

# LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

## *Cultivating Gratitude*

Features:

Chapter Coaches

Camino Culture

Book Reviews





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Photo by Thom Ryng.

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Photo by Ruben Mendoza.

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# LA CONCHA

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020

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## DECEMBER TEAM LA CONCHA

*Julie Gianelloni Connor, Joseph Curro, Ana Rojas Holland, Sara Steig Gradwohl, Amy Horton, Beth Jusino, Pruitt Layton, Francine Mastini, Megan Muthupandiyen, Thom Ryng, and Barbara Zang*



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What a year.

In any language, 2020 deserves to be described in paradox and superlatives. Out of an acute sense of our interconnectedness we isolated ourselves; as we did, both our greatest blessings and greatest wounds were cast in high relief.

This year's challenges left many of us with a profound sense of loneliness, existential bewilderment, and grief, and at the same time, an equally profound sense of kinship, purpose and joy. We have been invited, again and again, to become contemplatives ... or comedians ... in order to make sense of the present moment and our place within it.

Whether or not we have ever walked the Way, this is our moment — the moment of the pilgrim. Since March the world has invited humanity to both decenter and transcend itself, our habits of mind and custom and body, in pursuit of deeper, more intentional practices.

"This is a time for pilgrimages," Pope Francis writes in his very recently published book "Let Us Dream." In the final pages of this small volume, he calls all people to pack up what we have learned about ourselves and our world these past months and to "open [ourselves] to a new horizon." When we return we not only will be changed, we will also find our sense of home has changed.

The contributors to the December 2020 issue have heeded this call. In sharing how pilgrimage has influenced their practice of gratitude, they have not only deepened their own intentional practices as pilgrims, but also afforded each and every one of us an opportunity to do the same.

I am extremely grateful to them, retiring board member Barbara Zang and all of our colleagues on the La Concha editorial team for their love's labor on this issue. May each article be read as a blaze marking the pilgrim path we are all on, together and alone, in this present moment.

In peace,

*Megan*

Megan Muthupandiyen, Editor in Chief

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 MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear American Pilgrims,

Well, this year the phrase “welcome each day—its pleasures and its challenges” took on new meaning. A year ago, who would have thought we’d be this far into a global pandemic and facing perhaps the most dangerous and impactful months of all?

While it wasn’t planned that way, the theme of gratitude somehow feels right at this stage. Despite all the isolation, loss and sacrifice experienced by so many throughout this year, there is still so much to be grateful for. Above all, I’m grateful for all of the doctors, nurses, and others battling on the frontlines of this pandemic in hospitals all across the nation and the world. I’m grateful for all of those workers that were never fully recognized as essential, including those who work in grocery stores, distribution centers and make home deliveries.

And I know many of you, including some of my colleagues on the board of directors, have been directly impacted by this pandemic through the loss of family or friends. This holiday will be particularly difficult, I’m sure. But I know there is gratitude, too, for the life and times spent together and the memories that go along with it. Perhaps more than ever before, we need to leverage our global community of pilgrims to do what we do best ... to reach out and connect with each other, to share our experiences and to support each other.



Along those lines, I’m grateful for the volunteers, chapter participants and all of those in our Facebook community who are keeping the Camino spirit alive and growing. I’m grateful, too, for my colleagues on the board of directors and all of those key volunteers that keep American Pilgrims on the Camino working day-to-day. We’re continuing to adapt and find new ways to collaborate and meet the mission.

I know you’ll join me in thanking Barbara Zang for her years of service to American Pilgrims and La Concha as she departs the board at the end of this year. She has had a positive and lasting impact on the organization, and I wish her well. Well done, Barb!

And finally, please know that we’re all grateful for the continued support of our members. It’s only through your dues and donations that we are able to share information with current and future pilgrims, to support the Camino infrastructure and to forge lasting connections among this global community of pilgrims. What we’re achieving together matters ... now more than ever.

Happy holidays, and we’ll see you in the New Year!

Buen Camino!

*Dave*

David Donselar



## MEMBERSHIP

### It's A Perfect Fit!

Are you stuck at home and looking to give a meaningful gift to a fellow pilgrim this holiday season? Consider giving the gift of an American Pilgrims on the Camino membership! You can make a difference and share your passion for the Camino at the same time.

Your gift of a new membership can inspire a pilgrim to seek the Spirit of the Camino. Or you can renew a fellow pilgrim's membership. Here's how:

Click this link, [Gift a Membership-Donation Form](#), and fill out the donation form.

Select the button next to the dollar amount you'd like to give or select "Other Amount" and enter the amount. Individual membership is \$50/year; household membership is \$75/year; and lifetime membership is \$500. Partial membership fees cannot be applied and will be considered a donation.

At the bottom of the donation page in the Comment box, please indicate your donation is for a membership gift. Please add the membership type. Don't forget to include the recipient's full name, email address and mailing address.

That's it! Our membership coordinator will take care of the rest.

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.

We are grateful for your membership in American Pilgrims and your support of the Camino and the pilgrimage experience. We hope to walk with you to Santiago again soon.

¡Buen Camino!

*American Pilgrims on the Camino is a 501(c)(3) public charity registered in California. As of March 2020, the CARES Act allows individual taxpayers additional deductions from charitable donations in 2020, whether you itemize or take the standard deduction. While we suggest what to carry in your backpack to Santiago, we don't provide tax advice. Please talk to your tax preparer or accountant for more information on charitable deductions.* 🎁





## MEMBERSHIP

### Lifetime Membership Roll Call

We would like to thank the following new Lifetime Members for their extraordinary support of American Pilgrims' mission and vision! Each of these members chose to become a Lifetime Member during this very challenging year; through such generosity we are able to deepen our impact for years to come.

Amy Donselar, VA

John Sikora, IL

Nicholas Ney, CA

John Venuto, TX

Thomas Sesma, NY

Penelope Daulton, NY

Rosalie Hagan, UT

Connie Thomsen, OR

Cynthia Gardner, OH

Shauna Riely, WA

Eliana Reeves, CA

Christopher Sullivan, WA

Shannon Hammock, CA

Nancy Iredale, NV

Karen Iredale, OR

Francis McNally, CA

Jack Shubert, TX

*"We've always been enthusiastic supporters of APOC [American Pilgrims on the Camino] and of the Camino de Santiago. During these current anxious and unsettled times, when the fragility of the Camino became apparent, we took the time (and who doesn't have time these days?) to discuss how we could best show our support – ever since walking the Way in 2016 and again in 2019, we've considered ourselves lifetime peregrinos, so it just made sense to 'make it official' and become lifetime members of the organization that helped us prepare for our pilgrimages, and is now making it possible for us to help other pilgrims, both new and experienced."*

–Thom Sesma & Penelope Daulton

*"For my wife, Allison, and I, 2020 has become a disruptive and isolating year in many ways. However, this year has also become an unexpectedly revitalizing time of reflection on how much the Camino pilgrimage has meant to us and how it has changed our lives. As Americans, we feel that now is the perfect time to make a lifelong investment through American Pilgrims so that future pilgrims from the US and around the world will be able to experience the Camino as we did."*

–John Venuto



Camino del Norte, May 2018  
Photo by John Venuto

# GRANTS

## American Pilgrims Grants Program Makes a Difference

*By Joseph McClain*

*San Miguel De Allende, Guanajuato, Mexico*

*For the Grants Team*

I remember when it happened. It was late October, and I was somewhere in Bierzo territory, approaching Galicia. Just past Villafranca del Bierzo. I was beginning to experience a strange and unexpected sense of renewal or more, maybe exuberance, euphoria, elation. It didn't matter if it rained or the sun burned, I was feeling such happiness. Almost silly happiness, like a kid. Like jumping-up-and-down-in-the-street happiness. An encouraging sensation to feel at age 74! It was the Camino Francés, 2017.

On those long, lonely stretches of Camino ahead I began remembering an albergue here, an hospitalero there, someone who had welcomed my tired body with a chair, another who put a hot cup of something in my hand, remembering even the moments that were not so storybook-charming. After so many kilometers I understood the necessity of helping a peregrino. And that was the moment I began wanting to be a part of the Camino, wanting to give something back. Indeed, I became a little obsessed about not allowing myself, even when I was not walking, to lose contact with the experiences that transformed my inner life.

I pestered Joseph at the Albergue Beilari in St. Jean Pied de Port into letting me volunteer as an hospitalero. I worked in the Pilgrim's Office in Santiago. Then I found this organization, American Pilgrims on the Camino. I pulled up the website and saw they were looking for volunteers. I called and offered my services. I was obsessed!

And then the most amazing thing began to unfold. The leaders of American Pilgrims matched my past professional experience with a need in the organization. It was perfect. I had long years of experience with grant-making organizations and with organizations asking for funds from public and private sources. They told me there was a grants committee of American Pilgrims where a good chunk of change was awarded to organizations on the many Caminos to Santiago for improvement

of Camino infrastructure. I said "yes" to helping. Soon we were working with an organization that needed a new roof for an albergue, an association working to improve guideposts on the Camino Mozárabe, not-for-profits that were trying to open albergues in places where there had never been sufficient accommodation. The list goes on. This year American Pilgrims funded 17 projects at a total cost of \$55,000.

