

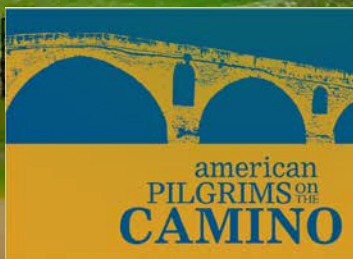
# LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

## MIND & SOUL

*The spiritual journey issue*

### CAMINO ON ICE



Essays  
Reflections  
Chapter News





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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, gathering pilgrims together and providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims.

A pilgrim waits for her number outside the Pilgrim's Office in Santiago.  
Photo Credit Cover and right: Thom Ryng



# LA CONCHA

Welcome!

I hope this finds you in good health anticipating a joyful summer. During the long weeks of spring isolation, the "La Concha" team decided that—thanks to your abundant submissions—we'd become a magazine. You responded so well to our themes for this issue that our submission form collapsed! Apologies to those who tried but couldn't submit. We've fixed the problem (fingers crossed). Please keep your submissions coming.

A magazine, from the French, means "storehouse." This "La Concha" is just that—ideas to keep your Camino spirit alive, inspiration in stories of spiritual development along the Camino, three book reviews and a poem. You'll also find:

- A close-up of four of the 17 grant awards for 2020 that your membership dues and donations have made possible;
- Our chapters report for 2019 plus articles from chapters about how they gather pilgrims together during this pandemic;
- First-person accounts from three pilgrims who decided to become Lifetime members of American Pilgrims on the Camino;
- Our hospitalero training program and latest class of trainees;
- A glimpse of the 2020 Gathering of Pilgrims in photographs; and
- Much more.

I'm delighted to welcome to the "La Concha" team Francine Mastini, who re-designed our publication; editors Julie Gianelloni Connor, Ana Rojas Holland and Thom Ryng; and proofreaders Bruce Ackerman and Kendra Wergin. They join our stalwart team of Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Beth Jusino and Zita Macy. All have my gratitude.

For the September issue, we invite you to send us in 100 words or fewer, your ideas about the re-opening of the Camino de Santiago, a multitude of routes, which itself does not close. But its infrastructure has been closed. What would you like to see, to experience on a re-opened Camino? What would make you happy to encounter when you return or visit for the first time? How will you keep yourself and others safe? What does social distancing on the Camino look and feel like to you? Read the story on page 10 then send your ideas to us using the **SUBMISSION FORM**. <https://form.jotformeu.com/americanpilgrims/la-concha-article-submissions> Deadline is August 21.

The theme for September is your post-pilgrimage processing of the Camino. What did it, does it, mean to you? Let us know in a maximum of 400 words. Follow the submission guidelines at [americanpilgrims.org](http://americanpilgrims.org). Deadline is August 21.

Wishing you a ¡Buen Camino! every day,

*Barbara*

Barbara Zang, Editor in Chief

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear Members,

I hope this issue of “La Concha” finds you safe and healthy. Like many of you, I am disappointed that I won’t likely be walking the Camino this year. I’m concerned for the people of Spain, people around the world and folks here at home. I’m thinking about the future of the Camino and the future of American Pilgrims on the Camino in this time of social distancing and isolation. Further, the uncertainty surrounding the effects of the pandemic, the duration of protective actions and timing of vaccine development recently drove the board of directors to cancel plans for the 2021 Gathering of Pilgrims in Asheville, NC. This was by no means an easy decision.

The resiliency, creativity and positive attitudes that our chapter coordinators, Facebook moderators and communities, our volunteers and members demonstrate as you adapt and find new ways to connect with the global community of pilgrims encourage me. Chapters host virtual gatherings. Our grants team is distributing \$55,000 to 17 individual projects in Spain. Our volunteers are reaching out to our international partners to help guide the future of the Camino. Additionally, our Facebook communities are finding creative ways to share experiences, including leading virtual pilgrimages, sharing memories from past Caminos and posting questions of the day to prompt storytelling. Plans are under way for a regional St. James Day Celebration in July 2021 in South Bend, IN. We’ll keep you informed as those plans develop...so stay tuned!

I remain inspired by Sara Gradwohl, board member and 2020 Gathering chair, and the Lake Tahoe chapter and other volunteers, musicians, presenters and members at the 2020 Gathering of Pilgrims in Lake Tahoe in March. We convened just before the pandemic accelerated. The Spirit of the Camino was evident throughout, even as we faced a late-breaking blizzard that transformed a warm, sunny landscape into a sudden winter wonderland. As the snow fell, Dan Mullins’ encore performance richly rewarded our hardy band of pilgrims. Simply unforgettable.

I am grateful, too, for your incredible support of the mission of American Pilgrims during these past months. Although credential requests are down for obvious reasons, you have all continued to establish or renew memberships and provide needed donations to meet the mission into the future. On behalf of the board of directors and all our volunteers, I offer you my sincere thanks for your generosity. When pilgrims are able to return to the Camino, the support of American Pilgrims and our partners around the globe will surely be needed and appreciated. We simply couldn’t do it without you.

Hang in there and stay healthy!

¡Buen Camino!

*Dave*

David Donselar



## MEMBERSHIP

### Your Membership Means So Much to So Many

*By Tom Labuzienski*

*South Bend, IN*

*For the membership team*

We value each and every member of American Pilgrims on the Camino. Your support means a lot, especially during these tough times of the pandemic. Your membership dues enable us to award competitive grants to albergues and Camino associations. Know that the recipients are most grateful for your generosity.

We hope that when the time comes to renew your membership, you’ll renew without hesitation. Three pilgrims recently became lifetime members. Read on to find out why they took this step.

**I’m not sure there is any great reason** why I joined at this particular time. I’m planning to do the Camino in a few years. I’ve attended a workshop held at REI about it, read, belong to the Facebook group for the local chapter, etc. I just like helping out groups I think are doing good work, like the Inland Empire chapter here in southern California. I plan on walking the Camino Francés. I’ll probably end up doing it by myself, but it would be nice if my wife or one of my kids would do it with me. But they ain’t walkers. For me, the walk would be a spiritual thing. My extended family is Catholic. I am Buddhist, but I have an appreciation for many religious things. So for me it would be walking meditation.

*--Shannon Hammock*

*Fontana, CA*

**My interest in becoming a lifetime member** is to contribute to American Pilgrims’ support of albergues and Camino associations in Spain and Portugal. I know how hard it will be for those who are economically dependent on annual pilgrimages to forgo their revenue for an entire year. I was inspired by the generous donations that American Pilgrims made to support the Camino’s infrastructure.

*--Shauna Riely*

*Issaquah, WA*

**This is a meaningful gift** for me as I stay home from work and follow what is happening here and around the world. I hope to inspire American Pilgrims on the Camino to find ways to reach out now when it is particularly difficult and make it easier for members

and others to help in Spain, France, Portugal, Italy and other countries where the medical and economic devastation continues along the Ways. I live in Olympia, WA, where the COVID-19 risk is real and immediate, but the confirmed cases are still small in number. Three family members are working, and REI is currently paying me to stay home. There are always reasons not to help or to wait awhile. But the need is great right now.

I’ve walked across Spain three times in the last two years, including an out-and-back in June-July 2019. Each time my experience was different. As I approached the Cruz de Ferro in July, I had an extended conversation with God (though I did all the talking) as I drafted a prayer without loopholes. I believe that holding on tight to our past often gives us excuses not to act. So my prayer described what I was giving up, what I acknowledged, and what I would embrace. Here it is:

I give up guilt and regret.

I acknowledge accountability for what I’ve done and not done.

I embrace opportunities to make amends, offer hope and act with love.

God knows I fail this test every day then get up and fail again. But I also have some successes as I follow this prayer and use it to guide me along the way. Perhaps it can help others, too.

*--Christopher Sullivan*

*Olympia, WA*



## How You're Helping (Re)build the Camino

By Ruben Mendoza  
Sacramento, CA  
For the grants team

American Pilgrims on the Camino offers competitive grants to non-private albergues and to charitable organizations to further develop the infrastructure of the Camino in Spain, Portugal and France. Each grant is limited to a maximum of \$6,000 US.



Parroquia de Aldunate exterior. Submitted photo.

In 2020 we awarded \$55,000 in grants to 17 projects from 22 applications requesting \$122,035. The 2020 grants varied from \$900 to \$5,000. Since 2008, membership dues as well as special donations designated for the Grants Program have enabled American Pilgrims to make grants in an amount exceeding \$350,000 in support of Camino projects. Thanks to all of our members for supporting this program.

The number of worthy applications always exceeds our available funds. However, many projects that will directly benefit pilgrims and the Camino will be supported. We highlight just four of these grants in this issue of "La Concha."

**Albergue Parroquial Santa María del Camino**, Carrión de los Condes, a well-known and beloved donativo albergue on the Camino Francés, will use its grant to fix roof leaks and perform other maintenance.

**Associació Gerunda: Amics del Camins de Sant Jaume** on Vía Heráclea (near border with France), Cataluña, received a second grant for their project to waymark the Vía Heráclea from Coll de Banyuls to Vilabertran. Their proposal highlights the need for waymarks 1.5 meters high across the Camino route. This effort is part of a three- to four-year plan to mark the road.

**Parroquia de Aldunate**, Lumbier, Navarra on the Camino Aragonés was offered a beautiful, if seriously dilapidated, former church to remake into a pilgrim albergue. The grant will fix the cupola of the choir section of the church. The church is on the Camino Aragonés in an area where there are no other albergues. A dedicated group of people is interested in rebuilding this church into a pilgrim albergue in the mold of Grañón and other venerable donativos.

**Albergue de la Santa Cruz** on Caminos Francés and Madrid in Sahagún will use its grant to help replace the hot and cold water plumbing in the albergue, repairs required by the Junta de Castilla y León. American Pilgrims funding will be added to other sources to complete the project.

We thank you for your support and good will as we continue to help improve the infrastructure of the Camino. 🙏



Parroquia de Aldunate interior: Church cupola to be repaired. Submitted photo.

## COVID-19

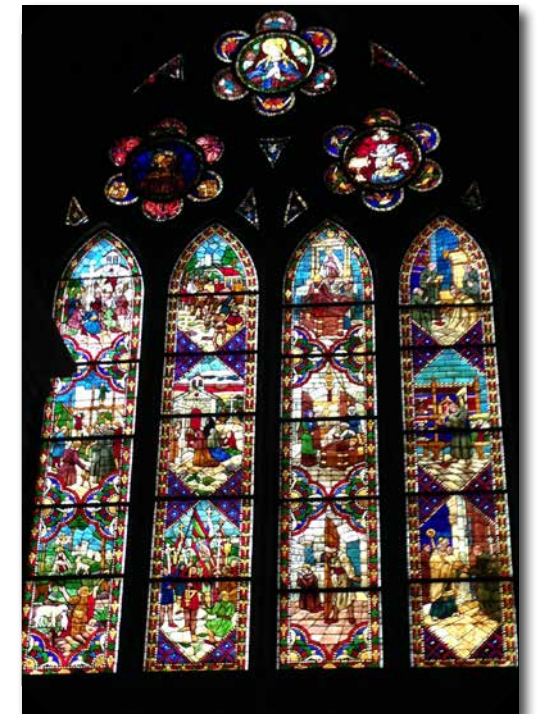
Gene McCullough  
Webmaster

Look for updated information about COVID-19 on the American Pilgrims on the Camino website under "News/Blog Posts." Information changes almost daily, but we try to keep the page current with links to authoritative sources such as the CDC, NIH, WHO and the U.S. State Department as well as several governmental agencies in Spain. You can also access "El País" in English for up-to-the-minute information about what is going on in Spain: <https://english.elpais.com>.

