

LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

MARCH 2021

Portals

Stepping Over the Threshold

The Call to Give Back:

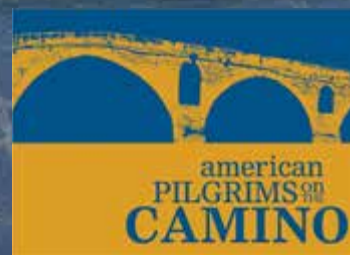
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The mission of American Pilgrims on the Camino is to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino by supporting its infrastructure, gathering pilgrims together and providing information and encouragement to past and future pilgrims.

RIGHT: A pilgrim statue helps mark a pilgrim's passage through Villafranca del Bierzo, Spain, on the Camino Francés. September 2016.

Photos by: Amy Horton, Warrenton, MO

Photo Credit Cover: Thom Ryng

Opposite Page: Photo by Thom Ryng

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LA CONCHA

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Dear fellow pilgrims,

In this issue of La Concha, we invite you to remember that moment you first crossed over your threshold to begin your journey as a pilgrim. Perhaps it was to go buy that new pair of hiking boots, or to meet with your local chapter for an event that, you hoped, would prepare you for the journey to come. Perhaps it was with a pack on your back and a passport in your pocket.

Undoubtedly, whatever the circumstances that marked your passage over your threshold, the breath that you took was punctuated with dashes of expectation and hope, excitement and fear. And with as much certainty, the passage over the threshold changed your life in extraordinary ways.

The many pilgrims who have contributed to this issue help us map out the transformative thresholds that pilgrims step out over at various stages of their journey. Some thresholds are biographical, as Alison Smith celebrates in "Preparing for Sixty." Others are spiritual, as Marian Gonsior reminds us in "Fear and Faith: The Spiritual Thresholds of Pilgrimage." Still others, as Robert Deming suggests in "Risk Management for Pilgrims," are psychological.

Layered with these voices are those of some of our amazing chapter coordinators from around the country. As we mark the one-year anniversary of the declaration of a pandemic this month, they reflect on the thresholds their chapters have stepped over in their efforts to extend the hospitality of the Way during a time in which it has been difficult to gather. Special note should be made of Elizabeth Crosby's essay "We Come Unready." A coordinator of the newly formed Memphis chapter, she reflects on the challenges of creating a new chapter in the midst of a pandemic!

Notably, several pilgrims reflect on the ways in which pilgrimage calls us back across the threshold home as citizens and community members. In their respective reflections, Peggy Eppig and Artemis Preeshl explore uniquely American pilgrimages: one that provides pilgrims the opportunity to retrace the Underground Railroad and one that honors and remembers the lives of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. In doing so, they deftly invite us to consider the ways in which pilgrimage gives us tools to serve a world that is hungry for peace and justice.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of La Concha and that it invites you to reflect further on all the thresholds you've crossed over on your pilgrim's journey. May what welcomed you on the other side continue to change your life in extraordinary ways!

Wishing you a ¡buen camino! every day,

Megan

Megan Muthupandiyana, Editor in Chief

Dear Pilgrims,

During a discussion about what first attracted us to the Camino and to American Pilgrims on the Camino, one of my fellow directors on our Board, Sara Steig Gradwohl, observed that while attending one of our annual Gatherings, she sensed that “these are my people.” I smiled when she said it then and know that she won’t mind me sharing that story now. Her observation came to mind again recently in that I’ve been thinking a lot about what makes our pilgrim community so special and what specifically we all see in each other that makes us want to be a part of it. Some of that thinking is driven by the longing I feel to get back to some sense of “normalcy” where we can again gather together, tell our stories face-to-face, and of course embark on our next adventures.

So, what makes folks feel like “these are my people”? For me, the all-volunteer makeup of the American Pilgrims on the Camino community has a big influence on the character of the organization. We all want to be here and contribute our talents to something that is extraordinarily special, and much bigger than ourselves. Throughout the pandemic, we’ve also demonstrated that we’re creative, resourceful, resilient and hopeful.

While there are probably lots of answers to the question, I attempted to boil it down to a few principles that attempt to capture what makes our community special and to guide our thinking going forward. I’ve shared the results below. Thanks to George Greenia, Steve Lytch and Megan Muthupandiyar for shaping and improving these as they were developed. As you consider them, please reach out and let me know what’s been missed and what you think should be added or subtracted from these:

- **HUMILITY** – During times of challenge or discomfort, focus first on what you can do to improve the situation for others.
- **SIMPLICITY** – Find the lightest way forward. If you carry too much in your pack, it will chaff you.
- **FLEXIBILITY** – Some of the most rewarding times on this journey involve the unexpected. Flexing is flourishing.
- **RESPONSIBILITY** – It resides in the single individual, gets shared, maybe delegated. We all smile at a job well done.
- **COLLABORATION** – Acknowledge this is a team and seek the blessing of others for your piece of the task. Don’t wait to engage when you have talents to share. Recognize and leverage strengths. Listening, good will and good humor build shared understanding.
- **CANDOR** – Be confident of your talents, but admitting your limits welcomes others to deploy strengths that may have gone unnoticed.
- **HOSPITALITY** – Engage fellow pilgrims with the warmth, generosity and good will that you would afford a complete stranger. Assume good intent and remember that at the end of a hard day’s journey, a smile and a bit of encouragement will ease their burdens.
- **GRATITUDE** – Be thankful and be willing to be thanked. Recognize the talents of each individual and show respect for their contribution to the larger good.

Thanks for being part of what makes this community, our community, so special.

Buen Camino!

Dave

David Donselar, Chair,
Board of Directors
American Pilgrims on the Camino

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



GRANTS

Evaluating the 2021 Grants Program Applications

*By Sarah Pierce Martin
on behalf of the Grants Team
Boulder, CO*

The word “threshold” is classified as a noun and is defined as taking you from one place to another, whether in the sense of a physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional or other type of transition. For many – if not all – pilgrims, the act of planning and undertaking a Camino, regardless of the route selected, represents a transition from the familiar and ordinary facets of daily life to others which are unknown and, possibly, uncommon. Crossing the threshold of an albergue or another Camino-associated institution leads us to other experiences, some new and others with which we have assorted degrees of familiarity.

In 2021, American Pilgrims received and reviewed 12 grant proposals from eight albergues, three associations and one federation. Projects include infrastructure improvements to albergues and waymarking along the following routes: Camino Inglés, Camino de Madrid, Vía Bayona and Camino del Sureste y de Levante. Another three applications pertained to the ever-popular Camino Francés and four more requested grants for improvements along various segments of the Via Augusta.

In keeping with American Pilgrims’ 501(c)(3) status, these entities must be non-private albergues or charitable organizations and provide appropriate documentation as proof. Grants are not awarded for general operating expenses of the organization or albergue. Funding for our grants comes primarily from membership dues and donations.

Under the guidance of a board member, volunteers are at the heart of the Grants Program. One volunteer logs in and organizes each application and its supporting documents. Another makes an initial review of each application file to ensure that all required information and documents were included and, as needed, follows up to obtain any missing elements from the submitters. After that, the application files are assigned to three teams of volunteer reviewers for their analyses and recommendations.

How do we determine who gets a grant? We do an assessment of the merit and design of the proposed project, its potential impact on pilgrims, the urgency of the grant and the applicant’s organizational capability to successfully carry it out. Additionally, the reviewers provide their observations about whether a project should be funded in the amount requested or whether it can be scaled down and funded at a lower amount.

Ultimately, these evaluations will be consolidated and presented to our board of directors. The board makes the final decision whether to fund each approved application and in what amount. We will announce the 2021 grant recipients later this year.

Thank you for your membership and continued support of American Pilgrims on the Camino. In the last 10 years we have distributed more than \$350,000 supporting more than 90 projects in Spain, France and Portugal. We literally could not do this without you! ☺



Before and after photos showing replacement of the hot and cold water system in 2020 at the Albergue de la Santa Cruz, Sahagún.

Photos provided by Albergue de la Santa Cruz.

MEMBERSHIP

The Impact of Membership

*By Tom Labuzienski
on behalf of the Membership Team
South Bend, IN*

Many fellow pilgrims have been asking how the pandemic is affecting our organization, American Pilgrims on the Camino. With the actual Camino closed for the past year, membership and revenue is down about 20%. As you are likely one of the 80% who have joined or renewed your membership this past year, please know that you are much appreciated and that your membership has a significant impact. Membership dues help give back to the Camino through our grants program. Last year alone, that amounted to \$55,000 directly to help non-profit Camino applicants make repairs and/or much-needed improvements to albergues and other Camino infrastructure projects. Membership also helps pay for the American Pilgrims website, helps us keep Camino information current and complete, and supports your local chapter's insurance needs. Thanks to members like you, American Pilgrims on the Camino continues and keeps giving back.

In a normal year, you request over 7,000 credentials. This past year, that number, along with credential donations, has decreased by 75%.

With vaccines and proper precautions, it is with great hope that we anxiously look forward to the Camino to reopen for us all to share more meaningful pilgrimage memories. If you have questions, please email us at membership@americanpilgrims.org.

Buen Camino from the American Pilgrims Membership Team.



Lupita at Rabe de las Calzadas. Photo by Ruben Mendoza

Thank you to all **Chapter Coaches, Video Editors, and Grants Team volunteers** for your **amazing support** of American Pilgrims' mission!



Chapter Coaches

Chapter Coaches serve as a resource and mentor for our Chapter Coordinators . . . and many of them serve in dual roles!

Video Editors

Our volunteer video editors create and edit engaging content to share with pilgrims.



The Grants Team

The grants team communicates with grant recipients as we seek to meet their requests.

Thank you for supporting the Camino spirit!

Volunteer Spotlight: Chapter Coach Vince Pratt

*By Allison Venuto
on behalf of the Giving Thanks Team
Dallas, TX*

Vince Pratt serves as a chapter coach for American Pilgrims. After he joined an informal group of pilgrims in 2014 during the year of his first Camino, in early 2017 he became one of the two co-founding co-ordinators of the Charlotte Chapter. Since then, as he notes, “Mike, Martee, John and Lynda have stepped in to form a strong leadership team.”

Since 2014, Vince has walked the Camino every year except 2020, when COVID-19 postponed his plans. Each year he has walked a different route, including the Norte, the Chemin Le Puy and the Portuguese, to name a few.

Since co-founding his local chapter, Vince has attended annual Gatherings every year, including the special coordinator session on the day before the start of the Gathering. These coordinator sessions, he says, help coordinators create connections, share valuable advice and develop friendships.

