Walking in Winter on the Camino*, is the result of much back and forth editing, the help of a talented local book designer, Brian's own Facebook posts and his photographs, plus his lengthy responses to my questions. The book is an inspiration for those who contemplate walking in winter – or publishing a book.

It's available on Amazon in paperback, a Kindle version, and two audio versions that Brian himself recorded. ♦



The Camino Francés in winter. Photo by Brian Morrison

# Tau of Thanks

by Natasha Ravnik, Oakland CA

When I reflect on the value of Gratitude, the words “Holy Spirit” come to mind. Holy – emanating from the Divine, and Spirit – an invisible, gentle, and benevolent force. I’ll call this energy the Tau of Thanks. It could simply be called Love.

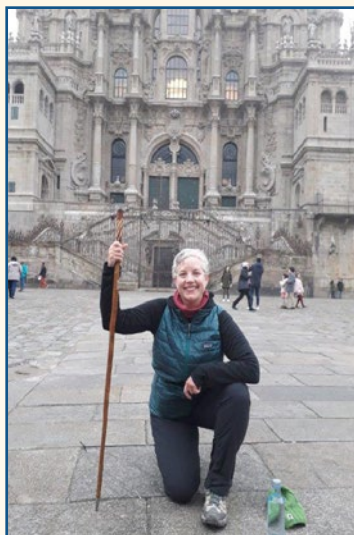
I felt this positive force carrying me forward as I recently walked the Camino de Santiago from Burgos to Santiago de Compostela. It was a warm, soft, careful and persistent nudge that kept my body going even on days when one more step seemed impossible.

I consistently felt held in a giant embrace – a Holy Spirit Hug, if you will. This energy had a healing quality that reached the deepest, most broken parts of my soul. It was total forgiveness, complete compassion, and a divine centering peace.

The Tau of Thanks exists in many forms: it is present in the assistance from strangers, the heartwarming, sunny shouts of “Buen Camino” from villagers, city dwellers and farmers. The Spanish people are a giant hug in themselves. It penetrates you through the sounds of church bells rung by an old man in a Galician wood, the rugged, intricate stonework of medieval towns, and the energy of well-worn Roman roads where pilgrims have walked for centuries. The Camino’s subtle visual beauty, combined with its long history of sacred devotion, bring to the surface a magic beyond words. One cannot leave it without being touched.

The greatest example of the Tau of Thanks came from one woman in particular: Marcela, the owner of La Casona de Sarria in Sarria, Spain. She and her husband quit their lucrative positions in Madrid to operate a wonderful albergue. They serve a fantastic breakfast, complete with fresh pancakes, homemade chestnut paste and quince marmalade, cheeses, meats, fruit and chocolate. Don’t worry, Marcela doesn’t count how many pancakes you eat!

It was through Marcela that I came to understand the true spirit of the Camino: Sharing.



*Natasha Takes a Knee at Praza do Obradoiro.*

The night I spent at La Casona de Sarria, four Spanish pilgrims arrived after walking nine hours in the snow. They had climbed over snow-fallen trees and had stayed in lodging without electricity due to an arctic storm. They arrived battered and broken. I was sitting in the living room with several other pilgrims and witnessed their arrival. Marcela welcomed them in such a way that I thought they were already best friends. In truth, she had just met them. Although it was late, she went out in her car to buy them

pizza, brought out homemade wine and liquor, and warmed them not only in physical body, but in spirit and heart. She shoved together benches and chairs, telling us to squeeze in at the table. “This is the Camino! Talk to each other! Share! This is how we do it!” By the end of the night, we had asked the important questions: Why are we here? Why are we walking the Way? What does God have in store for us? What is our calling? What is our purpose? Why have we been called to be here?

Marcela predicted we would become a family and would walk together into Santiago. This is exactly what happened. In the last 100 kilometers, we walked together and apart, prayed alone and in community, shared meals, tears, laughter, bandages, a night of apocalyptic snoring, and stories of hope. Our shared humanity knit us into each other, weaving a sacred fabric of Amistad that no distance can break.

