



LA CONCHA

newsletter of the american pilgrims on the camino

SEPTEMBER 2019

My Mank Sister

By Jeff Arnold
Cincinnati, OH

One of the most common forms of community a pilgrim will find on the Camino is the friends we make along the way. After a few days most of us find other people walking at the same pace, and soon get to know them at a level that takes years—or maybe never—to achieve with friends back home.

The story I want to tell is from this year on the [Camino Portugués](#). I move slowly because I have a lower back condition, a restriction of the holes in my spine where the nerves enter that constricts the nerves and causes inflammation and pain. Fortunately, acupuncture is effective in reducing the inflammation and thus the pain, but I am left with a pretty good “hitch in my giddy-up.”

I took the alternative path called the Spiritual Variant just outside of Pontevedra, walking to Combarro and then Armenteira. From Armenteira, I walked the beautiful Piedra y Agua trail down from the mountain, surely a world-class walk with all the ancient mills along the way. I saw a younger couple ahead who I had seen a few times before but never talked to. I noticed that she was limping and thought “Oh dear, blisters.”

I caught up with them at a shady rest area and introduced myself. They were Marijke and Jacob from the Netherlands. I asked Marijke if she had blisters, and she explained—with the help of Google Translate and hand gestures—that no, she had a lower back condition that constricted the nerves going down her leg. She explained she treats it with acupuncture.

At this point, I was practically jumping up and down. “Me too! Same thing!” Once we got it established that we have the same condition, same symptoms, and same treatments, we shared a moment of intense bonding and big hugs. This is such a personal condition that I have had for years; to find another person who had the same experience, especially walking the Camino, was emotionally overwhelming.

Marijke explained that the word for “lame” in Dutch is “mank,” and she named me her “mank brother.” She is my “mank sister.”

We have not seen each other since but have stayed in touch with WhatsApp and email. She and Jacob returned to the Camino recently, and they sent me a video greeting from Finisterre. I have no doubt that I will see her again. ☺



Jeff Arnold with his “mank sister,” Marijke of the Netherlands, putting their best feet forward on the Camino Portugués.

A Message from the Board Chair

Dear Members,



The challenge of walking 800 kilometers to reach Santiago de Compostela and a curiosity about whom we might meet on the pilgrimage drew my family to the Camino the first time. It's that sense of community that keeps drawing us back to the Camino. In light of current events both at home and abroad, I've wondered what it is about the Camino community that makes it so special and what we might learn from it.

First, on the Camino we have an expectation of inclusivity. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from. It only matters that you are willing to gratefully accept what is offered. The utter kindness of complete strangers and the willingness of local people to help yet another pilgrim is really something to experience.

Second, and perhaps the most critical to the formation of the pilgrim community, is the pace. Information flows with unbelievable speed, and the demands of work and family consume our time, making it often hard to see the good things that happen, to recognize small kindnesses or to step outside our comfort zones. On the Camino, as the pace slows, I find that the good things become more obvious; the opportunities to give and receive kindness are many.

Third, but not least, the common challenge breaks down barriers and strengthens the bonds of community. You don't need a common language to communicate that your feet hurt or that you're hungry and tired at the end of a long, hot day. That common experience helps us share a laugh, some tears, or maybe both, over a meal. It's the shared hope that we'll make it to Santiago that draws us together.

The American Pilgrims community strives to reflect these three building blocks of a strong community. We have an expectation of inclusivity. As we state in our vision statement, we strive to inspire ALL who seek the Spirit of the Camino to join the global community of pilgrims. We try to slow down and keep things simple to more readily recognize the good things around us. And we rally around a common cause by gathering pilgrims together, sharing information and supporting the Camino's infrastructure. We do these to share with others what we experienced on the Camino in the hope of reinforcing those attributes here at home.

Buen Camino, Dave Donselar

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"Empathy is the starting point for creating a community and taking action.

It's the impetus for creating change." -Max Carver

Welcome

The American Pilgrims' Value of Community

With this issue of “La Concha,” we revisit our American Pilgrims’ value of Community. You’ll find not only thoughtful essays on community from your fellow members but also lively reports from about a dozen chapters that are nurturing local pilgrim communities around the country. We include an update from a pilgrim who is discovering community in her hometown as she continues her daily walk to Santiago.

You’ll read personal accounts of the Camino Inglés and the Via Francigena in Italy from pilgrims taking two different routes on each of these paths. We include information about our two Facebook communities, details about grants to albergues that your membership dues have made possible, and a review of a provocative book about walking. And more.

As always, we welcome your submissions, your comments, your talents. Please see the last page of this issue for details.

Happy reading,
Your “La Concha” Team

A Message from your Membership Team

When we surveyed Camino pilgrims last spring, we learned that the “value of community” is one of the most important reasons for their membership. We celebrate that value of community in this edition of “La Concha” with members’ submissions about what this value means to them.

That survey also let us know that more than 60 percent of those who responded said that the Camino was one of the most powerful experiences of their lives. As a way to share those powerful experiences, American Pilgrims on the Camino enthusiastically offers community

through our more than 50 local chapters and our annual national Gathering of Pilgrims.

You’re receiving this newsletter because you’re a member of American Pilgrims. Your membership helps fund infrastructure improvements along the Camino de Santiago, provides insurance coverage for chapter activities and offers Camino credentials free to those who request the —just a few of the benefits of your membership.

May we please ask you two favors? First, when your membership comes due, please renew. Second, consider asking a

pilgrim friend to join American Pilgrims on the Camino. Expand your own pilgrim community one person at a time. If you have a chapter in your area, invite your friend to participate in its activities. If you don’t have a chapter, you and your friend might consider forming one in your area. Read the stories of our newest two chapters, Lake Tahoe and DelMarVa, in this issue of “La Concha.”

As always, we wish you a ¡Buen Camino! every day. ☺

“We are constituted so that simple acts of kindness, such as giving to charity or expressing gratitude, have a positive effect on our long-term moods. The key to the happy life, it seems, is the good life: a life with sustained relationships, challenging work and connections to community.” -Paul Bloom



Gathering of Pilgrims 2020

Mark your calendar! Our 23rd Annual Gathering of Pilgrims will be at Zephyr Point Presbyterian Conference Center in Lake Tahoe, NV, March 12–15, 2020. The Gathering is an opportunity to share experiences, support one another and learn more about the Camino and the pilgrimage experience.

The Gathering will run from late afternoon Thursday through noon on Sunday. We're planning many interesting speakers and helpful presentations on different routes, pilgrim first aid, history, a shell ceremony and singing of "Ultreia" for pilgrims walking their first Camino, movies and entertainment and, of course, our popular silent auction and raffle.

We'll email all members in early January with registration and further details. We hope to see you there! ☺

Albergue Grants Aid our Camino Community

By Sarah Pierce Martin
Boulder, CO

An indelible part of the Camino experience involves the sense of community pilgrims develop with others also making a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. For example, there's the Camino family—moving not in lockstep but rather in a wave, encountering each other during the day or catching up a few days later, sharing a meal or in an albergue further along. This sense of community also arises when searching for the all-important conchas and yellow arrows or in conversations and experiences.