Periodically, we'll post on the website summaries of the most important news from Spain. For example, you'll find highlights of the four phases of the de-escalation of pandemic restrictions now under way in Spain. Look for "COVID-19: What You Should Know" at [americanpilgrims.org/covid-19-what-you-should-know/](https://americanpilgrims.org/covid-19-what-you-should-know/). 🙏

"People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in their true beauty is revealed only if there is light from within."

- Elisabeth Kübler-Ross



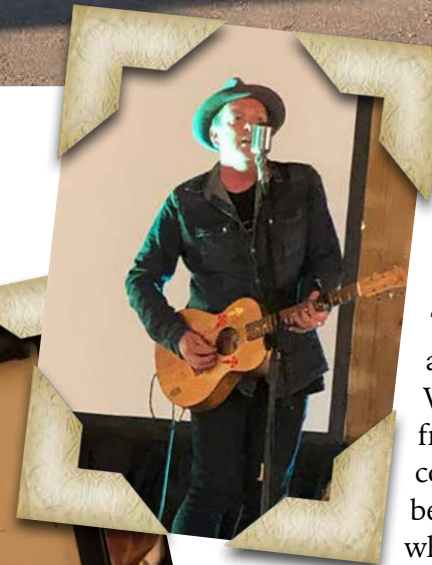
Santa Maria de León Cathedral.  
Photo credit Francine Mastini

### IN CASE YOU MISSED THESE...

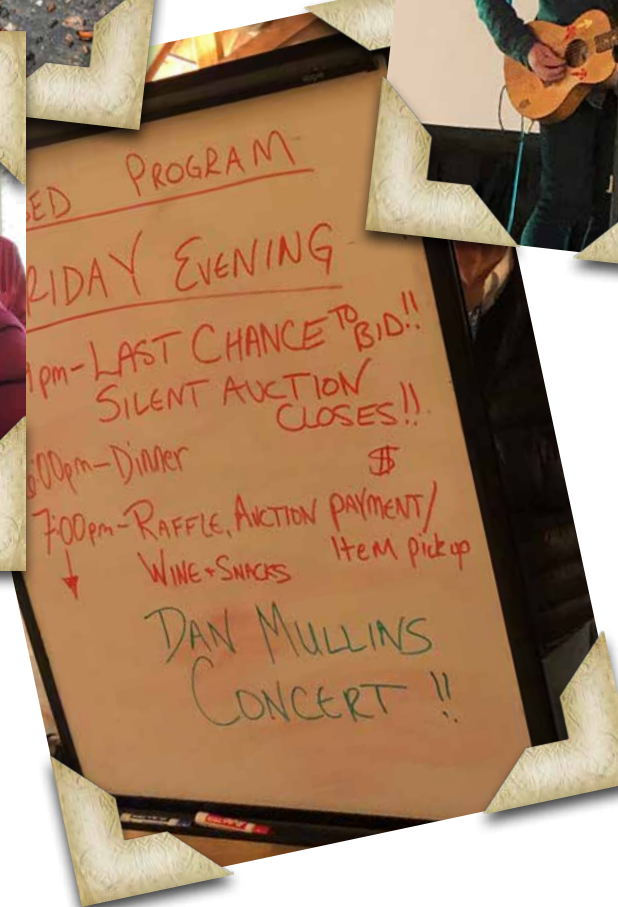
- ➔ Board member Bill Artz's interview with Ivar Rekve for the "[Camino Forum](https://youtu.be/CzEOhb4FCUw)" (<https://youtu.be/CzEOhb4FCUw>) in early June
- ➔ Board members Carmen Marriott and David Donselar appear on "Camino Talks" a program of "Follow the Camino" in mid-April: [Camino Talks](#) with Carmen Marriott and David Donselar - The Camino Spirit in the USA
- ➔ To support pilgrims around the world coping with the disappointment of pilgrimage postponements this season, the Dutch pilgrim association organized a May 16 concert of pilgrim songs performed by the carillonneur of the cathedral in Utrecht. The one-hour concert is available [here](#).



# The 2020 Gathering of Pilgrims



American Pilgrims are a hardy bunch. From March 12-15, we converged on the southern shores of Lake Tahoe for the annual Gathering of Pilgrims at Zephyr Point Conference Center. The sky was bright blue. The lake mesmerizing. Our lodges were comfortable. The communal meals jolly. We resisted hugging one another in greeting as the new coronavirus encroached. We washed our hands a lot, kept as much distance from one another as possible and used hand sanitizer compulsively. A full program of speakers and music began—and so did a blizzard. The blue sky turned white, creating a magical winter wonderland that was all ours. We sang and danced into the night, through the raffle and auction, and made our separate ways off the mountain at the end—grateful for another memorable time in the company of fellow pilgrims.



Those memories must sustain us until 2022. After much deliberation, the American Pilgrims board decided to postpone the 2021 Gathering of Pilgrims out of concern for the health and well-being of members. The planning for the next year's Gathering begins as that year's Gathering ends. It's a lengthy process made more complicated by the uncertainties of COVID-19. Will there be a vaccine? Will members want to travel? Will we be able to keep ourselves safe if the virus still lurks? Out of an abundance of caution, we agreed to skip the Gathering in 2021. See you in 2022! 🍷

Photo credits: Emilio Escudero, Thom Ryng and Francine Mastini



## WANTED: Your Ideas for a Re-opened Camino

By Carmen Marriott  
Tucson, AZ  
for the external relations team

On June 10, the Spanish authorities announced a coordinated re-opening of the Camino, the Cathedral and the Pilgrim's Office on July 1, 2020. Earlier in May officials from the Province of Galicia, Spain, organized a teleconference for global Camino associations to share information about the re-opening of the Camino. American Pilgrims on the Camino joined our counterpart associations from Australia, Brazil, Chile, Canada and several European countries in this discussion.

The Camino is important to the Spanish economy and to all of us who benefit so much from a Camino pilgrimage. Safety is the primary concern for all of us, pilgrims, hospitaleros, townspeople and local governments.

What do we know so far about the re-opening?

- Businesses must be prepared to implement all safety measures before re-opening to make it easier for pilgrims to plan their trip.
- Public albergues/hostels will return to activity gradually depending on each region's supply. This should provide some relief to the private sector, which has suffered severe economic impacts.
- The Camino Seguro program, a safety protocol, is expected to be approved soon. This program is intended to integrate support services for pilgrims across the various layers of infrastructure, including uniform requirements for hygienic-sanitary measures for workers of albergues and other lodging establishments.
- Six million euros has been allocated to support Camino-related businesses to adapt to the new requirements.

Much is still unclear.

- Should public and private albergues be subject to the same requirements as hotels?
- How do we ensure safe and sanitary albergues for all pilgrims?

- What happens if someone has or contracts COVID-19? Will there be contact tracing?
- Donativo albergues unique to the Camino de Santiago don't compete with other establishments. They provide lodging to pilgrims on a first-come, first-served basis, irrespective of a pilgrim's financial means. What should be done to ensure donativos don't disappear as a result of the hardships COVID-19 imposed?
- Should pilgrims be allowed to drop in an albergue without a reservation?
- Should temperatures be taken at the albergue door?
- What about cleaning and disinfecting the sole bathroom that serves 15-20 pilgrims?
- And what about communal meals?
- How can we social distance when 30 people may be sleeping in the same room?

The Spanish authorities recognize that with new information coming out every day about COVID-19, a strong, dependable official voice is necessary to communicate with the pilgrim community. We are hopeful that the final guidance in the Camino Seguro program will answer these questions.

We in the global pilgrim community will continue to meet by teleconference. We will keep our members up to date on our discussions about the re-opening of the Camino.

We all have a role to play in ensuring that when the Camino is ready to re-open, that it be done at the right time and with the right measures in place. Although the current pronouncement is that Spain will open to international travel in early July, little detail has been provided. Dream your dreams but wait to make your plans until it is the right time.

In the meantime, we invite you to send us your ideas in 100 words or fewer about what a re-opened Camino should look like. What do you need to know or want to see before you make a decision to start your Camino pilgrimage? Send your ideas to us by August 21 for the September issue of "La Concha" using [this online form](#). ☞



We congratulate the latest class of hospitalero trainees! March 2020 at Zephyr Point Conference Center, Zephyr Cove, NV.:

Adelina Aramburo  
Jeffrey Bray  
Nina Burgeno  
Martha Lee Child  
Kathryn DeWitt  
Philip Iriarte  
Bob Loew  
Sue Lopez  
Francine Mastini  
Scott McLaughlin  
Katherine Ollenbrook  
Mark Peterson  
Thomas Prez  
Julio Ribera  
Becky Rush-Peet  
Thom Rying

Pictured left with instructors Daniel DeKay and Martha Crites

## Answering the Call to Serve as an Hospitalero

By Thom Rying  
Tacoma, WA

Before we had even finished our first Camino in 2013, my wife, Francine, knew she wanted to give back to the Camino by serving as an hospitalera. She's the one who invites you in and gets you chatting while she puts on the kettle. If you're here for more than an hour or so, prepare to be fed. I'm much less gregarious. I wasn't convinced.

The first pilgrim hostels were Benedictine monasteries, and both Francine and I are Benedictine Oblates. We try to live the Benedictine life in the context of the world rather than the cloister. One of the cores of Benedictine spirituality is hospitality. Even so, it was only after our third Camino that I felt the call to serve in this

way. The Camino gave us a great gift, a gift we must hand on.

We took the hospitalero training in March, just before the Gathering of Pilgrims. There were 16 in our class with two amazing instructors, Daniel De Kay and Martha Crites. We spent three days in a lovely lodge that resembled an albergue, complete with common room, kitchen and communal bathrooms.

So what did we learn? I've got a thick notebook full of hospitalero principles, conflict resolution and troubleshooting procedures, spiritual helps and even recipes. We also gained insight into the hard work required to be a successful hospitalero.

Some of the deeper lessons we learned were those of hospitality and flexibility. How do you best practice hospitality? When must you stick to the letter of the rules, and when can you be flexible? How flexible?

Perhaps the most important thing we learned was this: An hospitalero is not the main character in the story of a pilgrimage. It is always the pilgrims' story, and you're just one of a vast panoply of supporting characters helping them live this adventure. Give them a place of welcome, a place of rest and respite. In the morning, cheer them on their hero's journey. And then get to work cleaning and preparing for the next wave of pilgrims. ☞



## HOSPITALERO CORNER

"It don't cost very much for you to place a gentle touch,  
for you to give a glass of water unto a pilgrim  
who's in need of such..."