I take great comfort in these memories and apply the lessons to my daily life and interactions with other people. We are different ages and came from different countries, our reasons for walking varied, and so did our strengths and weaknesses. We were so different in language and customs, yet



we were all humbled by the experience and still have Faith. The Camino takes no prisoners; it demands complete and total surrender to the Way. The Way of the Tau of Thanks – Gratitude, Sharing, Love, Connection, Grace, Humility, Prudence, Honesty and Devotion to the Sacred in each of our tiny, little souls. These are the greatest gifts, what unite us as One People on the planet. These are the gems lasting longer than any material possession, political affiliation or fleeting pleasure.

If you are in need of spiritual sustenance, pilgrim, walk the Camino and you will never hunger again. ♦



*Natasha's Camino Family at Monte de Gozo*

## Foot to Earth

by Cathia Friou, Charlotte NC

Inspired by the movie *The Way*, I walked from León to Santiago in the summer of 2012. Traveling alone was the ideal tonic for me at that time in my life, and I feel an ongoing sense of gratitude for my pilgrimage.

I relished in the joyful simplicity of existence along the Camino. My daily imperative consisted of only three things: tape my feet, repack my bag, walk to the next village. This facilitated steady, forward movement of 200 miles over two weeks, and evoked in me a sustained sense of contentment, the likes of which I had never known before. Foot to earth, foot to earth, foot to earth.

Although I knew from research that it was perfectly safe and common for women to walk alone, I wondered if I would be lonely. Or worse, would I be constantly in the mix and unable to be alone with my thoughts? Without any orchestration on my part, I was graced with the perfect combination of alone/contemplative time and community/pilgrim time.

Choosing to stay in simple inns along the Camino instead of the albergues, I was thankful for the quiet and privacy of my own bed on which to collapse dog-tired each afternoon. At times I felt self-conscious about my lodging choice, but

the inclusive trail adage of “It’s my Camino” gave me permission to have my own experience without apology.

My gratitude list for all the simple moments that nurtured my spirit along the Camino is infinite. There were the “angels” staffing the farmacias, the asphalt path that showed up on a day my feet desperately needed stability, the comfort of seeing yellow arrows when feeling lost (even figuratively), meeting Alberto and his imploring me to slow down, the soothing sound of distant cowbells, the recurrent joy of bumping into a favorite pilgrim I had lost track of a few days prior, and for all the serendipitous and synchronistic moments for which the Camino is well known. Today I pay homage to it all.

Walking the Camino was my response to an unidentified longing of soul. And while I tried mightily to talk myself out of it – the journey felt self-indulgent and laced with too many uncertainties – I am forever grateful for having trusted the summons and walked the good path.

As the Sufi mystic and poet Rumi advises, “Respond to every call that excites your spirit.” It was only a hike, but it was so much more. ♦





# The Pilgrim

by Keith Jones, Dallas TX

My first step, towards the unknown,  
Taken with trepidation and unease,  
Yet, wide-eyed and ready for the days to come,  
All alone, while surrounded by friends still  
unknown,  
I walk, step by step, one foot in front of the next,  
Heading west, ever west

Climbing, striding, struggling to adapt,  
Burdened by fears and mistakes collected over a life,  
Questioning all that I know and believe and was  
taught,  
Baggage, weighing on the back and legs of the  
pilgrim,  
Yearning for relief, a place to rest my weary soul,  
Heading west, ever west

Pilgrims, voyagers and vagabonds are we,  
Seeking the light of morning and the sunrise of  
promise,  
Dusty, dirty, but ready for the joy of this day to  
unfold,  
The weight of our lives growing less and less with  
each step and day,  
Learning to live only with what we need, sharing  
our bounty,  
Heading west, ever west

Friends made, if even for just one moment,  
A lifetime of thoughts, fears, burdens and joys, all  
shared,

Life lessons, fair and foul I learn, are more similar  
than not,  
My pack, baggage of a lifetime, steadily becomes  
lighter,  
Until left, like a pile of rocks in the early morning  
glory,  
Heading west, ever west

My home, not far ahead, my journey's end nears,  
People, strangers not long ago, are now my brothers  
and sisters,  
We journey on together while each still walks our  
own Way,  
Rejoicing, tears and laughter, wine shared, and bread  
broken,  
Knowing that this moment will soon be called to  
its end,  
Heading west, ever west

At the world's end I sit, gazing out into the vast  
gray unknown,  
Tears streaming down my face, wetting the dust of  
experience,  
Exposed and open to my future but, free from my  
past,  
Bonds built and shared with all who sit, staring out,  
Knowing, yearning, seeking and sharing our hopes  
and joys,  
Heading west, ever west ♦

# Gratitude on the Camino del Salvador

by Lynn K. Talbot, Blacksburg VA

I look back with gratitude on my walk last year on the Camino del Salvador from León to Oviedo. I was a solo, older hiker. I had always wanted to walk the Salvador, so last June I cautiously committed to walk alone, as my potential hiking partners all needed to bow out.