Mindful of the importance of the albergue system in supporting pilgrims and in promoting community, the grants program of American Pilgrims has long provided financial assistance to non-private albergues. In 2019, American Pilgrims provided four grants to increase capacity in existing albergues, replace well-used beds and mattress covers, and, in one, renovate a wall damaged by dampness, thus providing a healthier environment for pilgrims.

One grant funds five new bunk beds, mattresses and mattress covers for the Albergue de Peregrinos in Santervás de Campos near Valladolid on the Camino Madrid, shortly before it joins the Meseta portion of the Camino Francés. Projected to serve

americanpilgrims.org

approximately 350 pilgrims in 2019, this donativo albergue is estimated to serve 400 pilgrims in 2020, and over 500 in 2021, a Holy Year.



Communal dinner at albergue in Viana, June 2019.
Carmen Marriott, Tucson, AZ, photographer.

As the Camino Portugués grows in popularity – now second only to the Camino Francés – the need for more pilgrim accommodations is also increasing. The Abrigo do Peregrino da Santa Casa da Misericórdia in Azambuja, Portugal, is approximately three days north of Lisbon. By funding the renovation of a previously unused room, this grant increases the number of beds available for pilgrims in this donativo albergue.

The Albergue San Roque-Corcubión is a donativo albergue located less than a mile beyond Cee on the busy Fisterra-Muxía route. Our 2019 grant will contribute toward a project to double the number of beds available for pilgrims from 14 to 28, create a separate room for the volunteer hospitaleros and expand the kitchen. Sharing meals contributes greatly to building community among pilgrims.

We provided the Agrupación Bizkaia, which operates the volunteer-staffed Albergue de Peregrinos de Pobeña, a grant to eliminate wetness and mold on its walls. This albergue, located on the Camino del Norte, served more than 6,600 pilgrims last year. With the ever-increasing popularity of this route and the 2021 Holy Year, pilgrims will be assured an improved physical environment in this albergue. ☞

"Every successful individual knows that his or her achievement depends on a community of persons working together." -Paul Ryan

Our Two Facebook Communities Continue to Grow

As of August 1, 2019, our Facebook group for pilgrim walkers had 20,764 members. The group averages 550 requests for membership each month, with an average of 350 approved. Applicants must reply to three questions before being admitted to the group. Moderators deny access to those who don't respond to the questions.

Our volunteer moderators work to ensure that posts are civil and non-commercial. They report that the top 10 most engaging posts in July received an average of 62 comments, 631 reactions and more than 6,000 views.

Our Facebook group for cyclists now has 556 members. The volunteer moderators report that

there's been recent interest in bicycle rental in Spain and in the possible use of electric bicycles on the Camino.

To join either of these groups, go to facebook.com/groups/AmericanPilgrims/ or facebook.com/groups/CyclingAmericanPilgrims/ ☞



Becoming a Rock in the River

By Daniel De Kay
Sebastopol, CA

After walking one's own Camino, there is often the feeling of a void in one's life. After so many kilometers and so many special encounters with fellow pilgrims, the world at home can feel like it's missing something important. We long for the feeling of being a part of an extraordinary river of human experience that dates back over a thousand years. We miss the opportunities that only seem to occur on the Camino.

Have you ever considered becoming an hospitalero? The hospitalero is the rock around whom flows that special river of human experience. Pilgrims from every walk of life and every corner of the world bring the Camino to the hospitalero.

A typical hospitalero experience might include serving between 300 and 500 pilgrims during a 15-day posting. Among these encounters are opportunities to share stories, to witness, to counsel, to provide for and to encourage pilgrims who are tired, hungry or in need of physical, spiritual or emotional help.

Since 2004, American Pilgrims on the Camino has worked with the Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Camino to help staff donativo albergues on the various Camino routes in Spain. There is an ever-growing international family of dedicated hospitaleros who provide for pilgrims. You can become a part of that family.

American Pilgrims has offered 34 hospitalero training courses with a total of 635 volunteers trained. Of those trained, our records show 376 have volunteered at least once. Many trainees return year after year to volunteer.



Camino Portugués, Variante Espiritual, "Route of Stone and Water," April 2019.
Anne Born, Bronx, NY, photographer.

American Pilgrims members have staffed albergues in Spain, France, Portugal and Italy. The most common reason volunteers give for attending a training course is that they want to give something back to the Camino. Volunteers who apply to the Federation are assigned to an albergue for a quincena, which can be either the first or the second 15 days of a given month. Depending on the size of the albergue, volunteers work in teams of two or three, occasionally more than that and very occasionally alone.

The Federation, with whom American Pilgrims works closely, requires that volunteers attend a three-day hospitalero training

course prior to volunteering. During a course, there is ample time for attendees to share their personal stories of the Camino. They learn the history and philosophy of the donativo albergues, there are exercises

to share and experience the duties of the hospitalero, how to manage various aspects of an albergue and how to deal with a myriad of "what ifs" that might arise. They practice cooking for larger groups of pilgrims. They learn the ins and outs of hospitalero life. For example, what do you do when a group of pilgrims arrives, tired and hungry, just as you are sitting down to share the communal evening meal you have prepared?

American Pilgrims' mission is to provide for and support the Camino. What better way than to become an hospitalero? It can be a life changing experience! ☘

Building Community on the DelMarVa

By Ann Loar Brooks
Lewes, DE

In mid-March, almost 30 past, present and future pilgrims gathered in Lewes, DE, to explore the establishment of a chapter on the DelMarVa peninsula (the jut of land that incorporates Delaware and the Eastern Shores of Maryland and Virginia). At the meeting, two recent pilgrims willingly agreed to become co-coordinators with me.

At a coffee meet-and-greet in early May, 15 of us shared our stories of times on the Way and asked questions of veteran pilgrims. Having satisfied American Pilgrims on the Camino's requirement of gathering a minimum of 12 pilgrims at two meetings and having secured the requisite number of non-related co-coordinators, our DelMarVa chapter then just needed ratification by the board of directors at their next meeting. We received that at the beginning of August and are now one of the 50+ local chapters of American Pilgrims on the Camino! In June, 20-some pilgrims gathered at my home for a potluck, Camino 101 discussion and shell ceremony. With great emotion, we presented shells to five pilgrims who were departing this summer for a variety of Camino paths. We ended the ceremony with a rousing rendition of "Ultreia." On a late July morning, a number of us braved the heat to silently walk a labyrinth in the courtyard of a Lewes church, exploring the

similarities between a labyrinth walk and a Camino pilgrimage.

Our next planned outing will be a walk on the trails in Delaware's Edward H. McCabe Preserve and sharing a celebratory post-hike dinner at The Backyard in nearby Milton. Book shares, a gear swap, cooking classes, movie night, ropes and zip-line courses, kayaking, happy hours and community service activities are some of the activities that we are planning for future events. If you live or vacation in the DelMarVa area, please join us! ☺



Left: DelMarVa pilgrims braved the July heat to walk a labyrinth in a Lewes church courtyard.

Right: Five DelMarVa pilgrims received scallop shells at a June ceremony. All planned to walk Camino routes this summer. Submitted photographs.

