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LA CONCHA

Newsletter of American Pilgrims on the Camino
March 2018

Words of Wisdom

by Bruno Bruelbart, Hobbs NM

I'm an English teacher; I teach sophomores. I'm a shepherd of young men and women trying to make sense of the world about them. I daresay I'm not exactly qualified for the job because I'm a perpetual wanderer with his head in the clouds and his heart on his sleeve, but somehow my charges manage to glean some Life lessons here and there from their eccentric instructor.

We were studying the *Allegory of the Cave* by Plato, breaking it down to constituent parts and applying it to high school Life. Students respond when you make things relatable. I encouraged my charges to escape their caves, to see the Light for the first time, to suffer along the way, and grow because of it.

One young man stopped me after class and asked if I had left my cave. Had I embraced Life? I

showed him my tattoo – the cross of St. James and the meaningful lines – and detailed the following story of a chance encounter with a fellow Seeker on The Way. I went home that night and wrote this poem. There is power in questioning, such a mighty power in being able to reflect and understand who we are.

That young man reminded me I was Alive.

Did You Take the Path?

4 January 2018

I once met a man in Spain - he himself was from Geneva. Oscar, from Geneva; a countryman. A fellow Swiss walking the Way. I was young; he, old.

We shared drinks around a Spanish table, cigarello smoke our only air, beer and wine our only food - we existed.

"You have anger in your heart," he said.

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"I am Vice," I whispered.

"Seeker," he said. "You need to learn how to open your heart and close your mind."

I was born that day.

Born on those words of wisdom from a walker like myself.

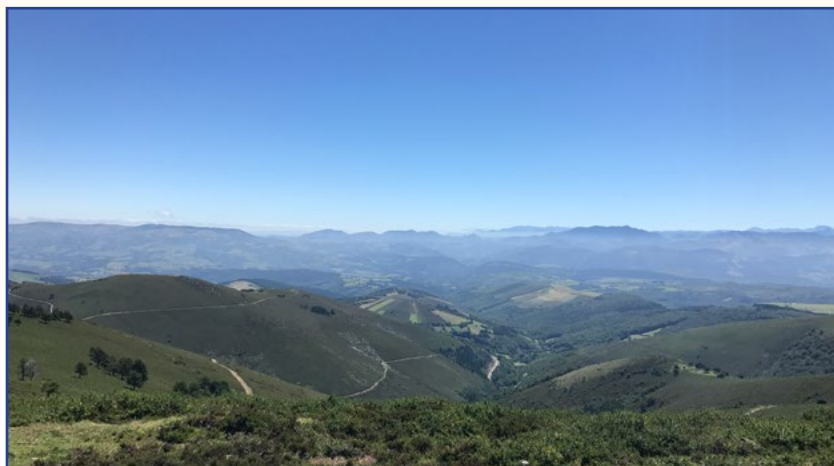
Oscar, from Geneva, was on my Way same as I was on to his. Brought me to Life with words. With words he brought me to realize my heart was hard and my mind weak.

The last I saw of him was a wide grin across his bearded face - a philosopher - disappearing into the Spanish smoke, drowned out by drunken calls, distorted in Vice.

His words - open your heart, close your mind - made me Lazarus.

I was alive.

I was on The Way. ♦



Camino Primitivo photo by Anne Born, New York NY

Message From the Chair

Dear Members,

A new year brings new energy and new opportunities. We've hit the ground running this year and are putting on the final touches for the National Gathering scheduled for April, evaluating grant requests and welcoming four new board members. I am especially excited to welcome in a new crop of board members who all bring significant skills and enthusiasm.

In my last Chair letter, we said good bye to two of our longest serving members. In this letter I am pleased to welcome Dave Donselar, Steve Lytch, Sam Hull and Barbara Zang. I could write so much about each of them giving you a sense of their professional and Camino experience and the excitement and energy they bring to the board. But in the interest of space, I invite you to take a look at their board profiles on our American Pilgrims website: <http://www.americanpilgrims.org/board-of-directors>.

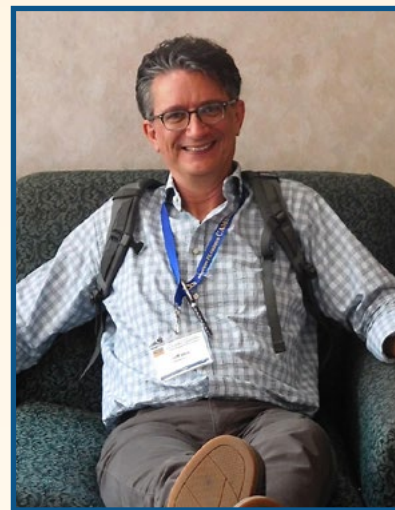
As I begin my second year as Chair, I am continually impressed and humbled to know that our members are willing to step up and express their commitment to the Camino in real and tangible ways. Some time ago, we created a new lifetime membership at a commitment level of \$500. To date, we have 75 members who have joined or modified their existing membership level. At the end of 2017, we created a few new membership levels that allowed members to express their commitment at a higher giving level. I am so appreciative of all who have taken the opportunity to express their support for all that we do. As your membership comes up for renewal, please consider one of the new giving levels.

We will maintain the original membership levels as we want to make sure that everyone has a stake in American Pilgrims. Membership makes up a large part of our operating revenue and each membership represents a mailed credential to an excited pilgrim, a grant to Jacobean association to support the Camino or the infrastructure that allows local chapter coordinators to keep in touch with pilgrims and pilgrims-in-training at their local communities.

Each and every one of us is committed to supporting the Camino de Santiago. We have walked or will walk and understand the power of pilgrimage. We couldn't do our Gathering, mailing credentials, local events or grants without our many members, supporters and volunteers. ♦

Buen Camino!

Jeff Stys
Board Chair



Jeff Stys
photo by Laurie Ferris, Oakland CA

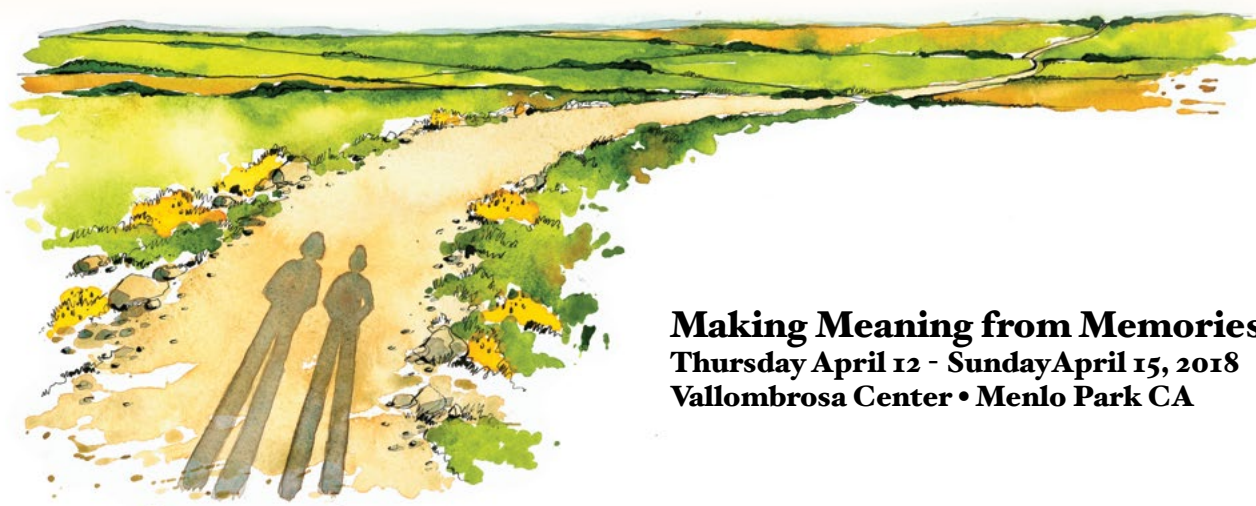


21st National Gathering of American Pilgrims

Making Meaning from Memories

The Gathering is coming right up, April 12 – 15 in Menlo Park CA. Session topics will range from philosophical and informative to artistic and practical. We will learn and we will play. *I'll Push You* will be the Movie Night film and its pilgrim/producer will be with us. We will have our first

