

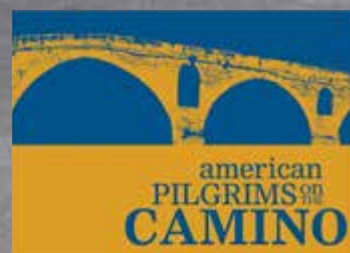
LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

remembering,
reorienting,
renewing

- Notes of Gratitude from American Pilgrims Grantees
- Poetic and Philosophical Musings on Pilgrimage
- Final Reflection: Commemorating St. James' Way

The
Extraordinary
Path
of the Pilgrim



SUMMER 2021

CONTENTS

SUMMER 2021 ISSUE

3 Editor's Welcome

4 Chair's Message

5 Organization News

As Spain prepares to open, the board continues to build capacity alongside our chapters, our fellow pilgrims, and our partners in Spain. Find out more about how to get involved!

12 Chapter News

Find out more about how our chapters are putting pilgrim fellowship, hospitality, and service into action.

16 Pilgrims' Way

Read about the many ways in which your fellow pilgrims remember, reflect, and reorient in the wake of their pilgrim journeys.

30 Arts & Culture

Celebrate the journey via poetry, philosophy, and creative essays.

41 Final Reflection

Steve Lytch explores the loud and the quiet of reorientation in the wake of the walk.

42 How to submit to La Concha

A call for submissions; what and where to submit for consideration.

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.



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Opposite Page: Photo by Thom Ryng.

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LA CONCHA

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Dear Fellow Pilgrims,

June 7th marked a reopening of the pilgrimage roads that have mapped themselves upon us. As La Concha goes to print, so to speak, many of us are looking forward to a weekend of fellowship at the St. James's Day Celebration in South Bend, IN, at the end of July. Many of us will have also opened our calendars to begin laying our plans to return to the ancient caminos that wend us toward Compostela, or even booked or boarded flights. We are, perhaps, each looking forward . . . and still pilgrimage is a journey that places us at the nexus of the past and the future in an interminable present.

In a Jubilee year marked with the hopeful return to "normality" and the sorrows we carry from the past, we are called to deepen our pilgrim identity and vocation through acts of remembering, reorienting and renewing. I hope that reflections such as Fr. Steven G Rindahl's "Paratrooper, Priest, Pilgrim," and David Carpenter's "Walking Down the Pandemic," to name just a few, will both inspire you and serve as signposts of the ways in which we pilgrims have honored the past, created new commitments, and recommitted to long-standing ones as pilgrims. At the very least, may they blend into a bright watercolor wash of the ways in which the extraordinary touches us, maps itself onto our bodies and souls, as we wend through our journey as pilgrims.

To be a pilgrim is to walk an extraordinary path. It is a path marked by an artless, deep listening that Kip Redick and Stephens Lytch both touch upon in their essays. It is also one of celebratory gratitude, as Kay Shue explores in "How Do I Dare Not Be Grateful," one marked by unease and uncertainty, as Dr. Guylene Gigi Tree celebrates in "Plan to Not Plan," and spirited perseverance, as Leah Wilkinson-Brockway displays in her most recent "Letter from the Camino." And it is an extraordinary path marked by stalwart stewardship, as co-coordinator Bill Werne reminds us in his report on the Western North Carolina chapter's spring service work.

The pilgrim path is made extraordinary through service, and I would like to personally thank Team La Concha editors Ana Halland and Beth Jusino who are both preparing for exciting transitions in their lives. Although other commitments inhibit their participation on our talented editorial team for the time to come, they have embodied the pilgrim spirit through their kindly service to the larger American Pilgrims community through the production of La Concha over these past several years.

In peace,

Megan

Megan Muthupandiyam, Editor in Chief

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

Dear Fellow Pilgrims,

I don't think anyone will argue that we've been walking an extraordinary path this Jubilee year. The theme of this issue certainly is right in line with the times, as are the words "Remembering," "Reorienting," and "Renewing" as we think about our future together. As Spain and the rest of Europe begins to re-open to Americans, I feel the same sense of anticipation and excitement I felt in advance of my first Camino, and I hope you feel that way, too. I'm seeing it in your responses to our Camino Updates, within our local chapters, as well as among our continually growing community of pilgrims on Facebook. It feels good to be planning again with a sense of certainty that we'll soon see each other in person, whether at a gathering here at home or on one of the many pathways to Santiago de Compostela.

I hope to see many of you at the St. James's Day Celebration at the absolutely beautiful campus of Saint Mary's College in South Bend, IN, July 23-26, 2021. The Celebration is open to all pilgrims and is being organized and hosted by volunteers from the Midwest chapters of American Pilgrims on the Camino. It promises to be a unique experience, including presentations, morning walks, musical performances, and service projects. As this is our first larger get-together of pilgrims, we're taking steps to protect the health of attendees while following CDC and local guidance. Specifically, Saint Mary's College will verify proof of vaccination for all attendees at check-in, and we'll follow the federal, state, and local guidelines for protective measures and capacity limitations. Additionally, we are limiting the number of attendees to ensure attendees can participate while maintaining a comfortable distance. For those unable to attend in person, I encourage you to take advantage of the option to view several of the events virtually. Follow this link for more [Celebration information](#).