*"The need for connection
and community is
primal, as fundamental
as the need for air, water
and food." -Dean Ornish*



The Spirit of the Camino in Lake Tahoe

By David Jennings
Kings Beach, CA

It all started back in 2013 when my wife, Monica, and I attended an hospitalero training session in Los Gatos, CA. At the end of the session, Monica casually invited the members of the group—led by Walt Scherer, Guy Joachim and Christine Minhondo—to come to Lake Tahoe and hike with us sometime.

To her amazement, the entire group took her up on it. With the aid of our neighbors and fellow pilgrims, Frank and Carol Coughlin, we picked the weekend of July 25, the Feast of St. James, for the get-together. We reserved campsites at the Mt. Rose Campground for about 24 campers and arranged homestays for the non-campers. Then came

the logistics of reservations, daily schedules, meal planning, hike planning, Saturday evening Mass, etc.

We worried that most attendees were coming from sea level to a campground at 8,900 feet and then hiking to 9,500

goodbyes and “Buen Caminos,” was the question: When will you do this again?

Our fifth and final camping weekend was in 2018. Each year, the weekend improved. We added more choices of hikes each day and celebrated Mass



First Lake Tahoe Chapter hike at Thomas/White Creek, A 7-mile loop on July 27, 2019. Photo by David Jennings.

feet, which could cause health issues. Yet when the weekend arrived, the pilgrims made it look like an everyday occasion. They picked campsites, pitched tents and volunteered for camp jobs. Some brought extra wine and appetizers, and soon we had a lively happy hour. What a wonderful group of people! Everyone was so accommodating.

On Saturday, following breakfast, the group hiked to a great photo op at Galena Falls. In the evening, some of us went to St. Francis of Assisi church for Mass and a pilgrim blessing. We returned to the campground and found that Walt had prepared a paella dinner, which has since become a tradition.

On Sunday, we hiked to Tahoe's Skunk Harbor. As the weekend came to an end, amid the

and the pilgrim blessing in the campground. Some pilgrims brought special food and drink, but basically everything from camping fees, homestays, and food was covered by a “donativo” hat passed at the end of the weekend.

For five years, this was a super event, renewing annually the “Spirit of the Camino” with old friends and new, surrounded by the natural beauty of Lake Tahoe.

Editor's note: They say it was the “final” camping trip, but this Lake Tahoe group really wasn't finished. The board of the American Pilgrims ratified Lake Tahoe as a new chapter in August 2019. Here's their update:

Lake Tahoe is divided between California and Nevada, so the chapter takes in all the surrounding communities

including Truckee, CA, and Reno and Carson City on the Nevada side. Our initial membership is about 60 people, with a little more than half having walked the Camino, and about half of those having done multiple Caminos.

The Lake Tahoe Chapter celebrated the Feast of St. James with a three-mile walk along the Truckee River, ending at Reno's St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral. Father Chuck Durante ended the celebration of Mass with a



Father Chuck Durante blesses pilgrims and scallop shells at St. Thomas Aquinas Cathedral in Reno, NV, on the Feast of St. James, July 25, 2019. Photo by David Jennings.

Blessing of the Pilgrims and gave scallop shells to five members who will be walking the Camino in September. ☪

We invite all members of American Pilgrims on the Camino to join any events and enjoy the natural beauty of Lake Tahoe and the surrounding Sierra Nevada. Please visit our Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/473130593264166/>



Lake Tahoe chapter logo and motto, which translates to “In the Spirit of the Way.” David Jennings design.

Camino Community from Portland to Santiago

By Martha Pelster
Portland, OR

“Blessed are you, pilgrim, if what concerns you most is not arriving, but arriving with others.”

This is part of the Beatitudes of the Pilgrim, which is read during shell ceremonies for departing pilgrims by many chapters of American Pilgrims on the Camino to embody the



Chapter volunteers baked Tartas de Santiago for a taste test after the shell ceremony marking the Feast of St. James on July 25, 2019, at St. Mary's Cathedral, Portland, OR. Photo by Rachel Ganzon, Portland, OR.

community and values that will sustain the pilgrims throughout their journey.

I happily joined the Portlandia Chapter of American Pilgrims in the spring of 2017 to support a friend who had walked the Camino. I did not have immediate plans to walk the Camino myself, but I was welcomed into the Portland pilgrim community and was delighted to support Portlandia's annual Feast of St. James Mass and celebration, which intersected with another important community in my life — my home parish, St. Mary's

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

Fast forward to the celebration of the Feast of St. James 2018, when I found myself experiencing several life transitions. My husband's father passed at the end of 2017, our youngest child graduated from high school in 2018, and I learned that I would be “liberated” from my job after 13 years due to restructuring.



Volunteer Earle Ellis presents shells to recipients at the Feast of St. James, Portland, OR, on July 25, 2019. Photo by Rachel Ganzon. Portland, OR.

These and other life transitions led my husband and me to the decision to walk the Camino. Nurtured and inspired by the Portlandia pilgrims, we committed to an October 2018 departure.

We received our shells from the Portlandia pilgrims on August 19, 2018, departed St. Jean Pied de Port on October 9 and arrived in Santiago on November 10. The pilgrims from Portland, and all the pilgrims we walked with, slept with, dined with

and laughed with have formed a community that continues to sustain us every day.

When the leaders of the Portlandia Chapter asked me to coordinate the Feast of St. James Mass at the cathedral in 2019, I readily agreed to support this wonderful community that fills me with so much joy. Of the approximately 88 attendees at the Mass and celebration that

day, 27 were volunteers helping with the liturgy, baking Tartas de Santiago, welcoming guests, serving food and drink and making my job of coordinating very easy indeed. That day, we sent another 23 pilgrims on their way to their Caminos with shells and the blessings of the entire community. Truly, we are blessed in the Portlandia Chapter to be continually “arriving with others.” ☞

Indianapolis Spiritual Trail

By Ian McIntosh
Indianapolis, IN

Every city should have a spiritual trail where people can walk in nature in a spirit of camaraderie.

The Indianapolis Spiritual Trail, which is open year-round for self-guided or themed group walks, was founded in 2015 as a project of the Indianapolis Center for Interfaith Cooperation. Inspired by the Camino de Santiago, the spiritual trail provides an opportunity for the spirit of the Camino to come alive in our community.

The original idea was to foster a climate where people from different faith groups could unite around shared understandings of joy, hope and faith. Like the Camino, our Spiritual trail supports journeys of meditation, awareness and personal growth. Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome!

Themed walks have been organized around a range of topics like freedom (in partnership with AmeriCorps), compassion (guided by a leading philanthropist) and love and common decency (in collaboration with the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library). Perhaps the most memorable walk was led by a group of singers gathered in the sparkling shallow waters of the White River singing their favorite songs. Members of the Hoosier Chapter of the American Pilgrims on the Camino have been regular participants in all these walks.



Members of the Hoosier Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino join the local Song Squad for a memorable dip in the White River while walking the spiritual trail. Photo by Ian McIntosh, Indianapolis, IN.