-T.A. Dorsey

### Hospitalero Training in the Time of COVID-19

By Daniel De Kay  
Sebastopol, CA

"It don't cost very much for you to place a gentle touch, for you to give a glass of water unto a pilgrim who's in need of such..." The words of this sweet gospel song, "It Don't Cost Very Much," by T.A. Dorsey capture the essence of what it means to be an hospitalero.

Many of us have been those thirsty pilgrims, and many of us have been those who offer a glass of water and a gentle touch. The Camino impacts us all in profound ways. Perhaps you've made plans to walk this year or plans to volunteer somewhere on the Camino. We want to keep the Camino in our lives however we can, and now our world's been turned upside down by a virus we cannot see. We've been quarantined, we don't go out without a mask, and we keep our distance, even from friends. Like so much else in our lives, this new situation challenges American Pilgrims' Hospitalero Training program.

We don't know when Spain will again be open to international travelers. And we don't know all the ways in which albergues will be impacted by whatever the "new normal" is. As the year progresses, we will be following the political, health, social and logistical changes on the Camino with an eye to how our hospitaleros might fit into the new landscape.

The safety of our trainers and members is paramount. In considering the changing health, travel, economic and social impacts of the virus, the hospitalero training committee has decided not to pursue further trainings in 2020.

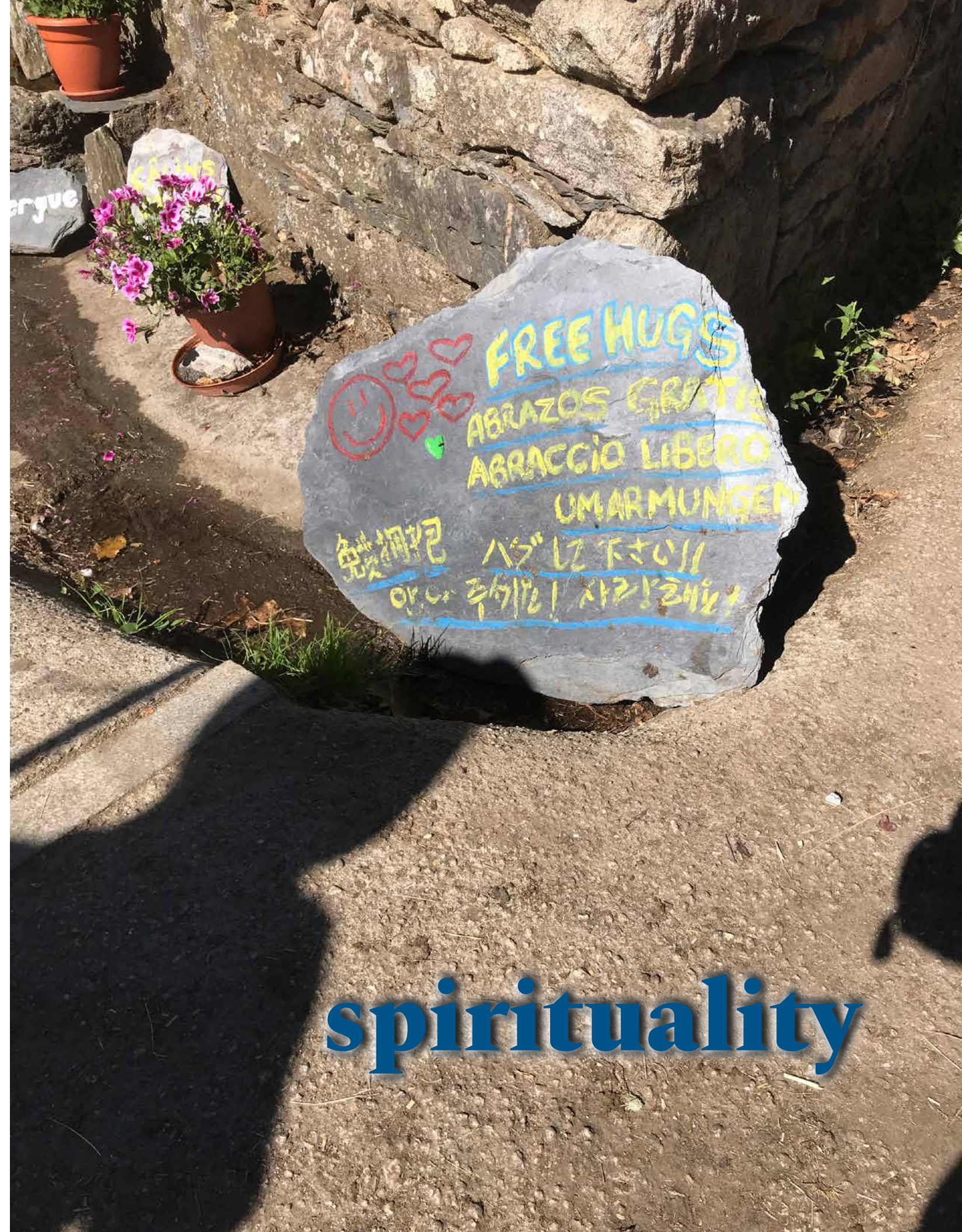
We hope to schedule hospitalero trainings beginning in mid-2021. Local chapters wishing to have a training in your area are encouraged to contact [hospitalerotraining@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:hospitalerotraining@americanpilgrims.org) for ways in which you can assist us in organizing a training.

And for now, what to do? Let the gifts of the Camino guide our lives, our decisions, our outlook. Practice being pilgrims at home, in your community. And stay in touch! Write a story for "La Concha." Put up a yellow arrow in your heart. Invite pilgrims in.

Whatever the new normal turns out to be, there *will* be a place for hospitaleros. What that looks like remains in the realm of the unknown. Whenever that door opens, we will walk through and together take part in creating the future of the Camino. We hope you will be there with us! ☪



A glass of water for the pilgrim.  
Photo by the author.



# spirituality



## Spiritual Lessons of the Camino

By Linnea Hendrickson  
Albuquerque, NM

With the death of my husband two and a half years before I departed on my first Camino, a light had gone out of my life. I'd lost the person who loved me best, and with whom I had shared everything for 30 years. What was the meaning of life without him? Ed had been my anchor, my best friend, my life's companion, my center and my rock.

My Camino was both a good-bye and a beginning. I set out on a new life, walking alone on the relatively untraveled route from Le Puy-en-Velay, France. No Ed to bail me out in times of trouble. No Ed to share my joys, my sorrows and my frustrations.

Despite my fears and sometimes panic, I trusted God would take care of me. Whatever was going to happen would happen. Much was out of my control: ATM machines did not work, the train didn't go through, I arrived in the dark and couldn't find the hostel, my trekking poles would not lock into place and I missed a turn on my first day of walking. I was alone, and not everyone was friendly. But sometimes strangers — Camino angels — came to my rescue. I found freedom in being on my own, setting out in an unknown land, with everything I would need for the next six weeks on my back. I was a pilgrim, walking in the footsteps of so many who had walked before me.

As I walked, forgotten French words and phrases surfaced

from buried recesses within me. Memories reawakened by sights, smells and sounds along the trail. I found myself remembering people, events and places from throughout my life. I would sometimes find myself in tears, sometimes laughing out loud and singing at the joy and freedom of walking — of feeling the earth beneath my feet; the sun, wind, rain and snow on my face; seeing beauty all around me, not knowing what I would encounter around the next bend or over the next hill. Life was so simple. No dithering over what I should do and whether I was meeting my responsibilities or the expectations of others. All I needed to do was put one foot in front of the other, keep my body going and find something to eat and a place to sleep at the end of the day.

I feared I might find walking drudgery, and indeed sometimes the last miles of the day seemed so long and hard, I thought I might expire before they did. As exhausted and sore as I might be in the evening, each morning I awoke refreshed, full of energy and anticipation after a much longer sleep than I ever had at home, eager to put on my boots and see where my feet would take me that day.

What did I learn?

- Let go. There is only so much I can control.
- Take it one step, one day at a time.
- Rejoice in the moment.
- Know that the hard times, the moments of sadness and the times of panic are

The author standing in front of the doors of the cathedral in Pamplona.



opportunities for growth.

- Sometimes I have to be at the end of my rope with hope extinguished before I can recognize an angel has been sent to help me, and I am not really alone.

I have since remarried and walked Caminos with my new husband. I have learned that walking day by day with a loved one presents different challenges than walking alone. We bring some of the safety and some of the responsibility of home with us when we walk with another, and we need to negotiate between I and we, us and me.

What did I learn?

- Be patient.
- Compromise.
- Communicate.
- Love.
- We walk alone even when together. No companion can walk for us.

The pilgrim constantly walks through new landscapes. When we stay at home, it is an illusion that nothing changes. Change is constant, even when we stay put. Pilgrimage helps us recognize that sometimes we are the tree standing by the water, and sometimes the passing stream. What remains forever? ☪

## The Spirituality of Camino Friendships

By Ted Hudson  
Whitinsville, MA

Let me first say that I'm not a person of faith. I didn't do the Camino because of deep religious convictions or in hopes of drawing closer to my faith. I did it for the challenge, to see Spain, to become immersed in another culture for a few weeks. My expectations were closer to trepidations, as I had never done more than five days backpacking, and I wasn't sure how much of a problem my near total lack of Spanish would be.

I left from St. Jean Pied de Port on April 20, 2018, eager to conquer the Pyrenees. I had reservations at Roncesvalles that night and anticipated a tough climb. It was, and although elated that I had made it, I was distressed by the number of my fellow hikers obviously suffering along the way. They were blistered from too-new boots, exhausted from being ill-prepared for the trail, cramped and dragged down by a kit burdened with non-essentials. I carried the pack of a man literally half my age for the last seven or eight kilometers so he could shamle into Roncesvalles. He dropped out that very same day. He was the first of several fellow pilgrims I got to know who then left the Camino with great disappointment but greater relief.

It's a long haul.

I'm comfortable with myself. Being alone is not at all intimidating, and I had no expectation of anything

else. And then I started meeting people. On the third day, I walked with a French physician from Zurich, and on the next day we were joined by a librarian from Sweden. The three of us became companions, then friends and walked together for almost two weeks before they each had to return home to work and family. We are still in touch.

Henri and Johanna were just two of many people I walked with, ate and drank with and shared a crowded albergue room with. My spiritual experience was that of friendship with many people brought closer by having the same objective, often for different reasons, but the same nonetheless.



Johanna and Henri, Camino friends near Puente la Reina, Spain, April 23, 2018. Photograph by the author.

I met and shared the path with pilgrims from 29 countries in the 30 days I was on the Camino. It was an experience I'll never forget; the memories fill my consciousness like a haunting. I plan on returning to Spain and the Via de la Plata to walk to Santiago with my new friends that I'll meet along the way. ☪



## The Inner Pilgrimage

By Megan Muthupandiyan  
Elm Grove, WI

It is three a.m. again. Using the same economy of movement and sound that I adopted before daybreak on the Camino, I feel for my wool sweater and slip it on. Then I silently slip out the door of our cabin, Compostela. The gravel crunches beneath my feet. The forest is alight with stars.

During quarantine, we have been residing in the Nicolet National Forest, on the bank of the Wolf River in northeastern Wisconsin. We wake early, take a light meal, work for seven or eight hours, break bread together, read or tell stories, and retire before the sun sets.