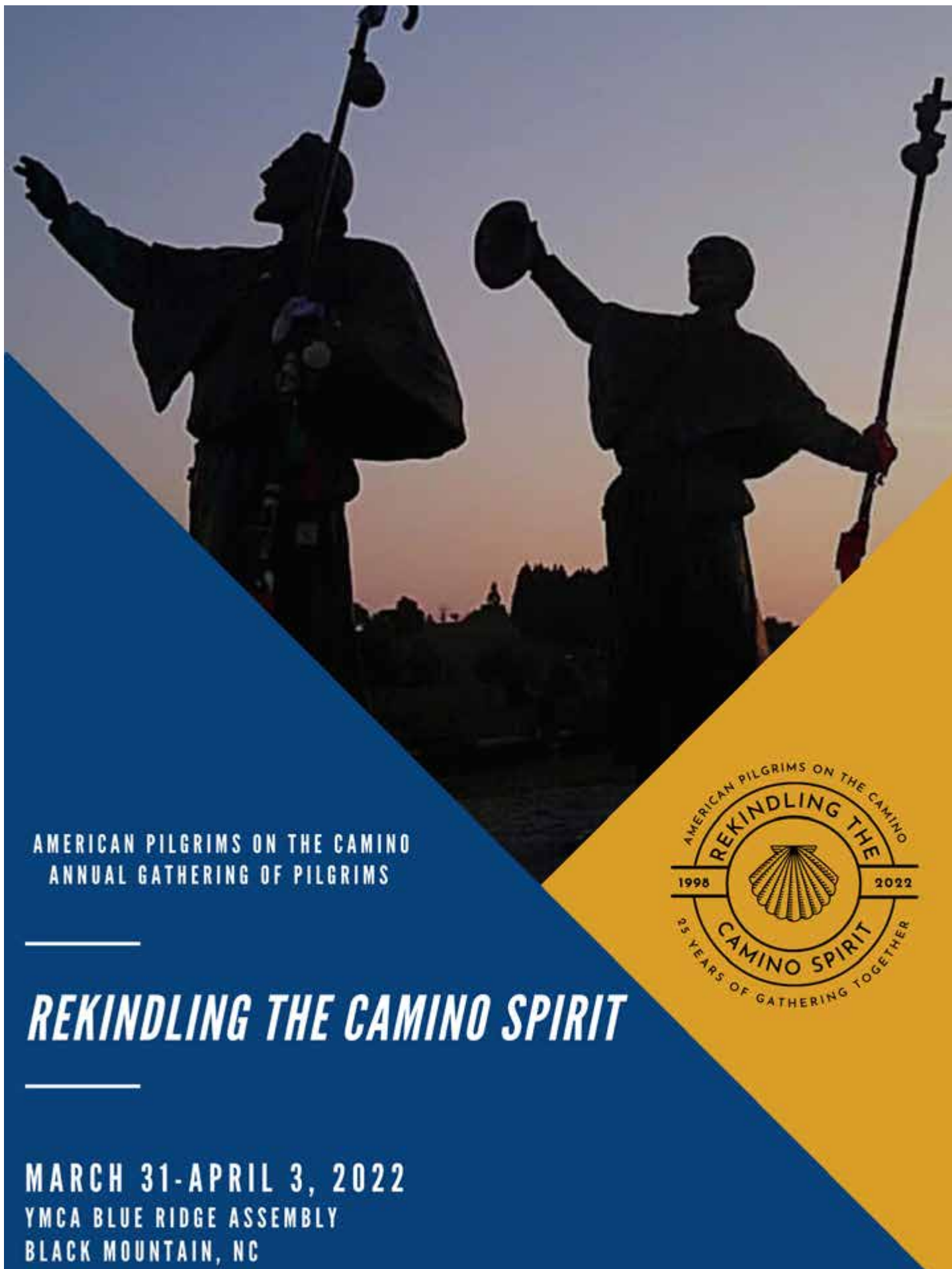


And if you're unable to join us in South Bend, know that we're already working on our return to the YMCA Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, NC (near Asheville) for our 25th Annual Gathering of Pilgrims, March 31-April 3, 2022. Our theme will be "Rekindling the Camino Spirit", and the program is already shaping up to include many of the speakers and events that have inspired us through the years, while incorporating new elements that promise to build enthusiasm and excitement as we dream about future adventures. Registration for the 2022 Annual Gathering will open in January 2022 ... so save the dates!

Buen Camino!

Dave

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



AMERICAN PILGRIMS ON THE CAMINO
ANNUAL GATHERING OF PILGRIMS

REKINDLING THE CAMINO SPIRIT

MARCH 31-APRIL 3, 2022
YMCA BLUE RIDGE ASSEMBLY
BLACK MOUNTAIN, NC



GRANTS

Notes of Gratitude from Further Afield

By Ruben Mendoza

Katy, TX

On behalf of the Grants Team

As a member of American Pilgrims, you are likely aware of the ways in which our Grants program aims to fulfill our vision and mission. Your membership dues and donations allow us to make these grants. In our discussion with Association members in Spain and around the world, it is clear there is a need for funds to support the Camino's infrastructure as it reopens. To be sure, there is much gratitude for the work we are doing! As a grantee said to American Pilgrims in the organization's recent award video,

"Se lo agradezco muchísimo, de verdad. Es un albergue pequeño pero muy necesario, en Betanzos, muy necesario. Y además queremos divulgar el espíritu cristiano en la acogida porque si no, corremos el riesgo de que se comercialice la peregrinación, que sea un negocio, un comercio, entonces, vamos, y con este interés abrimos este albergue, intentamos y queremos que sea un poco pionero, que haya otros que quieran hacerlo porque es necesario."

"I am truly very grateful. It is a small albergue, but a very necessary one in Betanzos - very necessary! And besides, we want to show the Christian spirit through our welcome [of pilgrims] because if we don't, we run the risk that the pilgrimage will be commercialized, that is, it will become just a business. So, with this intention, we opened this albergue. We intend and want it to be a bit of a pioneer [among albergues], and [we hope] that others will want to do so as well because it is necessary."

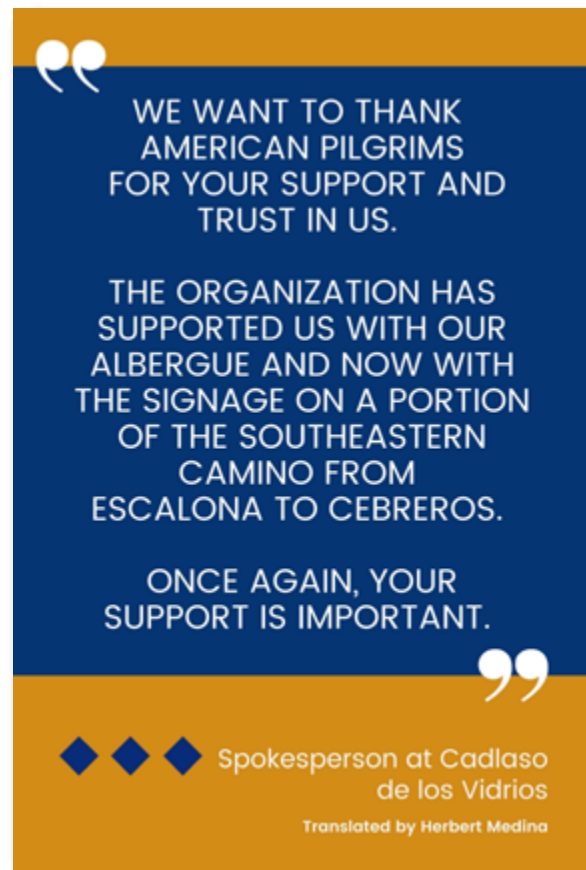
Jaume Alemany Pascual

President of Albergue Santa Maria Del Azogue.

Fundacion Acogida Cristiana

en Los Caminos de Santiago

~ Translated by Dawn Bratsch-Prince



We stand alongside Santa María del Azogue in thanking you so much for continuing your membership over the past year. During 2021, American Pilgrims has approved grants totalling \$48,214, to 11 associations and albergues. Several grants were for infrastructure improvements to albergues and others were for waymarking along these 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 various segments of the Via Augusta.

In the first quarter, American Pilgrims received several donations with designation for the Grants program, which will help support these projects. Thank you to these donors (and all who donate) on behalf of the organizations that we support. ☪

STEWARDSHIP



Interested in occasionally translating
video and audio documents for
American Pilgrims?

CONTACT COMMUNICATONS@AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG



Interested in writing an occasional
book review for American Pilgrims?

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USEFUL NEWS FOR PILGRIMS

The Final Days of Registration for the St. James's Day Celebration are Here!

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

We've entered the final days of registration for the [St. James's Day celebration at Saint Mary's College](#), South Bend, IN, from July 23-26, 2021.

The team of volunteers has been working hard finalizing the program. The weekend will be a wonderful and inspiring time, so come celebrate with us!

Registration Information

FULL REGISTRATION IS \$419 (\$369 WITH OUR MEMBER DISCOUNT) AND INCLUDES

- Eight meals (Friday dinner through Monday breakfast)
- All beverages (including receptions)
- Three nights' lodging in Le Mans Hall in a dormitory room (shared bathrooms)
- Participation in all activities
- Musical entertainment

Couples will share double-occupancy accommodations; all other attendees will be single-occupancy (with no single supplement required). Bathrooms are shared and linens will be provided, but bring your own toiletries, hairdryer, and other personal items.

Membership in American Pilgrims isn't required to attend, but members receive a \$50 registration discount off the registration cost. [Log in to your membership account to get the promo code](#). The code is on the welcome screen once you sign in to your membership account. It must be entered at the time of registration to receive the discount.

Do you live locally or have family and friends in the area? Commuter registration is \$289 (\$239 with our member discount) and does not include lodging or breakfast.

Registration is limited to 150 attendees and closes on July 6 at 11:59 p.m. so don't delay!

USEFUL NEWS FOR PILGRIMS

The Program

Check-in begins at 2:30 p.m. on Friday, July 23, and the program begins Friday evening and continues until noon on Monday. We've scheduled a walk at 3:00 p.m. for those arriving on Friday afternoon who want to stretch their legs after traveling.