Camino Café, with a Song & Story Corner. Bring instruments and tales. The Silicon Valley Chapter plans a Reception to Remember and the NorCal Chapter will lead a Stay In & Play evening of party-game fun. Bring your memories. ♦



artwork by Jennifer Lawson, South Portland ME

Making Meaning from Memories
Thursday April 12 - Sunday April 15, 2018
Vallombrosa Center • Menlo Park CA

2018 Chapter Coordinators' Workshop

The day before the National Gathering, many of the coordinators of the 45 American Pilgrims Chapters nationwide will hold their 2nd pre-Gathering workshop. Last year's workshop was helpful and fun, so we are doing it again. The goals

will be to share ideas for activities and best practices, to get to know each other so we can work together when it makes sense, and to spend time with the Board members we work with. Watch for photos and a report in the next *La Concha*. ♦

The Making of a Serial Pilgrim

by Hany Farag, San Bruno CA

The typical opening question in my local chapter meeting goes like this: “Did you walk the Camino? Which one? When?” My response is “Yes, I walked the Portugués in 2016 and the Francés in 2017.” A question from Kelly followed: “You did it once, so why the second time?” I didn’t have a ready answer to this question, yet I continued “and I’ll do it again.”

When I walked the Camino the first time, it seemed a travel destination on a to-do list. Once the task was accomplished, it can be checked off and taken off the list. However, upon reaching Santiago and attending the Pilgrim Mass, I realized the journey was not a task or personal record of physical endurance. There was more to feel, think and discover about the Way of St. James. This impression actually planted the seed for a second walk and paved the way to my becoming a serial pilgrim.

Preparation for my first Camino was intense and focused on travel gear, logistics and survival skills. The planning phase took several months. In my second Camino, the worries about gear and logistics

faded to the background. This wasn’t due to the knowledge I acquired during my first experience but was due to reality on the road; the Camino will take care of itself. There was no need to get answers for all questions. Simplicity and spontaneity brought the best possible results.

Repeating the Camino gave me a sense of belonging to a larger community beyond the specific name of the route. This community extends beyond the national origins, spoken languages, ages, gender, social class, or individual life persuasions. The community has a unique mixture and identity. I couldn’t have met the people I met on the Camino in any other way. This unique identity makes the bond very special.

Most serial pilgrims tend to choose routes they haven’t done before, yet this is not always the case. My friend Helga, who walked the Portugués with me in 2016, repeated the same route in 2017, while I

walked the Francés. We reached Santiago from different directions, equally rejuvenated and fulfilled to celebrate another reunion.

There is much to be said for becoming a serial pilgrim. ♦



Reunion of serial pilgrims and friends Vera, Helga and Hany in Santiago, September 2017

Santiago: Deepening the Spiritual Experience

by Jim & Janet Larocco, Alexandria VA

Our previous times in Santiago were always wonderful from so many perspectives. The hugs, tears, smiles and bittersweet farewells with fellow pilgrims met along the way sear into the soul why this experience is unique, so very human.

Planning our stop this time in October 2017, we decided to put special emphasis on the spiritual/religious aspect of the arrival and stay in Santiago, and our program could not have been more rewarding. To begin, we stopped in Monte do Gozo to spend the night at the John Paul II Center. In the past, we stopped briefly at Monte do Gozo, saw the chapel and the monument, but we blew right past the statue of the pilgrims, high on a hill out of sight. This time we sat there for more than an hour, watching the sun set over Santiago, savoring these moments with other pilgrims.

We walked into Santiago the following morning, stopping as always in front of the cathedral, but this time attending the 10 am Mass for English speakers in the chapel of the Virgen del Pilar to the right of the main altar. Packed with fellow pilgrims, it was such a warm and friendly event, and the group went for tea and pastries together afterward.

That evening capped an unforgettable day. We knew to take a spot in a pew halfway back on the south transept. The botafumeiro swings at you then soars to its height right over your head. Already feeling an emotional high, after the church emptied, we joined other pilgrims for a special prayer service for spiritual pilgrims only in the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. Each of us, perhaps numbering no more than 20 from countries around the world, were asked to address the group about

our spiritual experiences along The Way. The stories were deeply moving, especially those of young people who had found a new meaning for their lives.

After this was finished, the priest led us through the quiet, empty cathedral to the tomb of St. James under the altar where he gave us a special blessing and asked us to pray in silence. Our hearts were warmed and somehow our souls felt purified in a way we knew we shared with millions of spiritual pilgrims from many lands arriving in Santiago over the many centuries before us.

On our final day, we hiked out of town to Monte Pedrozo, for a sweeping vista of Santiago looking back toward Monte do Gozo. We were alone on this beautiful hillside, looking back at the path we had walked to reach our goal. Our spiritual camino was now fulfilled. ♦



Sunset and pilgrim statues – Santiago from Monte Gozo

“Where Wine Flows Like Water: A Gastronomic Pilgrimage through Spain” by John McAneney

Reviewed by Steven G. Rindahl, Cibola TX

Why read a memoir? The assumption is that there will be something of interest, something unique that will catch the attention and imagination of the reader. For many Camino pilgrims, this can be a tricky thing. Unless you have yet to walk, you have your own experiences against which the writer

Where Wine Flows Like Water: A Gastronomic Pilgrimage through Spain

by John McAneney

HarperCollins (New Zealand) 2012

185 pages

must compete. And, once you have read a couple of Camino memoirs, they start competing with each other as to just how each writer can give a fresh perspective on the same landmark.

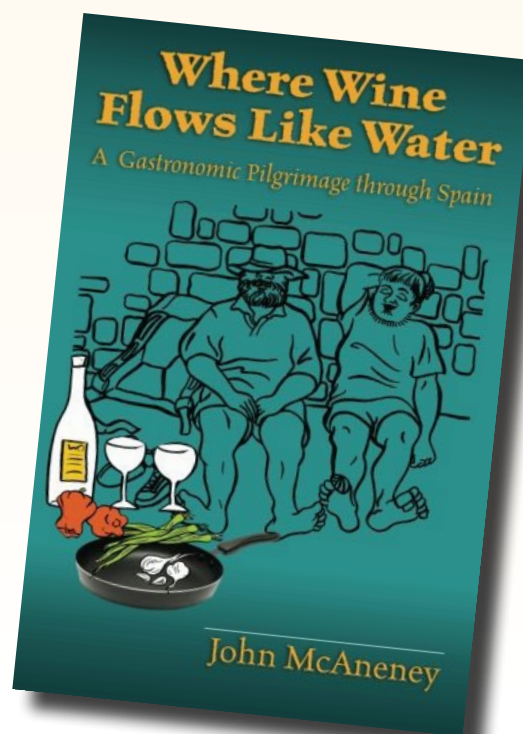
In *Where Wine Flows Like Water*, McAneney rises to the challenge. Writing of the pilgrimage he and a friend made over 25 years ago, McAneney provides a near day-by-day running narrative. Drawing his reader into the story through humor, wry observations, and friendly jabs at both his friend and himself, this volume feels less like reading another person's story and more like being along for the ride.