When I named Compostela I never imagined it would be the space where an inner pilgrimage would unfold, but the Way has made itself visible here these past months. From the very beginning of the pandemic, I have felt myself moving back into the liminal space of the pilgrim, re-embracing the silence that instructs. Physically and spiritually departed from both home and community, I find myself greeting strangers with the fierce courtesy of fellow pilgrims when we meet.

And I am not alone.

Above me, Menkent, the shoulder of the Centaur, burns clear white against the blue-black sky. I take a photo and send it to my best friend, who lives outside

of Rome. "I am watching the stars," I type. He responds almost immediately. Not asking what I am doing up at that hour but to affirm the beauty that we are experiencing, the soul work that we are undertaking under quarantine.

These past few months we have each been finding ourselves engaged in our own inner pilgrimages. "This morning I was thinking of how surreal the whole situation is," he admitted one week into Italy's lockdown. "But then I thought that it's like being in a pilgrimage. I felt very

much like I felt when I was on the Camino. That this is a test."

I would call it a centering. Now is a time of inner harvesting, to borrow the words of the Irish poet John O'Donohue. I find myself continually sorting and cellaring the fruits of my experience on the Camino and finding that those fruits are providing ample sustenance right now. One day I will return from this field of stars to the one that it is named for, the soul work presently being done having taken up more space within me. ☞



The author, at right, with her best friend Luca De Angelis, between Zubiri and Pamplona as they walked the Camino Francés in June 2017. Since the beginning of the COVID crisis, they have both felt engaged in inner pilgrimages. Photograph by Sonali Muthupandiyan. .

## A Journey of Perseverance

By Rosa Diaz  
Hialeah, FL

In 2009, I was on Google and stumbled upon an ancient route across Spain that was gaining popularity for hiking enthusiasts. I was not a hiking enthusiast, but it intrigued me.

A year later, I felt compelled to watch "The Way," elated to find a movie about the route that had come up in my search a year before. I instinctively knew I had to go there, but there were obstacles. My husband had just been diagnosed with terminal cancer, I had a full-time job, and I was facing some difficult times ahead. A walk across Spain was not on my horizon.

In those days, I was just learning that the Universe has a sense of humor.

Fast forward to 2016. I watched "The Way" again with my mom. As expected, she loved the movie. "What are you waiting for?" she asked me.

Those who have walked the Camino de Santiago say your Camino starts on the day you start

"Always remember you are  
braver than you believe,  
stronger than you seem, and  
smarter than you think."

– Christopher Robin

preparing for it. This was certainly true for me. During the next 24 months, I lived in a new reality. There was research, preparation and training. The South Florida Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino welcomed me and provided mentorship. I am infinitely grateful for these folks, now my friends, for their advice and assistance up to the day I left for my Camino.

On a late August evening, I arrived at my first albergue in Leon, Spain, and began my Camino the following morning with excitement and trepidation.

I was unprepared for the impact this journey would have on me. I had never been able to understand total physical collapse – something that is within my experience now. Each day I gathered my belongings and walked into the predawn darkness for another 13-15 miles, ready to face my fate. I sauntered through a still and serene universe. Arriving each afternoon at a different albergue, stupefied with fatigue, I would hit the rickety aluminum bunk bed like a dead fish.

There were entire days without the scent of humankind. Other days, I shared the Camino with pilgrims. The rhythmic pounding of our staffs hit the ground as if an invisible conductor kept the beat.

When I reached Santiago de Compostela on the 14th day of my journey, I experienced a profound sense of loss, knowing it had come to an end. I will always be grateful for this remarkable adventure. With every step, I was practicing the art of being alive. ☞





## Walking to Alleviate Karma of my Ancestors

By Barbara Wood  
Portland, OR

I had a plan to heal ancestral wounds as I started my first Camino in September 2015. Each morning I picked up a stone to carry for a particular person, often my mother, who was being tested for cancer. As I walked, I embedded in the stone my prayers to relieve any negative karma for that person. At day's end I left that stone on a kilometer marker.

Before long, blisters shredded the soles of my feet. I had blisters in all the usual places, plus under and between my toes, on the

outside of my heel and a particularly persistent one on the foot bed just behind the toes of my right foot.

Each morning I doctored my feet. I then set out, each step causing pain. I did this daily for three weeks. Tears flowed endlessly as I became as a conduit for the healing of my family's dysfunctional lines. On the final day of this practice, I selected a hefty stone for my mother's ancestral line, which was ground zero for some of the most dysfunctional behavior I've ever

known. Despite my 30+ year career in social services focused on child abuse, domestic violence and anti-poverty, my own family offered me some of the most challenging behaviors.

I knew when I set that final hefty stone down that I was "done" with this practice. I resolved to walk only for myself; to find joy, grace, laughter and connection. I wanted to feel the full experience rather than individual steps. I vowed to appreciate, be grateful and to love. It was like starting my second Camino. Then came the magic, and the reason I write.

Within two days, every single one of my blisters was gone! My soul had miraculously healed my soles. I now walked 15-18 miles instead of only 10-12 during the blister period. The walk was still challenging as my pilgrimage intertwined with news from home. In Navarete, I learned my mother had cancer; in Belorado, that it was pancreatic cancer; and in Boadilla, that it was Stage 4. She started chemo when I was in Burgos. I sobbed harder than ever a few days later in Castrojeriz when I learned she'd stopped chemo.

The practice of carrying stones to heal the karma of my ancestors ended after three weeks, but the spiritual purpose of my Camino remained paramount. ☸



Kilometer marker with stones after a day's walk to relieve ancestral karma, Spain 2015. Photograph by the author.

## My Musical Camino

By Tom Ayres  
Kensington, CA

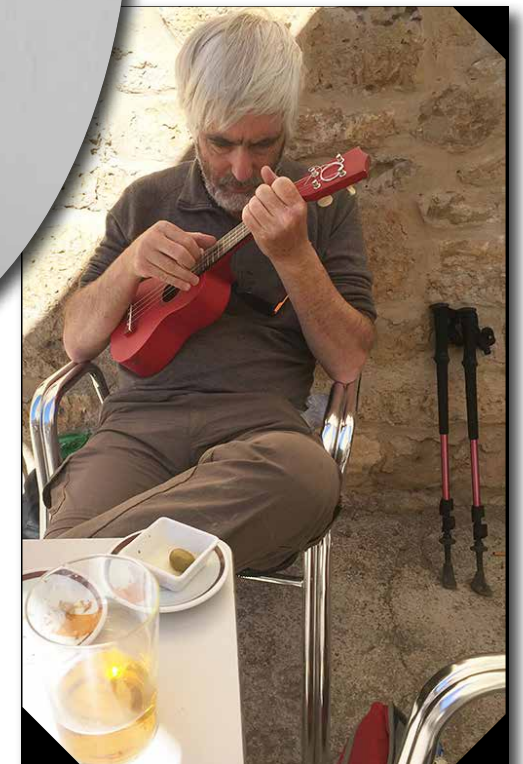
I've had several memorable musical moments along the 600+ kilometers spent on portions of the Camino in France, Spain and Portugal. There was the time a borrowed guitar at a small farm albergue in Portugal led to a night of song and dance among the pilgrims and hosts. The sound of a lone voice singing in a small chapel along the way. The many musical treats in Santiago de Compostela. And just once, I heard Ultreia sung, at the monastery and albergue in Conques, France.

After many days of walking without music on my most recent Camino, I was going through my typical withdrawal symptoms, craving some outlet. Without finding music around me, I had to reach inside myself to find the music. Sometimes a song begins spontaneously, and I improvise many verses which disappear as they pass through me, leaving only an echo within or a few lines and a bit of melody. Born from my own trials and aspirations, these songs retain a power of invocation for me.

Another way I draw music forth from within is by playing an instrument. Although a guitar has been my primary vehicle for musical travel, it is not a good choice for a walking pilgrimage. But I needed the feel of fingers on strings, and in Figeac, France, 200 kilometers southwest of Le Puy-en Velay, I paid €25 for a soprano ukulele. Less than 2 feet long,

less than a pound in weight, this humble toy-like wooden instrument rode on my back every subsequent day on the Camino, emerging at lunch or other breaks. The sounds I coaxed from it were far from beautiful, but it felt wonderful to me, mind and fingers working together to produce organized sounds.

Music enriches my experience of travel. Music is the closest I come to religious experience, bringing me at times joy, solace, tears or awe. Although I seek local music wherever I go – from street musicians to cafés to concerts to church services – I can only count on occasional tastes in that way. But carrying songs within me and a small instrument on my back help keep me whole and healthy amid the ups and downs of pilgrimage travel. ☸



Ukelele purchased on Camino in Figeac, France, September 2018. Author, at right, on a break on the Camino Frances. Photos submitted by the author.



## Ashes in O Cebreiro

By Rosco Tolman  
Ellensburg, WA

While visiting friends in Spain years ago, shortly after my mother's death, I visited O Cebreiro and lit a candle in the small church there in her memory. Two years ago, my wife, NaDine, passed away. I returned to O Cebreiro and once again lit a candle.

Upon returning to my home in Washington State, I felt that I must return and walk the Camino Francés in NaDine's memory, which I did last year at age 82. I carried some of her ashes in my backpack as far as O Cebreiro, and her daughter Lynn, who joined me there, and I scattered them under the trees in front of the church. We were accompanied by Lynn's husband, Don, my Spanish friend, Carlos, and several new Camino friends.

## An Inner Wisdom to Persevere

By Richard Rindone  
Santa Fe, NM

With my 82nd birthday just around the corner, completing the Camino was important to me. But later, when friends would ask me how my Camino was, I found it difficult to answer. It is hard to relate the experience in only a few sound bites. It's sort of like running a marathon. You don't think about what you are doing, you just do it. And the Camino is doing "it" day after day after day. You saddle up every morning and get going. Some days it felt like a huge success to stop for the night in one piece. For me, that meant bicycling on those days in the mountains where I had difficulty with some steep climbs. Those tough days were a test of my physical and mental abilities, and I found I was able to keep going even though my mind would sometimes interfere by whining. I knew if I let it, it would whine me into submission.

At such times you have to listen to your inner wisdom and pay more attention to your body. If your body needs food, give it food. If your body is thirsty, give it water. If you are on a bicycle and struggling up yet another steep mountain and your mind says "I can't go on anymore. Let's go back



The author, far right, with Camino friends from Denmark, Taiwan and various states of the United States scattering his wife's ashes on October 8, 2019, at O Cebreiro.

In the not too distant future, some of my ashes will join NaDine's.

It was one of the most profound and meaningful experiences of my life. ☯

down the hill and find a taxi," that is your body saying "I need some rest." Inner wisdom says "Stop. Let the body rest. Give it some food and plenty of water. Then, pick yourself up and keep moving forward, even if you have to push the bike because the way to Santiago is up this mountain. There is no going back. And quit whining." So, up the mountain and on to Santiago. And when you get there, you truly know your Camino was worthwhile. ☯



Between Foncebadón and Ponferrada on the Camino Francés, August 2018. Photograph by the author.

## Pilgrimage and Pandemic: Lessons Learned

By Marty Stortz  
Minneapolis, MN

Lockdown is not what I wanted to do this summer. I'd hoped to hike Camino del Norte. If this is not the life I chose, but the one I've been given, what does pilgrimage teach me about pandemic?