Planned activities include informative and inspiring presentations, morning walks (bring your walking shoes, hat, and sunscreen), and service and social activities while building community with other pilgrims. There will be several musical performances, presentations by George Greenia, Stacey Wittig, Annie O'Neil, Willie Williams, Kurt Koontz and Erin Dooley, and a wine appreciation course. We'll also be joined virtually by Johnnie Walker, Dave Whitson, Dan Mullins, Alexander John Shaia, Victor Prince, and several others. Sunday afternoon we'll have a shell ceremony for first-time pilgrims, an optional Catholic Mass to celebrate the Feast of St. James, and evening fireworks courtesy of Visit South Bend.

Follow the accompanying QR code, [or the following link to view the draft program](#). We'll update it as necessary.

Staying Healthy and Connected

Attendees must provide proof of receiving the COVID-19 vaccination upon check-in (no exceptions) and comply with all COVID-19 protocols established by the CDC, the college, and the local health department (including masks and social distancing as appropriate) at the time of the event.

Once you've registered, don't forget to join the private [Celebration Facebook group](#)!

We look forward to gathering with you in South Bend and celebrating the 2021 Jubilee!



Click on this QR code to access the St. James's Day Celebration Program on your phone!

Success at the Chapter Coordinators Workshop

By Allison Venuto

Dallas, TX

on behalf of the Chapters Team

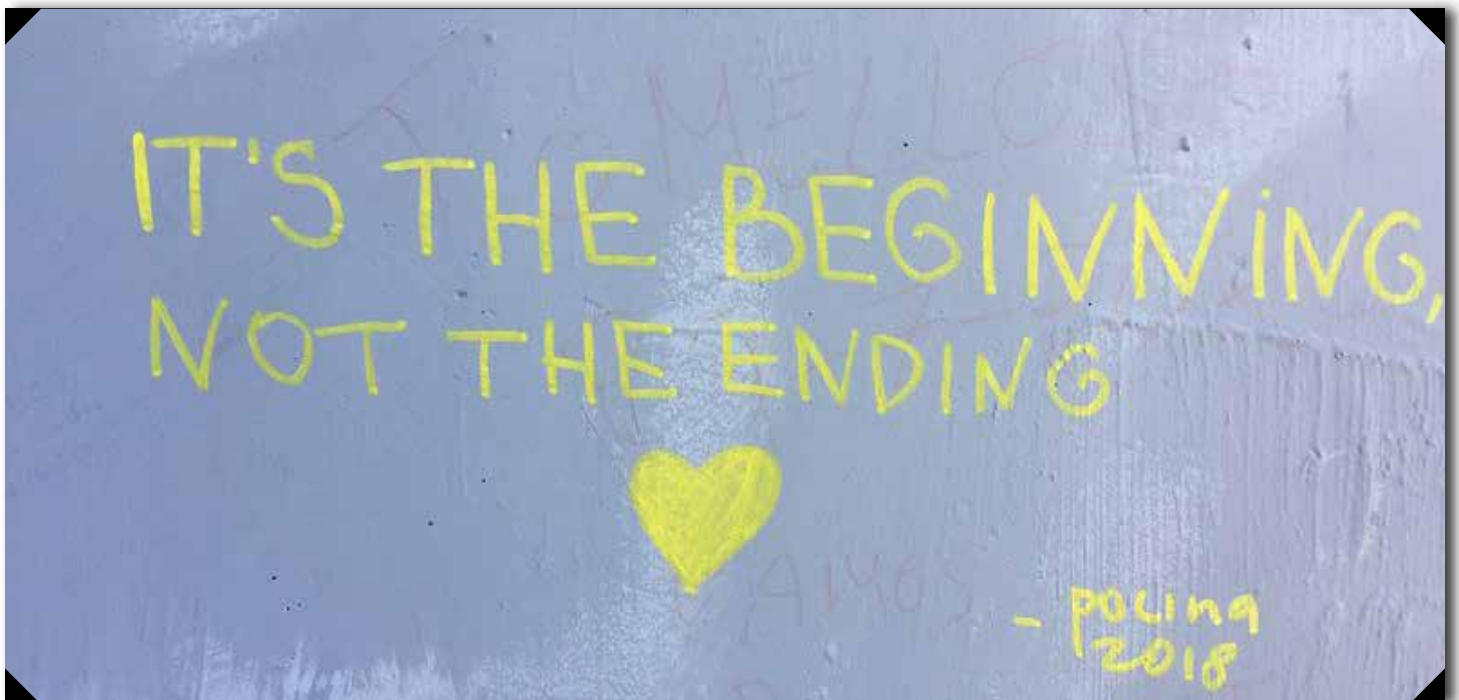
On March 27, 2021, over 75 chapter coordinators joined together to connect, hear updates, and learn from each other. In years past, the Chapter Coordinators Workshop preceded the annual gathering in the spring. Because of the pandemic, the pilgrims joined via Zoom to spend part of their day together.

The chapter coaches, Dave Combs, Jeff Stys, Rachel Ganzon, David Cook, Vince Pratt, and Mike Gardner, and Board Member Bill Artz, led an optional Meet and Greet where over 50 pilgrims shared stories. Then, fellow chapter coordinators began presenting on topics related to sustaining community, Camino infrastructure, best practices, and technology.

The sustaining community section included a presentation by Vince Pratt on the annual survey results, a presentation by Bill Werme on chapter newsletters, and presentations by Lisa Morales and Linnea Hendrickson on chapter event ideas. Next, Carmen Marriott provided an update on the Camino, Ruben Mendoza provided an update on the Grants program, and Daniel DeKay provided an update on the Hospitalero program within the Camino infrastructure section. The third session focused on best practices wherein Emilio Escudero led a panel discussion with Guy Joaquin and Jim Martin, and Jeff Stys led a question and answer panel with Bill Artz, Carmen Marriott, Ruben Mendoza, and Allison Venuto.

The optional final session featured David Drury highlighting some Zoom features and Gene McCullough demonstrating how to add chapter events to the [American Pilgrims website](#).

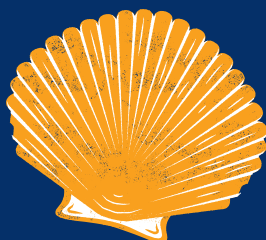
Coordinators participated in the chat throughout the workshop to ask questions, share resources, and support each other. Some resources from the workshop are posted in the Chapter Resources section of the Google drive. Bill Artz, Carmen Marriott, Vince Pratt, and Allison Venuto, members of the chapters committee who helped plan the event, thank all who attended and look forward to the next coordinator workshop. ☺



Graffiti outside of Real Aeroclub de Santiago, Galicia, España. Photo credit: Thom Ryng, Tacoma, WA.

Thank you for supporting the Camino spirit!

On behalf of the entire organization, the **Giving Thanks Team** would like to thank the following amazing volunteer teams for their continued dedication to our community of pilgrims.

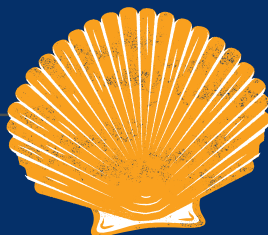


The Celebration Team

From securing a venue, to coordinating all of the programming and making considerations for pilgrim comfort and safety, the Celebration Team has been working hard to make it possible to bring us together to celebrate St. James Day in July.

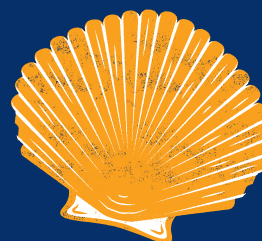
Ribadiso Team

The members of the Ribadiso Team coordinate and administrate the Ribadiso Welcome Service on behalf of American Pilgrims. They invite all American Pilgrims to consider becoming a hospitalero and applying to volunteer at the historic albergue at Ribadiso, a volunteer opportunity offered to members of American Pilgrims on the Camino by the Galician government.