Since April, the Charlotte chapter has been using Zoom extensively for chapter meetings, so Vince, alongside several other chapter coaches, began organizing and conducting Zoom forums that were open to all coordinators. The goal was to help chapter leaders share both their challenges and their successes. In October they hosted American Pilgrims Chair Dave Donselar and other board members in an open forum discussion with coordinators.

Both of these Zoom-based chapter coordinator events were well received and well attended. The coaches anticipate doing them on a continuing basis as a way to build and strengthen the bonds among coordinators and especially to support new coordinators or those who are not able to attend the annual Gatherings.

When asked why he volunteers as a chapter coordinator and coach with American Pilgrims, Vince replied, “It is a real joy to be making new friends in other chapters all across the USA. I enjoy

meeting new people in my community and helping them plan their Caminos.”

He encourages people who want to become more involved to contact their chapter coordinator. There are countless ways to get involved, he says, naming a few. “Offer to lead a hike, prepare a presentation, write a newsletter, find meeting or event locations, maintain your chapter’s Facebook page, maintain the donativo records, greet new members, become the technology guru who knows how to use Mailchimp, Google Forms, Survey Monkey ... or do any of a dozen other things that help a chapter succeed. There is bound to be a need that you will enjoy helping with!” ☞



Vince Pratt, arriving in St. Jean after completing the Chemin Le Puy beginning in Le Puy-en-Velay, France.

Member Spotlight: Rebecca Johnson

*By Tom Labuzienski
on behalf of the Membership Committee
South Bend, IN*

Last month, American Pilgrims member Rebecca Johnson of Vista, CA, became a Lifetime Member. It was, as she explained, a decision made in gratitude for what thresholds the Camino has helped her cross.

“Being able to take 19 days off and enjoy Spain with my husband and a few of our close friends created so many good memories,” she explained. “We planned the trip for a long time ... I’m glad we were all able to make it happen. Hopefully, I will be able to walk the Camino at least a few more times in my future. The Camino allowed us to really get to see many parts of Spain. The difference in topography, food, people, small and large towns and many parts of history was my favorite part. I never experienced time away from work quite like that before.”

When asked why she chose to support the work of American Pilgrims, she explained she feels very fortunate to have a good job in the midst of the pandemic and she knows many nonprofits are hurting right now. By supporting American Pilgrims, she is supporting the future of the Camino in honor of the past. Thank you very much, Rebecca!

As a membership organization, we are grateful for every one of our members and sincerely appreciate your support. Your continuing membership allows us to support the Camino and pilgrimage experience. ☺



Top: Santiago Road - Left to right: Diane Ryle, Joanne Givans, Rebecca Johnson and Chris Giulianotti.

Bottom: Left to right: Chris Giulianotti, Joanne Givans, Diane Ryle, Mike Giulianotti, Rebecca and Kris Johnson

Photos provided by Rebecca Johnson.

HOSPITALERO CORNER

An Update on the American Pilgrims Training Program

*By Daniel De Kay
on behalf of the Hospitalero Training Team
Sebastopol, CA*

American Pilgrims on the Camino has been working closely with the Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Camino since 2004. The Federation places approximately 6,000 trained volunteers a year in Spanish donativo albergues along several routes to Santiago. Over 600 American Pilgrims members have been trained and more than 450 have served through the Federation. Grateful for the privilege of serving, one volunteer said, “The inner journey of service put me as much in touch with my God as walking into the unknown every day.”

Our hospitalero training program has held three or four trainings per year for the last decade. Until 2020. Then the pandemic upended our hospitalero program. Our last training ended March 12, 2020. No members had the opportunity to volunteer last year.

A year later, we are wondering when, how and if any of us will be able to serve in 2021.

Anai Bareda, Volunteer Coordinator for the Federation, recently wrote: “There is no new news. We are on the path of waiting.”

She added that the Federation’s plan was to begin asking hostels at the end of February about the possible reopening of their establishments. But they are not optimistic. The Federation will not program courses for new hospitaleros. They do not want to create a pool of hospitaleros who will not have the opportunity to volunteer. The whole generation of 2019/2020 did courses but could not yet serve. They will be, if possible, the first to get to volunteer.

The Spanish government has had to make difficult choices between health and the economy and the return to a certain normality is still unclear.

Anai has advised future hospitaleros to wait until the WHO declares an end to the pandemic.

Despite the vaccination programs, it is unknown when pilgrims from North America will be permitted into Spain, Portugal, France or other countries on their way to Santiago.



Kathy Kennerly, hospitalero extraordinaire. Rabanal in 2010. Photo by Rick Baldwin.

Following the Federation’s advice, the American Pilgrims will not hold trainings in 2021 unless conditions guarantee the health and safety of members and trainers.

We all wish for better news. There will be better news. The Camino has withstood plagues, wars, and more. When pilgrims can safely walk the Way again, and hospitaleros can experience their inner journey of service, the Camino will be waiting. The pandemic has taught us to act with intention and to be patient. *Ultreia!* 🍀

USEFUL NEWS FOR PILGRIMS

Camino Celebration Planning

*By Tom Labuzienski
on behalf of the Camino Celebration Team
South Bend, IN*

It is with optimism and an abundance of caution that we continue to plan the Camino Celebration for July 23-26 at Saint Mary's College and the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. Lodging is planned for the beautiful 100-year-old Le Mans Hall, which replicates a French castle. Celebrating St. James Feast Day (on Sunday, July 25th) you will experience a fun Camino Camp with interactive activities. There will be invigorating daily walks with everyone sharing their two minute "ah hah" Camino moment,

Spanish cuisine and wine plus more Camino fun and sharing. We will continue to keep you informed as the event approaches and we carefully evaluate conditions, travel restrictions and safety precautions. If necessary, we will postpone the event to a future date. However, if circumstances permit, registration for this first-ever Camino event will begin in April.

We hope to see you in July! ☞



Le Mans Hall, where the celebration is to take place.

Corrections:

In the December 2020 issue the reviewer of "French Road: A Tale of Two Caminos" was erroneously identified as Martha Lopez. Linnea Hendrickson is the author of the review.

In the December 2020 issue Logan Vincent Pratt was erroneously absent from our spotlight on the Chapter Coaches. He is featured in this issue.





chapter news

We Come Unready . . .

*By Elizabeth Crosby, Chapter Coordinator, Memphis Chapter
Memphis, TN*

The new Memphis Chapter is grateful to the American Pilgrims on the Camino board of directors for their support during the formation process and is excited to join fellow American pilgrims who are also making their Ways. As we grow, we will look to you more experienced chapters for ideas and guidance.

The Memphis Chapter motto is part of a 1st-century pilgrims' prayer:

We come unready.

We come alone.

We come together.

Memphis Chapter pilgrims have a variety of experience on the Camino, including the French, English and Portuguese Ways. The group also includes those who have not yet walked the Camino, but who are interested in learning more about pilgrimage, this one in particular.

Since its first meeting in September, the group has met at a bookstore and in two homes for introductory discussions of the Camino de Santiago, including a practical session of tips for those planning a first Camino this summer. The Memphis Chapter walked the St. Jude Half Marathon in December and will walk across the Mississippi River and back at the end of February. The Harahan Bridge offers the longest public path across the Mississippi River, from downtown Memphis to Arkansas. Pedestrians and bikers enjoy beautiful views of the Memphis skyline, Tennessee and Arkansas shores and the mile-wide Mighty Mississippi.

Buen Camino, y'all! ☞



Last gathering before the lockdown: We walked across the Mississippi River and back on a beautiful Saturday morning in February. Little did we know what was around the corner! Photo by Virginia McArtor.

Facing page: Photo by Thom Ryng.

Using Adult Education to Raise Camino Awareness

By David Drury, Chapter Coordinator, Southern Oregon Chapter
Medford, OR

The Camino is a far richer experience when you know something about it. For the past two semesters, Southern Oregon's American Pilgrims on the Camino chapter coordinators have taught a course on the Way at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) program affiliated with Southern Oregon University (SOU). OLLI-SOU is one of more than 120 OLLI programs in the USA, offering noncredit courses to adults age 50 and up. OLLI courses are serious, but not heavily academic, and our chapter has found it a good way to reach out not just to potential pilgrims, but to anyone curious about this rich slice of history. Not surprisingly, many of our students have asked to be on the mailing list for American Pilgrims' events, and we hope that some will join as full members.

"Oh! Santiago is the same as St. James?"

OLLI-SOU student

There are endless ways to do it. Our course emphasizes the history and cultural legacy of the pilgrimage rather than the walking aspects, which can be better covered in chapter meetings and presentations. It's made up of four 90-minute sessions, which can also be recycled as stand-alone presentations for our chapter members or the general public.

- **Week 1:** St. James and the Birth of the Camino. Who was the apostle Santiago? Did he really preach in Roman Spain? Why is there a pilgrimage in his name?
- **Week 2:** Twelve Centuries on the Camino. We chronicle the evolution of the Way from the Middle Ages to the present, as shaped by the Reconquest of Spain, Cluny, the Black Death, the Protestant Reformation, Franco, the European Union and other factors.

→ **Week 3:** Caminos beneath the Camino. What if the 1200 year old Camino de Santiago was a recent development on the pilgrimage scene? We explore the evidence for pre-Christian Celtic and Roman pilgrim sites in Spain, and the rise of the modern "pagan's pilgrimage" to the Costa da Morte in modern-day Galicia.

→ **Week 4:** Walking the modern Camino de Santiago. What is it like to walk one of the Spanish or Portuguese caminos? This session is hosted by senior Chapter Coordinator Terri Stefanson, who shares her wealth of practical experience.

Our main teaching tools are PowerPoint-assisted lectures, videos, Q&A and group discussions. Although students are encouraged to take advantage of the class reading and media list, there are no required readings.