McAneney's book has two distinguishing aspects. The first is that he lets the reader in on his attempt to sort out his faith while on the Camino. This aspect, by itself, is not unique to *Where Wine Flows Like Water*, but McAneney's approach to the telling is. The book is not his story of faith on pilgrimage. Instead, his comments regarding his faith (and his exploration thereof) are woven into the larger story in a way that seems entirely natural. It is not the center-stage element of his story, but neither is it ignored nor forgotten. This allows the reader to gain insights into McAneney's more profound thoughts when food isn't center-stage and also piques thoughts of what, if any, spiritual aspects of the Camino are intertwined in the life of the reader.

The second aspect is hinted at in the description of the first – the FOOD. McAneney clearly loves

food (as if the subtitle of the book did not give that away). Each chapter (basically the account of a single day) includes what was on the menu (or, occasionally, what was being wished for) and a recipe so you can try it yourself. Have you already made a pilgrimage on the Camino? You will undoubtedly remember more than a few of these menu items. Reading about them with a recipe at the ready, you may soon find yourself reliving a meal or introducing friends to one of your Camino favorites. If you have yet to walk the Camino, the descriptions of the food will give you food for thought in your planning – what do you want to be sure to try or what might you feel it best to avoid?

All in all, *Where Wine Flows Like Water* is a fun-filled book that does not lose sight of the more substantial reasons for going on pilgrimage. A slender volume, with chapters that are only a few pages each, this is a quick and entertaining read. ♦



The Orange Ambassador

by Lanny James, San Francisco CA

When I walked the Camino Francés in the winter of 2012, I had to leave behind my best friend, a 16-year-old orange cat, with one of my human best friends. I knew my cat was in great hands, but still, I missed him dearly on my walk.

As I walked from village to village, I would think about what he was doing and how cozy it would be to snuggle up next to him at the end of the day after the long walk. I hoped his old arthritic joints were not paining him too much.

One afternoon, as I was approaching Vitoria de Rioja, a petite orange cat bounded toward me in a quick trot. She meowed as she approached and started to walk alongside me into town. She chattered energetically, telling me about her day and the latest news in town.

After a short walk, I sat down on a stone bench and she casually hopped on and sat next to me, still chattering happily about her wondrous stories. "Would you like some cheese?" I offered as I unwrapped my lunch. "No, thank you," and



*The orange ambassador on my lap
Vitoria de Rioja*

she continued her riveting stories. I listened intently, getting caught up in her excitement, and nearing the end, she stepped on my lap and faced me, finishing her story with great gusto and feline flourish.

"Wow, bravo!" I said. "Thank you," she chirped and proceeded to flop down on my lap.

A comfortable silence ensued as we people-watched and I ate my lunch. It was a refreshingly cold November day and I stroked her fur as she curled up on

my lap purring. I told her that my best friend back home was an orange cat like her, just a tad bigger. "Oh, I know," she purred, "and he said 'Hi!' He misses you." "Yeah, me too," I said.

The wind started to get cold. "Okay, better be on my way. Still a long way to go," I said. "Right," she stood up, stretched her back and yawned, "better be on your way."

She walked me to the edge of town and at the end of the road she stopped and sat down on her haunches. "Goodbye," I waved, "Thank you for spending time with me. You've made my day." "My pleasure," she chirped, "and Buen Camino!" ♦

Providing for the Camino

We know that "The Camino provides," but it can do that because peregrinos who have been touched by it give back. It takes generosity and work to make sure that the Camino is safe and welcoming. The pathways we walk, the albergues where we stay, and the flechas that guide us exist because people care about the Camino. A key part of the mission of American Pilgrims is supporting the infrastructure on the Camino. One way we do that is through grants that are made possible by the dues and support of our members.

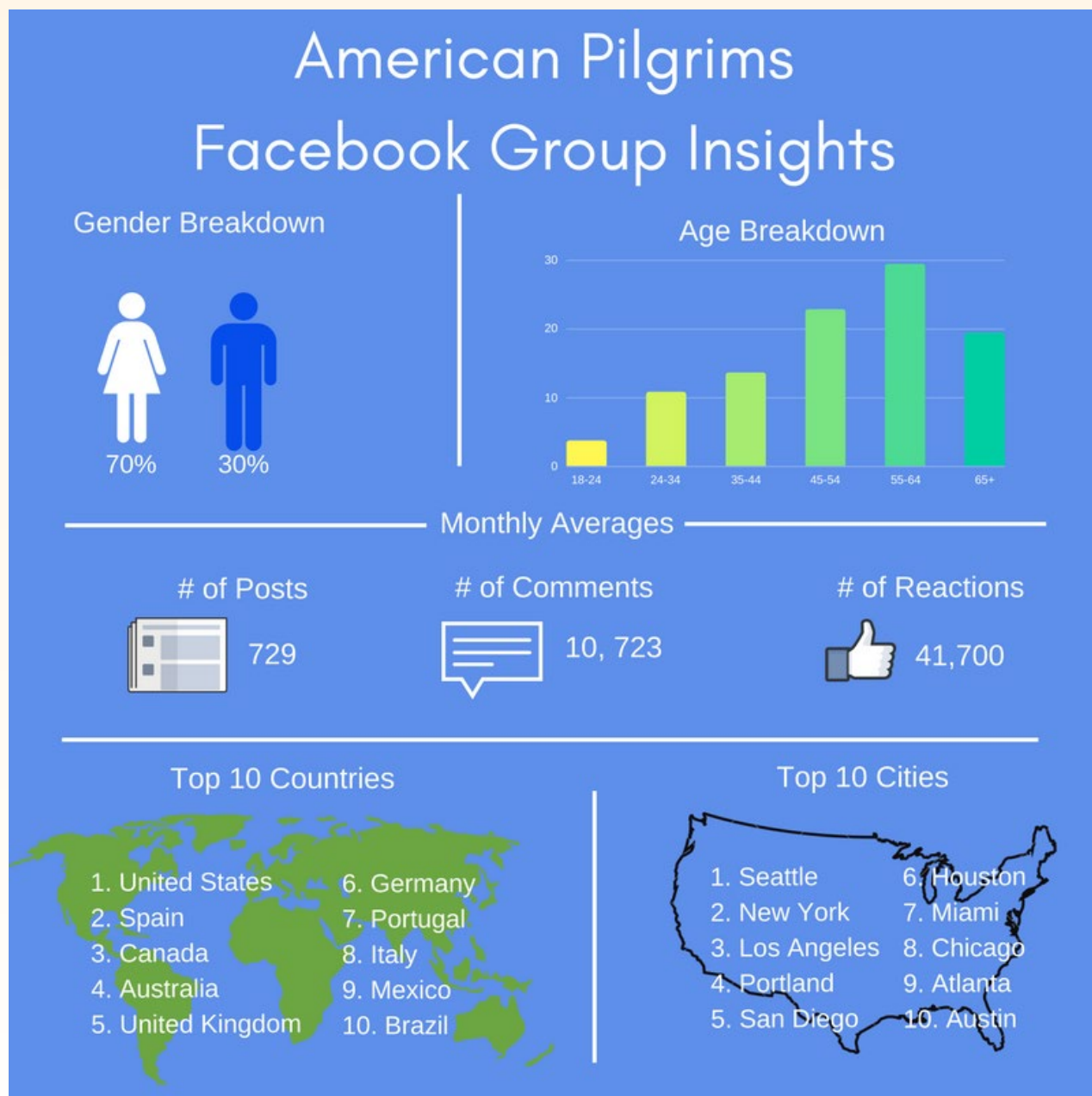
Last year American Pilgrims awarded ten infrastructure grants. One of those was a grant to the Asociación de Amigos del Camino de Santiago de