The Facebook Moderators Team

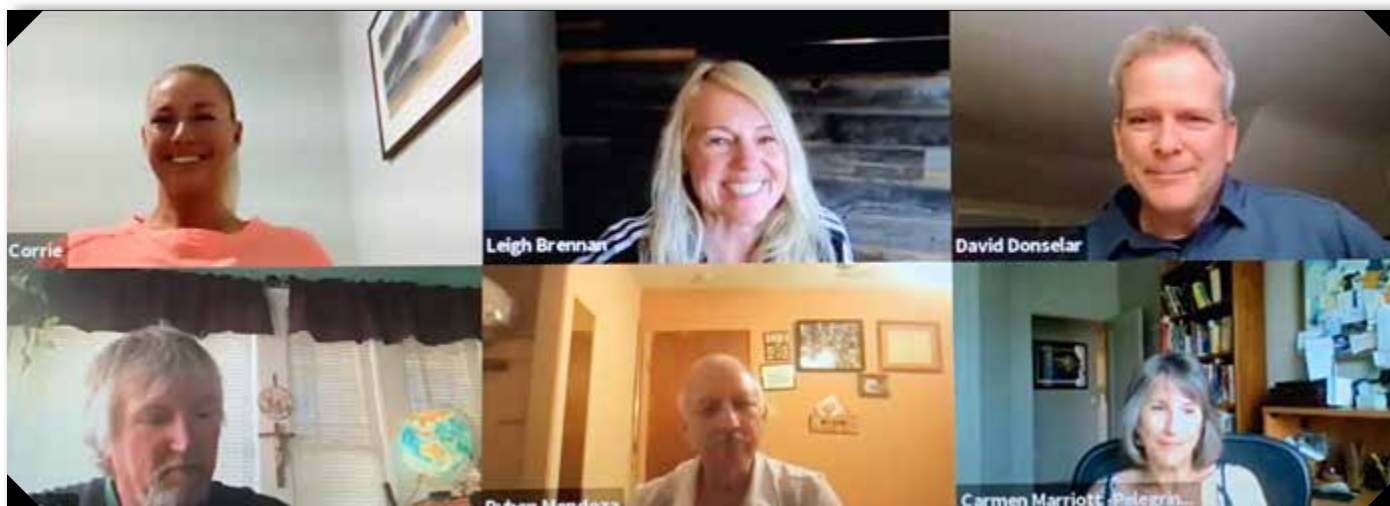
Our Facebook Moderators not only manage a pilgrim group that is 23,000 pilgrims strong, they also work very diligently to craft a safe, supportive and well connected pilgrim community.



Hospitalero Team

Although training of new hospitaleros has been on hiatus during COVID-19, the Hospitalero Team continues to stay connected to the Associations, and continues to be well informed . . . in order to prepare present and future American Pilgrims hospitaleros for our return to service on the Camino.

USEFUL NEWS FOR PILGRIMS



Board Interview at The Camino Cafe

Board interview with The Camino Cafe.
Photo by Leigh Brennan.

*By Leigh Brennan
Bainbridge Island, WA*

The Camino Cafe podcast had the privilege of interviewing board members from American Pilgrims on the Camino. Dave Donselar, Ruben Mendoza, William Artz, and Carmen Marriott shared upcoming events and described just what the organization does. And, like most of our interviews with Camino pilgrims, the hour was spent listening to entertaining stories, meaningful experiences and insights that I'm certain resonate with all of us.

In the interview, they share information about the St. James's Day Celebration and what the next Annual Gathering of Pilgrims will look like. Any doubts about attending next year's Annual Gathering of Pilgrims will be put to rest when you hear the fascinating stories of the last gathering in Tahoe. The board members also delved into the grants recently awarded, hospitalero training, and local chapter updates. But, most importantly, this interview highlights the very essence of what it means to be a Pilgrim. Dave, Bill, Ruben, and Carmen faithfully embody the mission of community, service, gratitude, and simplicity.

Our conversation reminded me that, as members of American Pilgrims on the Camino, we are able to pool our financial donations and service hours together to achieve more than we could possibly do as individuals. I remember when I joined this group I didn't know much about the organization. I had no idea what they did, but I thought, "Hey, I'm an

American and I'm a pilgrim, so why not?!" Luckily for me, this organization does so much more than provide credentials.

This interview will provide others with a glimpse into just how incredible this organization truly is. Dave, Bill, Ruben, and Carmen exemplify what it means to be a pilgrim during and after a pilgrimage, on and off the path.

This past year has been a stark reminder that nothing should be taken for granted, including the opportunity to travel and walk the Camino. It feels especially important, then, to recognize the many Pilgrims before us who walked this ancient path and honor the importance of paying it forward so that future generations have the opportunity to also receive the transformational gifts of pilgrimage.

[Watch interview](#)

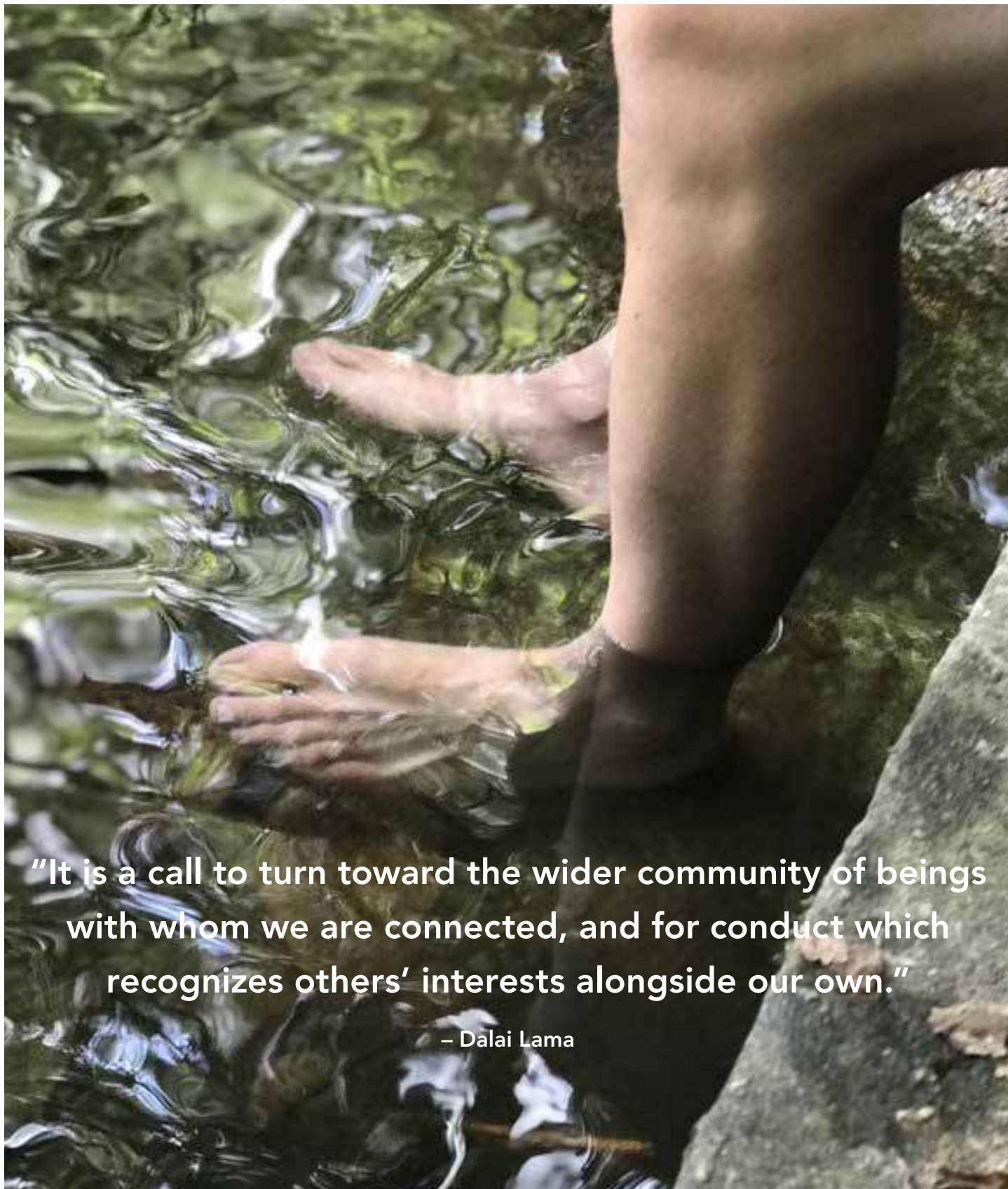
Connect with The Camino Cafe:

Podcast – <https://thecaminocafe.buzzsprout.com>

Youtube Channel – <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6VN9ze3z61n6tRLtDXWuQw>

Facebook Page – <https://www.facebook.com/thecaminocafe>

Facebook Group – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CaminoCafe> 



"It is a call to turn toward the wider community of beings with whom we are connected, and for conduct which recognizes others' interests alongside our own."