Talk about GIVING BACK! I had found it. I felt thankfulness as a peregrino to know that there would be better beds in the strenuous stretch of the Camino Primitivo. I felt thankfulness as an American knowing that from a distance we were making concrete improvements on the diverse Caminos to Santiago. And I felt thankful as a now 77-year-old peregrino to be able to give back, to be filled with quiet, tingling joy working directly with the Camino Associations on the ground in Spain, Portugal and France, keeping the Camino experience alive and well.

And it isn't magic where these funds come from! They come from all of us. From our membership dues, from some donations and from other American Pilgrim activities. When all of us hit send on that membership renewal, we are making it happen. We are giving back. When we think of including a contribution with the membership renewal, we are keeping it all alive. For me, this is clear-channel giving back. Thanks to all of you. Keep it up. We can make a real difference with the American Pilgrims grants program! 🍪

Joseph McClain  
volunteering in  
Beilari, St. Jean  
Pied de Port.





# USEFUL NEWS FOR PILGRIMS

## La Credencial Digital

*By Gene McCullough  
Denver, CO*

Some things change, and some things stay the same. But change, it's a'comin' for Camino credentials in 2021!

In anticipation of an expected tsunami of pilgrims arriving in Santiago during the Holy Year of 2021, the Santiago Cathedral and the Xunta de Galicia have created a digital credential that will be available on the first of January. This is how it will work:

The pilgrim will download the mobile app to their Android or iOS device. Then, using the app, once or twice a day the pilgrim will scan the QR codes offered by registered establishments that presently offer a sello (stamp). Such establishments can submit their sello through the official website and receive their unique QR code in return. Although the app is not yet available (as of the middle of November), once launched it will be available in eight languages.

Presently and into 2021, a pilgrim arriving in Santiago creates a registration with the Welcome Office. (Go to [oficinadelperegrino.com/en/](https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/) and "Register" in the menu.) This registration provides the pilgrim a time to arrive at the Office to retrieve their Compostela. This process is aimed at eliminating the hours-long lines at the Office. They are preparing integration between the credential app and the Compostela registry to avoid having to enter the data twice.

Los Correos says that the app will work on all Camino routes in Spain. They have confirmed that the app will work for the most common starting points, including St. Jean Pied de Port in France and Porto in Portugal.

Important: None of this means that the paper credential and its sellos are disappearing! Pilgrims can forego the app entirely or maintain a paper credential along with the app. For more information, check out the announcement on the Los Correos site:

<https://www.elcaminoconcorreos.com/en/blog/digital-credential-holy-year> 📄



Welcome to the 21st Century!  
An example of a QR code digital  
sello (stamp).



# ANNUAL REPORT

## Budget, Goals and Projections

By Steve Lytch

Treasurer, American Pilgrims on the Camino

Despite the challenges of 2020, we end the year in a solid financial position. Thanks to the generosity of members, donors and volunteers over the years, we have approximately \$225,000 cash on hand.

Not knowing when American pilgrims will be able to return to the Camino makes financial planning difficult. Compared to 2019, membership is running behind by about 25%. One of the prime motivations for joining American Pilgrims on the Camino is the desire to give back to the Camino and continue to participate in the community of pilgrims upon returning home. Since there are fewer new pilgrims, we have had fewer new members. Another source of income that has been adversely affected is donations given by those who have received a credential from American Pilgrims. Few credentials have been issued since March.

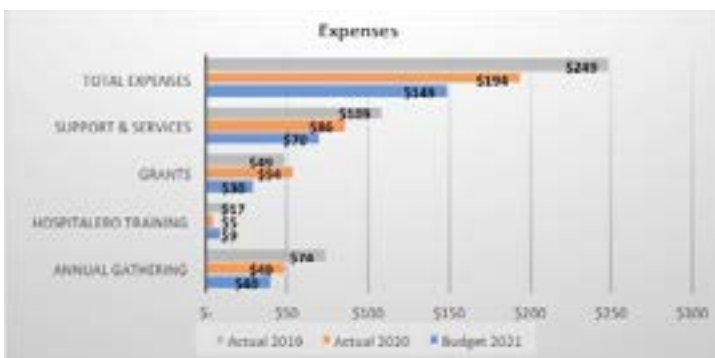
Nevertheless, because of your generosity, we have been able to fulfill our core mission. Individual donations from members and friends of American Pilgrims almost doubled compared to 2019. Despite being cut short due to the emerging pandemic and a spring blizzard, the 2020 Gathering at Zephyr Point, NV, generated over \$28,000 of income due in large part to the raffle, the silent auction and the strategic fiscal management of the Gathering's team of volunteer coordinators.

While the pandemic has reduced our overall income, it has also curtailed expenses. Three hospitalero training events were canceled. The board of directors has been holding its quarterly meetings virtually. There have been few expenses related to issuing credentials.

We met our goal of granting \$55,000 to partner associations in Spain, France and Portugal. These funds will directly support the infrastructure of the Camino. We have maintained support of local chapters, provided web-related services like Facebook and our webpage that connect and inform pilgrims and met basic operating costs such as insurance.

In response to the uncertainty of the continuing impact of the pandemic, the board of directors at its October meeting raised the amount of our designated cash reserve from \$20,000 to \$100,000, which will allow us to maintain operations for a year or longer in a crisis.

The charts below give an overview of our financial picture. If you would like more information on the finances of American Pilgrims on the Camino, please contact me at [treasurer@americanpilgrims.org](mailto:treasurer@americanpilgrims.org). ☞



## Hospitaleros in the Time of the Pandemic

*By Carmen Marriott*

*Tuscon, AZ*

*for the External Relations Team*

This summer albergues operated at one-half of capacity. In response to the pandemic, hospitaleros have implemented new and intense cleaning protocols and ensured an ample supply of cleaning gel everywhere (toilets, bathroom, corridor, kitchen, outdoor seating, rooms, etc.). I thank my fellow hospitaleros in Spain and France for being part of a successful re-opening of the Camino; according to Federación Española, there have been no COVID-19 outbreaks at any of their sponsored albergues.

In all this, hospitaleros have also continued performing non-cleaning duties, such as greeting and registering pilgrims, while maintaining physical distance and wearing masks when required. While hugs were few, warm, authentic welcomes for a comfortable stay were still the norm. Smiling with our eyes is easy, isn't it?

According to reports from our friends along the Way, hospitaleros and pilgrims seem to be quite satisfied with the experience. Some hospitaleros shared their observations, saying that although they felt a profound sense of responsibility for the well being of the pilgrims and the community, this was a special time to serve. Moreover, there were joys to be had. The fact that there were fewer pilgrims allowed for hospitaleros to spend more time with the pilgrims, and pilgrims were especially grateful for shelter and behaved responsibly and respectfully.

Balancing our desires for a return to the Camino with public health and safety is tough. We've learned that perhaps distancing and masks and the more extensive cleaning protocols, while intense and sometimes annoying, could become the new normal. Let's see these as positive changes which protect hospitaleros and pilgrims alike. ☺

Pilgrim Dinner at Apóstol Santiago, El Acebo, 2012  
Photographer: Megan Muthupandiyam.







**chapter news**



## SAVE THE DATE

### July 23, 2021, Midwest Regional Gathering Information

Your Midwest chapters are proceeding to plan our Regional St. James Jubilee Celebration. It will be held at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN, from July 23 to 26, 2021. (This will be moved to 2022 if necessary.) The planning committee is carefully following the impact of COVID-19 and CDC protocols for this St. James's Day Celebration.

The event is styled after the annual Gathering of Pilgrims to engage any and all pilgrims while social-distancing. As the 2021 Gathering is cancelled, as is travel to Spain, this will be a way to continue to keep the spirit of the Camino alive.

Anyone interested in the Camino is welcome to attend.

Registration includes meals, refreshments, single or double occupancy rooms in historic Le Mans Hall, lectures, local service projects and top-notch entertainment. Commuter registration will be available. Membership in American Pilgrims on the Camino is not required, but members will receive a discount on their registration fee.

Registration will open in late Spring 2021. Plan to join us in South Bend! Continue to watch this site (<https://americanpilgrims.org/annual-gathering/2021-celebration/>) for updated information. We will be sharing it here as it becomes available. ☕

Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN, is the site for the Midwest Regional Gathering 2021.



Chapter News Section Cover: Guadalupe R Mendoza Near Belinde June 2018  
Photo By R Mendoza



## Delightful Zoom with Elaine Hopkins, Author of "Wisdom Along the Way"

By Paul Patenaude  
Madison, WI

Like most other chapters, this pandemic has stolen our walking sticks and limited our hiking to perusing catalogs and the Internet for the perfect hiking shoes. We haven't hiked in good weather, and, since this is Wisconsin, our winters keep all but the stalwart cooped up – or on the ski slopes and ice rinks.

Our chapter did have a wonderful Zoom meeting in October. To back up a little, in March we had our first cancellation due to COVID-19 precautions. Our speaker was to have been Elaine Hopkins, author of "Wisdom along the Way." Elaine is from London and was to be in the United States on a book tour. As things were shutting down, she wisely chose not to come.

In October, thanks to modern technology, she was in our living rooms for a delightful meeting. Elaine has walked parts of nine Caminos including all of the Francés, the Le Puy and her epic walk from London to Santiago by way of the Plantagenet through France to El Norte.