**First, expect disruption.** Both pandemic and pilgrimage confound routine. That daily round of work and workouts, outings and parties, is gone. I struggle to find a new rhythm. Just when I think I have one, a new scare or a state order dictates more disruption.

But then pilgrimage is an exercise in disruption. My Camino routines altered with injury or weather or an albergue already full. I gained practice in the virtue of "what-the-hell-ness," an ability to "go with the flow," even in gale force winds. Plan B yielded to Plans C, D, and...Q, until something entirely outside my playbook intervened. Just as my buddy and I were about to leave the aforementioned albergue, the hospitalero took us aside: "I have a friend who has a

casa rural. It's one kilometer away on a sheep farm, but he has a spare room, and he'll pick you up." That night we sipped red wine, ate lamb and were grateful.

**Second, tend to bodies.** Pandemic puts all bodies on the front line. I'm hyper-aware of mine, how close and how far away it is from someone else's. I track my need for sleep, food and water because staying healthy is the only way I can care for myself, the people I love and the people who have to interact with me.

Pilgrimage was great training for this. In a world that values savvy and smarts, pilgrimage honors grit. Without tending our bodies, there was no way forward. I re-learned the importance of drinking before I was thirsty, eating before I was hungry, resting before I collapsed. An English pilgrim put it well: "All we do is sleep. Eat. Walk. Repeat." Pilgrimage returned me to the simple elements of a good life: food, clothing, shelter and friends.



The author, Maty Stortz, in pre-pandemic days along the Camino Primitivo in 2013.

**Third, take the next step.** I yearn for the "new normal," but I only know that the old life is gone. No one knows what the New Life will look like. I only have the tasks of today. Like pilgrimage, this journey may not be about reaching Santiago, about arriving, but rather just taking the next step. ☯



## Soaring

On top of the meseta, my head is lifted high;  
My spirit soars just like the birds that all around me fly.

Self doubt and fear, such useless things,  
no room in my pack.  
Camino brings simplicity, just what's on your back.

Insecurities fly away, replaced by love and hope.  
The road ahead shows me the way,  
and teaches me to cope.  
And You oh Lord, alive in me, You are what matters most.  
You take away the doubt and fear of evil's deathly ghost.

*By Cathy Hollister  
Hermitage, TN*

## My Pilgrimage

*Bonnie Warren  
Santa Rosa, CA*

While walking the Camino de Santiago is great exercise, it's difficult to find a pilgrim with that single motive. While solitary pilgrims are rare, we each conduct our own personal and private pilgrimage, despite walking with friends and strangers. While we walk to attain our goal—arriving at the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela—our 30-plus days on the Way is never about reaching the destination. And, while countless other pilgrims have walked these pathways for centuries, we've chosen to be here because we were called to journey to this beautiful place to honor St. James.

The source of our faith doesn't matter. We're of Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Hindu or perhaps no religion. Nor does it matter who we are—we've

become Pilgrims. Pilgrim. Again and again, we're called by the title: Pilgrim. And, again and again we hear the freely given heartfelt greeting, farewell and blessing: ¡Buen Camino! Pilgrims receive it hundreds of times and offer it hundreds of times. ¡Buen Camino!

The Camino is made up of diverse people on a like-minded journey. We share our stories in small ways, through innocuous conversation asking: "Where are you from?" "Tell me the reason for your pilgrimage." Answers correlate to one word: faith. We don't only share our stories as we walk. We share them over a glass of beer at the end of a hot day, over the pilgrim menu at a café or a communal dinner hosted by albergue hospitaleros. The gift of anticipating what

each day will bring is refreshed each morning.

The Camino structure is efficient and welcoming. A bed, shower and laundry are standard. Choose among dorm-style albergues, hostels or hotels with private rooms. Meals are affordable, tasty, flavorful and filling.

Many villages and cities offer pilgrim Masses. Tiny villages can't always support a daily Mass, but often the sanctuary door is left open. My Camino included carrying a travel prayer book and New Testament, and I often read Evening and Morning Prayer privately. A district Bishop presided over one memorable and moving pilgrim's Mass, giving a special blessing to each pilgrim. ☞



## Camino Under Quarantine

By Leah Brockway  
Spokane, WA

Greetings from milepost 1722! From my home in Spokane, I would be far northeast on the cold Hudson Bay near to Mansel Island, Canada, on my virtual walk to St. Jean Pied de Port. A third of the way to St. Jean, this Camino constantly amazes me. The direct route takes me northeast to Baffin Island and the southern tip of Greenland. God willing, after I reach St. Jean virtually, I will actually walk the Camino Frances to Santiago in 2022.

A native of New Orleans, my meandering life led me in 1988 to Washington State. After retirement in 2013, my anticipated idyllic home life was short-lived. In 2019, the Spirit called me to walk, to walk from Spokane to Santiago de Compostela, virtually and actually. My virtual Camino began 417 days ago, when I started walking locally. Last fall, my walking was complicated by left heel injury. Now with physical therapy and spring weather, things are improving. Through it all, there is progress.

COVID-19 has changed all our lives, but the virtual Camino continues. I am isolated – I call it *Home Alone with House Cats*. My church doors were locked after Mass on March 17. Since then, I have livestreamed daily Mass with Pope Francis and Zoom all gatherings. When weather deters, I walk circles around my house. My neighborhood jaunts lead me to the homes of friends, where I wave safe greetings from the sidewalk. My local newspaper suddenly stopped printing Saturday editions. I wear a mask to the grocery store. Despite a glorious spring, we wait. My heart weeps over the nearly 325,000\* COVID deaths worldwide. *\*This figure was as of the date this article was submitted. Sadly, the death toll continues to rise.*

My nine-month retreat, Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life, which I mentioned previously, ended today on the Feast of the Ascension. Through it, I sensed St. Ignatius of Loyola and the other retreatants journeying with me for a time on this Camino. More important was the knowledge that God is with us each step of our Caminos. Everything

is part of the journey: companions, helpers, intrusions, diversions, delays, pain, perseverance, the beauty of creation, fast-slow, up-down and COVID-19. Let us walk to honor those stolen from us by the virus. At times, I think of Frodo and Sam, protagonists in the “The Lord of the Rings.” The Way is rarely without difficulty. I know many of you were planning to walk in 2020, but things change. That’s the Camino for you! Perhaps our paths will cross. God bless you. Love, Leah ☪

*Editor’s note: This is the fifth reflection from Leah Brockway about being a pilgrim in her own town as she walks daily to travel the collective distance, as the crow flies, from her home in Spokane, WA, to St. Jean Pied de Port (approximately 5,055 miles). This is her Camino for now. Ultimately, her goal is to walk 500 miles of the Camino Francés from St. Jean Pied de Port, arriving in Santiago to celebrate her 70th birthday in 2022. You will find Leah’s previous reflections in the June 2019, September 2019, December 2019 and March 2020 issues of “La Concha.”*



Self-portrait of the author walking on a spring day.

## Remaining Present in the Presence of God

By Ron Ottenad  
Long Beach, CA

The Camino invites us to be present in ways we do not always experience in everyday life. Worry about the future, or an inability to leave the past behind, can rob us of this presence. Walking the Camino helps us step back into the present physically, emotionally, relationally, mentally and spiritually. Here we are invited to open to the reality of our hearts. We are also given the opportunity to open to God and others. Through prayer, I posture myself to walk in this openness.

In the mornings, I leave early and walk alone. This gives me time to meditate and pray. My posture here is the same as David’s in Psalm 139, “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.” In the quiet, as the sun is rising and the world is still, I can perceive the reality of my heart. I can be honest with myself and God about what I find. I can let go of the past and lay down any worries about the future. I can lament, petition, trust and praise. As I do, my heart becomes rooted in the present.

By the time I stop for my first café con leche, I am ready for company. My prayer is, “Father, let me see the presence of your Son in those I meet and allow me to be His presence to them.” This prayer invites my heart to be open to how God might want to use others to shape my story, and how He might be inviting me to demonstrate His kindness, compassion and love to them. My heart opens to the reality that each



L’Église Notre-Dame-du-Bout-du-Pont, St. Jean Pied de Port, May 27, 2014. Photograph by the author.

interaction can be a divine appointment. I become expectant.

At night, I review the day in prayer. This “Prayer of Examen” is an opportunity to develop a deeper awareness of God’s presence and guidance. I thank God for the gifts of the day. I ask Him for discernment to recognize His presence and work. I focus on one or two moments or events, seeking to understand their impact and what God might be inviting me into through them. And finally, I talk to God about any intentions I will carry forward with me. This allows me to rest.

These prayers set the rhythm of my Camino. They open me to God and others and permit my heart to be responsive and present. ☪



## Lifted by the Weight of Words

By Laurie Ferris  
Oakland, CA

The Camino provides us the opportunity to adopt a new daily spiritual habit, such as journaling, prayer, meditation or scripture readings. One cannot live on bread and hiking alone!

Reflecting on my state of mind during each of my Caminos, I recall several approaches to enhancing my spirituality. Although the popular advice is to carry less, I couldn't resist sneaking something small into my backpack to remind me to do a spiritual practice each day. Instead of weighing me down, these tools spiritually lifted me up!

On my first Camino, I wanted to embrace the pilgrim lifestyle, so I focused on the bonus material in the guidebooks. I found John Brierley's "Camino Portugués" guide packed with historical and spiritual aspects of the route. Most notably, "the best kept Santiago secrets and little visited Monte Santiaguíño." "Camino Portugués My Way," which I purchased at the famous Livraria Lello bookstore in Porto, had fascinating tidbits but was a little bulky, so I did a pilgrim hack to reduce the weight.

For my second Camino, I enjoyed pulling a daily reflection card from "The Way of St. James" deck, purchased in Santiago. Continuing this

daily card tradition on my third Camino with the "Sacred Traveler" deck became a fun icebreaker. I had pilgrims I met pull a card while I read comments from the accompanying app. To reduce bulk, I brought only one card for each day of the Camino Primitivo.

In 2018, I'd committed to read scripture daily through the "One Year Bible" reading plan. Having made copies of readings for the month I was to travel and walk the Primitivo, I recycled the pages as I finished each day's reading—lightening my load each day.

For my Camino Invierno last year, I brought Karin Kiser's "Your

Inner Camino." As suggested by the author, each day I randomly opened it and pondered that particular point. I loved the contemplative activities in this booklet and the size—no paring needed!

I definitely think about what I want to work on before each Camino, and all these tools enhanced my experience. But there is also something to be said for just letting go and seeing what unfolds day after day. You can decide if you feel the need to bring a guide, prefer to write your own experiences in a journal or find a fresh way of spiritual connection.



Examples of contemplative cards the author used on the Caminos Inglés and Primitivo.

Next page: Along the Camino Francés in Galicia.  
Photo credit: Francine Mastini





# Your Camino On Ice



We wondered how members were keeping their Camino spirits alive during the pandemic. So many plans put on hold. So many airfare refunds to request. So many lodging reservations to cancel. We asked how you were keeping your Camino spirit alive, and you told us---you're walking, Zooming, reading, meditating, planning...and more. We're delighted to share your practices here. -The editors

**ON OUR CAMINO** Westchester, we walk with our kids. We stay close to home. At 170+ miles and counting, we are finding our way.