– Dalai Lama

chapter news

Getting Trashed

By Bill Werne

Co-coordinator of the Western North Carolina Chapter
Asheville, NC

(Article reprinted from the April/May WNC Newsletter. Thanks for sharing it with La Concha, Bill!)

Masks are coming off, European travel is opening up for the US, the new [Connect Buncombe](#) website is *live*, our chapter did our first Camino in Brevard, we're carpooling again on Fridays to distant trailheads and *pilgrims are attending Tertulias!* Let's face it, now that summer-like weather is finally here. Who doesn't want to sit along the French Broad River and sip on a latte?

Back in April, the "Nasty Branch" needed our help. It's part of our Camino Frances second loop after lunch at White Duck Taco as we head east through the restaurant strip and up the hill (greenway) towards Mission Hospital. Justin Young of [RiverLink](#) organized volunteers from [Connect Buncombe](#) (a few Friday Hikers too) and brought trash grabbers, trash bags, sharps containers, and some extra gloves in case someone forgot theirs. We were told to be prepared with clothes and shoes that can get wet and/or dirty, a pair of work gloves and water to rehydrate afterwards.

Together we pulled several bags each totaling 300 pounds out of the water and steep banks. It was a good day for picking trash. Next time we're walking along the "Nasty" on the Camino Frances, give a shout out for River Link & Connect Buncombe. 🍷



Left: RiverLink's Justin Young with Terry Scholl and Mark Cobb. Right: "Home Ground" Tertulia after a 5 mile spin on the Greenways. Both photos by Bill Werne.

Section cover. Cool waters renew weary pilgrim feet. Camino Portugués Between Vigo Redondela, Sept. 2018. Photo by Amy Horton.

We Have Escaped . . .

*By David Jennings, Co-coordinator of the Lake Tahoe Chapter
Kings Beach, CA*

After a depressing lost year of faded memories, postponed dreams, and everything Zoom, the Lake Tahoe Chapter has, like spring flowers, blossomed out into the light.

It started May 8th when 10 vaccinated pilgrims joined together for a 10 kilometer jaunt. While the beauty of the Tahoe area is very well known, it was not the forest or the two lakes along the way that brought them joy, as much as the actual camaraderie; the memories, the hopes and dreams, became real stories, and real visible smiles, shared with real people. The Spirit of the Camino, was once again, seen, heard, and especially heartfelt. The exuberance of the outing began to slowly spread.

On May 26th, the chapter hike was a bit more strenuous. Our party of 16 climbed up to Eagle Ridge, experiencing the beautiful views of Carson Valley. Nature provided gardens of red Indian Paintbrush and yellow Arrowleaf Balsamroot flowers to distract our minds from the upcoming switchbacks. The majority of this group were veteran pilgrims; so much of our conversations were on the Whys for the Way. Finally, out of the shadows and into the light, the Camino calls and the pilgrims answer.

The prison doors of the pandemic were opened by vaccinations; the vaccines protect both the individual and the community. What idea could be more Camino-like? We are vaccinated, but caution and awareness will still be needed until sometime in the future. Do you hear the call beckoning the American Pilgrims back to the Francés, the Norte, the Primitivo, the Portugués, Le Puy, and beyond? Onward to the Field of Stars. ¡Buen Camino! ☞



Lake Tahoe Chapter pilgrims back on trails. Photo by: Dianne Jennings.

Our Jubilee Year "Camino de Virginia"

By James Larocco, member of the Mid-Atlantic Chapter
Alexandria, VA

Our plans were set: our next Camino would be the Invierno. However, with each passing month COVID-19 restrictions put our plans farther away from reality. On a hike with fellow American Pilgrims on the Camino pilgrims of the Mid-Atlantic Region at Shenandoah River State Park, the idea

came to us: visit all 40 Virginia State Parks as our Jubilee Camino.

Knowing that Caminos are not simply quests with an endpoint, but also journeys in time, space, history and natural beauty that refresh and renew body and soul, we set

out on a journey lasting eight months that took us to some unforgettable natural settings with a history going further back than even Spain can offer. For natural beauty, our visits took us to breathtaking vistas unexpected east of the Mississippi: to Natural Bridge, Natural Tunnel and the Breaks — the Grand Canyon of the East, or as one hiker called it, "the Grand Canyon with clothes on" for its resplendent colors from its covering of trees and flowers.

For history, we went back in time at First Landing (where the first ships of English settlers arrived), the Wilderness Road (the original Camino of Daniel Boone), Pocahontas and Powhatan Parks



(where the powerful Powhatan nation thrived), and Sailor's Creek (the last great battle of the Civil War). We also walked where the Spanish Jesuits and explorers trod a half century before Jamestown. But the oldest of the old was at the New River. Despite its name, geologists consider it the second oldest river in the world after the Nile. The New River Park, False Cape, Wilderness Road and York River, the last of which has a beach where fossils wash up on the shore after every storm, are each a dream for cycling pilgrims.



Unlike the Camino passport stamp, we received pins from the Virginia State Parks "Trail Quest" program at each key stage. There were five in all, including the fifth and much coveted Master Hiker Pin. When we received that and our Certificate of Completion in a formal ceremony, it was a bittersweet moment but also a time of jubilee celebration. ☺

Left column, top: Sky Meadows State Park near the Appalachian Trail.

Bottom left: Holy Family formed by nature in Bald Cypress root knees at First Landing State Park.

Right column: Virginia State Parks "Compostela" and pins. Photos on this page by Jim Larocco.

The Pilgrims' Way:



Remembering, Reorienting, Renewing

Walking Down the Pandemic

By David Carpenter
Minneapolis, MN

My wife and I have walked several pilgrim paths. We hope to do more someday, but the pandemic has made it impossible for the moment. However, the pandemic has also provided an alternative.

On February 22, the number of COVID-19 deaths in the United States passed 500,000. When I heard that news, I felt a responsibility to those people, an obligation to take notice of every single one of them. The idea of walking 500,000 steps came naturally, and I started two days later.

At first, I'd walk a couple of hours any day I had the time, and after a week, I felt like I was well on my way. But when I added up my steps, I saw that I'd barely scratched the surface. Clearly, I needed to make a more serious commitment. I figured out that if I pushed myself, I could finish by Easter, and that seemed to pull things together. The walking would be a good Lenten discipline.

I was often brought back to the thought that each step I took represented someone's death, and one particular morning I was able to visualize that very clearly. There was some fresh snow, and as I looked back at my footprints, I could imagine a person standing in each one. Single-file, they'd make a line 250 miles long. But what if, instead of single-file, they were standing everywhere I'd walked? There'd be two people where I'd walked twice, three where I'd walked three times. Before I was done, there'd be a crowd of people sixty or seventy wide starting right outside my door and continuing up the street! I felt like I was shouldering my way through them, and that was pretty grim. But then I imagined telling them that with every step I was holding one of them up in prayer. From then on, walking was much more enjoyable.