Miranda de Ebro for the renovation of an albergue in Miranda de Ebro. The town is located about 37 kilometers north of Santo Domingo de Calzada on the Vía de Bayona, which runs from Irun to Burgos. Working closely with the municipal government, the local association remodeled the former school so that it is now equipped to accommodate 6-8 pilgrims, including those with a disability. The grant from American Pilgrims provided for the purchase of building supplies, appliances and furniture.

Your Grants Committee is currently reviewing applications from local associations that do the essential work of maintaining the Camino. You can learn more about the Grant Program on the Web page www.americanpilgrims.org/grant-program. ♦

American Pilgrims Facebook Page

If you follow our Facebook group, you'll have noticed that we recently surpassed the 17,000 member mark in the group! Are you curious about the make up of this group? Well, here are some highlights: ♦



The Legend of Pasqual

by Brad Harper, Toana VA

I never met him, not face-to-face. But I did see him walk past me that day at the Pilgrim Office in Santiago, and I have no reason to believe Tom lied. Here's his story.

I'm serving with Tom as an Amigo in Santiago. I welcome people at the entrance to the Pilgrims Office where they apply for their Compostela, direct them to the next available clerk, and manage the crowd in the courtyard. One warm sunny afternoon, a man about my age (upper limit of middle age) approaches.

He is thin, and using both poles, takes an eighteen-inch step towards me with his left foot, drags his right foot even to it, and repeats. Despite this, he is beaming. He speaks only French, but no matter, my meager amount is enough, and soon he leaves with his certificate stored in his pack to the acclamation of many outside.

Tom has been silent the entire time, unusual for him, but once the man leaves he says in a soft voice, "That was Pasqual."

"How do you know him?" I asked.

"I walked from Le Puy last year, and we spent one night in a gîte together. The other pilgrims told me his story. He's something of a legend.

"He lives in Strasbourg, and three years ago had a stroke, nearly paralyzing the right side of his body. After two years of physical therapy, he decided to walk the Camino to ask God for a miracle. Every morning the men helped him bathe and dress, then he walked all day, just as you saw him now. It took him all summer to walk from Strasbourg to St. Jean Pied de Port, where he stopped for the winter.

"This summer he started in St. Jean, and now, three months later, here he is."

"That's a great story," I said. "But he isn't healed."

Tom shrugged. "Pasqual decided after the first month that just by walking the Camino, his miracle had already happened."

He looked at me. "He no longer walked to ask God for anything. Just to say thanks." ♦



Finisterre photo by Robert Deming, Fredericksburg TX

Numbers!

by Gene McCullough webmaster and Chief Number Pusher, Denver CO

The Camino year 2017 is now history so it's time to take a look at the numbers for the year. For the most part, trends that have been in effect for the last several years continued. The big number is 301,036. That's the number of compostelas that were awarded by the Oficina de Acogida de Peregrinos in Santiago. This is of course the first time that the 300,000 threshold has been breached. The number of compostelas awarded to U.S. passport holders ended at 17,522 or 5.8% of the total. Naturally more compostelas were awarded to Spaniards than any other country, followed by Italy, Germany and the U.S. This order has been constant since 2015. Starts on the Camino Francés continued creeping down to 60% with the Portugués being the primary route taking up the slack – 20%.

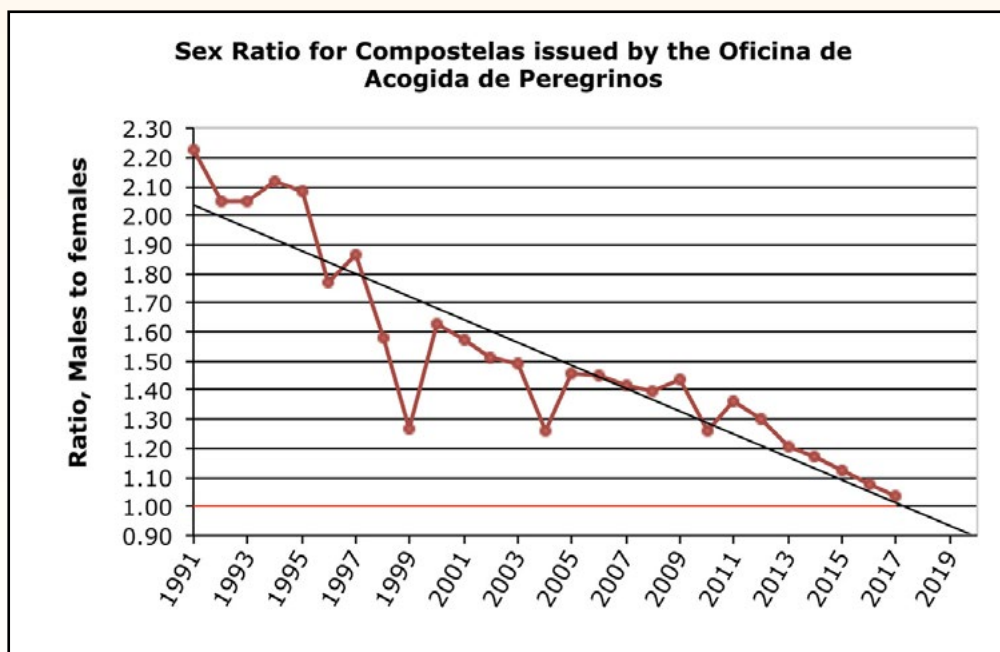
If you have been reluctant to walk the Francés due to the continuing increase in traffic on that route, here is another take. If you remove those persons starting in Sarria, you are left with those

starting everywhere before Sarria. And those numbers have been very steady dating back almost a decade! In fact 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017 showed year-to-year decreases. The downside is that you'll have to stop walking in Sarria! Alternatively you could split off on the Invierno in Ponferrada, just a thought.

However, we think the most interesting statistic over the past few years has been the numbers of males and females. The ratio M/F has been on a consistent linear decline since at least 1990, reaching 1.04 in 2017. It's our prediction that parity will be reached in 2018!

If this has piqued your interest in what else we might have collected, check out our Statistics page on the website: <http://www.americanpilgrims.org/statistics>.