"Remember that wherever your heart is," Paulo Coelho writes, "there you will find your treasure." Our heart is in the journey - the Camino we walk now, the Spanish Camino we dream

of returning to, the inner Camino that calls us.

We keep the Camino spirit alive by staying fully alive ourselves - discovering, helping and listening - by treasuring this season even as we look ahead to the next.

Kristin DeCou  
Los Angeles, CA



The DeCou family, from left: Rob, Kalea and Hudson, who throws rocks on their walk along Bluff Creek Trail in Los Angeles, March 29, 2020. Photograph by the author.



George Greenia with sheep in Galicia, 2005. Photocredit: Tom Wood.

**ZOOM VIDEO USERS** get to choose a name to show with their image. After the closure of the Camino and cancellation of my summer plans, I signed my emails and Zoom sessions as *peregrino en paro*, "out of work pilgrim." A friend from Spain suggested *peregrino en pausa*, "pilgrim on pause," which works even better.

This current crisis does not harm infrastructure or Spain's momentarily hushed hospitality, a welcome more earnest now than in any previous moment in history. That stimulus check from the government? I'm going to spend it as a pilgrim as soon as I can undo the pause button and spring into action again.

George Greenia  
Williamsburg, VA

**MY PLAN** was to start the Via Francigena in April, 90 days from Canterbury to Rome. My life was oriented toward being on the trail now. I just turned 68, and I know how easy it is to lose physical strength. So, twice a week I make an aggressive walk at Enchanted Rock State Natural Area. I just read "We Are Pilgrims: Journeys in Search of Ourselves" by Victoria Preston. I practice French weekly via Skype with European pèlerins who will walk parts

of the way with me. Sharing stories with pilgrims keeps me up, so I've also been hosting the monthly Austin Chapter American Pilgrims on the Camino Happy Hour on Zoom.

Robert Deming  
Fredricksburg, TX



A self-portrait of the author on a steep climb out of Cahors, France, along the Camino Le Puy, September 2019.

Compostela Dreams Cafe photo credit: Thom Ryng





**THE “CAMINO SPIRIT”** is not particularly elusive, nor is it exclusive to the Camino. It is, however, difficult to live this spirit - especially when you’re off the Camino - because it is ultimately and simply about living in the moment. I keep the Camino spirit alive by trying not to control my surroundings, by not over planning, by trusting. I remember the insights and revelations from the Camino, as well as the people and places that communicated them to me. I walk, I meditate, I eat, and I sleep as if I were on Camino because I pretty much am. Then the Camino Spirit can then become a part of me, instead of something I’m trying to chase.

*Robert Scheckenback  
Commack, NY*

**LAST MONTH** I started my Camino from home. I take long walks in the neighborhood and explore streets I’ve never been on. I say hello to everyone I see, even if from a distance. I support my favorite family-owned eateries offering takeout.

My at-home Camino is also an exercise in reflection and prioritization, directing less of my attention toward the outside world and more on the inner one. It’s an invitation to slow down, connect with the people around me, tie up loose ends and projects, create space for the new and visualize the world I want to live in.

*Karin Kiser  
San Diego, CA*

**ON CAMINO**, we experience a transformative point in time. It’s the same now, so we’ve adapted our plans. My sister Amy and I have cancelled our Camino but not our Camino Spirit!

This is Amy’s first Camino. I send her a daily text with an arrow pointing to the route location and information about the town we would have been staying in that night. We take “phone walks” together that end with a libation. It’s part of the training, right? We plan a Zoom dinner for our “last night.”

We hope to go in 2021 but will be patient for the right time.

*Linda Smith  
Portland, OR*

**AS I HAVE EVERY YEAR** for the past decade, I was planning to walk the Camino this spring. Like many peregrinos sidelined by the pandemic, I take early morning walks. Years ago, at a school near my home, a Scout troop had developed a nature trail in an adjacent wooded area. I began to perform trail maintenance and, ultimately, armed with yellow paint, re-marked the trail as a mini-Camino. The Camino reverie this trail provides me is broken when I emerge onto the school playground and find no welcoming Spanish bar for a café con leche.

*Lynn Liptak  
Wayne, NJ*

**AS A SCHOLAR** who studies technology and pilgrimage, I’ve found creative, determined pilgrims developing alternatives to keep their Camino spirits alive. In a Virtual Camino group on Facebook, pilgrims walked or re-walked our Caminos, sharing photos and stories. In Zoom meetings, I’ve witnessed pilgrim camaraderie and vulnerability. I’ve made pilgrim connections, just as on pilgrimage. I’ve spent this time in isolation deeply contemplating my existence and future plans, just as I would have if I were in Spain.

Technology is often vilified when it intersects with pilgrimage, a profane encroachment into the sacred space. We’ve seen technology open new modes of possibility, as pilgrims connect across space and time to offer support, love and the shared experience of a global pandemic. And I, for one, am grateful.

*Roni Jackson-Kerr  
Tulsa, OK*

**I WALKED** the Camino from St. Jean Pied de Port in June 1976. After 44 years, you would think my memories of the road would have dimmed to the point of invisibility. On the contrary, I think about it nearly every day. My wife, who is now gone, shared that experience with me, and I remember her with every warm memory of the road.

My wish for you, who are coming after me, is that you will find the experience as fulfilling and lasting as I have.

*Dwain Colby  
Camano Island, WA*

Previous page: Along the Camino Francés in the vicinity of Manjarín, June 8, 2014. Photo credit: Carol Delaney, Providence, RI.



IN 2009, I had acted Helena, who wrote:

*I am Saint Jacques' pilgrim, thither gone:  
Ambitious love hath so in me offended,  
That barefoot plod I the cold ground upon,  
With sainted vow my faults to have amended.*  
(3.4.4-7)

In 2011, I viewed the Camino through the movie "The Way."

In 2012, when I directed "All's Well That Ends Well," I vowed to walk the Camino.

To keep my Camino spirit alive, I hike the Rockies, do 100 Sun Salutations a day and connect with experienced and aspirational pilgrims regularly as I train for the day when I become the pilgrim I have become.

Artemis Preeshi  
Fort Collins, CO

I WALKED the Camino in 2018 from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago. I planned on walking it again this April. My plane tickets were purchased. Then COVID-19 hit!

I decided to walk a "Camino" in my hometown. As I walk, I try to envision the sights, sounds and smells of my first Camino experience.

Soon I will finish my Camino in Hillsboro, OR. I hope to be walking again on the road to Santiago in the future. I love this quote: "The thing about walking is that at some point we get to where we are going." I will!

Tom Kohl  
Hillsboro, OR

IN PREPARATION for our first Camino in spring 2021, my husband and I are walking a virtual Camino in our own neighborhood. We track our daily mileage against John Brierley's "A Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago."

The pandemic both broadens and focuses our Camino considerations. Pre-pandemic, our preparations were of a personal nature: getting in shape, testing clothes and equipment, making arrangements for being on the road and away from home. With the pandemic, there are new, global considerations like public health, economic and social policies.

Our Camino will be shaped by the pandemic, but the pandemic does not deter it.

Jenny Dudley  
League City, TX

Next Page: Monte de Gozo at sunrise.  
Photo credit Thom Ryng.

JUST UNDER a year ago, I embarked on my first Camino. It began the moment I stepped out my front door, drove to Logan Airport, and flew across the ocean.

These days, I enjoy walking to a nearby hilltop park overlooking Boston, where I can see the Logan control tower. I sit on a bench and soak in the stillness of the morning, meditating or listening to Dan Mullins' podcast.

The setting reminds me of Monte do Gozo and seeing Santiago and its cathedral in the distance. Except that now the contrails of planes making pilgrimages to my city have disappeared like the Camino pilgrims.

Joseph Curro  
Arlington, MA

THE QUARANTINE, like the Camino, is a unique journey, an opportunity, a struggle, a seemingly impossible task. You are on this journey with other travelers...those who have gone before you, those on the path with you, and those who are yet to come.

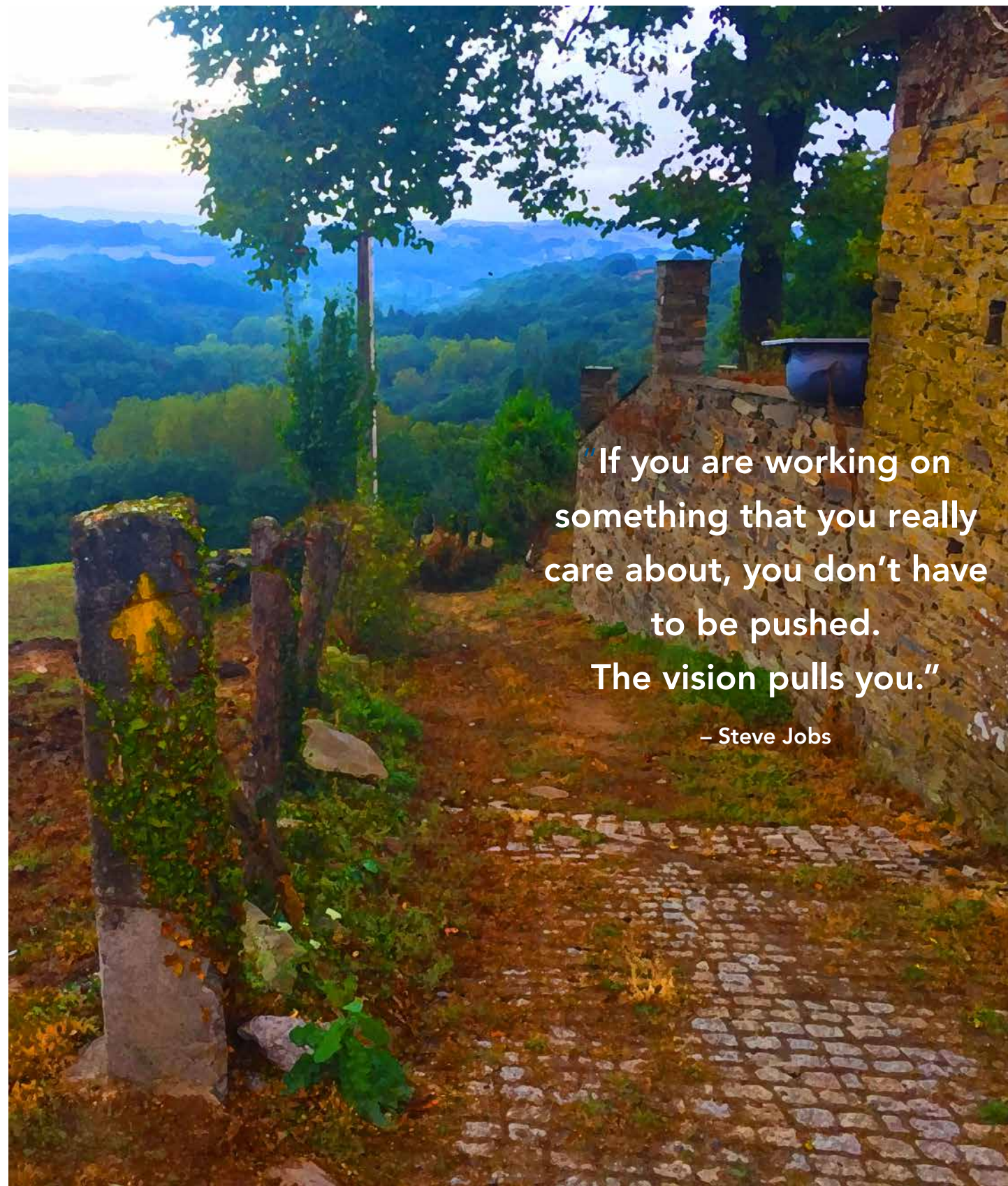
The quarantine, like the Camino, is hard at times, with some good each day, too. The company, the solitude, the sunshine, and at the end of the day, the glass of vino tinto and fellowship.