I finished with a beautiful walk the day before Easter. Was it a pilgrimage? Someone once suggested to us that pilgrimages are effective because "the whole experience gets walked into you." Walking all those steps has certainly given me an understanding that I don't think I could have gotten otherwise.

To the handful of people who knew what I was doing, thank you for your prayers and encouragement. And thanks for the socks! 🧦

The Ticket

By Shelia Kogan
Kensington, CA

It's been ten years to the very day that I started my journey on the Camino. On Mother's Day 2011, I left San Francisco to spend a night in Madrid before

taking a train to Pamplona and a bus to Roncesvalles. Armed with just a small blue backpack and purple walking sticks, I faced an expanse of unknown.

This decade Jubilee has been full of remembering, as I finish writing twenty stories about my trip, "Found Along the Way." And today, on Mother's Day, I go back to that first night in Spain when I bought a metro ticket.

"Uno, por favor," I said, trying to sound conversant. I couldn't understand a word of what the man said in response, but grasped the paper ticket and breathed in the excitement. "Who knows

what will happen? I'm simply going to head out and live through it."

I then meandered back to my hotel.

"The food, it was good, no?" the concierge asked me upon my return. (cont.)



Shadow on the Camino Portugués.
Photo by Benjamin Voss.

“Absolutely wonderful, thank you,” I answered. Holding up my stub, I added, “And I got my ticket for the subway, so I can get an early start tomorrow morning...”

His eyes crinkled as he chuckled.

“What’s so funny?”

“Señora, this is not a train ticket.” He pointed to the fingers crossed logo. “Es billet de Loteria.”

I started giggling with him. “Really? I got a lottery ticket?”

We burst into laughter, wiping our eyes between hoots. It was fun to see this seemingly staid man laughing so robustly. And I felt like I was throwing my arms up for a rollercoaster ride — there was no way I could control this trip.

“The ticket is yours,” I said, offering it to him. “I hope you win a million Euros.” I truly hoped he would win.

Along with any extra weight in my pack, I had already shed a lot of what was unnecessary. I thought back to the weathered, homeless woman I had once seen camped outside a church. When I had offered her five dollars, she had waved it off, saying, “I have all I need.” I had walked away wondering how anyone could refuse a few more dollars. Now, on my first night in Spain, as I propped my pack against the door, I could say the same: I have all I need. It was the beginning of my Camino. ☪



Photo by Becky Rush-Peet.

The Outcome

By Elizabeth Kilcoyne
Newburyport, MA

Solvitur ambulando. ‘It is solved by walking.’¹

It turns out my Camino had three purposes. Proving myself through physical endurance. Proving myself by letting go of my burdens. And the less tangible purpose of figuring out the future of my life.

As I walked slowly through the wall surrounding the old city of Santiago the cathedral burst into view and I knew my life was entering a new chapter. The past just seemed to melt away. I was tired but felt like celebrating.

On the Camino, I met myself and realized that I’m in charge of myself, and only I can make the changes I want in my life and have deeper, more meaningful experiences. Coming to that realization and living every day as this new person are two entirely different things. I have a long history of habits and feelings that define me and a posse of family and friends, who are familiar with that “me.” Trying to change within this environment has been uncomfortable.

Upon arriving home from the Camino, I immediately went back to work, and had a big Camino party within a week of me touching down in Boston. I returned to my regular routine, except for presentations about the walk at the local churches and libraries. I was still walking regularly, but change was coming more slowly than I expected.

Writing about my journey years later is creating more understanding and thought than I experienced during the walk. This is partly because my body was still vulnerable to the daily walking and partly because I wasn’t used to contemplating life. I am still seeking a deeper meaning to my life.

More and more each day, I am treating my experiences with intentionality and love. I am enjoying my daughters, who are pursuing their own dreams and doing a fabulous job. I want to love my new husband with my whole heart and attention. I want to enjoy my retirement and not (*cont.*)

1 St. Augustine of Hippo, *Unknown*

schedule every minute. I will never again say that I am too busy. I'm prioritizing my time according to those things that are worthy of my time, like a long walk by myself or with a friend, skyping with my grandson or ... writing this very story.

Buen Camino. ☞

A Heart2Heart: Podcasts and Camino Reflections

By Elin Babcock
Ashland, OR

In March of 2021, Mary Alice Arre from [Global Heart2Heart](#) radio called to invite me to share my sacred Camino experience. The interview began with Mary Alice's intro:

Please join me on a Buen Camino with the adventurous Elin Babcock, teacher, artist, poet and found object sculptor. Elin, or Tortuga as she is known on the trail, is a veteran pilgrim who knows what it is to journey along the Way on the long and winding road to Santiago de Compostela and "eventually end up with an empty pack and open arms." Listen in as we hear Elin recount her heart-felt stories of "information and help falling out of the sky and showing up at every turn."

~ Mary Alice Arre, Global Heart 2 Heart Radio

I call my experience "sacred" in the way that I protected my feelings, thoughts, and cellular transformation, akin to magic realism. Not exactly what most would understand.

The recording studio setup reflected the COVID-19 guidelines. Distance and masks. Between the mike and myself stood a large, coffee-lid sized, black mesh circle. With some tech suggestions from Cornelius Matteo and a pre-interview conversation with Mary Alice, I was asked if I were ready. By that time, Mary Alice had me in the palm of her hand. I felt like she swept the room's professional environment and my fears away. Instead, two women talked of a place one was interested in and a place another had experienced.

The humorous, instructional and difficult parts of my Camino spilled out. The story about falling and getting a black eye, the time an old woman helped me walk farther when I was hot, without water, and tired, the journal entries on my cell phone to

family and friends only to come home to Cantrell Maryott's YouTube song, "Buen Camino." The lyrics inspired from the Camino and the music magic from Cantrell's guitar.

My reflections after Mary Alice's interview reframed my Camino experience. As we talked and Mary Alice asked questions, I began to walk the Way again in my mind. I didn't remember sharing how "Black Eye" became my trail name. I listened again to Cantrell's song she created from my Camino online journal. Participating in the interview reminded me to reflect on the gifts of the Camino more often. ☞

Remembering, Reorienting, Renewing

By Dwain Colby
Camano Island, WA

While living in Spain, I learned bits and pieces about the old pilgrim road to Santiago. I developed an itch to walk it and to bask in the history it represented. When I retired, I found the time.

I crossed from France into Spain on June 3, 1976. The history of the road was my focus, but its spirituality kept intruding. I couldn't visualize the pilgrims of the eleventh and twelfth centuries treading the very stones under my feet without wanting to understand what drove them. The stories of miracles performed by Saint James were carved into doors, depicted on windows, displayed in cages and paid homage in the churches and cathedrals along the way. By the time I descended the (*cont.*)



Shell photo by Dwain Colby.

Monte de Gozo, my eyes firmly on the spires of the Cathedral housing the earthly remains of the “Apostol,” history had receded and the spirituality that drove those ancient pilgrims was taking its place.

The year 1976 was a Holy Year in Santiago. Even so, I was alone when I passed through the Puerta Santa and entered the Cathedral on June 25. I was not surprised, for during the 23 days on the road, I had encountered no other pilgrim.

Thinking back on my experiences along the road has always been rewarding. On about the twentieth day, I walked through a town where houses were made of slate. Surely it existed in the eleventh century. The road split on the west side of town and I couldn’t tell by my compass which branch led to Santiago. There were no signs. I walked back to the first of those strange-looking houses and knocked at the rough-hewn door. I heard something above me, backed away and looked up. A woman with stern features and grey hair stood on a small, second-floor balcony. I asked her to please tell me which of the two roads would take me to Santiago.

She stared down at me for a bit then said (in Spanish, of course), “If you shaved off that beard, you’d look ten years younger.”

I was flabbergasted and it apparently showed. She enjoyed my discomfort but finally taking pity on me told me which road to take and disappeared back into the house.