We shoot for a perspective that is secular, but respectful. The lectures feature a running counterpoint between objective history and the perspective of religious and folk traditions, which can convey spiritual and emotional truths far more important than their objective reality. "All of these stories are true — and some of them actually happened." ☞

CHAPTER NEWS

The Many Doors

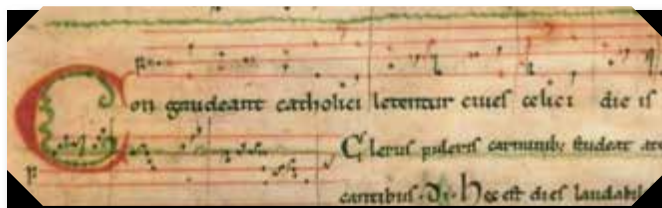
By David Jennings, Chapter Coordinator, Lake Tahoe Chapter Kings Beach, CA

Needing all the help I could get, I joined American Pilgrims in preparation for my first Camino. I have since answered the call of the Camino several times. Now a committed pilgrim and continuing member, I discovered there were a number of doors presented to members of American Pilgrims. One door opened to Hospitalero training, Amigo, and other foreign opportunities; another door allowed written and photo submissions to La Concha; and a third door offered opportunities for volunteering for a number of administrative committees.

Scrolling down the list I was attracted to yet another door. Stepping over the threshold of the Local Chapters door, I share my Camino experiences and my enthusiasm with past, present and future pilgrims in my area. Exchanging memories, answering questions, making presentations, hiking and socializing together bring the dreams to life and set the Spirit of the Camino aglow.

I invite all to find the chapter nearest to them and join in its activities. The door is open, walk right in, the only requirement is an interest in the Camino. COVID-19 has made the usual agenda for the local chapters a challenge, but it is Zoom to the rescue, so get introduced over a wine tasting, book or movie review, presentation covering everything Camino, and you can meet, share, mentor — all are welcome!

The only thing that could possibly be better is a return to the Camino. *Ultréa!* ☞



The Colorado Front Range Chapter's Virtual Existence

By Gene McCullough, Chapter Coordinator, Colorado Front Range Chapter Denver, CO

It has now been a year since the “before times” sputtered out of existence and, wow, are we all ready for some sense of normality to return!

The Colorado chapter has been rigorously following state and local restrictions on in-person events and that has required foregoing all such activities. We’ve forged on, though, with between one and even four virtual events every month. We have convened a *tertulia* every month and, while not anything like the in-person ones, these have proved to be useful. In November we had a Q&A with two chapter authors, and a highlight of the winter was a Camino trivia contest where we invited a handful of other chapters to take part. We had participants from every corner of the country, as well as a Camino friend in Canada and another in England! (This should serve as advice to other chapters to consider inviting others to take part in their virtual events.)

Following the lead of several chapters that have recently presented sessions on routes other than the Francés, we have coordinated presentations on the Ruta de Madrid and the Iona Abbey pilgrimage in Scotland. Finally, we will be presenting a video of a 2019 concert by St. Martin’s Chamber Choir entitled “Along the Way — Songs of Pilgrimage,” an event which includes a pre-concert talk on the music in the “Codex Calixtinus” and celebrates pilgrimage within reflective readings that are interspersed throughout the program. ☞

The Pilgrims' Way:



Stepping over the Threshold

Risk Management for Pilgrims

*By Robert Deming
Fredericksburg, TX*

On the [American Pilgrims on the Camino Facebook](#) group page I have seen many questions people ask when planning their Camino pilgrimage.

“What is the best albergue?”

“What is the best pair of boots?”

“What is the best pack?”

Many people plan their journey to the smallest detail. Some amount of planning is prudent; for example, it is appropriate to have good rain gear in your pack. But taking the uncertainty out of a journey with detailed planning also limits opportunities for serendipity. The albergue experience you talk about when you get back home is probably not the “best” place you stayed, it is the place where a snorer kept you awake and the bathroom was two floors down. The people who made your experience memorable were seemingly random meetings, not the best friend who dropped out at the last minute. The time schedule you had so carefully planned was thrown off by unplanned down days waiting for blisters to heal.

The threshold you cross going on a pilgrimage is giving up the illusion that you can control your experience, the idea that you can manage the risks of uncertainty. You may not know this for weeks into your journey. Camino Magic does not happen when



Image of Robert Deming provided by the author.
Section divider: Horse in stand of birch.
Photo by Thom Ryng.

the sun is shining and you feel great; it is when you are hunkered down in a drainage ditch terrified by lightning and rain.

My advice for new pilgrims ends with these two concepts: First, this journey is a religious pilgrimage, whether or not you practice a religion, and many of the people who support you along the way do so as an expression of their love for God. Be thankful for them. Second, do not overthink your preparations or try to micromanage your pilgrimage. Let the experience unfold before you. When you go home, make this your new way of being in a world full of magic. ☘

Preparing for Sixty

*By Alison Smith
Mount Pleasant, SC*

I am leaning into a threshold year. Milestone birthdays have a purpose, marking coming of age, adulthood, and maturity. As I approach sixty, it is no longer possible to pretend I am young. I may feel and act youthful, but there is no doubt: time is running short. Sixty is the perfect age to embark on pilgrimage.

Marking my sixtieth year by a long walk spent in contemplation is paramount, and I am searching for options. Although walking some segment of the Camino is my first choice, I remain open-minded. I was disheartened to learn that the Appalachian Trail Conservancy will not recognize thru-hikers in 2021 due to the possibility of contagion during the pandemic. The Pacific Coast Trail Association is likewise recommending that hikers postpone long-distance walks until 2022. I have begun to explore lesser-known trails in the United States, but none has captured my imagination thus far. In my twenties, I would have taken a risk and disappeared into the remote backcountry without a care. At 59, I am concerned about safety where there is a lack of infrastructure. Perhaps age has given me the gift of caution.

Prior to the pandemic, my musings were focused on which Camino, not whether I would make a pilgrimage at all. The Chemin d'Arles, the Camino Portugués and the Camino del Norte all beckoned.



Curious Cows on the Kerry Camino. Photo by Alison Smith.

Now I will walk whichever Camino I can, if I can, without concern about culminating in Santiago. As Arthur Paul Boers demonstrates in his book by the same title, “The Way is Made by Walking,” perhaps the destination itself need not be emphasized this year.

My walk on the Kerry Camino in Ireland in 2019 offered me a Camino experience without travel to Spain. Despite the differences between the Kerry Camino and the Spanish Caminos — most notably the absence of fellow pilgrims — my pilgrim colleagues and I created a meaningful journey that reinforced our commitment to the practice of pilgrimage. I walked the Kerry Camino prior to attending a pilgrimage conference and after having served at the Ribadiso Welcome Center in Galicia. In the summer of 2019, I experienced the diverse rewards of pilgrimage — physical, intellectual, and in service. I trust these memories to guide me as I prepare to cross the threshold into my sixties, hopeful that I will find the perfect way to honor that milestone. 🍷

The Camino Outside Your Front Door

*By Tom Friesen
London, ON*

One difficult challenge during these COVID-times is replicating the Camino’s transformational impact when you are walking close to home. One salient feature about a pilgrimage to a distant destination is that you have the advantage of dropping your roles, responsibilities and identity to just become a pilgrim.

This, of course, is much harder to achieve when you are returning home nightly.

There is now technology to provide a virtual idea of locations you would visit if you were able to go on an actual pilgrimage. Many apps, for example, can connect to your phone or a pedometer to track your progress on a trail, as if you were thru-hiking. Using such technology to set out daily meditative challenges may just focus your thoughts, with the goal of creating a life-changing experience through walking.

Some transformational techniques could be as follows: as you walk, carry a shell, yellow arrow or some other Camino symbol. Find new routes, destinations or different itineraries. Take photos that create new perspectives of the “normal” in your

Candles placed atop snack-size Tortas de Santiago by a Camino sister helped light the predawn hours and mark this pilgrim’s milestone birthday just before stepping out from Portomarin, Spain, on the Camino Francés. September 2016. Photo credit: Amy Horton, Warrenton, MO.



neighbourhood. Find local labyrinths to walk. Walk with someone in mind, recalling your experiences with them or your hopes and dreams for them. Pose a daily question as you set out. Sing as you walk. Recite poetry. Practice expressing yourself in a second language. Take a temporary vow of silence and meditate as you walk. Consider pivotal events in your life. Set goals for the next stages of your life.

When you arrive back home you may want to follow up on the walk by journaling, writing poetry, singing songs or doing art, organizing photos, etc. Perhaps you want to create a meal that replicates what you would eat should you be “on Camino.” Music may also take you out of your normal space. There are resources to assist in guiding you to debrief a Camino-like experience. To take advantage of our situation of privilege, you may wish to make a donation to an albergue to help it survive until we can return.

The opportunity to go on Camino will return. In the meantime, we can return to the experience using technology and the simple act of walking from our own doorsteps just as the pilgrims of old did. ☞

Pilgrimage Prairie Paths

By Sharenda Barlar
Wheaton, IL

Scholars in Pilgrimage Studies have often criticized pilgrims for using technology while walking a pilgrimage route such as the Camino de Santiago. Last year, at the Pilgrimage Symposium at William and Mary College, Nancy Frey, a leading scholar for Pilgrimage Studies, stated that technology takes away from the pure Camino experience. She advocates putting the phone away, taking a break from the emails and being present in the moment.

Remarkably, once the Camino closed to visitors in March, people began walking virtual pilgrimages around their homes. My writing partner, Dr. Susan Dunn-Hensley, and I stumbled upon an app called *My Mission: Camino de Santiago*, which allows pilgrims to walk wherever they are and chart their progress along the French Camino. We began our journey on May 31 and did not miss a day. We then thought about bringing the Camino to our colleagues at

Wheaton College, and asking them to share their expertise with us. For those of us who have walked the Camino, some of the most impactful experiences were the conversations between pilgrims. We then invited our friends, and overwhelmingly they wanted to walk with us! We told them that we would be interviewing them for our blog and that there would be stops for coffee because we were recreating the Camino.

Dr. Dunn-Hensley and I came up with our plan. Since our app told us where we were each day, I would tell colleagues about the geographical or historical importance of that place along the Camino. Also, the app would give postcards of significant locations on the French Camino. I shared stories about the food and showed photos of that particular spot. Our research assistant prepared questions to ask each participant which had earlier been emailed to them. I wanted our conversations to flow freely, so it was important that they see the questions ahead of time and be able to guide the conversation themselves.

Each path became sacred and embodied our virtual pilgrimage. I recorded every conversation with our



Walking with academics. Photo by Susan Dunn-Hensley. Herrick Lake, Wheaton IL May 2020.

Left to right: Susan Dunn-Hensley, Sharenda Barlar, Nadine Rorem, Provost Margaret Diddams.

colleagues, who were grateful for sharing their research and learning from us about pilgrimage. Since we were living amid political unrest and uncertainty in our country, we prayed together and discussed our concerns. Much like on the Camino, people opened up immediately and shared deep topics. Conversations that may have been uncomfortable became easy and fluid while we faced our path and walked in the same direction. ☞

Stepping Into Sacred Time and Space

By Jeff Arnold
Cincinnati, OH



Rabe de las Calzadas.
Photo by Ruben Mendoza.