I stayed at the Monasterio de Benedictinas in León. The next morning, I felt reassured seeing another pilgrim, Lies from Belgium, with a Salvador credential. Someone else would be out there with me!

I spent the first kilometers walking through suburbs. In the first café, I met Edward from Holland, and he walked a few kilometers with me even though his pace far exceeded mine. I encouraged him to go ahead. He offered to lighten my backpack by taking some of my belongings. I declined. That was the start of the kindnesses that I encountered.

I spent the first night in La Robla, with Edward and Lies. They became my Camino family, often walking with me before speeding off at their own paces.

Day two took me over the Alto de las Forcadas



*View from the albergue at Pajares.*

de San Antón, one of the two major climbs. Edward walked part way with me; Lies waited at the top. I arrived safely in Poladura de la Tercia, paying my companions back by ordering our dinner from the local casa rural, as they didn't speak Spanish.

The next day, as I walked over the very steep Collado del Canto de la Tusa and into Pajares, I encountered several other angels. I'm a slow walker up hills, and I stop a lot to rest, but I noticed that a Spanish pilgrim kept turning back and watching me from a distance, waiting until I started again after each rest. A few kilometers later, as I finally made it down a treacherous, muddy hill, there was another Spanish pilgrim waiting to see if I made it. Their concern made me chuckle, but I was filled with gratitude that my fellow pilgrims looked out for me.

From Pajares to Bendueños (and its fabulous albergue), then on to Mieres, and finally Oviedo, I walked on and off with Edward and Lies. We shared much in just six days. For their frequent help, I am extremely grateful. Although challenging, the Camino del Salvador turned out not as formidable as I had expected. ♦



*Climbing up to Alto Forcadas de San Antón.*

# Reflections on Gratitude

by Joyce DeToni-Hill, Lakewood CO

“You can do this!”

“If you can walk 500 miles solo across Spain, you can face this cancer!”

It was exactly a year ago November when I shared the painful news of breast cancer with my Facebook friends. My 2017 international Camino Francés family was the first to reply with encouragement.

It’s been a difficult year healing from major surgery and the exhausting effects of radiation therapy. But the summer’s oncology report showed a clean bill of health. I knew I needed to walk the Camino in gratitude for healing.

My husband, Derek, and I left Porto on September 19 to walk the Portuguese Coastal route into Santiago. My main intention was to walk with gratitude and be open to the lessons the Camino would provide.

On the Camino you never know which will be the day that will forever change your life. One morning after departing Pontevedra, I walked down a stretch of road that would soon direct me back up the mountain way when, at the bottom of the dip, I came upon a roadside stand. The cheerful woman offered stamps, fruit and hope in the form of free shells on which she had written encouraging quotes. I was drawn to a shell on which *salir* was written.

The roadside hostess translated the quote to read: “You will get out of this and many more because people like you shine with healing light.”

As I continued my walk, I realized that it did not occur to me that while I may enter a season of illness, I could also walk out of that shadow of death as well. That is exactly what I was doing – walking through and out of my illness into the light.

I needed to know that, and I am grateful. ♦

## Sunflowers

All sunflowers die facing east.  
The sun gives life,  
with self-confidence.  
The sun takes life away,  
with self-fulfillment,  
Standing tall shoulder to shoulder,  
in row upon row for the sun.  
Lacking self-awareness of time,  
sunflowers die facing east. ♦

by David Larwa, Brighton MI







*Stacey O'Rourke and John Hanifin on the Camino.*

## The Camino Ignaciano

*by Nancy Nee Hanifin, Jamaica Plain MA*

You've walked the Camino Francés, maybe more than once. You've walked the Portuguese, the Primitivo, perhaps even the Vía de la Plata. You've totally embraced the concept and the gifts of pilgrimage: the inner peace, the outer struggle, the insight, the inspiration. But what next?