American Pilgrims on the Camino member Ian McIntosh founded the Indianapolis Spiritual Trail. He is second from left in this photo, with other members of the Hoosier Chapter on a recent walk on the trail.

The spiritual trail begins at the Indiana Interchurch Center, where pilgrims have the chance to walk the outdoor, Chartres-style labyrinth. It then continues on a series of paths along the Central Canal Towpath and the White River. Walkers often unload a burden by throwing a rock into the fast-moving river, or they tie a colorful ribbon

around a tree as they make a wish or give thanks.

Often, we share with the group a story of importance. On Saturday, June 29, a particularly hot summer morning, 16 walkers, including eight who had completed the Camino, shared stories about the camaraderie that typifies the Camino

experience. The main message was “the Camino provides.” Walkers spoke of cherished moments and of memorable places and beautiful people from around the world who had been vital parts of their journey. Most of all, they talked about the transformative dimension of this pilgrimage and how they would never be the same again.

On the Indianapolis Spiritual Trail, pilgrims have a chance to keep the spirit of the Camino alive and the fires of community burning. ☪

Everyday Pilgrim

Editor's note: This is the second reflection from Leah Gardner Wilkinson Brockway about being a pilgrim in her own town. You will find her first reflection, “My American Camino,” in the June 2019 issue of “La Concha.”

By Leah Gardner Wilkinson Brockway
Spokane, WA

July 25, 2019: Happy Feast Day of St. James! Today I received my scallop shell at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Spokane.

I am now four months on my little Way of St. James. Since April, I have walked daily in my community in eastern Washington. Over the next three years, my goal through these daily walks is to travel the collective distance, as the crow flies, from my home in Spokane to St. Jean Pied de Port (approximately 5,055 miles). This is my Camino for now. Ultimately, my goal is to walk the Camino Francés from St. Jean Pied de Port, arriving in Santiago to celebrate my 70th birthday in 2022.

As an everyday pilgrim, life is not too simple. Typical worldly cares greet me daily: the news, bills, legal matters, pet care and housework. Night finds me sleeping soundly in my own bed with fresh clothes to wear in the

morning. But each day, I shoulder my pack and pass joyfully outside to walk. Our beautiful summer provides friends, animals, trees, splendid flowers, scenic parks, ponds and the now-placid Spokane River.

Settling into stride, I recognize the innate rhythm of walking, relaxed, like regular breathing. Yes, I am addicted now; certainly my endorphin levels have increased. The hills seem less steep. Often, I hum, sing or pray the rosary. My blisters have healed. Lessons this week were about dehydration (dizzy as can be) and sunburn (the clever sun found those wedges of skin without protection; this might hurt at least another week!).

Recently, my Camino provided me friends along the way (Norma, Karen, Tom). We chatter as we walk. Some have already completed the Camino and teach me about travel, trekking poles, useful clothes, socks, shoes and other wisdom. “Blue jeans will never dry!” My list of Camino lessons is growing. There is

“I think tolerance and acceptance and love is something that feeds every community.”

—Lady Gaga

always something more to learn and relearn as we walk in the palm of God’s hand.

Each step is a prayer and a gift. My prayers are for many people, especially the sick. My overall walk is dedicated to Jesus, but I pick a different prayer intention each day. July 22 marked the 45th year since my previous cancer diagnosis. Thank you, Lord, for the people who cured me and the parents who helped me. You may know these challenges and blessings, too.

My recorded mileage is now over 703 miles. Daily I meet amazing people. With each mile and each new encounter, my understanding about being an everyday pilgrim grows. God willing, this journey will continue to Santiago de Compostela. Perhaps I will see you out there. ¡Buen Camino! ☪



Jacksonville Chapter co-coordinators Susan Peacock (left) and Miriam S. Gallet (right) recognized chapter member Pamm Eutsler during the chapter's annual Spanish Wines and Tapas event July 13. Eutsler's support of the chapter is commendable and embodies all of the attributes of a true Camino de Santiago pilgrim. She has stepped up and led hikes when the chapter co-coordinators were not able to, has mentored pilgrims and has given Camino talks at the University of North Florida. This is the second time in five years that the chapter has recognized a member's outstanding service.

*"The greatness of a community is
most accurately measured by the
compassionate actions of its members."*

-Coretta Scott King

The Chapter Spiritual Guide: Sharing the Journey with Others

By Rev. Joyce DeToni-Hill
Lakewood, CO

My favorite piece of Camino art is in the dining room of Albergue de Santa Maria in Carrión de los Condes. It's a woodcut of the Walk to Emmaus, an Easter story in the Gospel of Luke. The picture depicts Jesus walking alongside two pilgrims. I like that they placed the picture in the albergue's dining room, because it is around the table that the bewildered disciples, yearning for meaning and hope, discover the risen Christ among them.

I get that picture. I've shared the journey of faith with many over 33 years as ordained clergy. When I wanted to give something back in gratitude for my own transformational Camino, offering to serve my local Front Range American Pilgrims on the Camino Chapter in Denver as spiritual guide felt like a good fit.

For the past three years, I have been privileged to preside over our spring shell ceremony, sending pilgrims forth with a word of encouragement,

offering shells and blessing their backpacks. I welcome their return with our storytelling session we call "Unpacking Your Camino." In this fall session, we invite returning pilgrims to share a meaningful experience in a time of deep listening *communitas*. Then we reflect on their story and its meaning together before opening up the storytelling to the wider group. This serves to help integrate the Camino experience.

I walk with pilgrims on our hikes, listening to and encouraging them as they prepare to walk into their own resurrections. I lead our Camino film discussions teasing out the lessons beneath the story. This summer, with our new "Labyrinth Crawl," we will invite pilgrims to continue to live out the blessing we share at our shell ceremony: "To be attentive to the Voice of Spirit and pass through the countryside sowing goodness."

The Camino leads us to new places we had not planned to go. I'm discovering that my role as Camino Spiritual Guide is stirring me to return to



"Walk to Emmaus", woodcut in the Albergue de Santa Maria in Carrión de los Condes.
Photo by Joyce DeToni-Hill, Lakewood, CO.

the Camino as a guide to offer spiritual roadside assistance throughout the preparation, walking and post-Camino stages. As I prepare to do this, I feel both the excitement and anxiety of my first Camino in 2016. The details are in process, but as we know, we make the way by walking.

Consider adding a spiritual guide to your American Pilgrims chapter to enhance your programming. ☞

*"There are many wonderful things
that will never be done if you do not
do them."* -Charles D. Gill

Portlandia's Annual Garden Party

By Barb Wood
Portland, OR

On a perfect cloudless, late June day, 54 of our chapter's pilgrims gathered for the 3rd Annual Garden Party in Southwest Portland. Pilgrims dressed in shorts and sun hats, brought tasty potluck treats and shared copious wine while exchanging memories, stories and plans for their Camino experiences. We invited pilgrims to write the year and route for Caminos that they have walked on their name tags to make it easy for future pilgrims to easily connect and ask questions. As a robust chapter with nearly 700 members on our mailing list, we have pilgrims who have walked nearly every Camino possible and a willingness to share stories, experiences and wisdom.