I walked my first Camino in 2017 with my wife Joan, who had already walked the Camino Portugués in 2015. We started on the Via de la Plata in Zamora, planning to turn left onto the Sanabrés in Granja de Moreruela.

We spent that first night in the lovely albergue in Zamora, and began our walk through the town.

When we got to the edge of town, the Camino stretched out in front of us as a gravel lane on the flat ground under the sun.

Before I stepped from the pavement of Zamora onto the Camino, I stopped, aware that here I was going to cross the threshold. Raising a foot, I said aloud, “With this step I enter the sacred space of the Camino” and put my foot down. Lifting the other foot, I said, “With this step I enter the sacred time of the Camino” and put that foot down.

As we walked, I found those words circling around in my head: “sacred time ... step... with every step ... I enter sacred time ... with every step, I enter sacred space... with every step I take, I enter sacred time, sacred time and space, with every step I take, sacred space and time ... ” Gradually a tune formed around the words and looped around and around, becoming a chanted/sung mantra that grew stronger, stepping with me for the next 21 days to Santiago. Sacred time and space, indeed. ☞



Here, the Physical and Holy Meet

By Natasha Ravnik
Oakland, CA

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines threshold as “the plank, stone, or piece of timber that lies under a door; a gate or door — the place or point of entering or beginning; the point at which a physiological or psychological effect begins to be produced. Or it is the value above which something is true or will take place and below which it is not or will not.”

All these definitions apply to my pilgrim journey.

When I committed to walking the Camino de Santiago, I was searching; I needed to change my life. Internal yearnings for something I could not understand kept calling me to walk. I began taking intentional training walks, marking the beginning of my adventure to Spain.

While preparing for the Camino, a pilgrim grows both spiritually and physically. My walks began to produce physiological and psychological effects. Once I embarked on this journey, there was no turning back.



While walking the Camino, I crossed over many physical thresholds. The sight of an albergue after a long day of walking is a welcome one. I remember the feeling of exhaustion at the end of a long day, dirty, sore and thirsty. I was greeted at one albergue with a smile and offered a cool glass of water — it was like winning

The precarious and strenuous descent from Cruz de Ferro serves as a threshold experience on the Camino Francés. August 2016. Photo by Amy Horton, Warrenton, MO.



After the taxing descent from Cruz de Ferro on the Camino Francés, pilgrims are rewarded with an idyllic scene as they cross over the Río Meruelo into Molinaseca, Spain. August 2016. Photo by Amy Horton, Warrenton, MO.

the lottery. This simple gesture filled me with gratitude.

Leaving behind the security of an albergue, my temporary home each night, required gathering a daily threshold of determination. I had to keep going. It took a giant force of will and courage to set out for the unknown at dawn. But, it was also a gathering of excitement.

Upon entering the Cathedral in Santiago, I crossed a spiritual threshold. Here, the physical and holy meet. No longer in achievement mode, I was immersed, stilled and held. I had walked 300 miles with deep, purposeful intention — a sacred journey of the soul; farther than I ever thought I could go.

The trials of returning home can produce other thresholds of inner and outer growth. As a returned pilgrim, I was bewildered. I was in a place in-between. I no longer had to walk to find lodging, but where was I now that I'd accomplished my goal?

A pilgrimage is an ever-changing, unfolding process — the doorways to the soul keep us moving forward, even if we don't understand why. ¡Ultreia, peregrino! ☞

Hills Ahead and Spaces Between

*By James King
Province, OR*

I should not have been so weary only nine miles past a restful night in a three-star Pamplona hotel, a splurge after the Larrasoaña Municipal.

Spotting a group of wayfarers at an outdoor café caressing San Miguel bottles, I stopped dead and ditched the game plan to plow on upward past the looming ridgeline of windmills leading to Puente la Reina eight miles beyond. I claimed a vacant chair, called for a beer, and spent the afternoon gleefully hailing spurts of sweat-grimed peregrinos who mostly opted for valor over discretion in forsaking the delights of tiny Zariquiegui's lone T-intersection.

Some weeks later in Laguna de Castilla, a small plaza and a few tables outside a well-tended albergue oriented toward the Galician massif's southeastern tail also called me to halt rather than press on two miles more to O'Cebreiro. As the afternoon lengthened, the farmlands fronting the mountains morphed into hazier yet richer golden orange hues, like a series of Monet landscapes come to life, the

most compelling view I'd encountered since admiring the Pyrenees from the deck at Orisson.

After working two jobs for most of a dozen years, I decided to tackle the Francés in 2015 without a cellphone or reservations beginning with Roncesvalles, depending solely upon Brierley and fellow wayfarers' intel. I was determined that the pilgrimage be a definitive page break from email, calls, meetings or anything that required scheduling before moving to Jinja, Uganda, for several years. I would be grateful later for snoring souls thrashing around on creaky bunkbeds who conditioned me to a nightly racket of barking dogs, honking motorcycles and open-air nightclubs thumping until dawn along Lake Victoria's banks.

Yet, while I imagined myself breezily carefree, I sometimes felt preoccupied, too, by the goal of pressing onward to collect my Compostela or, ironically, fretted about the prospects of finding a cot at the next inn and powered past some charming spots in which I wish I'd lingered. But Zariquiegui and Laguna helped me then and remind me now at times to resist the pressure of time's vise and exhilarate in unplanned respites. There will always be more hills ahead on our paths, but the spaces between them are so often where we step into the peace we seek and discover the company to sustain us as we cross over from one pilgrim journey to the next. 🍷

Twice Blessed

*By Wilson Whitehurst
Richmond, VA*

I walked the Camino Francés in October 2019. We began in Roncesvalles and thirty-four days later finished in Santiago. The experience is the most profound, significant adventure of my life. Looking back, I feel incredibly fortunate to have just beaten the COVID-19 lockdown. I am planning to return in the fall of this year.

They say that miracles happen on the Camino. Well, my first Camino miracle occurred before I had even gotten started. I flew into Madrid and was going to spend the first night there before heading to Pamplona to meet my group. The flight was perfect, and I arrived at my hotel feeling tired but excited and ready to get started. In an instant, my happiness changed to sheer panic when I realized that I had left my cell phone in the taxi. Obviously, the chance of retrieving my lifeline was very slim. My initial thought was that my Camino was over and I hadn't even taken my first step. My rescue team immediately jumped into action. The hotel staff talked with the taxi company multiple times and pointed me to a phone store for a replacement. My wife, Liz, and my daughter, Joy, continued to call my cell all morning in hopes that someone would answer. Unfortunately, my ringer was off and I had not activated "find my phone." This was a long shot at best. After some time, Liz did get through to the driver, and although Spanish is not her second language, she managed to get him to understand "Villa Madrid," which was my hotel. In the end, that wonderful man appeared mid-afternoon with my phone — a complete miracle. My Camino was saved. I felt confident and secure that I had nothing to fear. I was ready for anything. I had stepped over the threshold.

Only recently have I come to understand that, as I stood on the threshold of my pilgrimage, this event actually represented two miraculous blessings. First, my carelessness and ensuing panic were a necessary, significant jolt that abruptly forced me into a place of helplessness and submission. It was a watershed moment for me — a huge blessing. Second, the successful retrieval of my phone was obviously a separate, redemptive gift that gave me confidence, security and a sense that all would be well.

I can't wait to return and experience new blessings and step across new thresholds. 🍷





One of those beautiful small churches in which the author found solace. Located 12 km before Santiago on the Camino Francés.
Photo by Dianne Homan.

Crossing the Threshold

*By Dianne Homan,
Whitehorse, YT*

It was one of those churches that you pass along the Way — a graceful stone guardian at the edge of a town. The day was intensely bright and hot, thrumming with the sounds of farm machinery.

I trudged across the small courtyard, past a statue of an unfamiliar saint, then closed the heavy wooden church door behind me. It was cool and dark and quiet inside — like a prayer being answered. No one else was there.

I slipped off my pack and walking poles and slipped into a pew near the back. I rubbed my sticky hands on my pant legs and rested them on the smooth wood to each side of me. The sweat dried slowly from my face and neck. My eyes relaxed their squint. It was so quiet I could hear my heartbeat and breathing, hear them slowing.

I don't remember what the inside of that church looked like, only that I felt so peaceful there. I guess you could call it a religious experience. ☪

Crossing a Social, Political and Spiritual Threshold While Retracing Steps on the Underground Railroad

By Peggy Eppig
Delta, PA

When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven.

– Harriet Tubman from “Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman” (1869) by Sarah Hopkins Bradford

Months before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I had begun researching the Pilgrim’s Pathway, an Underground Railroad route that crosses the Mason-Dixon Line near where I live in southern York County, PA. By April, under pandemic restrictions and while working two jobs from home, I was walking sections of this route on weekends, both to confirm my research and disengage from the mental stress of this strange new world.

Then in May, social unrest erupted across the nation, triggered by the brutal death of George Floyd. My weekend walks, crossing and re-crossing the Mason-Dixon Line, took on new meaning for me, a Quaker and former natural resources police officer. As word spread about my “little pilgrimage” walks, someone suggested our Deer Creek Friends Meeting, which had played an important role in safeguarding freedom seekers moving through the region in the mid-19th century, should now walk pilgrimage in support of anti-racist movements.

Over three days in June, we walked 50 miles from the front porch of the Deer Creek Friends Meetinghouse in Darlington, MD, to the front porch of the Christiana Underground Railroad Center at Zercher’s Hotel Museum in Christiana, PA. The walk reaffirmed our commitment to working for social justice.

Others, too, have made similar pilgrimages.

Linda Harris led a 200-mile walk in September, retracing Harriet Tubman’s escape from Maryland’s Eastern Shore to Philadelphia. She is now planning to start Camp Harriet for children in Dorchester County, MD, as a way of introducing children to pilgrimage and sharing the history of the Underground Railroad.

Over the past two years, Ken Johnston has furthered his personal knowledge of the history of civil rights in the Mid-Atlantic by walking, often at night, to retrace the steps of freedom seekers escaping slavery using the Underground Railroad. Most recently, he continued his walk for civil rights, starting in Philadelphia and walking to the Harriet Tubman Memorial in New York City.