Assembled from the Statistics page on the Oficina website: <https://oficinadelperegrino.com>. ♦



A New Camino Map

by Laurie Ferris, Oakland CA



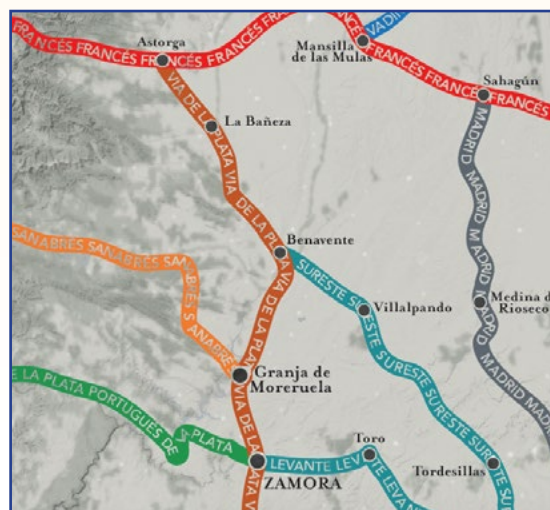
I have often wanted a different, more detailed Camino map. I found one!

It is designed by Michael Matynka, founder of the *Wise Pilgrim Guides* that many of us are already familiar with. When I walked the Portugués, I used Michael's guide and loved it. Similarly, when I found his map I thought: Thank goodness, the world needed a better Camino map, and this is it!

The map shows nearly fifty routes across Spain and Portugal, and four that enter

Spain from France. Each Camino is named and color coded and includes major cities along the route. Personally, I like knowing that there is a Manchego Camino. Is there cheese tasting along the way? I might have to walk that route someday!

Over the last few years, I needed a good Camino route map to display at our NorCal Chapter events and for research projects. I am delighted to have found this one. It is available at www.camino.org on his website. ♦



The Kindness of Strangers

by Elaine Hopkins, London United Kingdom

"You're doing what?" says my brother.

"Walking from London to Santiago."

"Why?"

"Because I want to go on pilgrimage, rather than walk a pilgrim trail. That entails closing my front door behind me."

"How long will it take?"

"No idea."

"Can I have a list of where you'll be staying?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know where I'll be staying."

"Doesn't sound like much of a holiday."

Such was my family farewell when I set off on my 2,075 kilometer pilgrimage in March 2016. I walked from London to Dover, caught a ferry to St. Malo, walked to Mont Saint Michel, then to Irun to the Camino del Norte.

For four weeks, I was the first and only pilgrim on the march in France. Then I met a French couple who would be my companions - on and off - to Santiago. Had I not met them, I would never have

made it. They helped me across stepping stones that would've floored me.

As the season advanced, pilgrim numbers increased. More French couples joined us. Soon my schoolgirl French graduated, and I was surrounded by French friends who greeted me by the French version of my name, Hélène.

France gave way to Spain, and our pilgrim band became more international. We had a near no-room-at-the-inn moment in San Sebastian when we coincided with a Bruce Springsteen concert, but persistence and Airbnb rescued us.

After 99 days of walking, six days of sick leave,

and three of rest, I arrived in Santiago in full summer and full of memories. The happy times I spent with other pilgrims are indelible. Even more touching, though, are the memories of the kindnesses I received en route. The French couples who took me into their home at short notice, the retired pastry chef who made me a gluten-free Tarta de Santiago, the elderly woman who tottered across a field to ask me if I needed food, water, a shower, the toilet.

These are the experiences I cannot explain to my brother. They only make sense in the context of the Camino, prompted by the symbolism of the scallop shell on my back. He was right about one thing though. Walking the Camino isn't a holiday; it's an exquisite series of holy days.

And "holy" comes from the same root as "whole," which is pretty much how I felt as I walked into Santiago. ♦



Elaine pauses for a photo

Camino of the Mind

by Sandy Lentball, Williamsburg VA



Flowers near Rabanal photo by Peg Hall, Gainesville FL

It is a lovely day in Williamsburg, Virginia, where I live. As always, the Camino is on my mind.

My favorite daily exercise is strolling along Duke of Gloucester (DOG, as we locals call it) Street. Walking at about the same time each day creates a street community. After a vacation absence there is a warm welcome: "Glad to see you back." No one knows each other's names. Nevertheless, smiles, hats, dogs on a leash become familiar "friends." Just like on the Camino, further identity is not important.

When my feet are moving in my walking shoes, the ones I wear on Camino, The Way is in my mind and heart. I often pick up a fragrance that reminds me of someplace, maybe the wild flowers near Rabanal. Two or three walkers laughing together reminds me of a time I had in Frómista.

On TV one evening, the Koreans were featured Olympic skiers, which made me think about three interesting Koreans I had met on the Camino in a refugio! They told me how their association with the Camino began by hearing tales from an acquaintance back home.

Of all things, a TV food commercial showed new packaged meals with a European accent and yes, Spain was first with a paella type entree that made my mouth water as I thought about the family with whom I was privileged to stay a night after meeting their son, a priest, at the church where I popped in "for a look."

A phone call from a daughter-in-law brought concern about some turmoil between our grandson and his chemistry teacher. All kinds of details on both sides, pro and con. I decided to go for a walk. Somewhere during Camino journeys, I realized how much better it is to think when my feet are moving. Recently, I read a study that people with dogs live longer than people without dogs. Could it be that walking the dogs, the need for walking, is the reason?

I suggest that the possibility of taking a walk and focusing your mind on Camino memories might work well for many pilgrims. It stimulates the mind, the body and the soul.

Buen Camino! ♦

Camaraderie and Connections – Yes Sacrifice and Simplicity – Not So Much

by Margarita Alvarez, Minneapolis MN

I am soft. I've thought about the takeaways from my time on the Camino and that is the big one. I probably knew this all along but doing the Camino confirmed it. "Why do I think this after having walked 496 miles?" you may ask. Here's how I came to this realization.

I disliked the hard labor of the Camino, to be specific, hand washing. I have washed things by hand (unmentionables) before but this was every day and all of my clothes. Growing up we had a washing machine and a dryer. If I had clothes that needed to be washed by hand (which I highly doubt was the case), I am positive my mom ignored that instruction and put it in the machine instead. Once I was in high school (or maybe even earlier) I was taught how to use those machines and did the laundry many times. The first time my clothes needed to be hand washed was when I got my first "real" job and had to dress up. Those were the days before business casual. Even now my hand washing days are few and far between, if I can help it.

To show how ignorant I was of the chore of washing clothes by hand, I had never seen a wash basin with a built-in scrubber (a shelf with grooves on it). I didn't know what those bumps were for (decoration, perhaps?) until I was in line for the sink at an albergue and saw someone put their clothes on the grooves and then push them back and forth, almost as if they were kneading them. (Come to find out later it's called a "scrub board." For scrubbing. Duh.) "This really cleans them," said my pilgrim friend as he scrubbed and I watched in amazement. "Oh," I said with my eyes open wide in wonderment, "that's what you do with that thing!" Always learning. Don't judge.