"This is a garden I'd pay to see," said one happy attendee. Sally Green and I, the party's hosts, live at the end of a dead-end road, on the outskirts of the

Portland city limits. Sally gardens a mature acre with conifers, fruit trees, shrubs, roses, flowers, vegetables and a variety of berries. Guests were invited to pick strawberries, raspberries and snow peas, the crops in production during the party.

This is one of three large community events the Portlandia chapter holds. The others are the

Feast of St. James and the holiday party, which we schedule for the first Saturday of December. We also offer 3rd Sunday strolls, rain or shine events each month except November and December.

If you find yourself in Portland and would like to join us for an event or a walk, please send us a note at portlandia@AmericanPilgrims.org. ☞



Pilgrims at the annual Portlandia Chapter garden party share stories and plans plus great food and wine, June 2019. Photo by Barb Wood, Portland, OR.

Cultivating Camino Community

By Laurie Ferris
Oakland, CA

For pilgrims, the Camino community at home is often a necessity to keep the spirit alive throughout the year. Our chapter's recent St. James Day Celebration in Piedmont, CA, was a great example of how pilgrims come together to cultivate community. As a chapter coordinator, I find this annual event is my favorite to organize, not just because it takes place in my neighborhood parish. Rather, it has become a meaningful way to honor the reason for the pilgrimage, celebrate with friends, provide a blessing to departing pilgrims and introduce St. James to those who are curious.

It was a joy to bring both of my communities —parish and pilgrims—together for this special evening. The first part of the event was tailored for our pilgrim community with a potluck dinner and chapter announcements. I swear, our potlucks keep getting better each time! There were Camino-inspired dishes, wine, tapas, paellas, caldo de Galicia and, of course, the superstar of the occasion, Tarta de Santiago. There were a few, actually!

Then, we had a blessing for departing pilgrims by Rev. Beth Foote, who led the group in a rousing "hands-on" interactive blessing. This blessing took place outside in the courtyard while a crew of volunteers magically transformed the community



A group of departing pilgrims gathered in the courtyard for a group blessing led by peregrina the Rev. Beth Lind Foote. Photo by Emilio Escudero, Berkeley, CA.

room to accommodate 25 more people who signed up just for the presentation.

This year, I invited guest speaker Alexander Shaia, who happened to be visiting family in the Bay Area. He gave a thought-provoking presentation, "St. James: The Despairing Evangelist Who Becomes an Inspiring Pilgrim — a Story for Today." We learned more about the apostle James and gained a deeper understanding of the significance of the Camino pilgrimage. Many of us pilgrims could relate to the four-part journey: hearing the summons; enduring tests and obstacles; receiving the gifts; and returning to serve community. The parish community also very much appreciated his talk as some were familiar with his theology and insightful work on the cycle of the four Gospels.

I was overflowing with gratitude for how people stepped up to help in myriad ways. Kudos to our NorCal chapter steering committee, volunteers and parish friends who made this

event happen. Overall, it was a joyous occasion to celebrate, contemplate and cultivate the Camino community. We hope that the evening, in some way, inspired people on their own journeys. ☸

"We don't need bigger cars or fancier clothes. We need self-respect, identity, community, love, variety, beauty, challenge and a purpose in living that is greater than material accumulation."

—Donella Meadows



Sugar Creek Winery, Defiance, MO. Amy Horton, photographer.

St. Louis Chapter News

By Amy Horton
Warrenton, MO

The St. Louis Chapter held a pilgrim meet-up hike July 20 at Klondike Park in St. Charles County, MO. Six hikers braved the heat to make the five-mile trek. The hike was timed in part to mark an early celebration of St. James' Day on July 25.

A heavy morning rain just before the group's August 17 hike provided more pleasant temperatures on the 6.7-mile trek at Lost Valley Trail near Defiance, MO. Afterward, the group continued the Camino conversation at a nearby winery. ☞

"Start by doing what's necessary, then do what's possible, and suddenly...you are doing the impossible." -Francis of Assisi



Anchorage Chapter's St. James Day hike, Middle Fork Trail in the Chugach Mountains, AK, July 2019. Photograph by Peggy Cobey, Anchorage, AK.



Heart of the Camino

By Doreen Ratigan
Orlando, FL

Accompanied by my Camino sister Betty from Michigan, I embarked on my first pilgrimage in April 2019, stepping foot from St. Jean Pied de Port on a 34-day, life-changing journey. My husband, Kevin, would later join us for the final 100 kilometers to Santiago de Compostela.

While preparing for my Camino, I told friends about the tradition of carrying a rock from the beginning of one's journey and depositing it at Cruz de Ferro — the rock symbolizing the burdens and sorrows a pilgrim carries, the act of leaving it helping release those burdens. My friend Susan — whose husband, Tim, had died 10 years earlier from brain cancer — asked if I would carry a small, heart-shaped stone and place it at the iron cross, to honor Tim's spirit. I agreed to carry Tim's stone with mine.

Before my Camino, I thought often of the many blessings along the Way — a thousand years of prayers, reflection, transformation and release. I posted to Facebook, offering to carry with me my friends' personal prayer requests. I received over 30 responses, enough to carry each friend's request for an entire day of my journey. I was honored to be a vessel for this outpouring of love and healing, and the practice became a blessing to me in return.

Each morning, I texted that day's friend: "Today I walk with you."

Please pray or reflect with me on your families'/friends' situation and for yourself." Each evening, I sent a collection of photos from that day's journey to my friends, with my blessings for healing and resolution. (I found it especially



Poster design by Doreen Ratigan's friend, Susan.

pleasing to take photos of heart-shaped stones or a collection of stones another pilgrim had configured into the shape of a heart — daily reminders of the constant flow of love abounding on the Camino.)

Arriving at the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, I lit candles for the community of friends whose prayer requests I had carried with me. My journey now complete, I was fulfilled with the blessings of the Camino de Santiago.

Upon returning to Florida, Susan presented me with a beautiful gift she had designed: a poster compiling all the photos of stone hearts and other photos Betty, Kevin and I had documented along the way. It was her thanks for carrying Tim's stone and a reminder that my Camino was far reaching. It is a true gift from the heart of the Camino. ☺

On or Off the Camino, You Are Part of Something Greater Than Yourself

By Karin Kiser
San Diego, CA

On the Camino, everyone is generally walking toward the same goal, so there's a built-in sense of commonality and belonging often missing in ordinary life.

On the Camino, you are part of something bigger than yourself, walking in the footsteps of millions that came before. It's powerful.

On the Camino, pilgrims naturally look out for each other. They acknowledge fellow travelers and greet them with ¡Buen Camino! When you rest by the side of the trail to tend to your blistered or swollen feet, complete strangers stop and ask if you are okay or need a bandage. Small kindnesses abound.

In contrast, at home we tend to go about our days inside our own personal bubbles. We don't look at or acknowledge the majority of people we pass. We're stuck in our heads, thinking about the next task or the next 10 minutes. Whereas pilgrims share a common goal on the trail, in everyday life it can seem like it's every man for himself, going this way and that.