Our Deer Creek Friends Meeting is planning to walk the Pilgrim’s Pathway again this June. Walking for civil rights has a long and established history as part of an American tradition of pilgrimage. The Mason-Dixon Line and the Underground Railroad have taken on new meaning for modern American pilgrims honoring the work of social justice advocates past and present, especially during a time of pandemic and civil unrest (and so many in need of a good long walk). For many of us, crossing the Mason-Dixon Line in the footsteps of those who sought freedom has served as a social, political and spiritual threshold toward justice. ☞

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Members of the Deer Creek Friends Meeting upon arrival at the Christiana Underground Railroad Center at Zercher's Hotel Museum in Christiana, PA.



Road sign marking the Pilgrim's Pathway, a section of an Underground Railroad route in Lancaster County, PA. The miller's house in the background was a documented safehouse on the Underground Railroad.



Road walking a section of the Pilgrim's Pathway in Lancaster County, PA.

Members of the Deer Creek Friends Meeting walk the Mason-Dixon Trail section of the Pilgrim's Pathway, along the Susquehanna River in York County, PA.



All photos on this page June 2020 by Peggy Eppig.

Finding Heart in a Winter like No Other

By Leah Wilkinson-Brockway
Spokane, WA

Dear Pilgrims, what a winter! My virtual pilgrimage progresses slowly across the Labrador Sea to Greenland. It has been full of ordinary things like dishes and laundry. Christmas was peaceful at home, but there were unusual things like a wind storm, a three-day power outage, sick cats and a broken furnace. And, there is the continuing pandemic. Now, I am logging miles volunteering in the Spokane COVID-19 vaccine clinics. We never know what will happen on a pilgrimage, when we step over the threshold.

I had a strange dream one night. In the dream, I stood before a mirror. I opened my rib cage like it was a trap door. Stepping into my chest, I was in an empty cavernous room with walls of rib and muscle. It startled me awake. Where was my heart? Indeed!

There is this “heart thing” that happens during pilgrim time with God. It happens walking, talking, praying, breathing or just being. It happens with sorrow and suffering when our hearts are shattered or when grief clutches our throats and strangles us. There is this “heart thing” that starts like a small seed growing, even when we give up in despair. Someone is gently knitting us back together. One day, we quietly notice our heart pieces are reassembled.

This “heart thing” continues when we realize our hearts are splinted by the Lord’s Heart. Our humility that day is profound. We pause to contemplate Jesus on His Cross and realize that He carries our hearts there, too. This is the threshold of thankfulness and powerful love. In the hardest times, He is always there healing us, supporting us, comforting us.

This “heart thing” happens when we accept what we cannot change and turn from ourselves to share the joy, pain and suffering of others along the Way. Everyone is made by the Lord to love and be loved. By grace, we are able to pray, love and serve. Here is the threshold of service.

At first, one by one, every pilgrim step was a prayer. Many steps, many miles and pain are all part of this pilgrimage. Every breath is a prayer. Every heartbeat is a prayer. When did the Lord’s Heartbeat become the answer? If I am not coherent, it’s because I am awestruck. It’s such a beautiful “heart thing”!

I have reached milepost 2,449 on my 5,055-mile journey. I have 2,606 miles to go. Until next time. Love, Leah

Editor’s Note: This is Leah Wilkinson-Brockway’s eighth reflection 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, September 2020 and December 2020 issues of La Concha. ☞



Threshold to the World. My kitchen door. Photo by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway. 2/21/21. Spokane WA.

Born Onto the Camino

By Robert Forrester
Denver, CO

There are many ways and many places to start a Camino.

This is about one of the more amazing starts you can experience.

In 2011 we enter la Cathédrale de Notre-Dame du Puy-en-Velay in Auvergne, France, via the back door for the daily 7:00 a.m. pilgrim Mass and blessing.

The atmosphere is warm and welcoming. Near the front stands a beautiful old wood carving of our man Santiago. He basks in the warm glow from the candles at his feet. He stares straight ahead and is missing part of an arm.

Other pilgrims have drifted in with their packs. We nod at each other in greeting as we take our seats.

For many of us, this is our first Camino. We are filled with anticipation, but we are also a bit apprehensive. We are nascent pilgrims. Soon we will have to get up and walk, but right now we feel safe and protected in the warm embrace of the church.

Under the benevolent gaze of the black Madonna behind the altar, the Mass begins.

At the end, the priest calls us forward for the blessing. Nuns hand us plastic rosaries, a medallion and a prayer. We all turn westwards, somehow knowing instinctively the direction we must go.

Unnoticed during the Mass, huge brass grates were opened in the floor. Momentarily we hold back not wanting to leave. Then as one we begin to shuffle forward.

The grates reveal a narrow passage with steep steps, descending. We enter and carefully squeeze our way through. There's no turning back; we are committed to exiting.

A short way down, we see light. The passage broadens, a tall archway rises up and opens to the sky straight ahead.

With lifted hearts we emerge, like baby pilgrims, into the light. All symbolism completely lost on me, we head down the steep, lumpy, volcanic rock paved Rue des Tables. We head for the Rue des Capucins, and then a steep hill out of Le Puy.

On the edge of town we are reminded of the enormity of our challenge. It's our first Camino sign; it shows 1521 kilometers to Saint Jacques de Compostelle.

Now, the Camino is real, and we're off to be pilgrims!

Ultreia et Bon Chemin! ☞



Side chapel within Santiago de Compostela.
October 16, 2018. Photo by Thom Rying.



An aging gate. April 26, 2013.
Photo by Thom Ryng.

Passing Over, Through, To and For

By Katalina Prince
Arcata, CA

What did we leave? Where are we going? Why are we going, and have we not realized that the moment we pass becomes its own new en-trance? Do we walk in meditation, aware that each step is a choice?

I have wished to “walk the camino” since a dear man who crocheted hot pads and lived in his big “yellow canary” motorhome spoke to me of this journey in Spain. It has been 25 years since he struck a flame with the sparkle of his eye and the words “La Via Galactea y el Camino.”

While I lived in the backcountry of San Diego County, it became clear that I *was* on my Camino. It happened one day during one of my windy jaunts through the mountains on an errand trip to “town.” I suddenly realized that we are each on our walk, our daily meditation, with intent, focus and prayer.

After coming to this realization, I felt like the road beneath my jaunting little jeep was now made of cobblestone. By the time I arrived in the metropolis, it became clear ... el Camino de Santiago, a San Diego! I saw the “signs” everywhere. There, Saint James Cathedral stood with a scallop shell suspended over the doorway, another embedded into the walkway to the door leading from the fountain. There, Venus stood on a scallop shell newly floated

in from the sea, as do the hubris of Santiago. There, the shore a landing, like a threshold to a new land, new footing.

This moment now is the portal to what may be next. Our steps may be languid, full of spirit, awareness, silence or thought. I am ready to realize, ready to accept and ready to pass over, through, to and for. ☞

Threshold Moments and the Camino

By Joseph Curro
Arlington, MA

On June 2, 2019, my daughter and I commenced our pilgrimage by stepping out over the threshold of our home. In the process, my thin, nylon duffel bag caught a nail on the door jamb and was torn. After a hasty application of duct tape, we were on our way, carrying with us the first lesson of the pilgrim: snags are to be expected, and obstacles can be overcome.

Our Camino was concurrent with some important threshold moments in my life. We set off for Europe the day after my oldest daughter graduated from high school, taking advantage of the time before she left us for college. My wife and I were approaching 25 years of marriage, and I was marking 20 years of service with the same employer. Meanwhile, my daughter and I were deepening our spiritual discovery, finding comfort in the embrace of a Christian denomination that was new to us.

With every crunch of my boots across France and Spain, a new threshold came into focus: that between my life before the Camino and life after the Camino. How could I know that my moments of peace would give way to a year filled with death and suffering from a global pandemic, a reckoning with questions of racial justice, political upheaval and a fundamental change to life as we know it?

Many people believe that the Camino is dotted with “thin places” where this world and the eternal world meet. This is experienced most profoundly on the meseta where the big sky touches the seemingly endless expanse of the earth.

We can almost feel the finger of God nudging us along until our feet can carry us no further and we stumble across yet another threshold... an albergue

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or hotel or café. We reach across the thresholds that separate nations as we encounter pilgrims from around the globe, as we break bread together and share conversations.

The Camino is a place where we can cross over from one state of being to another, experience personal transformation and appreciate the importance of life's happy threshold moments. These lessons have helped me to walk through the dark shadows of the past year, knowing that there is light and warmth at the trail's next bend. ☞



Marty starting the Camino. Photo taken by pilgrim Hans from Holland. St. Jean Pied de Port, May 2012.

Keep Trying

*By Martin Metras
Woodstock, IL*

I am a Pilgrim. At least I think so!

In 2003 my brother Mike walked the Camino and kept us apprised of his progress via email and phone calls. This got me thinking about the Camino.

I retired in 2007, and a month later I headed to Germany to visit with Mike and his wife Petra, who he met on the Camino. Before this I had only left the United States once for a few hours.

After listening to Mike and Petra, I decided I wanted to try the Camino. I was concerned because I spoke only English, so Mike said he would go with me for a week.

I started out being grumpy and frustrated, as I was over packed and out of shape. I had walked 98 km when Mike left, so I had to figure out things for myself. My fear was that of fear; I was not really afraid, just not sure of things.

After walking 150 km, I was sore and upset and I lost my pilgrim's passport. I back-tracked looking for it, so I had three 20-mile days back-to-back. In Santo Domingo I got a new passport. You need to trust the Camino.

Because I did not understand Spanish, I waited for a bus that never came. I finally crawled into Burgos and decided to stop walking; I took a train to Santiago, then a plane home.

Five years later I needed to try again. I wanted no deadline, so I bought a one-way ticket to Spain. I made sure I had enough money to autopay all my bills, then packed my backpack and headed out my front door on May 1st, 2012, and never looked back.

I walked from Saint Jean Pied de Port to Santiago. I was sore for a few days, but it passed. I got two blisters, but they healed. I helped at least two troubled pilgrims; they are fine. I only had two rough days, the walk over the mountain from Saint Jean Pied de Port and the bus ride from Finisterre back to Santiago.

The Camino was one of the best times of my life.

I am 74 now and have been thinking about one more Camino. Perhaps this year, but it most likely will not happen until 2022. We shall see. ☞



Marty's last day. West coast of Spain near Finisterre. Photos on this page provided by Martin Metras.