Now, in my nineties, I need memories like those to brighten my day and renew my zest for life. My Camino provides them in abundance. ☞

Remembering My Camino During This Jubilee Year

*By Richard Rindone
Santa Fe, NM*

When my wife decided to walk with a friend from St. Jean Pied de Port to Burgos, my first thought was to rent a bicycle and ride from St. Jean to some point along the Way and then double back by train to meet them. However, I decided that it was best to ride from Pamplona so I joined them walking out of St. Jean.

Early on during the climb up the Pyrenees I thought about how we were walking where Charlemagne, Roland, Napoleon and others did. But soon those thoughts disappeared and were replaced by the need to maintain my pace and my balance, and to endure the little hardships along the route. The climb not only tested my aging physical capabilities, but also my self-control and perseverance. Resting at the Fountain of Roland, I marveled at the courage of the earlier pilgrims making their way without modern-day boots, synthetic socks and the light-weight wicking material of the athletic clothing that we wear.

I did not go on the Camino as a pilgrim, but that changed a little as I walked. Nevertheless, I didn’t think that that made me a pilgrim. I was more focused on meeting the physical challenges. But, by the time I was on my bike, things changed. For most of the time I was riding, I was alone. There was not much else to do but think about what I was doing and why, especially on the Meseta where all there was to see were miles of stubble where crops had been. Going through the Meseta allowed me to put things in some sort of perspective. The flat, open landscape was so under-stimulating that it gave my mind a chance to do some internal processing.

As the days passed, it was no longer just an adventure, but a journey that changed my state of mind. I think that walking along the Camino transformed me. My journey became more spiritual. ☞

Plan To Not Plan

*Dr. Guylene Gigi Tree
Roseville, CA*



Many pilgrims enjoy the spontaneity of walking on a Camino. You arrive where you decide to stay the night and have no plans. An axiom that I like is “plan to not plan.” Having no plans leaves the door open for adventure.

The Camino I walked in September and October 2020 necessitated adjusting my usual ways of locating food and lodging. Because of COVID-19, many hostels, refugios, albergues, and casas rurales were closed. I knocked on doors (cont.)

but was getting nowhere. I therefore started using my phone to find shelter.

Because the Vía de la Plata is not as well-traveled as others, its “pilgrim infrastructure” is not as developed as on the popular Caminos. When the path led through small villages where housing was minimal, I consulted the apps. I looked for places far off the trail. I texted that I was walking the Camino and needed transportation to the house and back to the pickup place in the morning. Surprisingly many guesthouses and B&Bs were willing to do this.

Late one afternoon, I arrived at a tiny village in the Extremadura region to find all lodging closed. The next village was 20 kilometers away. I needed to find a place to stay . . . and soon. Using my phone, I located a B & B about 30 kilometers away. The proprietor Jean most willingly came to get me, arriving within minutes. After driving through a lovely, wooded area we arrived at a palatial-looking estate. The large electric gates swung inward, welcoming us in. All suites opened onto individual patios overlooking a lovely lawn and garden.



Lovely room of the B&B the author stayed in. Photo by Dr. Guylene Gigi Tree

Later, Jean drove me to the lone restaurant/bar in the village. The chef of the restaurant asked me what I liked and prepared a meal. First came wine with the olives so typical of Spain, followed by a butternut squash bisque with some grated, cured Manchego cheese. The entrée was sautéed sea beam served over asparagus with a Spanish paprika sauce. If that was not decadent enough, dessert was a traditional egg flan with a glass of Orujo, a Spanish brandy.

This marvelous experience would never have happened had I found a room according to plan and teaches us that inconveniences can lead to grand adventures. ☼

Paratrooper, Priest, Pilgrim

By Fr. Steven G Rindahl, DMin
Cibolo, TX

Remembering. What am I remembering while rethinking how to walk the Camino in a post-pandemic world? In this 2021 Jubilee Year, the Holy Year of Santiago, I remember my first Camino in 2016. Pope Francis had declared 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy, opening all “Mercy Doors” for pilgrims. I had just retired from the Army after a long career in service. I had begun my career as a young paratrooper, craving adventure. Then I took an intermission to go to school and through the ordination process. Returning to the Army, I shifted careers to become a chaplain. That meant a significant reorientation in focus . . . retiring in 2016 invited another reorientation.

Reorienting. My experience at the Cruz de Ferro was my reorienting event. Leaving the Army meant learning to serve as a civilian. Heavily burdened from my time in service, and unfamiliar with parish ministry, I was walking the Camino to close one chapter of life and to open another. I carried 20 stones to the Cruz de Ferro, each representing a soldier — sons, brothers, husbands, fathers — lost to the world because of the war in Iraq. I said a Mass for them on a makeshift altar atop a picnic table nestled among the trees. I placed the stones at the foot of the cross. As I slowly walked away, I knew that I was healing. My calling to serve the men and women who have served our nation was renewed.

Renewing. This renewed calling gave birth to Warriors on the Way. The program engages soldiers in purpose-designed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Moral Injury healing pilgrimages. In the program’s early years we were bringing groups out with
(cont.)



Fr. Steve standing at the Cruz de Ferro in 2016. Photograph by Marie Bechler.



Footsore in view of the Cathedral. Photo by Becky Rush-Peet.

great results — until COVID-19. In this Jubilee Year, we shall resume. A group of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are seeking healing so they can renew their lives and clarify their visions for their futures. They join countless others from everywhere heading to the Camino for mercy. In the words of singer-songwriter and author Mary Gauthier, “every single one of us could use some mercy now.” 🌿

My Daily Camino

*By John Bryce
Oceanside, CA*

Remembering, reorienting, and renewing are good words to sum up my experience since the Camino. I walked the Camino from St. Jean Pied de Port in 2019. It was a memorable and life affirming experience on many levels. The sights, the food, the social interactions were all amazing. More profoundly spiritual was living a month with mindful intention. Every step, flower and interaction was a gentle reminder that we are all connected to each other and to all of nature . . . that there is balance, harmony and love fundamental to us all.

Almost immediately upon returning home I felt the urge to experience the Camino again. As a consequence, even in the midst of other events and plans, I found a way to carry the Camino with me on a daily basis. My daily walks or runs at the

local nature park are my way to relive the Camino experience. Stepping off the train was the start of a mindful adventure. The same thing happens daily stepping off the sidewalk onto the dirt trail. Every dragonfly is a reminder to come back to now, to let go of the distractions of worry and planning. The Camino taught me to revel in the sights and smells all around me, and to smile at and greet the fellow creatures I meet.

My daily Camino helps me remember how important the original experience was. It helps reorient me to what is essential in life, to balance, to a connection with nature and all around me. It opens to love without boundaries or categories.

My daily Camino, like the one in Spain, is renewal in its truest sense. 🌿



Following page: Cool waters renew weary pilgrim feet on the Camino Portugués. Photo by Amy Horton.

A close-up, first-person perspective shot of a person's feet stepping onto a rocky beach. The person is wearing a grey raincoat. The ground is covered in small, wet, brownish-grey rocks and pebbles. White, frothy ocean foam is washing over the feet and the surrounding rocks, creating a dynamic and textured scene. The lighting is natural, suggesting an overcast day.

***"Renewal requires opening yourself up
to new ways of thinking and feeling."***

~ Deborah Day

Letter from the Camino: Rejoice!

By Leah Wilkinson-Brockway
Spokane, WA

Dear Pilgrims, greetings from Milepost 2,660 on my virtual pilgrimage from Spokane to St. Jean Pied de Port.

Shout for joy! Sound the shofar! Forgive debts! Free captives! At last, I am over halfway. I have reached western Greenland near Nuuk. The long trek across the Labrador Sea is behind me. The Jubilee Year in Santiago de Compostela is extended through 2022. But COVID-19 is in Iqaluit; Nunavut is in lockdown. Rejoicing is tempered by dire news around the world.