As we settled into autumn, many of our members delighted in the centering conversation. "Elaine shared such warmth and wisdom about her unique perspective on her life and her experiences on the Camino," chapter participant Joyce Pohl reflected. "Listening to her felt like meeting another member of our Camino family. She challenged us to think back about our experiences and impressions of those we meet on our journeys."



Author Elaine Hopkins. Photo Credit from her book.

Elaine's vignettes also show how resourceful you can be when the need presents itself and when you are willing to think differently than in the past. In the wake of the meeting, many of us felt that it would be good to read chapters of her book off and on and reflect on our thoughts as we go on our journey on the Camino and through life in general. ☺

*Editor's Note: La Concha reviewed Elaine's book in the June 2020 issue.*

# CHAPTER COORDINATOR ASSISTANCE

## Getting to Know Your Chapter Coaches

*By Megan Muthupandiyam  
Elm Grove, WI*

American Pilgrims is an entirely volunteer-run organization. Our volunteers are not only passionate about pilgrimage, they are also passionate about giving back to the community of pilgrims. In honor of this amazing spirit, each issue of La Concha will offer a volunteer spotlight on an individual or a team of volunteers who are helping us move forward as an organization!

It's only appropriate that we are launching this volunteer spotlight in an issue dedicated to the exploration of gratitude. We are grateful to the American Pilgrims Chapter Coaches for the fantastic work that they do to connect the chapters together and to the national organization as well as helping each chapter reach its goals!

### **Rachel Ganzon**

In addition to being a chapter coach, Rachel Ganzon has been a co-coordinator of the Portlandia Chapter in Portland, OR since 2019. She walked a section of the Camino Francés in 2017 and looks forward to the day when she can return and complete her journey to Santiago. In the meantime, she says being a chapter coordinator helps her to get to know members and to connect people to one another. As she says, "You can really find kindred spirits in a group like this!"

Since 2016 Rachel has volunteered with American Pilgrims in a variety of ways, from administering the chapter Facebook group, to planning and running events. Why does she volunteer? "It's the spirit of the Camino to give and help! If I have the time and ability, it is such an easy way to contribute. I, too, want to encourage the spirit of the Camino, so volunteering seems like the right thing to do."

### **Dave Combs**

Dave Combs first walked the Camino with his best friend in 2013, then returned the next year to deepen his pilgrim's journey while walking alongside his son. A member and coordinator of the Old Pueblo Chapter in Tucson, AZ, he is also an hospitalero, and served at an albergue in Najera in 2015. He volunteers with American Pilgrims both to deepen his own engagement with pilgrimage, and to mentor and assist other pilgrims. In his words, "I serve because I am mesmerized by the Camino. I felt awakened from my first exposure. I love facilitating and meeting the needs and expectations of others interested in pilgrimage."


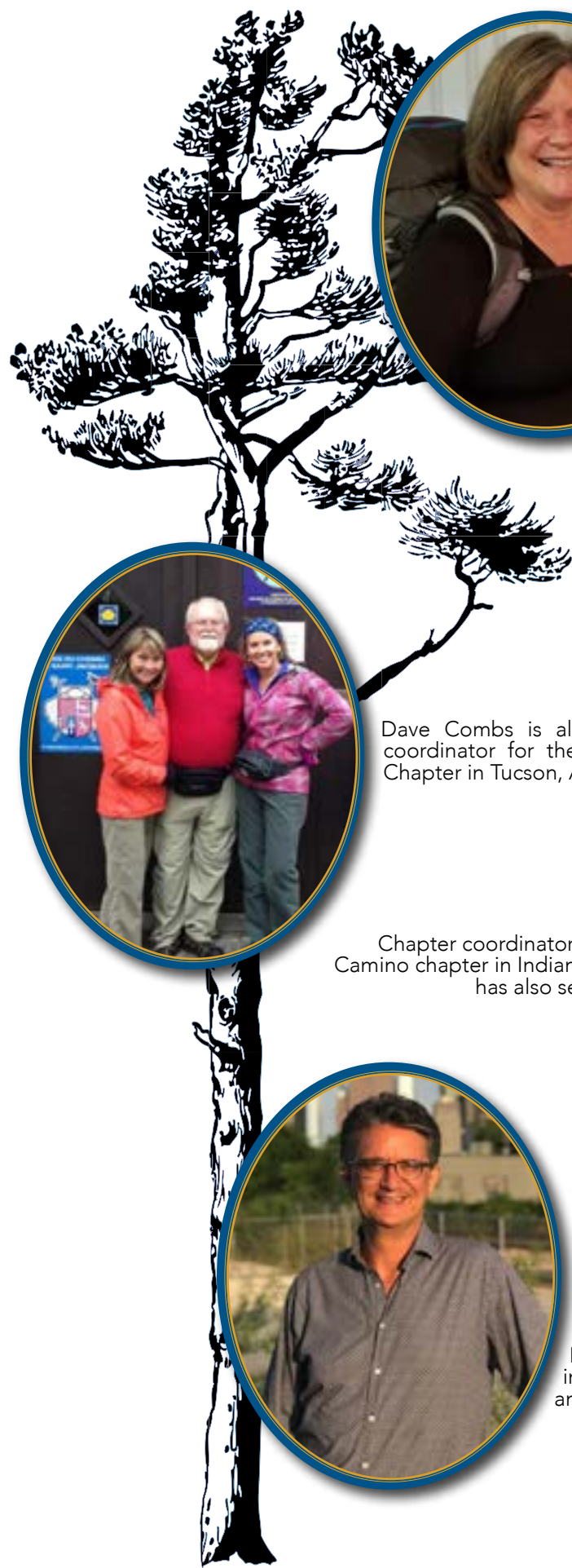
### **Jeff Stys**

A former member of the American Pilgrims on the Camino board, Jeff Stys is also a founding member of the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter in Houston, TX. Since his first pilgrimage in 2003, he has walked many of the pilgrim routes in Spain and delights in talking to others who would like to walk some of the less traversed routes.


Now as a member of the Chapter Coaches committee, he is excited to be helping create and deepen connections between chapters. "American Pilgrims gives me the chance to give back," he explains. He loves the community spirit that is fostered by the organization. As he states, "I find that most people who return and stay involved in American Pilgrim activities are kindred spirits who are actively trying to find ways to live their Camino values of community, simplicity, gratitude and service."

*(continued on page 16)*




A circular portrait of Susan Corwin, a woman with short brown hair, smiling. She is wearing a dark top and a backpack.


After taking her first pilgrimage in 2017, Susan Corwin jumped into volunteering with the Atlanta, GA Chapter and the broader organization, serving as both a co-coordinator and a chapter coach.

A circular portrait of Rachel Ganzon, a woman wearing a purple beanie, a dark jacket, and dark shorts, standing outdoors.

In addition to being a chapter coach, Rachel Ganzon has been a co-coordinator of the Portlandia Chapter in Portland, OR since 2019..

A circular portrait of Dave Combs, an older man with a white beard, wearing a red shirt and khaki pants, standing between two women in a room with a map on the wall.

Dave Combs is also a chapter coordinator for the Old Pueblo Chapter in Tucson, AZ.

A circular portrait of David Cook, a man wearing a blue baseball cap and a blue t-shirt with the text "THE GREATEST SPECTACLE IN RUNNING" and a map of Texas.

Chapter coordinator of the Hoosiers on the Camino chapter in Indianapolis, IN, David Cook has also served as a hospitalero..

A circular portrait of Jeff Stys, a man with glasses wearing a grey button-down shirt, standing outdoors.

In addition to his work as a chapter coach, Jeff Stys is a founding member of the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter in Houston, TX, and has served on the board of American Pilgrims.

# CHAPTER COORDINATOR ASSISTANCE

## Susan Corwin

After her first pilgrimage in 2017, Susan Corwin jumped into volunteering with the Atlanta, GA, chapter, becoming one of its three co-coordinators shortly thereafter. In addition to producing the chapter newsletter, she has trained as an hospitalero, became a chapter coach, and has been an active participant at the Gatherings. As a chapter coordinator, she loves to get to know the members of the chapter, and to help them prepare for pilgrimage, “I’ve made life-long friends with people I’ve met by being a coordinator,” she says, adding, “If not for American Pilgrims, I probably would never have walked my Camino, and I gained so much from that experience ... it’s important to give back!”

## David Cook

David Cook has two friends to thank for introducing him to pilgrimage and American Pilgrims on the Camino. Through the process of serving as their pilgrim-wingman during two pilgrimages taken four years apart, his friends introduced him to the Camino de Santiago and American Pilgrims on the Camino. As he states, “the rest is history.”

The chapter coordinator of the Hoosiers on the Camino chapter in Indianapolis, IN, he also regularly attends national Gatherings and has served as an hospitalero.

“In 2017 I served at the Municipal Albergue in Nájera for two weeks in September,” he states. “Becoming friends with co-hospitaleras from Italy, France and Spain was a wonderful experience.”

David feels honored to become associated with many wonderful people as a chapter coordinator. In many ways, the people he has encountered are as diverse as if he were on pilgrimage. “It has been so fulfilling to meet people from all walks of life,” he offers, adding, “volunteering with American Pilgrims is a way to continue to spread the spirit of the Camino here at home.”

**WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED? JUMP IN!** In the words of chapter coach Jeff Stys, “There’s so much potential to help organize an event, start a newsletter, mentor a person with questions, or even help welcome people as they walk in the door. I like to think of a chapter as an albergue – there may be someone ‘in charge’ but it works best when everyone joins in to make it a meaningful experience for everyone involved.”

To find out more about the goings on in your local chapter, check out the [Local Chapters index on the American Pilgrims on the Camino website.](#) 🍷



Here are some suggestions from your Chapter Coordinators on where you might start if you want to become more involved as an American Pilgrim:

"Definitely participate in chapter events. It will allow you to see where help is needed and welcome. Because I really love the aspect of community, I would add that the volunteer opportunities really allow you to meet others, ask questions and share your own knowledge." — *Rachel Ganzon*

"Offer training sessions on how to properly equip a backpack, use trekking poles, and on how to make proper use of technology on the Camino." — *Dave Combs*

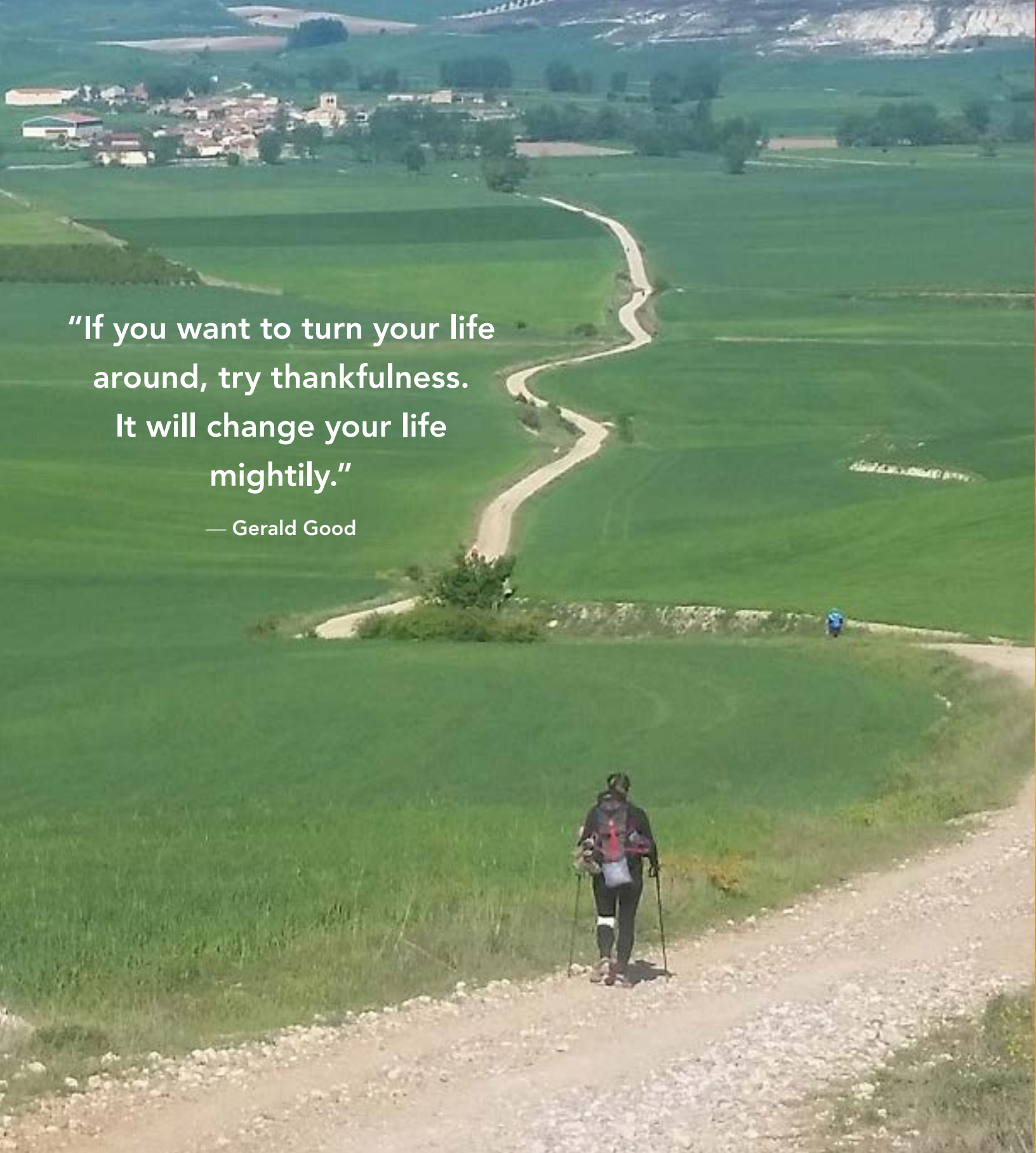
"To get really involved, volunteer to be a chapter coordinator when there is an opening!" — *Susan Corwin*

"Once people become aware of the chapter, they can step up and offer to lead a hike, propose a topic for discussion or find a place to gather (in post-Covid times).

Your chapter coordinators are always hoping to delegate these opportunities for service to members!" — *David Cook*

"Consider becoming a mentor for a new pilgrim, or become a hike leader or event coordinator with your local chapter." — *Dave Combs*

"Connect with your coordinator and ask what you can do to help. We all have gifts and we can all think about ways to help out our chapters and support our chapter coordinators!" — *Jeff Stys*

A scenic landscape featuring a winding dirt path that snakes through vibrant green fields. In the distance, a small village with a church spire is visible. A hiker with a backpack and trekking poles is seen from behind, walking along the path in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

"If you want to turn your life  
around, try thankfulness.  
It will change your life  
mightily."

— Gerald Good

**pilgrim's way: in thankfulness**



## Giving Back to the Camino as an Hospitalero

*By Tom Friesen  
London, ON*

**I walked the Camino** in early 2005 with the intention of going back and giving back. Before I left for Spain, I had signed up for the joint conference between American Pilgrims on the Camino and the Canadian Company of Pilgrims held in Toronto in 2005. The hospitalero training provided before the conference by Mari Luz and Jan Melis was inspirational. I had already met Mari Luz by chance in Eunatic when she invited us in for tea. Her hospitality and the welcome and support of other hospitaleros gave me a model for the hospitalero I have tried to become.



I have been serving as an hospitalero on an average of half a month for each of the past 15 years. I feel that this gives me more than I provide. Besides getting to meet interesting pilgrims, I also love the opportunity to relate to people in the local community and deepen my understanding of Spanish and Italian culture in places I have served. Back here in North America, I have tried to share my understandings, as I believe that the differing schedules of pilgrims and locals does not allow for a true understanding of the culture and people of the lands we walk through.

I train hospitaleros to go to Spain, France, Portugal and Italy. Their service gives me a vicarious opportunity to be in those locations when I orient and debrief our volunteers.

I am also currently offering a virtual singing course for hospitaleros to enable them to use the joy of song in the albergues with the pilgrims. We have conducted courses for the last five years in Spain and are using Zoom. As I believe song is joy in action, waking pilgrims up with song and using music to build a sense of community in the albergue is important to me.

Section Feature front page: Walking with an open heart,  
the descent into Hornillos del Camino.  
Photographer: Ron Ottenad, May 2018.

When we offer orientations to new pilgrims as a part of our local chapter activities, we try to include both spiritual and cultural components.

Various local chapter groups here in Canada have “adopted” albergues to provide monetary support for capital or ongoing expenses.

An initiative that comes from our Victoria chapter is a badge that says: “My Stay Home COVID Camino 2020”. Donations for the badges have so far raised €13,000, which have been sent to dozens of albergues in Europe in €300 lots. 🍀

## Giving Back to the Life of the Camino

*By Ron Ottenad  
Long Beach, CA*

**When I arrived home**, I knew the Camino had given me gracious gifts that would transform how I lived, but I had no idea how to tangibly display gratitude for what I had received. It was not until the next winter that I would catch a glimpse of how I might steward my experience to give back to the ongoing life of the Camino.



Sharing the contents of my pack to help others decide what to carry in theirs.  
Photographer: Ron Ottenad, February 2018.

It began when a friend reached out and asked if I would meet with her neighbor who was thinking of walking the Camino Francés but who had no idea where to begin. When we met, I discovered the joy of coming alongside someone to help them prepare for their own journey. Over time, one future pilgrim led to another, creating a rhythm which has allowed me to encourage

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and equip others to walk the Camino every year since I first stepped onto the Way.

Often, people come seeking answers to questions about when to go, how to get there, what to carry, and where to sleep. While these are important details, there is more to give. Our conversations are opportunities to recognize something they often do not realize they need but which is essential to take with them.

What I hope we are able to cultivate in our time together, which they can then take with them, is a heart postured to be open to the serendipity of the Camino. Through listening and asking questions, I help them explore their hopes, desires, fears and expectations. There are not always answers to the questions I ask, but talking about them awakens pilgrims to the reality of their heart and invites them to hold their expectations loosely.

With any luck, some of these questions will come back to them while they are walking, especially when things are not going as they had hoped or expected. In those moments, I hope they are able to acknowledge any disappointment or frustration they might feel, but to also have a sense of anticipation that in the unexpected, something life-giving might reveal itself.