If you'd like to experience a deeper, more intentionally spiritual walk, the Camino Ignaciano awaits (map on page 19). This 647-kilometer pilgrimage originates in the Basque region of Spain, in the birthplace of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who founded the Jesuits. A well-to-do rogue, soldier and social-climber, Ignatius was gravely injured in the Battle of Pamplona in 1521. During his convalescence, he had a conversion. In 1522, after regaining the ability to walk, and determined to visit the Holy Land, Ignatius set out on foot toward Barcelona with a stop at the 11th century monastery in Monserrat. But plague broke out in Barcelona, so Ignatius walked instead to Manresa where he spent the following year aiding the poor, praying and writing his *Spiritual Exercises*.

The *Camino Ignaciano* was conceived to celebrate the 500th anniversary of his walk and the founding of the Society of Jesus. Flechas naranjas – orange arrows – trace the steps of Ignatius from his home in Loyola, down through the Basque mountains and into the Rioja region where they meet the flechas

amarillas – yellow arrows – of the Camino Francés for two days heading west.

In Logroño, the path turns toward Cataluña, following the Ebro River, and the Camino Catalán. Pilgrims will often see the two arrows together pointing in opposite directions! The path passes through four provinces and affords a visit to Zaragoza, with its incredible Basilica of Nuestra Señora del Pilar; Verdu, where one can sleep in the 15th century home of St. Pere Claver, patron saint of slaves, to whom he ministered in Cartagena, Colombia; and to Monserrat, where pilgrims are allowed a two-night albergue stay in those mystical heights.

The official *Guide to the Camino Ignaciano* has detailed maps and instructions as well as a spiritual guide to the “interior way,” allowing the pilgrim to undertake a form of the *Spiritual Exercises* while walking. Ignatius required a month-long pilgrimage of each Jesuit novice. The two primary forms of praying he taught in the *Spiritual Exercises* are meditation and contemplation, which are familiar to nearly every pilgrim.

For more information about this Camino and about the *Spiritual Exercises*, see <http://caminoignaciano.org/en> or email me at [boston@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:boston@americanpilgrims.org). ♦



*Map used with permission of the Oficina del Peregrino del Camino Ignaciano.*

"Gratitude, like faith, is a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it grows, and the more power you have to use it on your behalf. If you do not practice gratefulness, its benefaction will go unnoticed, and your capacity to draw on its gifts will be diminished. To be grateful is to find blessings in everything. This is the most powerful attitude to adopt, for there are blessings in everything."

- Alan Cohen



## Grantsmaking: Your Membership Dues at Work

American Pilgrims on the Camino offers competitive grants to non-private albergues and to charitable organizations to further develop the infrastructure of the Camino in Spain, Portugal and France. Each grant is limited to a maximum of \$6,000. In 2018 we awarded \$30,000 in grants to six projects on five Caminos. In this issue of *La Concha*, we highlight the remaining three of these grants. The other three appear in the September 2018 issue of *La Concha*.

If you witnessed these albergue improvements as you passed by or stayed in these albergues on your pilgrimage, let us know your thoughts on the American Pilgrims Facebook group: [www.facebook.com/groups/AmericanPilgrims](http://www.facebook.com/groups/AmericanPilgrims).

### Camino Aragonés

We awarded \$4,200 to the Federación Española to purchase eight bunk beds with railings and ladders, sanitized pillow coverings, and fire-retardant, anti-insect mattress covers for the Albergue Arrés, a donativo albergue operated in the tradition and spirit of the Camino. Two volunteer hospitaleros generally staff this albergue, which is located in a remote part of the lesser traveled but increasingly popular Camino Aragonés. The Federación places most of the American Pilgrims-trained hospitaleros here each year. We awarded another grant to this albergue in 2011 to improve the kitchen and bathroom.

### Camino Portugués de la Via de la Plata

The Asociación Zamorana and its donativo Albergue de Almendra, located about 20 kilometers from Zamora, received a \$4,000 grant to repair the albergue's roof. After Zamora, there are currently no albergues for about 50 kilometers on this spur of the Camino Portugués de la Via de la Plata. This Camino route has a long history but has been largely forgotten. The route passes through two parks and a biosphere reserve. It is a unique "bi-national" Camino. Improving this Camino's infrastructure alleviates overcrowding on other Caminos. The Asociación has support from many different organizations as well as a strong volunteer base.