The saints who walk with you will guide, strengthen and love you on your walk and in your quarantine.

Michelle Perram  
Dayton, OH







"If you are working on something that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed.  
The vision pulls you."

– Steve Jobs

## Chapter News

## CHAPTER NEWS

### SE Michigan

#### Planning and Storytelling: Bookending the Camino Experience

By David Larwa, Brighton, MI and  
Paula Jager, Owosso, MI

In January and February, David Lawra gave presentations and led discussions about walking the Camino de Santiago at the REI in Ann Arbor, MI. David offered four evening sessions to acquaint people with Camino history and landscapes and offered insights about what it's like to be a Camino pilgrim. They discussed

preparations for the journey, including what backpacking gear might be needed. Prepared handouts were given to participants to help in their planning. Some 120 people attended David's four talks, and we know American Pilgrims on the Camino gained new members. Three of the sessions were held at REI, and the fourth was held at a local brew pub. We would like to thank REI for giving us this opportunity, and we look forward to this continued relationship.

On February 29, 2020, we had our First Annual Camino Storytelling Brunch. The brunch was held



SE Michigan chapter co-coordinator Paula Jager presenting shells to Thom Davenport and Elyse Connors at the Storytelling Brunch. Hamburg Public Library, Hamburg, MI, on Feb. 20, 2020. Photo by David Larwa.



at the Hamburg Township Library outside of Ann Arbor and was a great success. We set out tables with crusty bread and Spanish olive oil for dipping, Spanish cheeses, chorizo, two tortillas, two Camino cakes, coffee and hot chocolate.

Participants were asked to prepare one or two stories that illustrated the true nature

of the Camino. The stories people told came from the heart and reflected authentic pilgrim experiences and feelings including moments of triumph, humor, adversity and character building. What a great way to share and make new friends!

The event ended with a shell ceremony. We chapter coordinators and several guests gave readings, and we presented seven new pilgrims with their shells. This event was popular with those who participated, and it's certainly something we'll be repeating in years to come. 🐚



## Chapter Growth by the Numbers

### 2019 Annual Chapter Report Results

By Bill Artz  
Whiting, IN  
for the chapters team

Our overall number of chapters continued to grow in 2019, leading to a corresponding increase in chapter coordinators, chapter events and participants.

The number of chapters grew from 50 to 56 last year. Chapters now range across 33 states. We also now have 123 chapter coordinators, compared to 112 coordinators last year.

Chapter events and attendance also continued to expand and grow in 2019. Based on chapters' responses, there are 15,486 people on chapter mailing lists for an average of 329 per chapter. This is up over 2018 and 2017, where we had 11,367 and 7,786 people on chapter mailing lists, respectively. That's 227 per chapter in 2018 and 181 per chapter in 2017.

Chapters held a total of 875 discrete events for an average of 19 events per chapter in 2019. By comparison, in 2018 chapters held 781 discrete events, and in 2017 chapters held 528 events. This is an average of 18 in 2018 and 16 events per chapter in 2017. So, chapter events continue to do well! The events included hikes, information sessions, shell ceremonies, coffee meet-ups and group dinners.

Average chapter event attendance held steady at 20 people per event in 2019. In 2018, chapters had a total of 15,233 attendees, and in 2017 chapters had 10,032 attendees at events.

#### Gathering responses

Thirty-seven chapters have at least one coordinator who has attended a Gathering of Pilgrims and/or coordinators workshop. This was up from last year. Also, 38 chapters expressed an interest in attending a regional Gathering.

#### Hospitalero Training

Twenty-six chapters have at least one coordinator trained as a hospitalero. This is also steady from last year.

#### Communication Tools

Chapters predominantly use Gmail and Mail Chimp to communicate with their chapter participants. Nearly 50% use both Gmail and Mailchimp.

- Gmail – 69%
- Mailchimp – 79%
- Meetup – 14%
- Survey Monkey – 12%

Ninety percent of the responding chapters – all but four – maintain a Chapter Facebook page, and 85% have accessed the chapter coordinators Facebook group. 📺



Chapter coordinators enjoying well deserved refreshments at the workshop at Zephyr Point Conference Center, Zephyr Cove, NV in March 2020. At lower left is Frank Coughlin (Lake Tahoe chapter) and from left, Amy Horton (St. Louis), Susan Corwin (Atlanta), Vince Pratt (Charlotte) and Linda Smith (Portlandia).

Twenty-four chapter coordinators from 17 chapters participated in the March 11-12, 2020 workshop at Zephyr Point Conference Center, Zephyr Cove, NV.



Chapter Coordinator Participants in March 11-12, 2020 Workshop at Zephyr Point Conference Center, Zephyr Cove, NV

Luana Duggan, Linnea Hendrickson (Albuquerque), Susan Corwin (Atlanta), Denise Palma (Austin), Phil Woodford (Boise), Vince Pratt, Mike Gardner (Charlotte), Gene McCullough, Joyce De Toni-Hill (Colorado Front Range), David Cook (Hoosiers), Peggy Sue Lansing, Cathy Sackett (Inland Empire), Frank Coughlin (Lake Tahoe), Sharon Fields, Dave Combs (Old Pueblo), Robert MacMillan (Philadelphia), Linda Smith, Rachel Ganzon (Portlandia), Kerri Daniels (Sacramento), Amy Horton (St. Louis), Marcella Theeman (Southern Oregon), Joni Melville, John Melville (Tampa Bay), and Harry Clyde (Western Pennsylvania).



## NorCal Chapter Enjoys a Virtual Book Club

By Laurie Ferris  
Oakland, CA

I would have been walking a Camino in May, so to maintain the pilgrim spirit, I started a book club for the Northern California chapter. “Your Inner Camino” by Karin Kiser proved to be the perfect book to read during this time of lockdown. Even though our weekly meetings are held virtually via Zoom, it is great to see familiar faces and meet new pilgrims. Participants enjoy the opportunity to ponder the topics that resonate with them. Just for kicks, I created a credencial complete with sellos and a “BookClubStella” for pilgrims who complete the virtual last 100 kilometers. 🍷



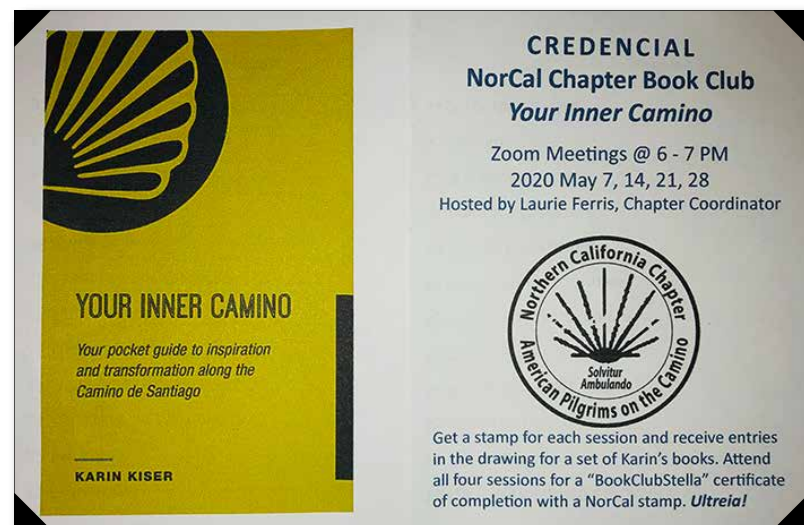
## Lake Tahoe Chapter Shares a Song

David Jennings and Frank Coughlin, coordinators of the Lake Tahoe Chapter, sent us this message, which we suspect they’ve shared widely with their chapter’s participants.

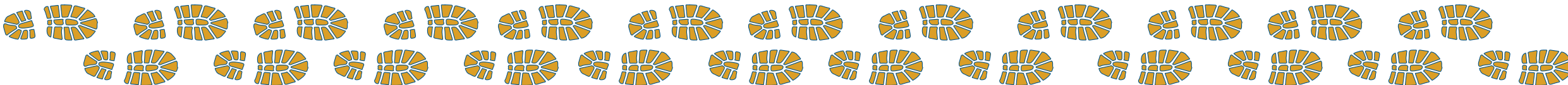
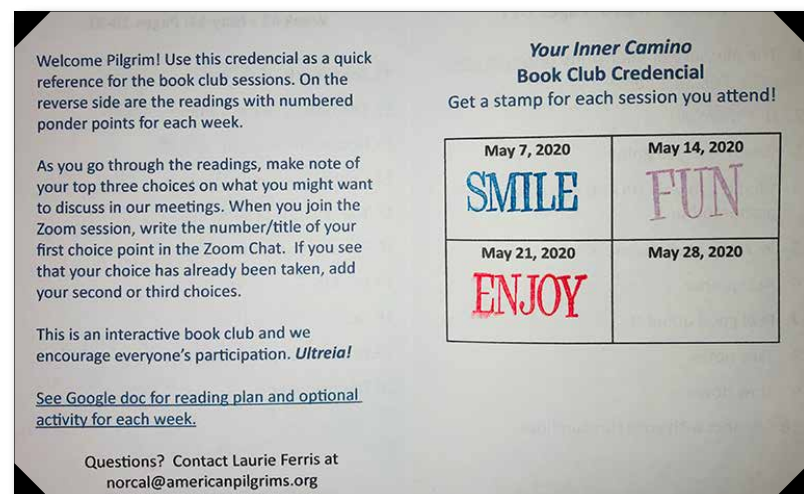
“A nice, short sound clip to raise your spirits. Think about this song as you plan your next Camino and when you start walking.”

We will, we will. Thanks, Lake Tahoe!

Click this link to hear the song:  
[YOU’LL NEVER WALK ALONE](#) 🍷



The “credencial” for the Northern California chapter’s book club.



## Storytelling Keeps Mid-Atlantic Chapter Alive

By Lisa Frederick  
Washington, DC

In this time where we are isolated in our homes and can’t see one another in person, we wanted the Mid-Atlantic chapter’s participants to stay connected in small ways. We invited chapter participants to share Camino stories for the chapter’s newsletter. They shared photos and a few stories of why the Camino is such a wonderful experience. Here are some of them:

Chapter participant William Daly was suffering from shin splints and stopped at a café. The proprietor started playing “The House of the Rising Sun.” William knew this was for him. After enjoying his café con leche, he began his journey again, but the pain was no longer there. It had disappeared.