When they return, we meet again, so they may share their story. Here, questions are used to bring clarity to their experience, and to give them the opportunity to articulate what has been birthed. This brings us full circle, acknowledging the gifts they have received and posturing them to demonstrate their own gratitude. ☘



MEDINA DE RIO SECO  
Retablo of Santiago in the  
Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol  
Photographer: Jim Larocco.

## Giving Back by Paying it Forward

By Jim Larocco  
Alexandria, VA

**2020 was a Camino-less year for us**, but rather than dwell on this disappointment, we have walked our own Caminos in the U.S., often reminiscing about our favorite caminos. Our most recent one, Camino del Madrid, which we walked in October 2019, was special due to the hospitality of the villagers, the albergue hosts and hospitaleros and the special attention we received all the way, in no small part because of the few peregrinos on this Camino.



VILLEGUILLO Jim  
Larocco and Bar  
Manager Kiki  
Photographer:  
Janet Larocco  
Sept 2019.

From what seemed to be the entire community of Peñafior de Hornija, which was so proud of the newly opened village albergue, to hospitaleros Pepe and Pedro, who endlessly engaged weary pilgrims in Villalón de Campos, to Kiki in Villeguillo, who altered his meal hours to feed us course after course of delightful food, we knew we could never repay the hospitality we received.

Our most memorable stay was in Medina de Rioseco, a fascinating city with arguably the most impressive retablo to Santiago in Spain, which can be viewed at the Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol.

We stayed at the Monasterio de Santa Clara. Formerly a convent, it was now run by friars from Brazil who operate it on a strictly donativo basis. We shared our room with a French Basque couple whom we had walked with for several days and who would be with us till Sahagún. He walked as she rode buses, unable to walk on a badly blistered foot that we helped re-bandage every evening.

How did we repay the hospitality extended to us? By paying it forward. Everywhere on this Camino paper products were lacking, either in number or quality. We knew that a bundle of 64 rolls of multi-ply toilet paper would raise the spirits of tired peregrinos. Good quality



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paper towels, a large jug of liquid soap and dishwashing liquid would further add comfort.

We had also learned from our earlier Caminos that taking photos of scenery is fine, but so much more meaningful to us and to those who hosted us was taking photos with them and sending them back. Just as we would remember them, they would remember us as grateful, gracious peregrinos, true pilgrims finding our own “way.” ☞

### Finding Light in Walking, Despite Winter's and Life's Harsh Realities

By Leah G. Wilkinson-Brockway  
Spokane, WA

**Dear Pilgrims,** here I am 2,290 miles into the 5,055-mile virtual trek from my home in Spokane, Washington, to St. Jean Pied de Port, France. Virtually, I am now crossing the Labrador Sea, but in reality I continue my daily walk around Spokane.

Lately, my range is closer to home. First, the pandemic is worsening, with more than 11 million\* cases nationally; I often wear a mask. Second, I continue to deal with left Achilles tendonitis, so my progress this year is slower. Third, serious winter weather began here in Spokane in October.

Walking a long distance has so many possibilities. There are times when I worry. Will I complete the Camino Francés, as I intend, after I finish my virtual trek? Will I live through the pandemic? When will Americans be able to return to Europe? If I do finish my pilgrimage, what will I do then? Too much worry... Let me just focus on the next step, the next prayer. The rest is left to God.

Before my pilgrimage, I took walking, running and dancing for granted. Now, it seems the inflammation in my heel is God's will. Fortunately, when I bind this pain and stiffness to the Lord's suffering, I discover a precious nearness to Him in contemplation. My pain becomes a blessing. This pilgrimage will develop as He intends.

My divorce, finalized in June after 29 years, seems like a time warp. Recently, my 14-year-old cat Monty died



Spokane Falls Spokane WA. 10/22/20.  
Photo by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway.

suddenly. For a time, I felt traumatized again. I had barely buried Monty before snow-laden branches fell, cutting off my power for one night and littering my yard. Now, a third snowstorm has damaged my home. Finally, as if there is not enough drama, COVID-19 has come to the church I visit weekly for Eucharistic Adoration. Life is inexorable. St. John Henry Newman's poem consoles me, “Lead, kindly Light... one step enough for me.”

St. James, pray for us! Pray the pandemic ends soon. Pray for pilgrims everywhere, and for the homeless and hungry, especially in winter. There are not enough shelter spots, and folks sleep on the icy pavement downtown under the railroad trestle. Let's give to the poor as we are able, pilgrims. May our hearts be filled with the peace of Christmas! Blessings, Leah

\*This figure was as of the date this article was submitted; the number continues to rise.

*Editor's note: This is the seventh reflection from Leah G. Wilkinson-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, March 2020, June 2020 and September 2020 issues of La Concha.* ☞

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## The Labyrinth

by Dianne Homan  
Whitehorse, YT

**I finished my first Camino** in spring 2011, filled with gratitude for the opportunity it gave me to empty my mind, to dwell in the present moment, to enjoy the pleasure of putting one foot in front of the other and to have a sacred path laid out and marked for me and other pilgrims. I knew I wanted to pass that blessed opportunity on to others at home with a good-sized labyrinth. I had walked one daily at a writing retreat, and it provided much the same benefits mentioned above, although on a smaller scale.

I wracked my brain for a suitable labyrinth location. When I let go of the idea that it needed to be right on or adjacent to my property, I thought of a flat area near the lake about a half mile up the road. RVs used to use it to camp there, and in the muddy season, pickups spun and swerved and dug themselves in there. A road-grading crew had recently built up a berm to block access from the road, though. It was perfect.

For two summers, I walked or drove up and down that section of road, finding and transporting heavy rocks to place in the labyrinth pattern. It was like a Camino, doing a bit at a time, over and over and over, until it was done. My final step was to stack a waist-high rock tower in the middle that would stick up above winter snows.

In snow-free seasons, families drive up to the lake, and kids run joyfully through the labyrinth's nested circles. Folks from town check it out as they pick berries in the woods around it. Pilgrims use it, too. They leave pretty rocks and flowers and beribboned sticks by the tower in the center, in the heart of the labyrinth, in the heart of the Camino experience. 🍷



Labyrinth in early winter by Dianne Homan, Jackson Lake, Yukon, 2013.

## The Reluctant Pilgrim

By Sonali Muthupandiyar  
Elm Grove, WI

**My quads were screaming.** I grilled myself, gritting my teeth in agony. The steep mountain taunted me. I urged my body to continue, one step at a time.

When my mom first asked if I wanted to join her on the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in Spain, I wasn't particularly inclined to spend the summer before my freshman year of high school walking 500 miles.

I was close-minded and accustomed to the comforts of my bubble. However, she was going to walk alone if I didn't come, and I was worried for her safety. After thinking about it, I reluctantly agreed.

Boy, did I initially regret it. In the swelter of that Spanish July, every fiber of my being struggled to make it through the Pyrenees mountains and foothills west of Pamplona. After the first week, though, my broken body began to rebuild itself, turning into a powerhouse. My brain was becoming a stronger muscle as well; day by day, I focused less on the pain and more on the rituals: the taste of chocolate copa in the morning, the feeling of rest at midday and pilgrim voices in the albergue kitchens at night.

After 10 days, I could feel that the pain and the harsh terrain were making me grow physically and mentally. I knew that I was capable of finishing the Camino. As my mindset shifted, my body and brain started working in unison. I started walking longer distances of 20 to 30 kilometers, then waking up at 5 a.m. and doing it all again.

After two weeks, I found myself more focused on the beautiful country and the diverse group of pilgrims I encountered, such as Patrik from the Czech Republic. Patrik traveled to Spain for no particular reason and often answered "I don't know" when someone asked



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Sonali pausing to take in the view, July 2017. Photographed by Sarah Wilkinson.

why he chose to make the pilgrimage. I related to that, as I didn't choose to walk the Camino for reasons of my own. But as we walked and exchanged stories and recipes from our diverse homes, I began to realize just how small my world was. Being from a multi-racial family, I take pleasure experiencing diverse cultures, but this was different; hearing about another person's way of life in a setting unfamiliar to my own helped fully appreciate theirs and my own.

Although my Camino ended after 33 days, I am still on it, regularly tapping into the mindset I developed while walking. Doing so enables me to not only deal with challenges, but to embrace them. I have also become more resilient.

There are a number of things I can point to as evidence of this, such as trying out for the freshman basketball team (with absolutely no past experience!) just because I enjoyed playing, or jumping into learning

four years of French in order to continue conversations I started during that trip. But perhaps the strongest confirmation of the Camino's influence is the leadership style I have begun to develop. During my junior year, I joined LAUNCH, a yearlong business/engineering collaboration. When my project team was forced to work remotely due to COVID-19, we quickly discovered that we would not be successful unless we engaged in good team communication and project management. Stepping into my Camino mindset, I leaned into the discomfort and like to think I helped facilitate our team's success.

I believe that we are all pilgrims seeking transformation through the journey of life. In college, I will continue to lean into experiences that aren't in my comfort zone and look forward to discovering how they will transform me. ☯

## Work Is Love Made Visible: Service to the Camino

By Jorge Cortes  
Dover, FL

**Ever since my wife** and I finished our first Camino Francés, we knew that we wanted to give back and serve our fellow pilgrims. Iris completed the hospitalero training given by American Pilgrims on the Camino, and I applied for the Welcome Service at the albergue in Ribadiso. I was selected as a volunteer in June 2017, and, with my teammate, enthusiastically welcomed pilgrims from over 40 countries.