### Camino Portugués

We awarded the Associação Cidade Barcelos a \$3,800 grant to support four distinct projects: installation of accessible bathrooms for disabled pilgrims; solar panels; recycling facilities; and energy-efficient lighting. The number of pilgrims with accessibility needs, such as wheelchair use, is low, but this initiative reflects the values of American Pilgrims on the Camino. We are pleased to be able to support these projects in the spirit of *Um Caminho para Todos* – A Camino for All. ♦

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## Lifetime Members!

We are pleased to welcome these new American Pilgrims on the Camino lifetime members from September through November 2018. For details about how to become a lifetime member of American Pilgrims, visit [www.americanpilgrims.org/membership-join](http://www.americanpilgrims.org/membership-join). ♦

- ♦ Amelia Billingsley
- ♦ Weyland Billingsley
- ♦ Sophia Cheng
- ♦ Wade Coggin
- ♦ James Eychaner

- ♦ Denise Ketcham
- ♦ Fernanda M Legeren
- ♦ Bob Logan
- ♦ Robert MacMillan
- ♦ William Nye



## Hospitalero Happenings

American Pilgrims continues to be a strong volunteer presence along the Camino. We work closely with the Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Camino to provide hospitaleros in the 18 donativo albergues the Federation assists. Many of our hospitalero volunteers have also served in private, municipal, and parochial albergues that are not connected with the Federation. Hospitalero opportunities exist in France, Portugal, and Italy as well. ♦

Our last training in Winter Park FL in November added 17 new hospitaleros to our team. Our team of hospitaleros continues to grow as do the wonderful experiences of the hospitaleros in the albergues on the Camino. Congratulations to the new graduates. We look forward to hearing about your hospitalero experiences on the Camino. Registration for the March Hospitalero Training will be open in January. ♦

- |                    |                   |                      |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| • Roger Acker      | • Diana Huntress  | • M.J. O'Meara       |
| • Ed Boatner       | • Jerri Kerley    | • Susan Peacock      |
| • Lynn Chapman     | • Carol Lindsey   | • Catherine Phillips |
| • Beatriz Daniel   | • Richard Mallory | • Sue Skelly         |
| • Patricia Henry   | • John Mateczun   | • Michael Szklarz    |
| • Elizabeth Holmes | • Deb Miller      |                      |

## Our Newest Hospitaleros



### Upcoming 2019 Hospitalero Training

**March 2019 - Black Mountain NC**

**June 2019 - Seattle WA**

**September 2019 - Colorado Springs CO**

## The Room

by Jeanne McGovern Acuña, Minneapolis MN & Sonya Varea, Greenville SC

Through our experiences as hospitaleras for American Pilgrims on the Camino in Ribadiso we received lessons of gratitude, as only the Camino can provide. Serving was humbling and rewarding. We were privileged to hear many peregrino stories of inspiration, perseverance and love. Their stories about graces, large and small, moved us to our core.

When pilgrims arrive in Ribadiso, two days from Santiago, they are savvy enough to know what to expect from the common municipal albergue – a large, open floor of bunk beds.

So, it is with great delight and gratitude that those fortunates who chose this stop find a scenic river to soothe their aching feet, friendly pilgrims, and an albergue with a personality



*The albergue and surroundings.*

like no other.

Sixty assigned beds are sectioned into six cozy, though open, sleeping areas. A little gem – a four-bed separate bedroom – sits hidden on the top floor. When the

first family or group of four arrives, the

albergueras assign them the beds in “the room,” without mentioning its privacy. When Jeanne and I escorted them to their beds, we opened the door and experienced vicariously their joy and gratitude. “The room” reminded us of the essence of gratitude – the ability to recognize and appreciate the small graces of life. We are so grateful for the opportunity to have served as volunteers, and to give back to the Camino. ♦



*Hospitaleras Sonya Varea (left) and Jeanne McGovern-Acuña.*

## An Idea from El Acebo

by Rennie Archibald, Ponferrada España

My wife Maggie and I have been doing hospitalero stints for many years in Foncebadón, just before the Cruz de Ferro, and El Acebo, the first town after the Cruz. Both albergues are parochial, hence donativo. Both provide evening meals and breakfast.