But if we look a little closer, we might see life off the Camino is not that much different than life on the Camino. We are walking this Earth beside others on the same journey — life. Even if it isn't always clear what our purpose is or where we're headed, we all generally want to live our best lives, help others where we can, and feel a sense of belonging.

As a pilgrim, you were able to create friendships with people from all walks of life, often in a single day. Perhaps you found yourself looking out for others, being more aware of your surroundings and your fellow travelers, sharing whatever you had with whomever needed it. Sharing and community are part of your nature as a human being. The Camino is a good reminder of that.

The truth is, whether on the Camino or off, you are part of something greater than yourself. Connecting with others on a regular basis allows you to feel that sense of community no matter where you are. One way to recreate that sense of belonging is to reach out to pilgrims you connected with in Spain. Join your local chapter.

Support and encourage one another. Share stories and photos.

Another way to recreate that sense of community and belonging is to look up and reach out. Acknowledge people around you, especially on your daily walks and in your day-to-day activities. Share a hello or a smile. That could be just the thing to brighten someone's day, including your own.

Adapted from "After the Camino: Your Pocket Guide to Integrating the Camino de Santiago into Your Daily Life" (Karin Kiser, Camino Chronicles Press, 2019). You will find a review of "After the Camino" in the June 2019 issue of La Concha. ☞

Discovering Divine Trust, Discovering Community

By Natasha Ravnik
Oakland, CA

There were many moments along the Camino when I wanted to give up. Inevitably, those were the moments when someone of the Camino community would miraculously appear to come to my aid. It is through these experiences I discovered Divine Trust — I came to trust in God and in total strangers to take care of my well-being. And by allowing myself to experience a stranger's warmth of heart and generosity of spirit that I expanded my narrow definition of community from the people I know to a wider world — a greater, human family.

When I became violently ill with stomach flu in Carrión de Los Condes, the sisters at La Nuestra Señora de Belen patiently looked after me and gave me rest until I was strong enough to continue.

When I reached the Cruz de Ferro, I met a Camino friend who was as moved as I was by this important milestone, and we continued together down the mountain. Her presence reminded me I was not alone.

A pilgrim offers whatever they have to help a fellow pilgrim — whether it's a bandage, a piece of advice, a chocolate or a hug. We need each other. We're there for each other. We share one's burdens.

The night before my arrival in Santiago, I began having panic attacks. Again, a Camino sister stepped in to my aid, arranging to have my pack shipped ahead the next day. (The only day I did not walk with a full pack was my last day on the Camino!) I was so grateful.

At every turn, a human kindness was offered to me. It opened my heart and spirit to such a degree,

though sometimes I still cannot believe I actually experienced such humanity.

But I do have faith and Divine Trust. I remember there are good people in this world — and especially along the Camino de Santiago — who are willing to help complete strangers.

It is my memories of community and safety on the Camino that I cherish when my post-pilgrim life seems bleak. I remain resolved to strive for spiritual enlightenment. I firmly believe that for every bad person, there are 100,000 good people; and for every bad deed, there are 100,000 good deeds happening at the same time.

Community can be made and rebuilt on and off the Camino, one step and one person at a time. ☸

*You have not lived today
until you have done
something for someone
who can never repay you."*

-John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress (1678)

My Companion at the Sink

By Marjorie Young
Savannah, GA

I journaled daily on my Camino from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago de Compostela in September – October 2016. This journal entry from September 15 shines the light on some of the more unexpected and fleeting moments of community we can experience along the Way:

"I realized about 11 p.m. that I had forgotten to brush my teeth, so I quietly climbed off my top bunk with my trial-size toothpaste and neon-green toothbrush and tip-toed past dozens of exhausted, sleeping peregrinos. Arms and legs dangled from all the beds. Two men were in the co-ed bathroom using the only two sinks, so I continued past them to the co-ed showers, and found a tiny white porcelain sink about 12 inches wide mounted below an open window. I stuck my head outside to get a breath of fresh air. Above and to my right a huge outdoor iron lamppost lit the street below with an amber glow. The night was still, except for a reddish flash of lightning in the distance. As I squeezed on the toothpaste tube, a pea-size black spider dropped down to investigate my activities. I stepped back from the sink to give him back his space. We stared at each other for a few seconds. He finally decided to climb back up to his lamppost condo, perhaps because I didn't speak Spanish." ☸

What Community Means to Me

By Paula Lahti
Ayer, MA

I'm 65, and I can say I am just understanding what community means to me. I have always considered myself a social misfit: shy, not athletic though I love the outdoors, with an adventurous spirit.

What does this have to do with community? Growing up I was always trying to fit into some group. Community meant belonging. Much later, I came to accept being different, and I appreciate solitude and quiet. So, I made a short Camino last year solo. But one is never alone on the Camino, and now I have a better understanding of community. Consider the young man who advised me to have my pack transported because he saw it put me off balance in walking up my first long hill from Sarria. Then another who waited to see me cross a busy road safely. Or, the young woman who gave me magnesium tablets when my legs cramped severely. A local woman in Melide helped carry my pack from the bar stop to the Xunta Albergue, though she was suffering the effects of cancer treatment. I learned to walk backward downhill from a lovely woman who saw me struggle descending into Ribadiso. And may

I never forget the trio of ladies from the Dominican Republic who helped me share their joy in being on the Way.

For me, community is the capacity of human beings to support one another in any circumstances. A young man came to my door this week. He was going door to door selling solar energy systems. We sat and chatted on my front porch. After a few minutes he asked me if I was concerned when I answered my door to him. I asked him why. He mentioned his race and said he thought my neighborhood lacked diversity. I thought back to my childhood when busing was used to integrate my school, then of my

children and their friends from various traditions. And my neighborhood actually is quite diverse.

I considered my experience on the Camino. All the classifications that we use to separate ourselves from others, into communities, didn't mean anything. Gender, age, race, religion, nationality, sexuality, disability ... Who cares? Just help me put one foot in front of the other, and God willing, I will get to Santiago de Compostela. And, yes, may God allow me to help others. I provided a cold drink and said goodbye to my door-to-door salesman. Let's continue to live the Way wherever we are and whomever we're with. ¡Buen Camino! ☘

One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals.

-Jean Vanier, Canadian Catholic philosopher, theologian and humanitarian

The Shortest Camino: Camino Inglés

By Robert Deming
Fredericksburg, TX

In June 2019, I walked what must be the shortest Camino: the Camino Inglés from A Coruña to Santiago. It is only 75 kilometers, and you don't qualify for a Compostela unless you get credit for at least 25 kilometers of walks in your home country first.

You can also walk the Camino Inglés from Ferrol. That route is more popular as it's 110 kilometers, and the distance meets the requirements for receiving a Compostela. I used the Kindle edition of Johnnie Walker's guide; he will send you

updates via the Camino Inglés Facebook page if you ask.

The bus from the airport (LCG) to A Coruña costs €1.80. The route begins at the church near the harbor, where I found a stamp and received a pilgrim blessing. If you get lost (as I did), just follow Maps.me to the O Burgo bridge at the south end of the Paseo da Ria do Burgo.