I missed my creature comforts. Another example of how I'm soft. One of the days far into my Camino, I realized how much I missed my life back home. It was not a bad life, I didn't want for much. When I would think about what I truly needed, the list was pretty short and most of the things on the list

I didn't really need. I had a roof over my head, a comfortable bed, a car, and a good job (before I quit). Doing the Camino every day had become my work and my home was my backpack, everything I needed was in there. You would think having that level of simplicity would make me realize I needed even less. Yet I found myself yearning for things, like my own room, new clothes, different shoes. I could go on and on. The simplicity of the road did not rub off on me. Instead it made me want to get home even more so I could get back to my normal life (and all of my stuff).

Finally, there was the pain. I have never broken a limb, nor have I had any kind of medical procedure where I was cut up or open. Although I have had teeth pulled, the pain was dulled by anesthesia and it was usually gone the next day.

The pain started on the third day on my Camino, was in different areas of my body, and never really left me. It included pain on the bottoms of my feet from the rocky surfaces, blisters from my shoes, tight muscles from hills we climbed, and, towards the end, foot cramps. I was surprised it could be so painful when you are simply walking.

As I walked I thought of my husband and other friends who suffer from chronic diseases and daily pain. They are never free of pain and yet they rarely complain about it. This is a part of their daily life they accept and live with. It helped me put the experiences I had in context of a bigger picture. As I walked I tried to take the pain I felt and offer it back to the universe thinking, "This is for all of those who can't do the Camino. They are with me."

Being on the Camino for some is about sacrifice and simplicity but for me it was more about camaraderie and connections. I am glad I did the Camino and do not regret a minute of it. When I look back, I will probably do it again but, with the knowledge I have, I will do it differently. I would not make myself sacrifice so much of what I enjoy in order to do it. After all, I have learned... it is my Camino; I can do it whatever way I want to! ♦

The Wonders of Finisterre and Muxía

by Larry O'Heron, Rochester NY

My partner and I stood before the marker for kilometer 000 in the backdrop of the Finisterre lighthouse with the power of the Atlantic Ocean around us. The ocean breeze blew across the cape, increasing the salty taste in the air.

Climbing the hill to the lighthouse, we passed full parking lots and buses of tourists passed by so, unfortunately, the feeling and experience of

the location was somewhat dampened.

One lesson I learned on the Camino is that the external world affects me only to the extent that I pay attention to the distractions, but I did suffer a tinge of regret at the lack of spirituality on the way up the hill. Having



Church in Muxia

stopped in little capillas and chapels and ermitas all along the Camino, I relished the silence and peacefulness of those places. That made Finisterre rather jarring to the soul.

That night we had a wonderful experience on the sunset cruise along the coast and out to the ocean, rounding the cape. Boarding the boat about two hours before sunset, we had a marvelous view of Finisterre from the bay and the ocean. As sunset approached, we were in the Atlantic Ocean, around the cape for the spectacular onset of night. After the sunset that night, we returned to the port under the stars of the night sky with the lights of Finisterre ahead.

Three days later we walked into Muxia. Unlike Finisterre, the cape at Muxia (where *The Way* with Martin Sheen was filmed) lies at the ocean's level. With the Church of Our Mother Mary, Patron of Ships, in the background, I found that moment of peace and awe with which I wanted to end this Camino. The view with the ocean on three sides was achingly beautiful. The Mass at the church helped me decompress and, in the short walk to the ocean, I walked to the edge and stood there as the waves



Larry overlooking Muxia

washed over the rocks. The world that I left behind had receded and its relevance drifted farther away ...but I was finally ready to return to that life ♦



Sunset at Finisterre

Chapter Snapshot

We now have 45 chapters engaged in the work of gathering pilgrims together. The Chapters are as busy as ever, especially with planned training hikes and speaker events. In the Northern California and Albuquerque Chapters members are brushing up on their Spanish language skills in anticipation of future Caminos. Here is a snapshot of the wide-ranging activities during the first quarter of 2018 from a sampling of 17 of our chapters who engaged in an astounding 131 activities:

Hikes: 45

Speaker Events: 22

Camino Coffees: 8

Movie Screenings: 2

Spanish for Camino Series: 2

Tertulias: 18

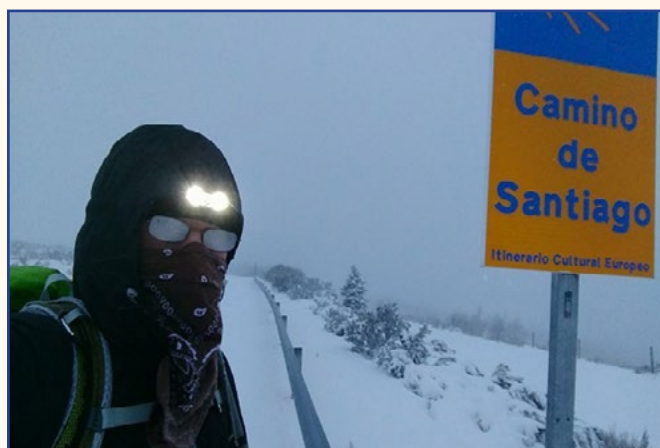
Meals/Potlucks: 7

Happy Hours/Tapas: 8

Meetings/Gatherings: 6

Shell Ceremonies: 12

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>. ♦



Albuquerque NM



Anchorage AK



Asheville & Raleigh NC



Chicago IL



Hoosiers - Indianapolis IN



Jacksonville FL



Mid-Atlantic - Virginia, Washington DC & Maryland



Northern California - San Francisco Bay Area



Old Pueblo - Tucson AZ



Philadelphia PA



Raleigh Area NC



Silicon Valley CA



Southern California - Los Angeles



Texas Gulf Coast - Houston



Le Puy Route photo by Peg Hall, Gainesville FL

“Europe Through the Back Door: The Travel Skills Handbook” by Rick Steves

Reviewed by Jerald Stroebele, Anchorage AK

Ho boy, I came across a six-year old copy of this book after I had just walked my third Camino, read a few pages and then figuratively slapped myself on the forehead for not reading it years earlier. When I finished it, I followed Rick Steves’ advice and immediately ordered the latest edition. When I finished that, I downloaded a copy of the e-edition on my iPhone. A fellow peregrino and I were recently comparing notes on our (separate) walks of the Camino del Norte and we agreed that once we started walking on the Camino, following the yellow arrows and finding food and a place to sleep was not that difficult. But getting to Irun, Spain, or Hendaye, France, the start of the Camino del Norte, from Madrid or Paris was a lot more complicated. Like my fellow traveler, my family and I took the train north to Irun. Unlike him, we did not lose a whole day by trying to start at the wrong train station, then trying again without a reservation.

American pilgrims travel to and from their caminos by planes, trains and buses and in the process likely use metros, subways, buses, taxis. Their first stop on arriving at the airport, after using the servicio or baño – the toilet, should be a visit a telebanco – an ATM. Then if not hailing a cab to town, they must purchase a subway or bus ticket from a machine. This book will in detail tell the peregrino exactly how to do all that, including important information on European toilets.

I am not a foodie but one of my continuing minor disappointments in Europe was watching a waiter pass by my table to the next one with a steaming, delicious smelling local dish. Read Rick

Europe Through the Back Door: The Travel Skills Handbook

by Rick Steves

Rick Steves 37th edition 2017

777 pages

and you will eat better. He will even teach you how to tell whether a croissant was made from butter or margarine, before you taste it.

Have a medical problem on the Camino? There is good advice here on how to deal with it and how to prepare beforehand.