In Ribadiso, volunteers assist the local staff in welcoming, orienting and helping the numerous pilgrims who arrive daily. It did not take long for us to develop a routine for our two-week assignment. We had a lot of fun doing it, and being of service to so many weary pilgrims was very rewarding.

Iris's chosen path placed her at the Albergue San Nicolás de Flüe in Ponferrada. She served as one of four hospitaleras there, tending to an albergue with over 170 beds. She shared responsibilities with her fellow hospitaleras to make the huge task of running a very busy albergue manageable without the help of local paid staff. As in Ribadiso, beginning there was challenging until a routine was developed.



Albergue San Nicolás de Flüe by Iris Cortes  
Ponferrada June 01, 2017.

I enjoyed my experience so much that I returned to Ribadiso as a volunteer in 2018, and now I've been blessed to be a co-coordinator for this wonderful Welcome Service. In addition to managing the application process, our team has the difficult task of selecting 18 to 20 volunteers each year from a pool of over 50 applicants. It's a challenging job, but I enjoy every minute of it, both as a volunteer and as a coordinator.

After retiring 10 years ago, I knew I didn't want to work again, but service on the Camino or in support of the Camino is not work. It is love for the Camino de Santiago and everything associated with it which sustains my enthusiasm and passion to serve. Whether you have volunteered in Ribadiso or as an hospitalero in another albergue, whether you have been the welcoming face at the Pilgrim Office or whether you have done one Camino or several, if you shared a meal, translated for someone or helped a fellow pilgrim, you are unknowingly giving back what the Camino has given you! ☘

## Camino Trees

By Karin Kiser  
San Diego, CA

**I was somewhere along the Meseta**, the flat central plateau between Burgos and Astorga. It was the height of summer along the Camino Francés, and yet there wasn't a single pilgrim in sight. The weather was hot, dry and glorious. There were fields of wheat as far as the eye could see. No cars, no tractors, just me and the singing birds. Minutes became hours as I walked, immersed in the beauty of stillness.

Suddenly, I spotted something in the distance. Was it one of those tiny towns that seem to materialize out of nowhere along the Meseta? No, that was no church steeple ahead. Instead, it was a single, solitary tree. I felt like I was in the desert seeing water for the first time. Perhaps my mind was playing tricks on me?

As I walked closer, the tree appeared enormous against the background of the everlasting sky. I soon realized the tree wasn't directly along the Camino path, but off in the middle of a field. No matter. It would be worth the detour. I headed for it, fantasizing about the picnic I would have in the shade of its many branches.





Trash pickup along the way  
Karin Kise  
Camino Francés,  
Galicia,  
summer 2019.

I came closer, admiring the strength and resilience of this lone tree.

Then it hit me like a punch in the stomach. I wasn't the only pilgrim to venture off the path to take refuge under this

tree. The magnificent picnic rest stop I had imagined was more like a restroom, surrounded by used tissues and human waste. Heartbroken, I apologized to the tree, lingered a few moments in disbelief and then turned and walked away.

I ruminated for days over how people could walk an ancient spiritual path and leave anything but footprints behind. I was determined to play a part in leaving the Camino in better condition than when I found it. Unfortunately, for all my good intentions, the last thing I wanted to do while walking all day, fully loaded with a backpack and trekking poles, was to stop and collect some rubbish. Bending down with a full pack seemed a Herculean task. So it wasn't until years later when I volunteered at an albergue in Galicia in 2018 that I got my chance. During the two-week commitment, I assumed responsibility for the 3 kilometer stretch on either side of the albergue and rounded up a dozen bags of waste. Since then, I've collected nearly 100 bags along the Camino Francés.

The experience was transformative. I knew I was meant to be involved in the Camino beyond just walking it. I decided then that I would use part of the proceeds from my books to support maintenance efforts along the Camino. This year, I had planned to take a small group of Camino veterans with me to Spain to continue the trash pickup, but alas, 2020 had other plans for us all.

While the Camino is resting, my newest venture in giving back to the Camino is with trees. By far the

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hardest part of the Camino cleanup effort for me was seeing trees surrounded by waste. Trees, as living beings, deserve better than this. They clean the air and provide valuable shade along the journey. A single tree can absorb 4.5 kilograms of air pollutants a year. Trees are more than just the lungs of the Earth and storage vessels for carbon dioxide. They are a source of natural intelligence, ancient wisdom and healing properties. Spending time among trees can help boost our immune system, lower our blood pressure and even help us sleep better.

Although I can't pick up litter around the trees of the Camino de Santiago this year, I can team up with local groups in Spain to get more trees in the ground. From now through the end of April 2021, I am doing just that. I'm calling it my "Global Regeneration with Trees" project, and I hope to inspire others to plant trees not only in Spain but around the world. With more than 32,000 hectares of trees cut down every day, it will take more than just a few of us to regenerate the Earth.

Plant a tree in your yard. Protect ancient forests and the stewards who care for them. Support tree-planting groups in your community. Join others from around the planet who are restoring harmony and balance to the Earth, one tree at a time. 🌳



Planting trees in southern California

In photo from left to right: Julia Blanco, Karin Kiser  
Photo by Karin Kiser, Vista, CA, October 2019.

## A Transformative Journey to a Sacred Center

By Blaine Rada  
Indian Head Park, IL

**I love Parker J. Palmer's definition of a pilgrimage:** "A transformative journey to a sacred center, full of hardships, darkness and peril. In the tradition of pilgrimage, those hardships are seen not as accidental but as integral to the journey itself. Treacherous terrain, bad weather, taking a fall, getting lost—challenges of that sort, largely beyond our control, can strip the ego of the illusion that it is in charge and make space for the true self to emerge."

I walked from St. Jean to Santiago in 23 days, a pace I do not recommend to anyone. Blisters formed on my feet on day two and stayed with me for the entire journey. When you walk for nine hours and cover 22 miles a day for 23 days in a row, you leave a lot of blood, sweat and tears on the trail. What could I possibly give back to the Camino when I gave everything I had just to complete it?

As a professional speaker, I am always looking for ways to share my life experiences in ways that can benefit others. While walking the Camino, I started writing keynote presentations in my head. I wanted to take the ideas I was seeing with so much clarity and share them with my audiences, perhaps inspiring others to take their own pilgrimage.

What I did not expect was that I would turn my Camino journey into a book. After returning home, I planned to write a short summary of my experience to share with family and friends, but the Camino had other plans. As I gathered my notes, photos and videos together, I realized I had the making of a book that could reach a much larger audience than I could reach with my speaking.



"From Sore Soles to a Soaring Soul: Changing My Life One Step at a Time on the Camino de Santiago" was born, and what was crystal clear to me was that all profits from the sale of the book would go back to the Camino, specifically by donating to charities that support the trail, the pilgrims that walk it and the albergues.

My Camino experience has helped my true self to emerge. Now I am doing my best to inspire others with my spoken and written words and am giving back to the Camino a small portion of what it gave me. ☘



### Family Matters

*By Alison Smith  
Mount Pleasant, SC*

**Quite often we are drawn to walk the Camino** by matters of family. We may walk to honor a loved one who has recently passed on, or perhaps we walk to heal the wounds of a broken heart. Some walk to get away from family members, others walk to be drawn closer to them. As a volunteer at the Ribadiso Albergue, I had the immense privilege of listening to pilgrims' stories. At times I would walk alongside pilgrims from Ribadiso up the hill to Arzúa, and stories would unfold at the pace of our stride. I recall that one grandmother told me she was dedicating the pilgrimage to her grandson, who had been severely injured in an accident. Her love and concern for him brimmed over as we walked side by side and she told me his story. Love for fathers, mothers, children, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins and beloved friends—the Camino holds the stories of every sort of family relationship.

I come from a loving family of enthusiastic walkers, and for that I am tremendously grateful. The loss of my father in 2019 and my cherished aunt in 2020, both of whom loved to walk, causes me to long for a pilgrimage to honor their beautiful lives. Unfortunately, walking the Camino during the pandemic has not been possible. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the opportunity to walk in the suburban area where I live, despite the pandemic. In early October, I completed a virtual Camino of 480+ miles, and I used the time walking each day to reflect on my gratitude for family and friends.

The Camino touches us by offering the possibility of familial healing, and we express our gratitude by engaging with new “Camino families” that take on a life of their own. These powerful relationships beckon us to offer our love and caring to new people in the surroundings we discover on the Way. Whether we spend but a few days walking with our newly discovered Camino family or forge a lifetime of friendship, the bonds we share with our Camino brothers and sisters are unlike any other. This is how we express our gratitude for the Camino, through our love for and appreciation of our fellow pilgrims, whom we come to treat as cherished family members, if only for a fleeting moment in time. 🍷



Collection of family walking sticks  
by Alison Smith, Rock Hill, SC, October 2020.