We have developed five evening meals, lentils with chorizo (or not for the vegetarians), pasta with red sauce (Italian-approved), chicken with dumplings, pasta with garlic, anchovies and olive oil, and potatoes with chorizo, onions, pimento and garlic. You’ll notice we begin preparation of four of these by chopping onions and garlic and cooking them very slowly...the aroma drives our pilgrims crazy.

This year at El Acebo we came up with an idea that has proven to be a big hit and we recommend it highly.

Each evening we over-catered which resulted in leftovers. This also relieved us of the stress of guessing how many late arrivals we’d have. After two days, we’d cook one new dish and present a buffet of the leftovers and the new dish, together with a salad and bread to go with the main dishes. The pilgrims loved the variety. A little wine and every evening became a party.

By the way, do control the volume of wine served. ♦



# Oasis Trails in Villamayor de Monjardín, Camino Francés

by Dianne & Vern Hartenburg, Lakeside OH

Some life experiences impact the body, while others may affect the spirit. Our two-week experience as hospitaleros on the Camino Francés, in October 2018 at Oasis Trails Albergue in Villamayor de Monjardín strengthened the muscles of our bodies and the spirit of our hearts. Completing the American Pilgrims' hospitalero training in Spring 2018, we sought to serve pilgrims on the Way as gratitude for the restoration the Camino has provided each of us over the past six years.

The Oasis Trails Albergue offers 28 beds (for 10 euros) in a three-story, 400-year-old stone guest house, and provides a delicious three-course homemade evening dinner (for 10 euros). Under the auspices of the Spanish Federation and the Dutch Association, the albergue openly acknowledges a Christian environment with an optional "Jesus Meditation" in the albergue's stable, complete with a manger!

Many pilgrims – just five or six days into their walk from SJPP – have a desire to share and gain physical as well as emotional support, which the loving hospitaleros welcome. A cold glass of lemon water upon arrival, small snacks, foot baths, carrying of their backpack to their room, warm showers, a

"spinner centrifuge" to aid in drying of clothes, and sensitive attention to bodily hurts, underscored that we cared and were there to serve and support them as pilgrims.

A nurturing pilgrim community forms. As hospitaleros, we found our giving always resulted in receiving more than either of us ever imagined. As pilgrims left the following morning, refreshed in body and often renewed in spirit, so we were in our hearts.

The following edited excerpt from the October 2018 Oasis Trails Newsletter helps capture the essence of our experience. For us, it was a time of physical labor, but, more importantly, a time of restoration of the heart.

"Many people have passed this month... From a fireman who survived 9/11 to a son carrying the ashes of his father, and a honeymoon couple from Poland. What do we do? We just listen to them, love them, cater to their bodily and spiritual needs. There is a joy in the midst of work and challenges. The master Sculptor has definitely done some great work in the last weeks as we are transformed more and more into His image." ♦



*Pilgrims relaxing outside the albergue.*



# Logroño Hospitalero Experience

by Dan Fitzgerald, Oswego IL

My previous Caminos were enhanced by some memorable hospitaleros and I knew that I wanted to give back to make others' experiences just as memorable. I took hospitalero training in February 2018, submitted my name for assignment, and accepted a post at the Logroño Parochial Albergue for the second half of September. As my departure grew closer, I became anxious, perhaps nervous at not knowing what the experience would be like.

I was unsure how equipped and stocked the albergue kitchen would be, so I bought some pans and utensils at Goodwill Industries, and stocked up on ingredients that I read were difficult to purchase in Spain, including nine pounds of chocolate chips. I had plans to make cookies each day for arriving pilgrims. I ended up having a checked bag (weighing 34 pounds) of supplies and ingredients.

Staying in a hotel for two nights to acclimate and shadow the outgoing hospitaleros helped to calm my nerves and get me more comfortable with the role.

I settled into a routine quickly. Up around 6:30 a.m., oversaw breakfast, pilgrim goodbyes and departures by 8:30 a.m., albergue cleaning, evening meal planning, grocery shopping then I

relaxed in the early afternoon, got ready for pilgrim arrival by 3:00 p.m., and prepared for and cooked dinner. I really enjoyed the cooking aspect and dinner. I invited pilgrims to help. I set out those ingredients that needed chopping, dicing, or slicing on dining tables, in stations with cutting boards and knives. It was lively and fun as the pilgrims came to help. Cooking is easy when others do all the chopping!