Fear and Faith: The Spiritual Thresholds of Pilgrimage

By Marian Gonsior
Westland, MI

The phrase “stepping over the threshold” brings to mind old wedding day photos. “By carrying the bride over the threshold,” explains the *theamericanwedding.com* blog, “the groom is putting a protective space between her and the floor,” avoiding a possible fall that would upset evil spirits. The thresholds pilgrims cross spring up from deep-seated emotions rather than superstitions.

Fear is a psychological threshold that can crush a Camino dream. Immediately after my husband and I decided to become first-time pilgrims, we were gripped with fear. Multiple “evil spirits” hurled questions at us: were we fit enough? Young enough? Smart enough? We became almost panic-stricken, and high blood pressure and other ailments appeared. We had never done any long-distance walking in the United States, much less in another country. The only person we knew who had done a Camino was half our age. Numerous worst-case scenarios haunted us. In desperation, we scheduled long put-off physicals, joined Camino Facebook groups, and pored over our Brierley guide. During practice walks, we shared tips about no-blister foot care and must-have hiking gear. Knowledge eased our fear, and together we pushed our way across this threshold.

Later, faith loomed before us as another threshold, albeit a spiritual one. Phil Cousineau said, “In each of us dwells a pilgrim. It is the part of us that longs to have direct contact with the sacred.” How would we find that part of us? We weren’t particularly holy people. Could our ordinary lives be transformed? The presence of chapels, cathedrals and other religious sites along the Way would surely help. Being surrounded by the sacred would make us holy, wouldn’t it? Revisiting spiritual guides who had sustained me in the past, I found poets and other writers had much to say about the close connections between spirituality and walking. Prayers and images from my Catholic upbringing provided additional inspiration. The Prayer of St. Francis. The 23rd

Psalms. We crossed the threshold of faith by preparing to be open to the divine we encountered along the Way.

Unlike the bridal threshold, the pilgrim thresholds I’ve described are not always crossed just once. These crossings might have to be repeated, but great strength comes with each recrossing. Fear is diminished. Faith is increased. The next time, we might even serve as another pilgrim’s guide. ☞



A bread bag hangs at the gate of a home in Palais de Reis, Spain, on the Camino Portugués. Horns tooted by bread truck drivers signaling their early morning deliveries provided memorable notes on this pilgrim’s Camino soundtrack. September 2018. Photo credit: Amy Horton, Warrenton, MO.

Camino-in-Place for George Floyd and Breonna Taylor

By Artemis Preeshl
Jefferson, LA

In spring, COVID-19 derailed my first Camino, as the pandemic had for so many people. After learning of Annie O'Neill's film, "Phil's Camino", on Phil Volker's Camino at home, I declared myself a "pilgrim" and started on the Camino Francés-in-place. During my daily walks, I decided to dedicate my Camino to social justice.

As a Minnesotan, George Floyd's death deeply moved me. I had taught gymnastics in the neighborhood where George Floyd was murdered. Then, I saw Annie O'Neill's interview with Rebekah Scott about walking for her young, black daughter who was murdered in Texas. As a result, I leaned into an anti-racism practice whereby I would think about my breath as I walked. George Floyd, echoing the words of the late Eric Garner, repeatedly said, "I can't breathe." As the pandemic deepened, I became grateful for the simple things: air, being able to breathe, walking. Sometimes, I would talk with people who had Black Lives Matter signs in their yards or wore Black Lives Matter clothing or accessories. Other times, I would walk silently. Coming from an "All Lives Matter" family, posting regularly on Facebook was part of my anti-racism work: "George Floyd: Rest in Power." "Justice for Breonna!" "Black Lives Matter." I emailed George Floyd's brother, Philonise Floyd, to let the family know that I stood and walked in solidarity as an ally. My Camino Francés lasted from July to October, longer than it would take to walk in France and Spain. I had dreams of walking in Fall 2020.

At the end of 487.5 miles, the pandemic escalated. Breonna Taylor was a first-responder who was shot in her own home. The police had the incorrect address on a no-knock warrant. I declared another Camino. Now I am walking for Breonna Taylor. I emailed Terry Willis, an Alabaman who is walking from the site of George Floyd's murder to Louisville, Kentucky, where Breonna Taylor was murdered. I'm walking in solidarity with Terry Willis and all those with whom he's talking along the way. I've passed mile 130 on the 390-mile Camino Portugués-in-



Along the way outside of Samos.
Photo by Thom Rying

place. Still breathing; still walking. Grateful to be alive.

With the pandemic spreading, will I complete all six ways to Santiago de Compostela before I actually walk the Camino in-person? For whom will I walk next? As a pilgrim, I realize the Camino is a state of mind, a journey beyond the destination.

Buen Camino! 🌿



**"The world reveals itself
to those who travel
on foot."**

– Werner Herzog

arts & culture

A Double Holy Year

CULTURE

By George Greenia
Williamsburg, VA

Math whizzes can tell you that the “periodicity” of July 25, the Feast of St. James, falling on a Sunday works out to intervals of 6, 5, 6 and 11 years. The last “Año Santo” was in 2010. It was a long wait of eleven years, and now 2021 is a Holy Year too.

This year’s ceremonial opening of the cathedral’s Holy Year Door on December 31 was live-streamed to tens of thousands around the world. During long months the cathedral was closed while the interior was cleaned and restored. This was the media’s first chance to broadcast the sanctuary’s now gleaming appearance.

To everyone’s delight that day, Pope Francis granted special permission to make this Holy Year 24 months long, spanning all of 2021 and 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic cancelled nearly all pilgrimages to Santiago in 2020 and will continue to make 2021 and beyond chancy. An extra-long Holy Year will ease crowding, permit a more gradual reopening of services, spread out the economic benefits and allow for uneven vaccination patterns in Spain and countries of origin.

Double Holy Years are rare. The relics of St. James were hidden during Sir Francis Drake’s raids on the Spanish coasts and lost for several centuries. After their rediscovery in 1879 and papal validation in 1884, the Church added a special extra Holy Year in 1885 before the regular one in 1886.

Another double took place in 1937-1938 when Spain was in the middle of a devastating Civil War. Fascist general Francisco Franco and his Republican opponents engaged in what many historians now view as a dress rehearsal for World War II. During

the legendary Battle of Brunete in July of 1937, native Spanish forces were reinforced by German and Soviet aircraft, fiercer tanks and artillery and international brigades. Both sides suffered some of their worst casualties of the entire conflict. That battle ended on July 25, and Franco declared that his victory was a sign of blessing from St. James himself. Franco would use that claim to label his side a “crusade” and promote pilgrimage to Santiago as a political symbol of the far right. A native of Ferrol, he appropriated St. James and publicized his personal alliance with the patron saint of Spain.

The Civil War lasted until 1939 and Franco’s cruel dictatorship until his death in 1975. He often attended Holy Year services in person to read the traditional *Ofrenda Nacional*, a pious speech of allegiance to Santiago. He stayed in the Parador on the Obradoiro Plaza, and some tours of the building will show you his suite, the one closest to the cathedral.

The revival of the Camino de Santiago over the last forty years has, in a sense, redeemed St. James and delivered him from the unholy characters and causes that co-opted his name in centuries past. Today’s honest and unaligned pilgrims are James’s best defense against political misuse.

Those same math whizzes can tell you that you only get fourteen Holy Years per century. The special double Holy Year of 2021-2022 will not change the schedule for the future. New Holy Years will inspire fresh surges of pilgrims to Compostela in 2027, 2032 and 2038. ☛

Opposite page: April 17, 2013.
Photo by Thom Ryng.

Porta Sancta: Holy Doors

CULTURE

By Thom Rying
Tacoma, WA

For nearly nine hundred years, during Jacobean holy years, the Holy Door of Santiago Cathedral has been the object of pilgrims. The Catholic Church has only established a handful of Holy Doors, most of which are in the various basilica churches of Rome. The most famous is located in Saint Peter's Basilica — which is opened in Jubilee years, which typically happen every 25 years — and in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. The Santiago Holy Door is opened during Jacobean Holy Years, which occur whenever the Feast of Saint James (July 25) occurs on a Sunday.

But what is a Holy Door, and why do pilgrims seek them?

A Holy Door is simply a designated door in a cathedral or basilica church. It's normally bricked up, but in certain years it is ritually opened. In passing through a Holy Door, a pilgrim obtains a plenary indulgence. Contrary to popular belief, an indulgence does not mean that your sins are forgiven; that only happens at baptism and during sacramental confession. Indeed, part of the conditions of obtaining the indulgence include confession, as well as being free from attachment to sin, receiving communion and praying for the intentions of the Pope.

So what does an indulgence do? It remits some (or, in the case of a plenary indulgence, all) of the temporal punishment due to sin. Wait, what? If your sins are forgiven in confession, why would there still be punishment attached?

It works like this. Imagine you're playing ball in your yard, and you accidentally break your neighbour's window. Being a good person, you go to the neighbour and apologize. He forgives you. This is the equivalent of confession, where you seek absolution for your sins from God in the person of the priest.

But here's the deal: the window's still broken. And it needs to be fixed. In the case of sin, the "fixing" is done through prayer and good works. And if

you happen to die before everything is "fixed," you'll spend some time in Purgatory making up the difference before winging your way to Heaven. Indulgences wipe all that away, and you start with a clean slate. Also, you don't need to necessarily apply the indulgence to yourself. You can instead apply it to somebody who is already in Purgatory, perhaps a deceased friend or relative or spouse.

You can see why Catholics then — and now — might want to obtain that indulgence! And you can see why they might want to go on a long, difficult pilgrimage to Rome or to Santiago to obtain one.

Tradition has it that the Holy Door in Santiago was established by Pope Calixtus II (of "Codex Calixtinus" fame) for the Jacobean Holy Year of 1126. Later, Pope Alexander III granted this privilege in perpetuity with the papal bull "Regis Aeterni" in 1178.

In 2016, Pope Francis proclaimed a "Year of Mercy," which allowed every single bishop in the world to designate temporary Holy Doors in one or more of his churches for the year. If you walked the Camino in that year, you would have had the opportunity to walk through Holy Doors in many places along the route, including the Cathedrals of Pamplona, Burgos, Léon and Astorga, as well as some of the other important churches along the Way. More recently, due to the pandemic, the Pope has extended the current Holy Year of 2021 through the end of 2022. So you've got some extra time to get that indulgence! ☞



Thom's wife, Francine, going through the Holy Doors. May 4, 2016. Photo by Thom Rying.