## A Way to Pray on The Way

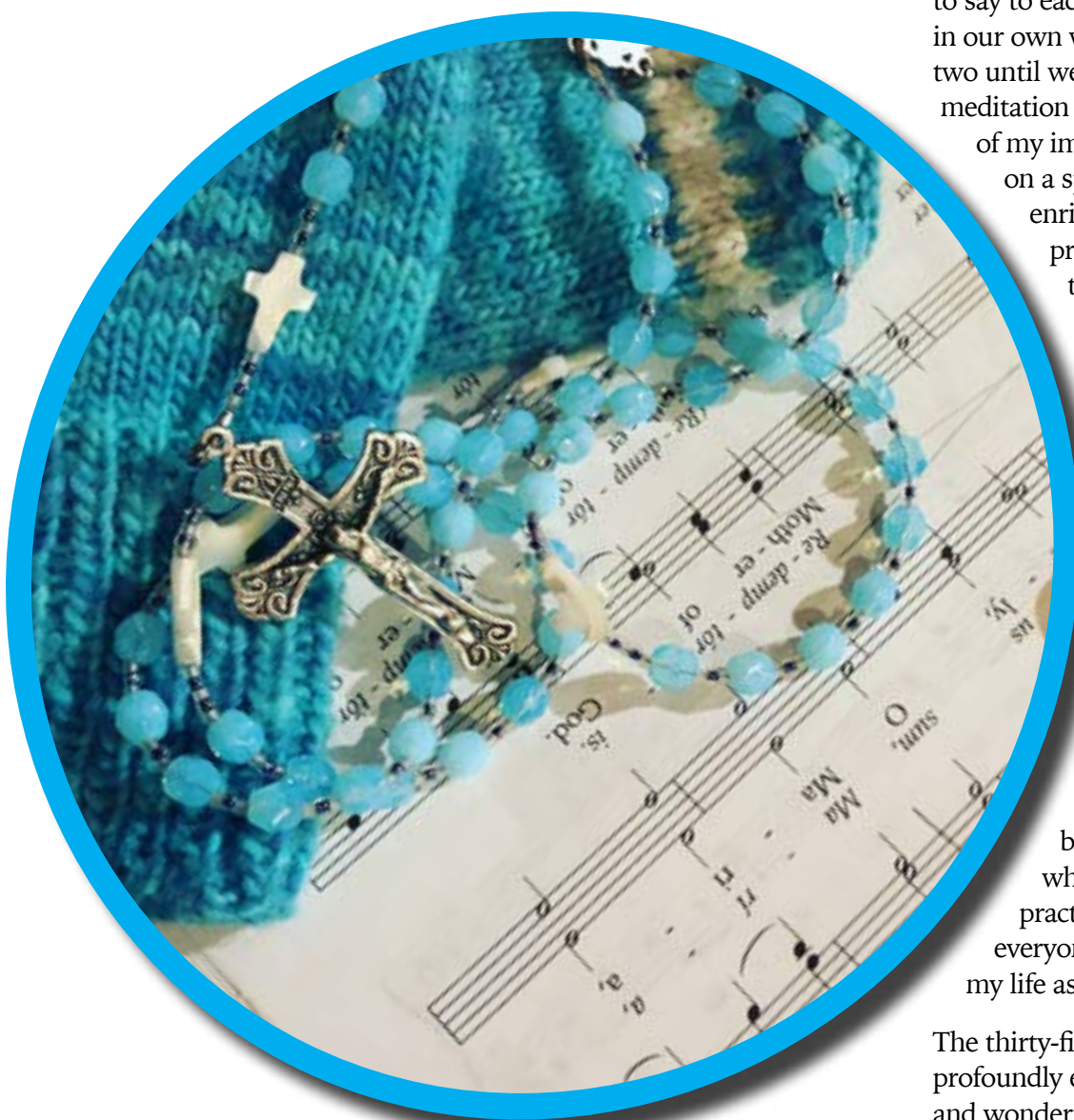
By Rick Weiss  
Oreland, PA

### Several years ago I walked the French route

with my good friend Doug Brown. At the start of each day, we would have very little to say to each other, silently meditating in our own ways for the first hour or two until we reached a café. I'd begin my meditation by thinking of each member of my immediate family, reflecting on a specific way each member enriched my life, and offering a prayer for each one. Following that, every day I would pick a specific group of people whom I have encountered over the years and offered up a prayer for them, including childhood friends, classmates, roommates, teachers, coaches and neighbors.

This form of meditation reminded me of the tradition of praying the Rosary, substituting a group of people for the Catholic Mysteries, with each bead representing a person for whom to pray. As I deepened the practice, my prayers encompassed everyone I've met so far throughout my life as a soldier and a schoolteacher.

The thirty-five days on the Way were profoundly enriched by deep reflection and wonderful memories. These reflections and memories gave me a true sense of thankfulness and the opportunity to recognize, in a small way, every single person who has touched my life. It was part of the pilgrim experience that made my Camino a true journey of gratitude. I offer this practice to you as a suggested way to pray on the Way. ☪



Warm handknit mitts, Pope John Paul II's papal anthem Totus Tuus (Totally Yours), and a rosary. Image by Francine Mastini.





**arts & culture**

## The Botafumeiro Will Rise Again

By Barbara Zang  
Worcester, MA

**When I completed my first Camino**, I waited in line for my Compostela at the Pilgrim's Office then went to the Pilgrim's Mass in the Cathedral, a familiar ritual to many other pilgrims. Perhaps you did the same thing. I hadn't given much thought to the Botafumeiro, the gigantic incense burner on pulleys that is a wonderful feature of a Cathedral Mass. I knew about it but hadn't considered I might witness that gigantic orb flying through the vast space, spewing flames and smoke in one breathtaking arc after another. But there it was—simply astonishing in its speed and splendor.

It's been my privilege to see the Botafumeiro take flight several other times, and it always takes my breath away. The seeming randomness of its appearance is a mystery, though. It doesn't show up at every Pilgrim's Mass. The Botafumeiro appears as if conjured by magic.

It's safe to say that no one has seen it since the Cathedral renovations began about two years ago. According to an announcement from El Camino con Correos, now that this work is complete, the



Above: Botafumiero hanging in Santiago de Campostela,  
Section cover: Cheeses in Arzúa.  
Photographer for both: Thom Ryng: May 2016.

Botafumeiro will once again fly across the vast interior of the Cathedral starting with the “Traslato” ceremony in December to mark the start of the Holy Year.

The Botafumeiro has a fixed yearly schedule:

- Three Kings Day – Epiphany of the Lord (January 6)
- Easter Sunday
- Ascension of the Lord
- Apparition of the Apostle–Clavijo (May 23)
- Pentecost
- Día de Santiago (Feast of St. James, Apostle) (July 25)
- Assumption of Mary (August 15)
- All Saints Day (November 1)
- Christ the King
- Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- Christmas (December 25)
- Traslato Santiago Apóstol (December 30)

In addition, it's possible for pilgrimage groups to make a request for the Botafumeiro for a particular Mass. We at Team La Concha do not know the cost of such an appearance, but we suggest you contact the Cathedral at [botafumeiro@catedraldesantiago.es](mailto:botafumeiro@catedraldesantiago.es) to find out. If you're fortunate enough to be able to make a pilgrimage to Santiago during the Holy Year—or any year thereafter—why not celebrate with the Botafumeiro at a Pilgrim's Mass of your choosing?

If you are curious about the history of the Botafumeiro or crave a look at this icon, visit the Cathedral's website <http://catedraldesantiago.es/en/liturgia/> where you'll find a short video of the Botafumeiro in flight. ☞



## Alison Raju, Camino Pioneer 1939-2020

By Martha López  
Sacramento, CA

**I was so excited** when English Camino friends Anne and David Truman invited me to volunteer with them at Refugio Gaucelmo in 2004. My first hospitalera assignment! We would be a team of four, led by David's cousin Alison Raju, who had worked at Gaucelmo many times. Eager and willing, I had no idea who Alison was, nor how lucky I would be to learn from the best.

Alison set the gold standard for running a smooth operation. With 2004 a Holy Year, the refugio was filled to overflowing every day. She quickly took us in hand, and we successfully hosted over 1000 pilgrims during our two-week stint. Many pilgrims camped in the refugio's large, enclosed garden, which Alison charmingly called our "hotel de las mil estrellas" – hotel of a thousand stars. She was tireless, fluent in multiple languages, and unfazed by any problem. She showed us how to put pilgrims' needs front and center, and how to fit in and work well with the local community. I was in awe.




It came as no surprise to learn Alison had by then authored multiple Camino guidebooks. She would go on to write several more, including guides for the Via de la Plata, St. Olav's Way, and the Via Francigena. Alison was always walking somewhere, either making detailed notes for a new book, or gathering information to update an existing one. If you're lucky enough to own one of her books, you know how much information she could squeeze into a handy pocket-sized guide.

American Pilgrims invited Alison to give a presentation on the Via de la Plata at the 2008 annual gathering in Santa Barbara. Our paths crossed again when I was preparing to walk the Via Francigena in 2011. Alison generously sent me a copy of her almost-finished manuscript for the route – a godsend, as little information for the Via Francigena was available at the time.

Alison died November 2, 2020, at the age of 81. Her enthusiasm for the Camino and her work with the Confraternity of St. James and Confraternity of Pilgrims to Rome benefited pilgrims worldwide and helped make the Camino what it is today. She was a true pioneer and leaves a great legacy.

*Buen Camino, Alison.*

Read more about Alison's life and legacy here: [www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk/2020/11/04/alison-raju-pilgrim-guide-obituary/](http://www.pilgrimstorome.org.uk/2020/11/04/alison-raju-pilgrim-guide-obituary/) 

Alison checking in a pilgrim at Refugio Gaucelmo, Rabanal del Camino

People in photo: Left: Alison Raju, Middle: Anne Truman, Right: Spanish pilgrim

Photographer: Martha Lopez, August 2004.