I had six entrée recipes that I rotated; they were written out to show ingredient quantities for six to 32 diners as I didn't know how many pilgrims would come until late afternoon. The donativo dinner included a salad, entrée and homemade dessert. Dinners were a success, and I'm happy to share recipes.

In addition to dinner preparations, pilgrims cleaned dishes, tables and the dining room, and they helped set out breakfast for the morning. We were done by 10 p.m. The daily routine was enjoyable and fulfilling.

I walked the Camino del Norte after my hospitalero experience and upon arriving in Santiago a month later, I ran into pilgrims who had stayed in Logroño during my tenure and received hugs and high praise for the hospitality and dinner. These were great confirmations of my service and made my day. ♦



# Warriors Healing on the Way

by Steven Rindahl, Cibolo TX

In the last weeks of September, I led a group of combat veterans on a PTSD and moral healing pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago. I'm a life member of American Pilgrims on the Camino and organized this pilgrimage through Warriors on the Way©, a non-profit organization. Generous donations from many people and organizations made this journey possible.

The Warriors on the Way© 2018 pilgrims were a mix of infantry, special operations personnel, and a medic. We traveled the roughly 290 kilometers between Astorga and Santiago de Compostela along the Camino Francés, starting each day with a reflection on healing.

Healing was the intent, and healing was achieved. Within a few days into the pilgrimage, one pilgrim who had not slept through the night was sleeping normally. Another pilgrim spoke of how weighed down he felt since returning from combat. Once he left those burdens at the foot of the Cruz de Ferro, he felt the weight lifted. Another pilgrim explained, while sitting in the Cathedral in Santiago, that he had not gotten what he expected but what he did receive was much more valuable.

Beyond this positive, verbal feedback, there are the stats.

Each veteran participating in the Warriors on the Way© pilgrimage did a PTSD assessment before, during and after the pilgrimage. Using the PCL-5, which is a validated test instrument for monitoring symptom change during treatment, to determine any change of severity in their PTSD symptoms,

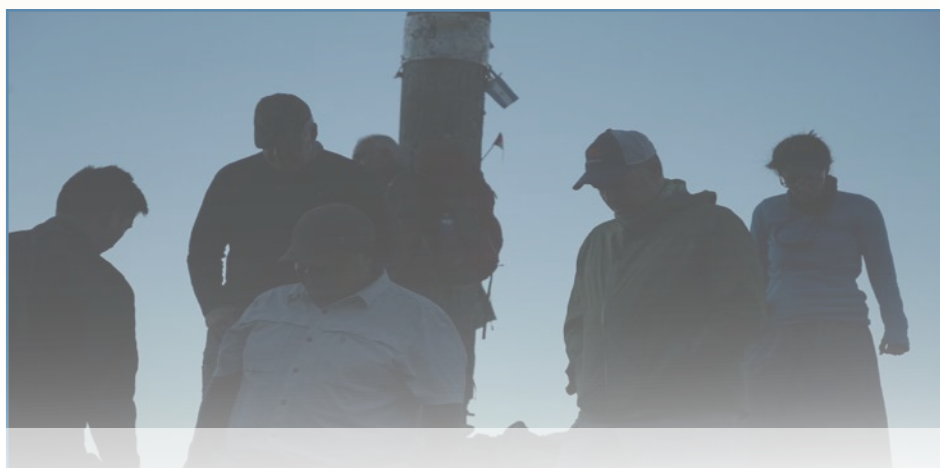


*Warriors on the Way© 2018 Group Photo at the Cathedral in Santiago.*

the pilgrims demonstrated clinically significant improvements. The average reduction of the total symptom severity score was 70 percent. The pilgrim who demonstrated the lowest amount of change experienced a reduction of 30 percent.

What made the Warriors on the Way© pilgrimage so successful? It is surely a combination of factors. Significant bodies of peer-reviewed research demonstrate the PTSD healing efficacy of multiple facets of the design of this pilgrimage. Simply spending more time outdoors has been shown to reduce symptoms. Being with other veterans with the same or similar experiences tends to reduce the experience of symptoms. Engaging in positive spiritual practices has been proven to reduce symptoms common to PTSD. And, lastly, physical exercise and exertion have been demonstrated to mitigate PTSD symptoms.