Step Out

*My introvert heart, my solitary soul
Clings to safety behind solid doors
Drawn curtains, my shield
Voicemail my dodge*

*Hateful words infiltrate my space
Filtered through a narrow lens
Fear and rage seethe from my screens
Warning me of dangers external.*

*But a cloistered life cannot blossom
Cannot breathe the sweet air of conversation
Solitude does not serve
Introspect does not give*

*Over the threshold of my self-made exile
An unobstructed view exposes
Kindnesses to offer and collect
Hurts to perceive, slights to notice.*

*Discernment is my gift to you
To sense your anguish, value your doubt
But only if I choose to greet you.
Only if I see and hear you.*

*Journeys begin with choice.
Though I fear the far side of my door
I trust the world to nurture
When I take the first step.*

**By Cathy Hollister
Hermitage, TN**

A Letter To My Children

POETRY

By David J. Larwa
Brighton, MI

My adult children recently asked me if I had a favorite poem. I gave this question some thought and wrote the following to them:

Poem: *noun*

a piece of writing that partakes of the nature of both speech and song that is nearly always rhythmical, usually metaphorical, and often exhibits such formal elements as meter, rhyme, and stanzaic structure.

If you have ever tried your hand at writing a poem as I have, you know this definition makes it seem simple. Rhyme, meter, free style, throw in a few commas and periods and you have a poem.

Having said that, I can see a few old poets rolling over in their graves. My pick of poets has changed over time. Also, every poem they wrote has not had the same impact on me. Throw out the rhyme and meter and bring on the metaphorical connection to my experiences. Make me feel each line.

I need a poem that makes me think, feel and dream.

The poem I selected was written by the early twentieth-century Spanish poet Antonio Machado. I first learned of Machado while walking the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

I read the following on a sign in front of a hostel. Just this one line: "Travelers, there is no path, paths are made by walking." - Antonio Machado 1875-1939

Here I was, alone in the middle of somewhere, looking for the path out of town with 350 kilometers to walk to my destination. That one line seemed to say it all. The one line defined me at that point because it made me stop and think.

As I walked on I could feel the road and experience the path with the wind. Later still, I dreamed, making a wish with my heart.

At this moment, one dream does not tell you a lot about me. Also, this one line is not the entire story told by this poem.

There is more if you care to read on.

"Traveller, the path is your tracks

And nothing more.

Traveller, there is no path.

The path is made by walking.

By walking you make a path

And turning, you look back.

At a way you will never tread again

Traveller, there is no road.

Only wakes in the sea."

The poem sends a message to me, to live in the present. Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow I just don't know. Live for today.

I must place one foot in front of another to move forward, and do it today. "And turning, you look back. At a way you will never tread again."

This thought went to my lips many times on the Camino. I felt the need to turn and look. Then, dreaming I saw my wife and children behind me, I smiled a little smile.

This is still not the entire poem. You will have to go on your own search for the rest.

Perhaps you will read it someday and dream. More importantly, perhaps you will walk your own Camino and feel your way with the wind.

When you do, read the poem again and think of me. Ultreia! ☘

In Memoriam: David Gitlitz

On December 30th, 2020, the world of Hispanic studies in general and the Camino community more specifically lost one of its most significant figures. David Gitlitz was an emeritus professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Rhode Island.

David, a Harvard doctorate in 1968, discovered the Camino in 1974 when he accompanied American University students to travel the Camino Francés. This was an experience that caused him to return to the Camino numerous times. He, often with his wife Linda Davidson as coauthor, published some of the most significant scholarly works on pilgrimage generally and the Camino specifically. Perhaps most widely known among these are “[The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook](#),” which was published in 2000 and the two-volume “[Pilgrimage: From the Ganges to Graceland: An Encyclopedia](#),” selected by Library Journal as a Best Reference Source for 2002.

David was also one of the foremost scholars of the world of the Crypto-Jews. In this field probably his best-known book was the acclaimed “Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews” (2005), which won the National Jewish Book Award. He and Linda also jointly published “A Drizzle of Honey: The Lives and Recipes of Spain’s Secret Jews” (1999), which won the National Jewish Book Award as well as the International Association of Culinary Professionals Prize for Scholarship.

A compendium of his publications may be found on the [ResearchGate website](#).

David inspired a generation of researchers in the United States and Canada. In large part through his influence, there are currently more than fifty institutions with programs on the Jacobean

phenomenon. Among these are the programs organized by his former graduate students Lynn Talbot (Roanoke College, in Virginia) and Maryjane Dunn (Henderson State University, in Arkansas). Our good friend George Greenia calls David “the foremost scholar in pilgrimage studies in the western hemisphere.”

An obituary is available in La Voz de Galicia ([Spanish](#) or Google English [translation](#)).

David’s family welcomes people to share their reflections and memories of him on the website <https://memories.lifeweb360.com/david-gitlitz>. It is their hope that the many overlapping groups of people whose lives he impacted can grieve his loss and celebrate his life together. ☞



Top: David Gitlitz with farmer – getting directions (Navarra, June 1979). Photo by Brian Wood.

Middle: Still hiking (with Maryjane Dunn) above San Pablo Etla, Mexico (January 8, 2020). Photo by Lynn Talbot (1974 pilgrim).

Bottom: Washing up in Lavacolla, as would any medieval pilgrim before entering Santiago (July 12, 1979). Left to Right: Linda Davidson, Maryjane Dunn, Brian Wood, Ana Sims, Suzy King. Photo by David Gitlitz.



"Without Oars"

BOOKS

By George Greenia
Williamsburg, VA

"On the Camino de Santiago, makeshift shrines along the way are littered with things pilgrims have left behind – an extra pair of shoes, a sweater, a razorblade, an inflatable pillow, a book, a pair of pants, a makeup kit. Nearly every pilgrim on the Camino, despite careful packing, discovers that they are carrying too much."

-Wes Granberg-Michaelson, "Without Oars" (p. 13)

Every time I walk the Camino, I challenge myself to carry less. Even after thousands of miles of walking with a backpack, I always realize that I have carried something I never used.

"Without Oars" (2020) is among the latest additions to a hefty backlist of meditative works the Camino has spawned, scores of mostly self-published, and sometimes self-indulgent, titles. About twenty are truly admirable, Rebekah Scott's "A Furnace Full of God" among the best. Lee Hoinacki, Arthur Paul Boers, Kevin Codd, Edward Stanton, Robert Ward, Jack Hitt, Joyce Rupp and others rapidly assemble a shelf full.

To my knowledge, no other pilgrimage trek in the Christian West has inspired a continuously productive line of post-pilgrimage reflections, not Fátima or Lourdes or Medjugorje, or even Lindisfarne or Canterbury. Treks to Iona and St Patrick's Purgatory/Loch Derg have generated a few thoughtful memoirs by those who made those spartan island retreats.

Even modern travel to Israel yields publishable journals only tangentially, like Maggi Dawn's "The Accidental Pilgrim" (2011) or James Martin's "Jesus: A Pilgrimage" (2014). I think the Camino motivates writers precisely because it is an actual walking pilgrimage with abundant time to reflect.

We all compose a life narrative out of our slow travel narrative. It's the life narrative that we're anxious not to forget and eager to share.

As for the objects and gear visibly left behind, they produce mixed feelings. Like impromptu memorials after tragedies, one day's votive offerings are the next day's trash for trail stewards to clear away. Pilgrims leave things behind in hostels, often on a swap shelf. The gesture is less ceremonial, more charitable. I still have a compact flashlight I acquired that way in Azofra, and it reminds me to pray for the previous pilgrim owner.

The most inspirational arrangement was in a private home in Navarra where a hostess with a spare room helped pilgrims unburden themselves of excess gear. She would wash previously worn items and display them for later walkers in need of an extra layer or replacement for a lost object. Sometimes truly poor aspirants would show up and she would bestow entire trail outfits on them. Mostly apparel just accumulated. Every few months she would haul the surplus into town to a clothing bank for the needy.

I write this during Christian Advent 2020, a quarantine paring me down, leaving unneeded things behind. My life narrative is being rewritten once again. I hope that my next Camino, and 2021, will be light indeed. ☞



Capturing the Heart of the Camino

BOOKS

"Finding Santiago: Stories From and About the Camino de Santiago"

by Don Thomas
Self-published in June 2020
264 pages

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

This collection of stories by an author who writes under the pseudonym Don Thomas contains some of the most lighthearted accounts of the Camino that I have encountered.

It differs from other Camino memoirs in several important ways. For one, it is not a "how-to" guide about gear and trip planning, although the author shares some insights about such things. The book also lives up to its promise as a collection of stories rather than a straight narrative. Some of these essays are loosely connected to one another, but most can easily be read on their own.

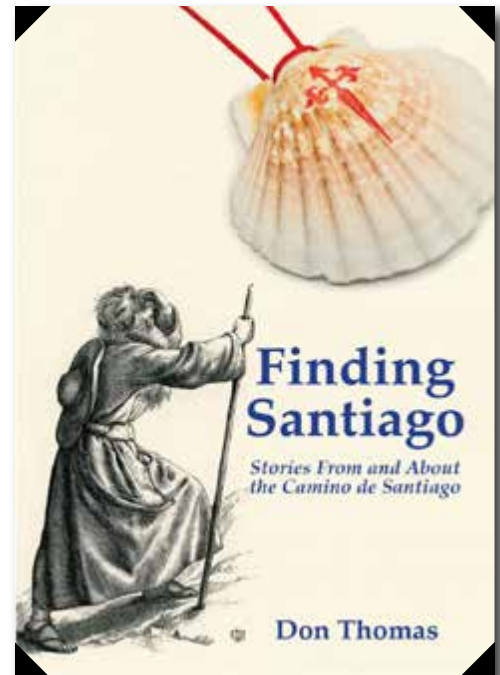
Perhaps most importantly, the collection narrates some experiences that are not generally covered in pilgrim accounts of the Camino. At least half of it is devoted to the author's experiences as a volunteer in the Santiago Pilgrim's Office. Additionally, the author's accounts reflect multiple pilgrimages taken on many different routes over multiple years.

Because "Finding Santiago" is presented in bite-sized chunks, it makes for easy reading and can be enjoyed whenever a few minutes present themselves. There are many humorous stories, such as Thomas's account of living over the train station in Santiago and hearing the boarding announcements from early morning until midnight. He is skilled at using descriptive detail to delight: episodes in which he assembles Ikea furniture for a pilgrim reception area and encounters a fellow volunteer who is a dead ringer for Santa Claus are both artfully rendered and hilarious.