Details aside, and there are thousands in this book, Rick Steves obviously shares a similar philosophy with many peregrinos. He advocates traveling light (20 lbs max), walking a lot, and mixing with the local people courteously. He teaches European etiquette and suggests ways to reduce the travelers’ carbon footprint. He also advises readers to adopt a worldview. Fortunately, this last is easy. At my last breakfast at an albergue, I shared the table with Swiss, Spaniards, French, Argentinians, Austrians, Italians and an American. Buen Camino! ♦



Quotes from the Camino

gathered by Erin P Moore, South Pasadena CA

Here are some quotes collected by my Medical Anthropology class at USC: *The Global Performance of Healing*. We walked 200 miles across northern Spain to collect healing stories, some of which were our own.

"Some people walk to get away from something. Some people walk to get something. We walk just to walk."

"The real Camino starts after you leave Santiago."

"The Camino is sacred, because of all the pilgrims who have walked on it before us."

"Things catch up to you on the Camino."

"I could not grieve all day, I guess. I was surrounded by Spain: the flowers, the forests, and the mountains. Maybe God wanted me to see more."

"No vino, no Camino."

"I came to understand and embrace the beauty of life's unpredictability."

"I was feeling that I had been called to do it [walk the Camino], that I needed to do it." Along the way from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, she had felt stunned by the power of the Camino.

"I was completely exposed," she revealed.

"The Camino brings out all of your unresolved conflicts."

"If I can do this, then I can do anything."

"Keep going, keep it simple,"



"The Camino gives you what you need, not what you want."

"There is no prize for first nor last and no clock on the Camino."

"No Spain without Pain."

"On the Camino, we have a bed to sleep in, food to eat, water to drink, and a path to walk. Everything else is excess."

"On the Camino, you have nowhere to hide from yourself."

"On the Camino, people are so kind, because they are given a chance to be. In daily life, everyone gets tunnel vision and is so stuck in their own routine."

"Don't rush because your destination is your own self."

"Tourists complain; pilgrims say how can I help you."

"I like to be unconventional," he asserted, "I call myself a globetrotter. But I am not a tourist. Tourists go places to see the sights. I go to see more of myself."

"Every Camino is different."

"In spirituality, you get your energy from what's around you... the trees, the sun, the people. In religion, you get your energy from God."

Quotes from the Camino

New Lifetime Members!

We are pleased to welcome the following new lifetime members, December 2017 – February 2018, to American Pilgrims on the Camino. ♦

- | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| ♦ Abigail Bornstein | ♦ Gerald Fritz | ♦ Tim Nelson |
| ♦ Wanda Alexander | ♦ Bridget Highfill | ♦ Frederick Newman |
| ♦ Laura Austin | ♦ Chris Howard | ♦ Maria Rutland |
| ♦ David Bugg | ♦ Janice Kaplan | ♦ Clara Serrano |
| ♦ Bill Edwards | ♦ Karin Kiser | ♦ Demetrios Simopoulos |
| ♦ Lysa ErkenBrack | ♦ Cathy Krauss | ♦ Donald Sleight |
| ♦ Emilio Escudero | ♦ Sarah Pierce Martin | ♦ Thomas Thomsen, Jr. |
| ♦ Dan Fitzgerald | ♦ Mary Minow | ♦ Martin Zamora |

Saying Yes to the Universe

by Bill Ludwig, Branford CT

September 15th, 2017 I began my Camino in Lourdes. Little did I know what was in store for me...

Three weeks later, I was enjoying dinner with a lovely Danish woman when the lights in the dining room went out. At first I thought there was a power failure but soon the familiar refrain of *Happy Birthday* in numerous languages took over the room. Not until the following morning would I meet the birthday girl.

Faced with a steep incline to start the day's walk, I started early and soon came upon two peregrinas. I learned that one, Charlotte, had been the center of last evening's festivities. In typical Camino fashion we walked together off and on through the morning. At one point, we came across two side by side labyrinths. Charlotte and I decided to try them out. Walking to the center then back out. At the end she was wearing a big grin and I had tears running down my face. We concluded that she got the happy one and I got the sad one.

We stopped for lunch at a little outdoor cafe in San Juan de Ortega where Janny announced that between the pain in her hips and blisters she was

not going further this day. Charlotte had to be in Burgos in two days to make her connections to return to Holland. So, we continued west. We talked about our lives and background. Just as we reached Cruz de Matagrande, the high point of this section of the Camino, we came across a giant labyrinth. I followed Charlotte for the 15 or so minutes it took to reach the center. As soon as she reached the center she turned and opened her arms. And when I walked into them our souls collided and we suddenly discovered that we were in love!

We enjoyed the night together in a funky albergue in Cardenuela Riopico before heading to Burgos where I booked a first class room in the Hotel El Cid overlooking the cathedral. We were both in tears the next morning when I put her in a taxi to the train station.

After finishing my Camino I visited Fatima and then Lisbon where I caught a flight to the Netherlands. Later Charlotte flew to New York to join me in the States for a week at Thanksgiving. I next returned to Holland for Christmas and New Year's and will be heading back soon for 3 weeks Yes, the Camino continues... ♦

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 eighteen 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. ♦

Congratulations to the graduates of Hospitalero Training Course #29!

We welcome to our growing family of hospitaleros the 19 members of our most recent training course, held Feb. 9-11 in the beautiful Marin Headlands, just north of San Francisco. Participants traveled in from Virginia, Texas, Nevada, Washington, Illinois, Utah, South Dakota, Oregon and California. Weather was sunny and balmy, the food was excellent, and the Camino spirit was strong.

Our hospitalero trainings began in 2004 when four icons of the Camino hospitalero system brought the trainings to us at the annual Gathering of Pilgrims in Santa Barbara, California. American

Pilgrims was given permission to hold our own trainings beginning in 2007 when we held a training at the Gathering of Pilgrims in Williamsburg, Virginia. Our trainings are modeled after the original course in 2004. This same training program has spread to Ireland, Germany, Italy, France and South Africa,

This most recent course brings the number of hospitaleros that American Pilgrims has trained to 543. Over half of those have served in albergues on various Camino routes, many returning year after year to provide for pilgrims. We are proud of these new hospitaleros and wish them all the best in their volunteer posts in service to pilgrims from all over the world. ♦



Upcoming Hospitalero Training
April 10-12, 2018 in Los Alto CA
June 15-17 2018 - outside St. Paul MN
Nov 9-11, 2018 - Winter Park FL

“Buen Camino! Tips from an American Pilgrim”

by Anne Born

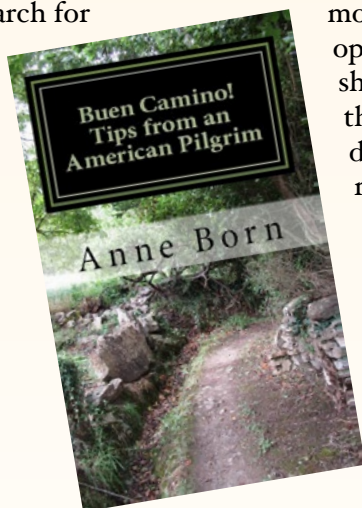
Reviewed by Stephanie Winslow, Tulsa OK

Thinking about walking a camino for the first time or perhaps once more?