The Camino provides opportunity for all of the above combined into one. As the saying goes – the Camino gives you what you need. ♦



*Warriors on the Way© departing the Cruz de Ferro at early morning nautical twilight.*

# Who Does a Pilgrim on the Camino Thank?

by Tom Labuzienski, South Bend IN

**Gratitude:** *We embrace every opportunity to thank and be thanked for actions big and small.*

Who are we grateful for?

The family and friends we left behind, who not only wished us well but supported us while we prepared, and then listened to our Camino stories when we returned.

St. James, for being the first Camino pilgrim to bravely blaze the path with one of the greatest missions.

All the pilgrims who walked the trails before us, because they wore the paths that guide our way. They inspired us to experience our own Caminos.

All the people of Spain – those who work in the albergues, restaurants, bars, churches and more – who were so genuinely hospitable, supportive and welcoming. Even the people who just smiled as we walked past and said, “Buen Camino.”

All the fellow pilgrims along the way who inspired us to keep going through their sharing of powerful stories and moral support.

All the people who support the Camino with their contributions and communications, who not only keep “The Way” going, but who continuously improve the Camino experience.

All the Camino authors, artists, movie and documentary directors and crews, and journalists, who inspire us to experience meaningful Caminos.

All the “Camino Angels” who turned personal challenges into “Camino miracles.”

Spain herself, for the history, cuisine, spirituality, scenery and nature.

Our tired bodies that took us along the way, supporting this powerful journey, making such an impact on our lives. ♦

**American Pilgrims on the Camino fosters the enduring tradition of the Camino by supporting its infrastructure, gathering pilgrims together, and providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims.**

## Contributors

- |                         |                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| ♦ Jeanne McGovern Acuña | ♦ Beth Jusino         |
| ♦ Susan Alcorn          | ♦ Thomas Labuzienski  |
| ♦ Rennie Archibald      | ♦ David Larwa         |
| ♦ Kerri Daniels         | ♦ Ann Loar            |
| ♦ Joyce De Toni-Hill    | ♦ Lisa Morales        |
| ♦ Robert Deming         | ♦ Brian Morrison      |
| ♦ Laurie Ferris         | ♦ Richard Myers       |
| ♦ Dan Fitzgerald        | ♦ Natasha Ravnik      |
| ♦ Cathia Friou          | ♦ Roger Remedios      |
| ♦ Sara Gradwohl         | ♦ Steven Rindahl      |
| ♦ Nancy Nee Hanifin     | ♦ Robert Scheckenback |
| ♦ Dianne Hartenberg     | ♦ Lynn Talbot         |
| ♦ Vern Hartenberg       | ♦ Bobbye Underwood    |
| ♦ Linnea Hendrickson    | ♦ Sonya Varea         |
| ♦ Keith Jones           |                       |





*The mission of American Pilgrims on the Camino is to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by supporting its infrastructure, by gathering pilgrims together, and by providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims.*

## Do You Have Camino Impressions to Share?

With every issue we are delighted anew by the quality, variety, and abundance of submissions – and especially by the fact that so many are from first-time contributors. Your enthusiasm for the Camino and for *La Concha* as a medium for sharing that enthusiasm keeps us going!

So, please keep telling us, in 400 words or fewer, about your Camino. Consider a photo, a poem, or a new found understanding of an old idea – a pilgrim's perspective. Be sure to include your city/state of residence. Please visit Newsletter on our website for suggestions and guidelines.

Also, we need your help: Our long-serving volunteer layout and design editor is stepping down. We're grateful for Mona Spargo's extraordinary years of

service. If you have design skills you'd like to contribute to your newsletter, we want to hear from you at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org).

The theme for the next issue is Service, one of our organization's values. How do you practice this value in your life, in your chapter? The submission deadline for the next issue is February 21, 2019. We welcome your questions, comments, and submissions at [newsletter@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:newsletter@americanpilgrims.org).

iBuen Camino!

Anne Andert, Sara Steig Gradwohl, Elaine Hopkins, Beth Jusino, Zita Macy, Catherine Magyera, Mona Spargo & Barbara Zang  
December 2018 Team La Concha

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