There is a lot of uphill climbing the first two days, but once out of town the path takes you through quiet rural neighborhoods, farms and forests. Today there are few pilgrims on the route, but back in the 1500s the harbor sometimes held 20 ships unloading pilgrims.

The route has limited food and drink options, but I never went hungry. My first night was in the

ultra-modern Xunta albergue at Sergude (20 kilometers). The only food to be had is a few hundred yards down the road at a bar, where the bartender/cook asked me to chill out for a few minutes while she finished playing a hand in a lively card game. She lost the hand but fixed me a filling plate of meat and potatoes. Two delightful women from Malaysia, who had bought their supper from a bakery back up the trail, were the only other pilgrims.

On the second day the route from Ferrol joins in, and you will see more pilgrims. The next albergue is in Hospital de Bruma, only 14 kilometers from Sergude, so I kept walking and stayed off the Camino at the very nice Hotel Nogallás in Ordes (\$35).

The next morning I followed a nice route on Maps.me out of Ordes. For a while I walked with three friendly and curious local women who peppered me with questions and showed me how to join back up with the Camino. The third night I stayed in the quiet town of Sigüeiro and was in Santiago by noon on the fourth day. This Camino is solitary but delightful! ☺

Camino Inglés

By Donna Ysland
Cashiers, NC

My partner, a veteran pilgrim, spoke often of walking the Camino. He had encountered harsh conditions and uncertain lodging and meals, but the pilgrims he met along the way turned inconveniences into a spiritual awakening.



Author Donna Ysland in Neda, Spain, at the start of Day 2 on the Camino Inglés.



Along the Camino Inglés from A Coruña, June 2019. Robert Deming, photographer.

Training completed, bag packed and travel arrangements made, on September 3, 2018, this 70-year-old stepped foot on the Camino Inglés. I would walk 116 kilometers over six days from Ferrol to Santiago.

The first day we walked 18.8 kilometers to Neda over lovely paths beside the Ria de Ferrol estuary. By late afternoon, we found our lodging (with an awaiting cozy bed) and discovered our transported packs had arrived as expected.

The next morning, we began the 17.2-kilometer walk to Pontedeume. The sun glistening on the water, gentle breezes and centuries-old architecture made this stretch unforgettable. Upon arrival we spotted a charming café, enjoyed dinner and called an early night.

On our 17.3-kilometer walk to Betanzos on the third day, we crossed the Eume River Bridge

and continued through the historic district. A stone tower in the distance serves as a reminder of attempted Portuguese and British invasions. We had a steep 196-meter climb out of town, but once at the crest the way leveled to earthen paths with interesting architecture and cool breezes... simply delightful.

The next day, a 20.8-kilometer walk to Bruma, began overcast with rain. We walked along well-marked sunken paths canopied by ancient trees leading to a delightful hamlet, Casa Julia. We joined fellow pilgrims over lunch before walking 460 meters up to Hospital de Bruma. It was a difficult climb, but worth the view. After a few wrong turns, we arrived at Casa Rural Dona María, a time capsule of another era. We won't soon forget this time spent with fellow pilgrims over a glass of port and a delicious meal.

Meandering for 17.3 kilometers to A Rúa along earthen paths and stopping only to enjoy a hilltop picnic outside the industrial area of Sigüeiro made for a beautiful fifth day from start to finish.

On the last day, we walked 17.2 kilometers to Santiago along stretches of natural pathways, woodlands and through country hamlets. Entering Santiago was breathtaking as we encountered an annual celebration with hundreds of performers in costume, playing drums, dancing and interacting with pilgrims arriving from all directions. I was completely overwhelmed.

I received my Compostela. Yet, I felt an emptiness I cannot explain except, perhaps, a yearning to explore more ways of the Camino.

Editor's note: The Camino Inglés has since been re-routed, bypassing the popular Casa Julia and shortening the route to 113 kilometers. ☞

Seeking Community on the Via Francigena

By Barbara Zang
Worcester, MA

The theme of this “La Concha” is our value of community. It’s also the value I missed most on my pilgrimage along the Via Francigena this past April and May.

The Via Francigena officially begins in Canterbury, England and runs through France, Switzerland and Italy, ending at St. Peter’s Square in Vatican City (Rome). Middle Ages pilgrims followed it; modern day pilgrims are re-discovering it. Rome, Santiago de Compostela and Jerusalem are the three most important destinations for Christian pilgrims.

American Pilgrims on the Camino members are familiar with various pilgrimage routes to Santiago. I have walked the

Camino Francés from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago and the Camino Portugués from Porto to Santiago. I met kindred spirits from around the globe on both routes. The camaraderie among pilgrims to Santiago is something I treasure, and I’m not alone. I expected to find a similar pilgrim community along the Via Francigena.

I started the Via in Lucca after buying a credential in that city’s Cathedral Museum for €5. Who wouldn’t love walking through the glorious fields of Tuscany or exploring the Italian city of Siena? The pilgrim who couldn’t follow the pilgrimage waymarks, for one. The Via Francigena is marked, but not with yellow arrows or scallop shells. The marking system is varied; finding the signs was sometimes a challenge.

The Via’s infrastructure is not yet well developed. Ostellos (we know them as albergues) are often listed on Booking.com, so my overnight companions often were not pilgrims heading to Rome. They were not heading anywhere. Some stay several nights, using the inexpensive and comfortable quarters as a base for their vacations. I met Italian families and work groups on short holidays, not all bound for Rome.

The countryside is beautiful with vineyards and meadows. The small Italian towns are lovely. The path is mostly through field and forest with an occasional stretch along the busy Via Cassia highway. Parts follow the old Roman stone road. This makes it the perfect route for those who



Handmade marker on the Via Francigena, May 2019. Barbara Zang, photographer.

crave a contemplative, meditative pilgrimage.

The ostellos, monasteries and convents I stayed in offered sheets, a blanket and pillow. Very few offered meals. I rarely saw a pilgrim meal advertised, but no worries. Italian food and wine are excellent, and I didn't go hungry, at least physically.

I encountered few pilgrims along the Via. My hunger was for a pilgrim community, something I did not find on the Via Francigena. ☞



Old stone marker along the Via Francigena, April 2019. Barbara Zang, photographer.

Via Francigena del Sud: Thirteen Days with the Gruppo dei Dodici (Group of Twelve)

by Linnea Hendrickson
Albuquerque, NM

Four New Mexicans, four Germans and two Norwegians, accompanied by local volunteer leaders and numerous Italian part-time walkers, participated in a thirteen-day International Walk on the Via Francigena south of Rome from April 18 to May 1, 2019. We walked through flowery meadows and historic villages, past mysterious ruined churches, up and down hills and along the sea. We followed parts of the ancient Via Appia in the footsteps of Saints Peter and Paul and numerous pilgrims who have walked between Jerusalem and Rome. The volunteer leaders (most of whom were taking time from their full-time jobs) were enthusiastic and cared deeply about maintaining and promoting the ancient pilgrim paths, their history and treasures.