Thomas's stories also weave moments of great mystery, such as his memorable tales about the Shadow Pilgrim in the Santiago Cathedral and his seemingly miraculous healing by a group of evangelical pilgrims in front of a shrine devoted to Our Lady of the Cures.

This collection details times of great sadness and joy. The author offers several deeply touching remembrances at the deaths of pilgrim friends who have walked or worked with him, and he also details many small, joyous occasions that commonly overtake pilgrims along the Way. The reader can feel this joy rekindle in themselves as the author describes finding items for fellow pilgrims, fixing their gear or handing out warm hats to strangers to comfort them. In anecdotes such as these, the author reveals a deep and inspiring commitment to the practice of pilgrim hospitality.

This book does contain a number of copyediting distractions. That notwithstanding, it is a work that is full of heart. One of the most memorable accounts in the collection is Thomas's description of dining at the Parador during St. James's Day celebrations. One can easily imagine sitting there with him, sharing a bottle of wine or a café con leche and listening in rapt attention as he spins his fascinating and expertly told adventures. ☞



How to Better Understand the Spain You Walk

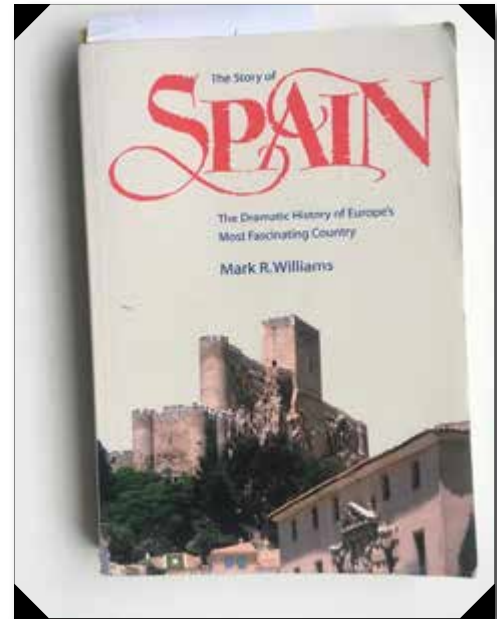
BOOKS

"The Story of Spain: The Dramatic History of Europe's Most Fascinating Country"

By Mark R. Williams
Golden Era Books
2009
320 pages

Reviewed by Jerald Stroebele
Anchorage, AK

Spain! When you walk the Camino de Santiago, you embrace the country of España and its people. More importantly, they embrace you. The American pilgrim will be awestruck by the Roman walls and bridges, Romanesque churches and Gothic cathedrals he or she walks past each day. Indeed, if you see a church on a distant hilltop you can bet the Camino will lead you to it. The same upward path will lead you past modern windmills atop high ridges. The path beneath your feet covers the footprints, wagon wheel tracks and some blood of Iberians, Basques, Celts, Romans, Visigoths, Moors (Arabs and Berbers), Franks, Roma and, more recently, Spanish Republicans.

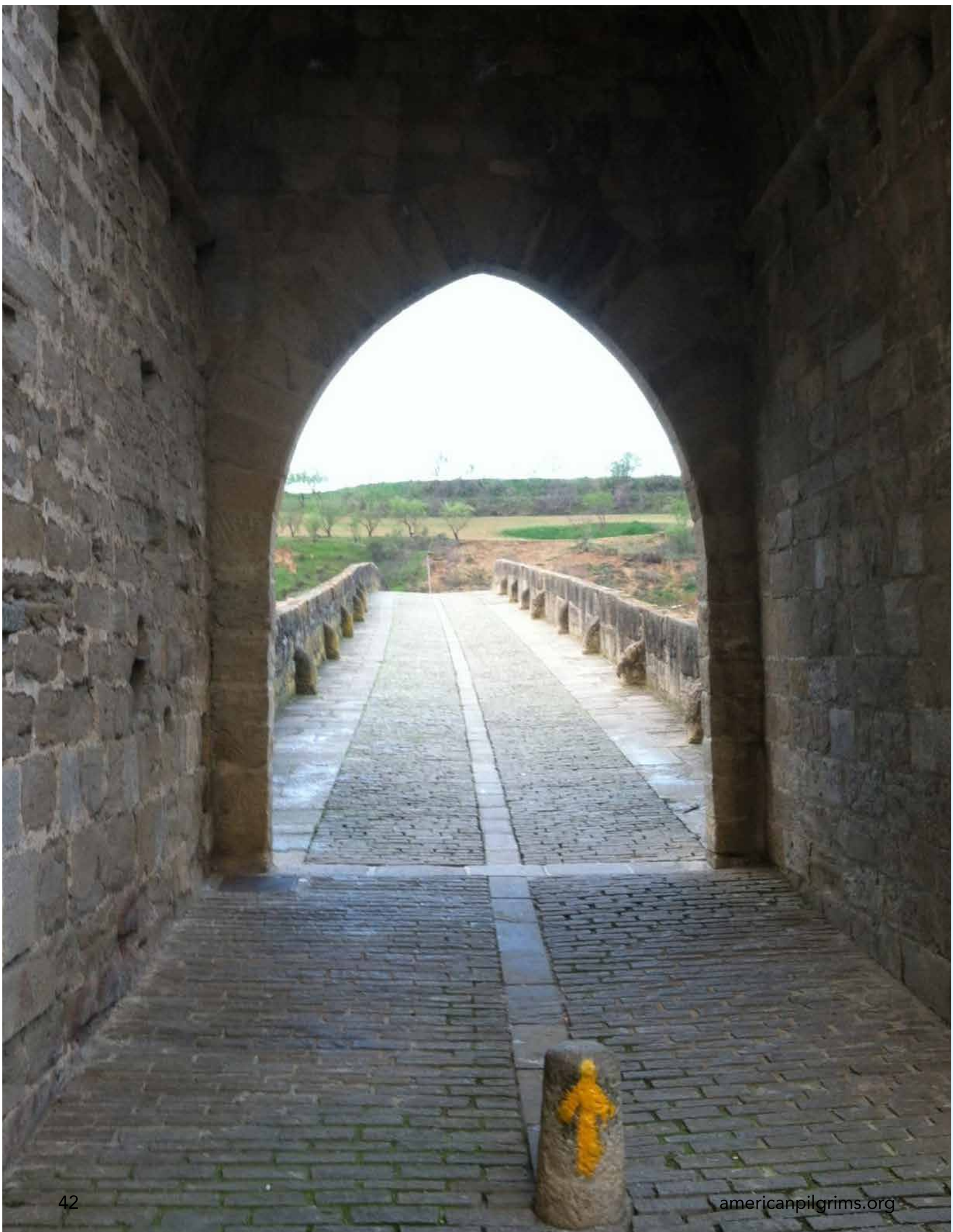


The COVID-19 pandemic dashed the plans many of us had to walk a Camino in 2020, but, it has given us plenty of time to better prepare for our next Caminos. I took this opportunity to reread Mark Williams's history of Spain. While drinking your café con leche in a small village bar café, if a Spaniard told you stories of the local history you might think he exaggerated too much. Yet this book corroborates his stories of the wild, bizarre and often sad march of mankind south of the Pyrenees.

Williams details migrations, wars, politics, religions, kings and queens, knights and conquistadors and soaring cathedrals. He also describes Spanish art, literature, theater and music.

When you read these stories you may understand a little better, and appreciate much more, your fellow Spanish peregrinos and hospitaleros, their cultures, their challenges and their accomplishments. Williams also helps the reader better appreciate some of Spain's influence on American history. For example, in a 1510 Spanish novel, the word "California" originated as an island west of the Indies "very close to the earthly Paradise." Williams also shares how, during the American Revolution, a "combined Spanish-French fleet took control of the English Channel and prevented Britain from sending reinforcements to the beleaguered Lord Cornwallis, who was forced to surrender to the Americans in 1781." (On your next Camino, you may want to thank your French and Spanish fellow peregrinos for your freedom.)

Superbly written, witty and spellbinding, if Williams' book had been one of my college textbooks, surely I would have graduated with a better GPA. 🍷



|| FINAL THOUGHTS ||

The Liminal Space

*By Thom Ryng
Tacoma, WA*

There is something magical and compelling about a doorway, about a crossroads. It is a time and place in between the old and the new, between past and future. It is; the liminal space where for a moment time stands still, and new possibilities – undreamt of mere moments before – now come sharply into focus.

The mystics tell us that liminal spaces are the places where heaven and earth are close enough to kiss. They are doorways and windows into a deeper world, where God is imminent in a way He is normally not in the human experience. These places may be human-built holy sites like a moss-covered ancient church or a soaring cathedral; or they may be natural places such as a misty forest glade or the Yosemite Valley.

The Camino de Santiago is one such place where the human constructions of a millennium are jewels in the crown of diverse natural beauty. Most pilgrims who tread the Camino experience this liminality to some extent, whether they expect to or not. People come to the Camino for a multitude of reasons, walking in faith or without. Some come as wanderers, some as hikers and some as tourists. But eventually, all are pilgrims.

Opposite Page: April 5, 2013.
Place: Puente la Reina (Navarra,
Spain). Photo by Thom Ryng.

NEXT ISSUE

Submissions to our June 2021 issue close on May 21st, and we would love to receive your reflections!

The June theme is **WALKING THE EXTRAORDINARY PATH IN A JUBILEE YEAR.**

Remembering, Reorienting, Renewing. Three words that describe the rich cycle of commemoration that characterizes jubilee — a ritual observance that is not only festive and celebratory, but also encourages us to pursue reflective growth.

Santiago de Compostela celebrates an Año Jacobeo, or Holy Year, every year that July 25 falls on a Sunday. Due to the pandemic, Pope Francis has extended the 2021 Jubilee year through the end of 2022.

Throughout this Jubilee, we pilgrims are invited to do more than simply to celebrate. It is a time in which we are invited to extend mercy, to forgive debts, to correct injustices and to lean into the spiritual freedom it offers us as pilgrims.

Please explore this theme for the June 2021 issue by sharing images and essays that communicate:

- Your reflections on how you will observe the Jubilee year as a time of celebration and reflective growth.
- What you've experienced as a pilgrim that has invited you to extend mercy, forgive debts, correct injustices and embrace a new sense of freedom.

The form for submissions can be found by following this link: [La Concha Article Online Submission Form](#)

We include as many submissions as possible in each issue. We may defer some items to future issues.

Thanks! We look forward to hearing from you.

Team La Concha

American Pilgrims on the Camino

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