## Thy Rod and Thy Staff

by Gigi Oyog  
Paris, France

**"Bourdons are beautiful objects,"** Jean-Francois Demange says, adding "but their real beauty is revealed only by impressions left by pilgrims' hands after countless walks and imbued with memories only the pilgrims know." Demange was at one time a historiographer, adviser for period films, photographer, author and lecturer; there would have been no bourdons at all today if he had not saved them from extinction, thus fusing the stories of pilgrims and bourdons into one of living, dying and resurrecting.

Demange was inspired by bourdons while writing, directing and producing "La Memoire du Temps" (1983). In the show he needed bourdons as props, but he discovered that none could be found. Teaming up with wood sculptor Charles-Henri Ravanne, he dedicated himself to resurrecting the long-disappeared bourdons.

With no models to copy, he and Ravanne relied on iconography and stained-glass windows. They learned that in medieval tradition pilgrims were buried with the clothes worn during their pilgrimage, and with their bourdons. "That is why you will not find a single bourdon in French museums," Jean-François explains.

Today, Jean-Francois continues this medieval craft near Saint Jean Pied de Port. He follows the age-old tradition of using wood from oak, ash, boxwood and olive trees, each carefully selected for its superior quality. The wood is cut in winter during the waning moon, then dried for at least three years within the shade of a shed. Once ready, the wood is sculpted into shape by hand, rubbed with linseed oil and finally polished with beeswax. Each bears a silver-coloured scallop shell.

Demange feels that each pilgrim deciding to acquire a bourdon is taking on a "serious act of life." Each bourdon is the pilgrim's alone and no one else's. "Therefore, I must be at the pilgrims' service," he explains, "helping them to choose the symbols to be engraved on the bourdon's handles."

He also embeds a small glass vial inside a hollow in the bourdon. In it he puts a pinch of dirt taken from Stèle de Xibraltar, a small village where three main paths merge into the one that unravels all the way to Galicia. Demange estimates he creates one hundred bourdons a year. Those leaving for the United States are especially dear to him, as he sees it as a small way of giving back to a country that helped liberate his own during the Second World War. ☚



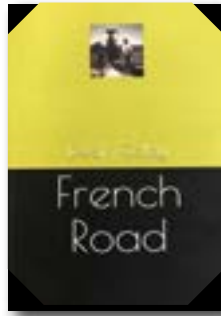
Walking stick by a mojón in La Rioja.  
Photographer: Thom Rying, April 2013.



## A Tale of Two Caminos

### *"French Road: A Novel"*

By Martha López  
Sacramento, CA



First published in 1977 after Colby's own 1976 walk from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago, this dual narrative is the fictional story of Jerome Lionel Barbar, a renowned scholar of medieval Spanish history who mysteriously dies while walking the Camino Francés, and Bill Updike, a professor of English who uses Barbar's notes to retrace his footsteps along the "French Road." Updike, hoping to uncover the mystery of Barbar's death, in the process also finds some other disturbing secrets about Barbar.

Against the advice of many, Barbar sets out to walk the Camino alone at age 70. Along the way, he meets priests and other characters who tell him many legends and tales relating to Roland, Charlemagne and the Camino. Updike follows Barbar by four years, though traveling in a white van purchased in England and outfitted to suit his new young wife. He meets many of the same people as Barbar and learns more about the

professor as he goes.

The premise is intriguing, though in dusting off the book's cover after more than 40 years in order to republish, the manuscript would have benefitted from some editorial housekeeping. The format can at times be confusing, and it is not always immediately clear whether one is reading Professor Barbar's notes or Updike's account (although eventually it becomes more evident that the two stories are told fairly consistently in alternating chapters). Frequent references to Greek myths and use of flowery language can be jarring (as in this passage from page 28: "Aurora pushed open the crimson portals and Dawn emerged to paint the mountain tops with her long rosy fingers"). Inconsistent spellings of character names (Barbar is sometimes Barber), unusual spellings of Camino place names (Cebrero for O'Cebreiro, Eunante for Eunate) and the scrambling of Camino references (Calixtine Codex for Codex Calixtinus) can be distracting. And readers may find more reliable retellings of Camino legends and tales elsewhere.

Despite its structural, stylistic and typographical frustrations, I was caught up in the story, wanting to find out what had happened to Professor Barbar. The story also provides insights into what the Camino Francés was like during the 1970s, when it was much less travelled. ☞

*Buen Camino*



## A Camino Hero's Journey for Children of All Ages

### *"WALK: Jamie Bacon's Secret Mission on the Camino de Santiago"*

By Esther Jantzen

Jantzen Books

2020

338 pages

*Reviewed by Amy Elizabeth Horton  
Warrenton, MO*

This is a tale of a hero's journey told through the lens of an 11-year-old boy's adventures with his mom and his sister, Lily, on the Camino Francés.

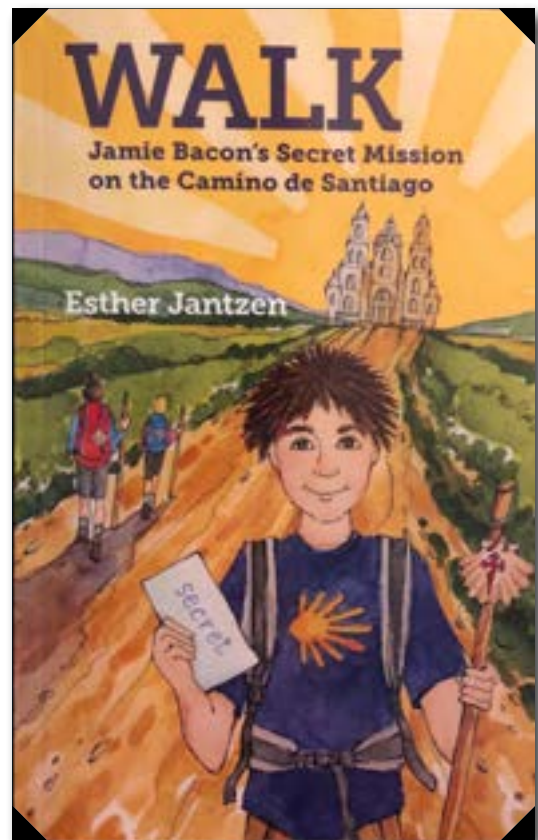
As with any hero's journey, Jamie's begins reluctantly when his parents plan a 500-mile walk in Spain as part of their homeschool curriculum. Unhappy about leaving his friends, he sours to the idea even more when his dad cannot come along due to a work emergency. Jamie's outlook slowly changes during his trans-Atlantic flight, as he talks with his seatmate Father Diego – the archetypal mentor. Father Diego piques Jamie's curiosity with Camino history and lore, then bestows him with a talisman to carry along the way. "I've waited a long time to find the right person to pass it on to," Father Diego says. "I think you're the one."

Father Diego also intrigues Jamie and Lily with his mysterious, sage insights: "I want to warn you both of something. The Camino can be a cranky old fellow. He'll talk to you in a lot of ways – through blisters on your feet, uncomfortable beds, or unusual fellow pilgrims. Some days Señor Camino is ornery and mean; other days he plays tricks. He'll give gifts – all that you need – and then he gets boring. He invents surprises and he disappoints. ... My best advice about walking the Camino is to persevere, regardless. The Camino will shower you with surprises and miracles if you're lucky... if you pay attention...and if you're grateful."

Jamie crosses the threshold onto his journey when he meets fellow pilgrims Hans and Pieter. Unable to continue their own pilgrimages, they enlist Jamie's help to fulfill a secret mission upon his arrival in Santiago. Along the way, Jamie encounters many helpers. Some come to his aid. Others offer the right perspective or information just when he needs it. And then there are

the magic makers. They each serve a vital role in helping Jamie advance along his path.

Geared to readers ages 8 to 14, this work of juvenile fiction is ideal for young pilgrims who are preparing for or have walked the Camino. It would also make a perfect gift for those middle grade readers in your life curious about "that Camino thing you keep talking about." This book also offers something to pilgrims of all ages, reminding us what we discover in our travels – about a place, about humanity and about ourselves. ☞





# CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

## Please consider contributing to our March 2021 issue!

### THE THEME: STEPPING OVER THE THRESHOLD

A threshold marks the boundary between the steady warmth and security of one's home and the potentially intemperate and insecure beyond. It is a physical barrier with psychological, spiritual and emotional consequences.

We must step over a threshold to leave an environment that is certain and familiar, and we must step over one in order to enter a shelter. In preparing to step over the threshold, we subtly or consciously prepare ourselves.

What thresholds do we cross when we decide to become pilgrims? What thresholds do we have to cross during the course of our journeys ... and upon our return home?

Please explore this theme for the March 2021 issue through:

- images that communicate the symbolic or literal thresholds that you've crossed over or are preparing to cross over as pilgrims
- 400-word (maximum) essays that explore the art of stepping over the threshold as a pilgrim—no matter where you are in your journey or practice

The form for submissions can be found at the link below.

[La Concha Article Submissions](#)



Crossing the threshold, Santiago. By Megan Muthupandiyan, 2017.