Because of them, we were treated to experiences we would not have had if walking on our own. Local mayors greeted and fêted us. Museums opened just for us and tours were provided of ancient ruins, a historic bridge, a cistern dating from the era of Julius

Caesar, Fossanova Abbey where St. Thomas Aquinas died, and many other special places. One day we received a magnificent lunch featuring local sausages, and later (after scrambling up and then down a steep hill via an overgrown track) were greeted on the outskirts of Terracina by musicians playing antique instruments. The musicians accompanied us to a park, where we were welcomed with wine, strawberries, cookies and a concert. The day culminated in a tour of an ancient Roman port, pizza and drinks and yet another dinner! Understandably, some of us were weary by this time, and more than anything wanted boots off, showers and time to rest!

Most of our dinners were superb and far more extravagant than any we would have ordered for ourselves. Lunches, usually purchased at shops, were eaten while sitting on stone walls or roadside benches. The rare stops at village bars were a treat. Lodgings were in convents or monasteries, and occasionally in somewhat more luxurious hotels and guesthouses. My husband and I always had a private room



View of Sessa Arunca, Campania, Italy, April 2019. Linnea Hendrickson, photographer.



Walkers on the Via Francigena del Sud near Itri, Lazio, Italy, April 2019. Linnea Hendrickson, photographer

"Don't underestimate the power of your vision to change the world. Whether that world is your office, your community, an industry or a global movement, you need to have a core belief that what you contribute can fundamentally change the paradigm or way of thinking about problems." -Leroy Hood

with bath, even if the beds were bunks. Dinners, breakfasts, lodgings, and transport for luggage and sometimes for us was provided at the amazingly low cost of €45/person/day!

We enjoyed the walk immensely and are ready to go again, despite some frustration over never knowing quite what to expect. This was partly due, I'm sure, to our leaders' modest English skills, and our zero competency in Italian. Dates for the 2020 walk are April 23 – May 6.

You can view my

YouTube video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-UJb5pYpg8&feature=youtu.be

and see more photos at www.flickr.com/photos/manga_mom/albums/72157678182533957

Click on the following links for more information on the Via Francigena del Sud: www.gruppodeidodici.eu/Francigena/index.jsp?home

Privacy Act Waiver Information

American Pilgrims member Rennie Archibald, who lives in Ponferrada, Spain, sent us this notice. He says that should an American become seriously ill in Spain, locating family members can be an almost impossible task. The U.S. Embassy in Spain suggests travelers complete a Privacy Act Waiver that will give embassy staff permission to discuss the case with "whomever (the patient) chooses to list, such as the hospital, social services or any family or friends (the patient) wishes to include."

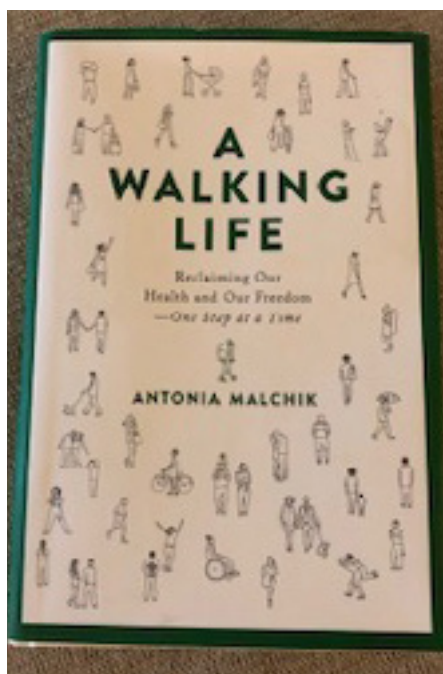
If you're interested in filing this waiver, type DS5505 into your browser to access the form, complete and email it to the U.S. Embassy in Madrid (AskACS@state.gov). Also send a scan of your passport's biographic information page. 📄

Walking Makes Us Human

A Walking Life: Reclaiming Our Health and Our Freedom – One Step at a Time

By Antonia Malchik
DECAPO PRESS, 2019. 259 pp

Reviewed by Roni Jackson-Kerr
Tulsa, OK



Walking makes us human. That is the concept around which Antonia Malchik's "A Walking Life: Reclaiming Our Health and Our Freedom — One Step at a Time" is centered. This ambitious book seeks to answer a number of questions that pilgrims and walking enthusiasts will laud. Questions like, "If walking is in fact what makes us human, as paleoanthropologists claim, what does it mean that humans are walking less and less? How is our modern sedentary lifestyle, more and more separated from nature, affecting us as humans? What does it mean for communities? For democracy? For our health? For our social lives?"

The book seeks to answer all of these questions and more in a thoughtful and comprehensive way. Most importantly, Malchik elaborates on the essential nature of walking and why we should be making more time for it in our lives. She also discusses the importance of re-thinking the ways in which our cities are designed and stresses the importance of making them more walking friendly. The book examines the role of walking within various aspects of human life: "health, creativity, spirituality, grief, community," and discusses the ways in which all of those things have declined alongside the decline of walking.

While only one chapter is directly dedicated to the topic of pilgrimage and spiritual walking, I believe that many pilgrims will find this book valuable. It made me think about my Camino differently. It reminded me that walking the pilgrimage didn't just connect me to other pilgrims or to the medieval history of Spain; it connected me to my humanity, to humans who have walked this planet forever.

It's no easy task to take on all of the elements of our humanity that are being affected by our modern mobility in 259 pages, but Malchik manages to do it in a way that is engaging, erudite and socially conscious. At times borderline tangential, the book is nevertheless an important addition to the conversation about what walking does for our minds, our spirits, our communities — and what we are losing as we spend more and more time in the car, in our offices or camped in front of the television, separated from nature and our communities.

In sum, this book is an important one, and it stresses the importance not only of walking, but of considering walking as we address issues of city planning, community engagement, peace and the environment. No small task, but Malchik makes a strong case for why we should try. 🧡

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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.

With every issue of “La Concha,” we are delighted anew by the quality, variety and abundance of submissions. Your enthusiasm for the Camino and for “La Concha” as a medium for sharing that enthusiasm keeps us going.

The theme for our December newsletter is our value of Gratitude. How do you live this value in your daily life? In your community? How hard is it for you to accept the gratitude of others? Send your essays, photographs, poems and more to us by Nov. 21, 2019, at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org. We ask that you follow these simple submission guidelines:

- Be an American Pilgrims on the Camino member.
- Include your name, city and state of residence.
- Keep to the 400-word limit and submit as a Word document. (We will review a longer, tightly written submission of no more than 800 words.)
- Include no more than three photographs or illustrations as jpegs. Send them separately, not embedded in the Word document.
- Make sure your photograph is between 500KB and 2MB
- Include a caption with each photograph and identify the photographer, place and date of the photograph.

For more detailed guidelines, please visit Newsletter on the American Pilgrims website.

We’d love your help. If you have editing, photography or design skills you’d like to contribute to your organization, please let us hear from you at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org.

We welcome your questions, comments, and submissions at newsletter@americanpilgrims.org.

¡Buen Camino!

September Team “La Concha”

Suzanne Gainer, Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Janie Johns, Beth Jusino, Zita Macy, Catherine Magyera and Barbara Zang

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