Start here—Anne Born has consolidated everything you need to know when planning to walk the Camino...not in an encyclopedic format, but as thoughtfully presented factual categories of information and tidbits to inspire AND keep things in perspective. I loved the organization of the book and the simple titles of each chapter. Can't get lost here! And you know exactly where to go when you want to read a particular part again.

Anne has written this book from the perspective of “A Day in the Life of a Peregrino.” So helpfuland calming. One of the best things about this book is that once you've read it, you can search for

more detail or other opinions elsewhere should you feel the need. Anne directs you to those resources, which saves a lot of time.



I found *Buen Camino!* to be a great launch pad for understanding and planning.

As a 36 day pilgrim trekker on my inaugural camino, followed two years later by a short five-day journey from Samos to Santiago and a 15 day hospitalera assignment in Ribadiso, I consider myself

Buen Camino: Tips from an American Pilgrim

by Anne Born

CreateSpace 2017

124 pages

experienced enough. In *Buen Camino!* I learned more than a dozen tips I wish I had known prior to my first step, perhaps even before I had bought my plane ticket.

I recommend this book for first timers, returning pilgrims, and family members so they can understand the pilgrims' journey. Get your highlighter out and enjoy! ♦

Contributors

- ♦ Margarita Alvarez
- ♦ Anne Born
- ♦ Bruno Bruehlhart
- ♦ Robert Deming
- ♦ Hany Farag
- ♦ Laurie Ferris
- ♦ Peg Hall
- ♦ Brad Harper
- ♦ Elaine Hopkins
- ♦ Lanny James

- ♦ Jim & Janet Larocco
- ♦ Jennifer Lawson
- ♦ Sandy Lenthall
- ♦ Bill Ludwig
- ♦ Gene McCullough
- ♦ Erin Patrice Moore
- ♦ Larry O'Heron
- ♦ Steve Rindahl
- ♦ Jerry Stroebele
- ♦ Stephanie Winslow



Welcome, New Members!

We are pleased to welcome the following new members who joined American Pilgrims on the Camino from November 16 2017 through February 28, 2018. We look forward to meeting all of you at future Gatherings and events.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ◆ Mark & Susan Abernathy | ◆ Jane Cloninger | ◆ Pamela Head |
| ◆ Robert Allen | ◆ Dale Cohen | ◆ Daniel Henderson |
| ◆ Leslie Ammons | ◆ Andy Cohn | ◆ Rosanna Herrera |
| ◆ Michael & Ava Anders | ◆ Patricia Coleman | ◆ Nancy Herron |
| ◆ Matthew Anderson | ◆ Bradley Cordle | ◆ Kelly Herzog |
| ◆ Suzanne Auchterlonie | ◆ Jim Craig | ◆ Kathy Hillesland |
| ◆ Susan Austin | ◆ Liz Crowell | ◆ Donna Hnosko |
| ◆ Cecily Bailey | ◆ Andrea Daisley | ◆ Leonard Howell |
| ◆ James Baker | ◆ Guy Davis | ◆ Janice Hubatch-Smith |
| ◆ Joseph & Jill Balabis | ◆ Vicki Davis | ◆ Richard Hudiburg |
| ◆ David Barham | ◆ Janet Dawson | ◆ Ted Hudson |
| ◆ Christopher Barreras | ◆ Mary Detweiler | ◆ Ronald Hudson |
| ◆ Kathryn Barush | ◆ Mike Dickman | ◆ Glenn Hull |
| ◆ Anna Berezin | ◆ Catherine Dodds | ◆ Carol Hume |
| ◆ Carmen Bernal-Tribolet | ◆ Ray & Christine Dolan | ◆ Phyllis Jessen |
| ◆ Linda Birchall | ◆ Zachary Donselar | ◆ Rebecca Johnson |
| ◆ Denise Bleakly | ◆ Troy Ehlers | ◆ Dennis Jones |
| ◆ Dianne & Robert Bobowski | ◆ Mei Li Feng | ◆ Keith Jones |
| ◆ Alice Bodnar | ◆ Joy Fernandez | ◆ Frank Jones |
| ◆ Mike Boggess | ◆ Kaitland Finkle | ◆ Robin Jones |
| ◆ Sheridan & Richard Botts | ◆ Ian Fish | ◆ Windi Jones |
| ◆ Michael & Lori Bouchard | ◆ Maggie Fitzgerald | ◆ Julie Judd |
| ◆ Jodie Boudreaux | ◆ Sherry Foley | ◆ Lisa & Katie Kapp |
| ◆ Jordan Boyer | ◆ Steven & Betty Fraga | ◆ Paula Kelly |
| ◆ Esther Brakkee | ◆ Lee Fromme | ◆ Lisa, Casey & Taylor Kipp |
| ◆ Chris Breston | ◆ Gerry Gacioch | ◆ Robert Klee |
| ◆ James Brooks | ◆ Mel Gallagher | ◆ Tom Kohl |
| ◆ Melinda Brovelli | ◆ John Gallen | ◆ Elizabeth Krushinskie |
| ◆ Thomas Brundage | ◆ David Gentry | ◆ Pamela Laflin |
| ◆ Suzanne Brunner | ◆ Robert Gieselmann | ◆ Peter Lagerwey |
| ◆ Grace Bunemann | ◆ Louisa "Teresa" Gonzales | ◆ Patti Lamb |
| ◆ Norma Cantu | ◆ Carol Gourley | ◆ Jennifer Larck |
| ◆ Shana Carey | ◆ Lisa Graves | ◆ Mark LaRocca-Pitts |
| ◆ Brenda Carlozzo | ◆ Sonja Greenlee | ◆ Lizette Larson-Miller |
| ◆ Justin, Whitney & Jacie Carr | ◆ Jill Grey | ◆ Steve Lebens |
| ◆ Dania F Carrillo | ◆ Marie Gunter | ◆ Steven LeGendre |
| ◆ Tad Carter | ◆ Luis Gutierrez | ◆ Chery Legendre |
| ◆ Colleen Casey | ◆ Susan Hagstrom | ◆ Jessica Leonard |
| ◆ Lora Chatfield | ◆ Janet Harder | ◆ Loren Levy |
| ◆ Judy Christen | ◆ Pamela Harris | ◆ Robert Lewis |
| ◆ Maria Cisneros | ◆ Vern Hartenburg | ◆ Rodolfo Licea |
| ◆ Anne Clewell | ◆ Thomas Hayes | ◆ Curtis Loftin |



- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
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| ◆ Eileen Logsdon Bugee | ◆ Michael Palcisko | ◆ Jessica Sobelman |
| ◆ Therese Long | ◆ Tony Palumbo | ◆ Mary Spadaro |
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| ◆ Bonnie Overgaard | ◆ Gary Slagter | |
| ◆ Roberta Pacheco | ◆ Kyle Small | |

➤ Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life.

It turns what we have into enough, and more.

It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. ➤

-Melody Beattie



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 idea – a pilgrim's perspective. Please visit Newsletter on our website

for suggestions and guidelines.

The submission deadline for the next issue is May 18, 2018. We welcome your questions, comments, and submissions at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org.

¡Buen Camino!

*Laurie Ferris, Peg Hall, Elaine Hopkins, Steve Lytch, Zita Macy,
Mona Spargo & Barbara Zang*

March 2018 Team La Concha

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Peg Hall – Secretary
Emilio Escudero
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Barbara Zang

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Gene McCullough

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