Chuck Miller, another chapter participant, shared a photo of one of favorite stops along the Central Camino Portuguese, attending the Pilgrim Mass at the Capuchin Franciscan Church “Ingreja de San Antonio.”

During the time at home, one of our experienced pilgrims designed a new mask for travels along the Way... 🍷

A Camino-inspired COVID-19 mask for the discerning pilgrim.



After completion of the Camino and just outside the Cathedral in Santiago on June 6, 2014, four pilgrims form the word “OHIO” – a tradition for many Ohioans when traveling outside the state.

## Central Ohio Chapter News

By Greg Madsen  
Westerville, OH

As you can see from this photo, we’re a Camino-spirited group!

We’re keeping the Camino Spirit alive in our chapter during this time of COVID-19 by providing our participants with periodic messages including

- ➔ Web-links on the status of travel in Spain,
- ➔ Video links such as “Camino Talks” and
- ➔ Member postings to our Facebook page. 🍷





## BOOK REVIEWS

### Resilience, Reflection and Resolve

#### *"Savoring the Camino de Santiago: It's the Pilgrimage, Not the Hike"*

By Julie Gianelloni Connor  
Bayou City Press  
January 2020  
265 pages

*Reviewed by Joseph A. Curro, Jr.*  
Arlington, MA

In this time of trial, we are all looking for silver linings in the face of tragedy.

Julie Gianelloni Connor tells a very personal story of doing just that. She opens her book recounting how an incident of violent sexual assault changed the course of her life, eventually leading her to the Camino de Santiago more than four decades later.

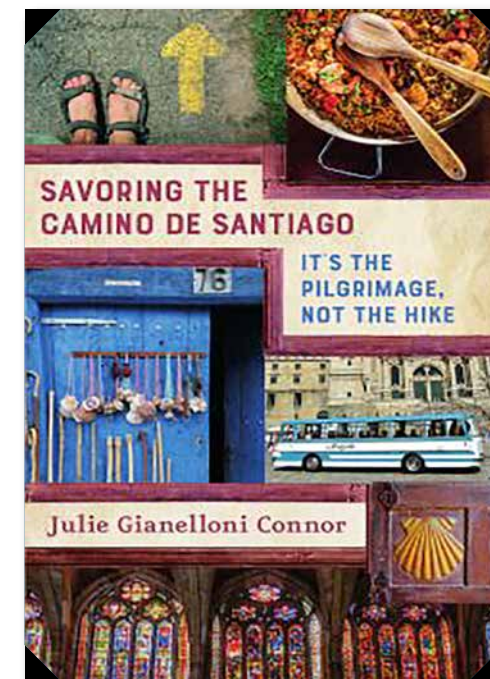
This volume feels like several books rolled into one. It is part memoir, part travelogue, part guidebook for the would-be pilgrim and part activism on behalf of the Camino.

The author writes of her love of Spain, which sprang from a stint as a young teacher overseas and was inspired by James Michener's "Iberia." After a career in the Foreign Service and a battle with breast cancer, she fulfilled a lifelong dream of traveling the Camino Francés.

Connor emphatically does not equate a Camino pilgrimage with walking the entire way. She confronts potential pilgrims with a series of eleven "tests" composed of brutally frank questions that they should ask themselves before taking on a walk of several hundred miles. Readers are sure to think twice before attempting a walking pilgrimage.

After an obligatory discussion of gear and logistics, the author shares some favorite stories from her Camino journey with her son, including encounters with the Almond Man and the Truffle Hunter. Camino veterans will readily relate to the nicknames attached to various characters encountered along the Way.

Signs at Pilgrim Gathering 2020, Zephyr Point Conference Center, Zephyr Cove, NV. Photo Credit: Francine Mastini



Connor writes about her devotion to visiting open churches, her disappointment in finding so many closed and the challenges of her son's foot injury and quest for an easily portable guitar.

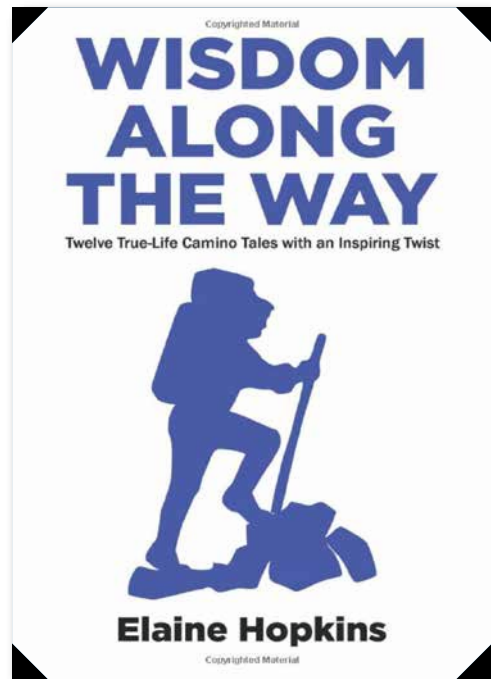
The middle portion of the book consists of a day-by-day travel journal. Each entry is brief and accompanied by delightful hand-drawn illustrations and step counts. True to her intention of savoring the Camino, the author lays out some relatively short stages, plenty of rest days, and an approach that included the use of luggage-forwarding services and a combination of taxis, public transportation and walking.

The author writes of her lobbying American Pilgrims on the Camino to place a plaque to Father Elias Valiña in O Cebreiro, and she includes a letter to Spanish government ministers, urging more support for the Camino and the people who visit it.

Connor's message is simple. Walk your own Camino, take time to enjoy it and work so that others might do the same. 🍷



## BOOK REVIEWS



### Bringing the Camino to Our Daily Lives

#### *"Wisdom Along the Way: Twelve True-Life Camino Tales with an Inspiring Twist"*

By Elaine Hopkins  
Powerhouse Publications  
2020  
117 pages

*Reviewed by Don Shaw*  
Fairfax, VA

We can't currently go on the Camino because of COVID-19, but this book is the next best thing. It's written in such a conversational style that you feel as though the author, Elaine Hopkins, is sitting across from you in a bar in Spain, telling you all about her adventures.

"Wisdom Along the Way" is not your standard Camino memoir. It has a simple structure: 12 chapters that each relate one of Elaine's Camino adventures in the context of a coaching principle, with a reflection on how we can integrate that principle into daily life.

If that sounds preachy, rest assured the book doesn't fall into that trap. Elaine has a wonderfully self-deprecating way of writing. The book includes some laugh-out-loud moments (Chapter 3 is priceless), as well as some thought-provoking reflections. I could also mention a tearing-up moment or two.

All of the tales are culled from Elaine's five years and 5,000 kilometers on various Camino trails in France and Spain. Her evocation of pilgrim life and landscape, characters and conversation (for which she has a particularly acute ear) reconnect us to our own Camino experience. But it's in the context of coaching principles, such as "there is always something you can do" and "it is easier to change ourselves than it is to change others," that we learn about Elaine's own struggles.

Afflicted with an inherited neurological condition that affects her balance, orientation, and ability to interpret signs, she seems a somewhat unlikely, even inept, pilgrim. If there is ineptitude, however, she wears it lightly, remarking in the foreword "but then we all have challenges." By sharing her vulnerability and innermost thoughts, Elaine takes us not just on a 5,000-kilometer walk along the Way, but on a walk into ourselves. As we marvel at her determination, her occasional stubbornness, her insights, and, above all, her growing self-compassion and resourcefulness, we gain glimpses into our own psyches and into how we can become richer, more rounded versions of ourselves if we connect with the principles outlined in this book.

Full disclosure: Elaine is a dear friend. Even if that weren't the case, I'd still rate "Wisdom Along the Way" an exceptional book, and I'm not the only one. It's been read and recommended by two Camino luminaries: Lydia B. Smith and Johnnie Walker. Read it before you go, as you go, after you return. Just read it. 🍷

## BOOK REVIEWS

### It's Time for "It's About Time"

#### *"It's About Time"*

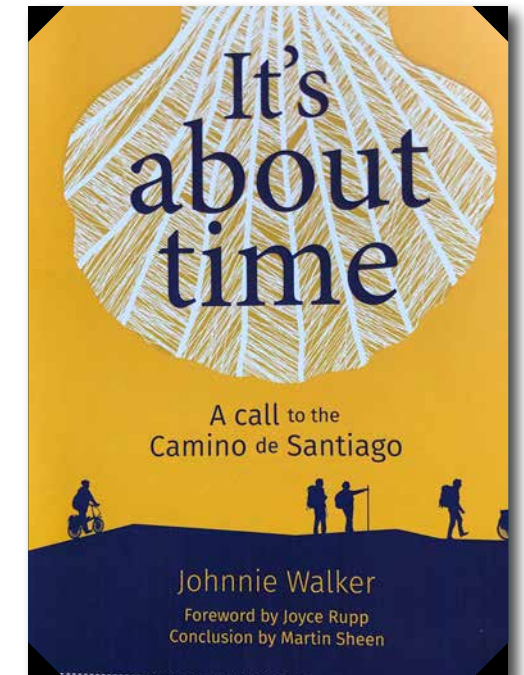
By Johnnie Walker, photos by Miguel Castaño  
Foreword by Joyce Rupp, Conclusion by Martin Sheen  
Chawton, Hampshire, UK: Redemptorist Publications, 2019  
63 pages

*Reviewed by Linnea Hendrickson*  
Albuquerque, NM

Johnnie Walker's slim volume is packed with bits of carefully chosen historical and practical information. The heart of the book, though, is the moving short stories based on his own pilgrim experiences and those of pilgrims he has met. There is something here for veteran pilgrims (who will nod their heads in recognition of common experiences) but also for aspiring pilgrims and those who are simply curious about the Camino.

The book is arranged in nine short chapters patterned on a pilgrim version of the familiar "For everything there is a season," from Ecclesiastes. Each chapter contains paired opposites: "A time to feel like giving up, and a time to feel inspired by the whole experience," with a subheading, "A time to share with others, and a time to listen." For each of these experiences there are stories. Johnnie Walker quotes from his diary, "'Today even the lone shepherd on the hill didn't wave back.' He must have been having a hard day, too." He tells the story of his companion Bridget, who on one wet day is so tired and discouraged she can't walk another step, but on the next day exults, "This Camino thing is wonderful. It is like total freedom, total bliss!"

This is not a practical guidebook filled with details, but a concise guide to the essence of the Camino. It will be good reading for people who wonder why anyone would walk a Camino or any



pilgrimage, for those who have returned home and are still grappling with the meaning of their experiences and for those who are thinking about going.

Appropriate and inspiring brief quotations from the Bible, poems, prayers, hymns and other pilgrims are scattered throughout. The accompanying photographs convey the spirit and beauty of the Camino. A brief list of websites tells where to get a pilgrim passport and where to find more information about the Camino.

One of the best parts of the book is a list of "it doesn't matter" things pilgrims often argue about. The list concludes with, "The only thing that matters is that wherever you start, you walk each step of the way to Santiago and treat it and its traditions with respect. It is a holy road." Thank you, Johnnie Walker. It's about time we had this book. 🍷

*Editor's note: Johnnie Walker generously donated a copy of "It's About Time" to each American Pilgrims on the Camino chapter. Check with your chapter coordinators to borrow it.*