My life now seems like a pilgrimage layer cake. The virtual trip, walking the streets of Spokane to France, is a prelude to my pilgrimage on the Camino Francés. Next, there is a stronger sense of our Great Pilgrimage, from birth on the way to Heaven. Finally, I am distinctly aware of an interior journey, my soul moving from grief and trial to peace.

The Lord is all we need, but He is not all we get in this abundant life. Draw Him into your heart and realize that He has already drawn you into His. The luscious tapestry of creation, creatures, relationships, comforts, grief and joy never ceases to surprise and amaze me.

Graces and gifts abound as I emerge from pandemic seclusion. I held a tiny baby in my arms last week and hugged a friend. My book club met in person, and I visited older friends in their home. Church services are normalizing. At the grocery, a sign declares vaccinated people no longer need to wear masks. Yes, I, too, was ill after Moderna #2, but now having the vaccine is a sweet spot of safety from virus treachery.

My left heel improves but is stiff and screams without daily turmeric. However, spring's glory has arrived. Lilacs, dogwood, spirea and chestnuts are blooming. The river flows tumultuously. The days are longer and warmer, but the wind blows cold. We need rain.

During Holy Week, Las Medias, a kitten I adopted while on deployment in Spain in 2008, became severely ill. Her chest was full of pus. The vet

said she had lung cancer and urged me to euthanize. But, I could not. At surgery, no cancer! With lobectomy and antibiotics, she recovered and again rules my house. To say that I spent Holy Week weeping and praying is an understatement. Rejoice, I say again, rejoice!

Thank you, dearest Lord, for all the graces and gifts of this Jubilee Year! In Jesus, may we walk, dear pilgrims. Love, Leah ☪

Editor's note: This is the ninth reflection from Leah G. Wilkinson-Brockway about being a pilgrim in her own town as she walks daily to travel the collective distance, as the crow flies, from her home in Spokane, WA, to St. Jean Pied de Port (approximately 5,055 miles). This is her Camino for now. Ultimately, her goal is to walk 500 miles of the Camino Francés from St. Jean Pied de Port, arriving in Santiago to celebrate her 70th birthday in 2022. You will find Leah's previous reflections in the June 2019, September 2019, December 2019, March 2020, June 2020, September 2020, December 2020, and March 2021 issues of La Concha.



Leah Wilkinson-Brockway and Baby Nola. Photo by Cindy Rea.

How Dare I Not Be Grateful

By Kay Shue
Dalton, OH

The Camino is a such a wonderful teacher if you allow her to be. After walking the Camino Francés in 2016 and the Camino Portugués in 2018, my husband and I have summarized the lessons we've learned in four words: Simplicity, Contentment, Generosity, and Gratitude. To keep these important teachings at the forefront, we have found it important to reflect and revisit our Camino memories from time to time. I wrote the following reflection in June 2018 while leaving Santiago by bus, one link of the chain that would lead us back home:

As we whiz by small groups of houses in the countryside, I not only imagine what it feels like to be walking, I actually feel what it is like to walk by the gates in front of houses and gaze in at their gardens. I feel what it is like to watch a woman meticulously hoeing her corn. I hear the dogs (cont.)

barking as we walk by. I feel each push of my hiking poles as I ascend a steep incline. I see the smile of a local as we catch eyes and exchange an "Hola, Buenos Dias." And I am blessed by their "Buen Camino."

I have been contemplating a phrase I heard from another pilgrim: "How dare I not be grateful." With every blister, I am grateful, for it means I am able to walk. With every sore muscle and bruised heel, I am grateful, for it means I have strength. With every foreign word I cannot understand, I am grateful, for it means I can hear. With every smile exchanged instead of words in languages in which I cannot communicate, I am grateful, for it means there is love in the world.

Buen Camino to all as our journeys continue. ☞

Challenged by Plans

By Miguel Garcia
Rio Linda, CA

My story started when I watched "The Way. This movie ended up consuming my life and my every thought.

For the next two years I lived with the idea of walking the Camino de Santiago. Nobody took me seriously, but I continued making my plans. With my retirement approaching, I knew I had the time and the finances to walk the Camino without any time or money constraints. After a great deal of research, I decided to make the commitment and booked my first trip for April 2018. Though I told my family and friends about what I did, they still all doubted my resolve. I ended up using a travel package from a travel agency. This allowed me to put everyone at ease with a full itinerary of my trip.

Booking a package had its pluses and minuses. Benefits included having a schedule of the dates, miles and accommodations for every day, as well as being able to secure a private room. (I'm a very light sleeper with some unique sleeping routines.) The

minus was that there were days I should have walked less or more, but I was not able to adjust my schedule. My schedule did not allow me to listen to my body and base my walk on how I was physically doing. I came across two situations where I needed a rest day but due to my schedule, I continued walking.

What was my reason for walking the Camino? I was looking for a new challenge in my post-work life. I was looking to challenge myself which I haven't done through the past 30 years while working in an office, in a tiny cubicle. I was looking for diverse experiences along the route, and to immerse myself in the Spanish language and culture. I sought to speak only Spanish, to learn the dialects and rhythm of the true language.

I believe I was able to achieve this when several pilgrims and locals wanted to know where I learned to speak English so well and were shocked to learn that I was an American from California!

When I got home I began to write about my Camino, but I found it almost impossible to find the words. The more I tried, the more I failed. How could I put into words the people, the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, the ancient villages and churches, the Roman roads and bridges? Walking one step after another for mile after mile after mile?

I found that I couldn't. But what I was able to grasp and talk about was the changes in the way I see my life now. I now realize that those places which the Camino led me to have become places *within* me. They have become an enduring part of my family's geography as well, as we move forward. ☞



Resting by the Galicia marker before entering O'Cebreiro. Photo by Miguel Garcia.



A Pilgrim's Next Step

By Joseph A. Curro, Jr
Arlington, MA

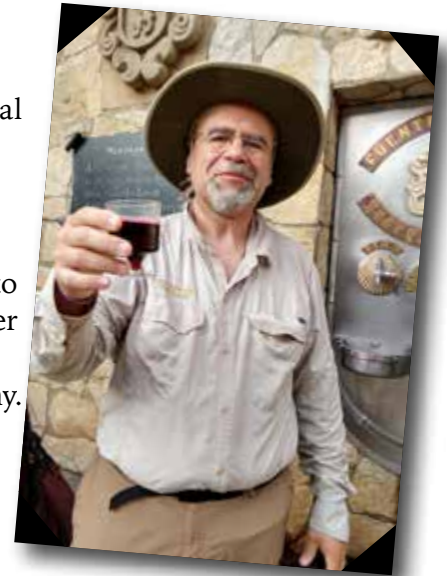
Camino veterans know that it is possible to walk the same path and share a common goal with others from different nations and backgrounds. We are seeing a glimpse of this phenomenon on a global level, as people around the world have pulled together to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year of Jubilee will be a year of joy and relief for many of us as we emerge from the valley of death we crossed through 2020 and into 2021. The Jubilee should also be a call to action, though, to remember those in less developed nations who continue to struggle to provide safety to their populations in the face of a destabilized world economy. We are only as healthy as the least fortunate among us.

On a personal level, this year will represent a personal cause for celebration, as my wife and I send our youngest child out into the world to study and grow and develop as an independent woman. We are reaching the end of a two-decades-long pilgrimage, staring down a bunch of questions: What next? Where is our destination? Which path will we take?

As pilgrims know, the answers to these questions are not always clear. The most important thing is to put one foot in front of the other and keep moving, while never losing sight of the world around you. The Camino provides, and so does life.

The most important step a pilgrim takes is the next one. ☞



¡Salud! Photo of Joseph A. Curro, Jr at the Bodegas Irache, Ayegui, Navarra. Ready to take the next step. Photos on this page by Joseph A. Curro, Jr.

A Camino Translation of a Dream

By Gigi Oyog
Paris, France

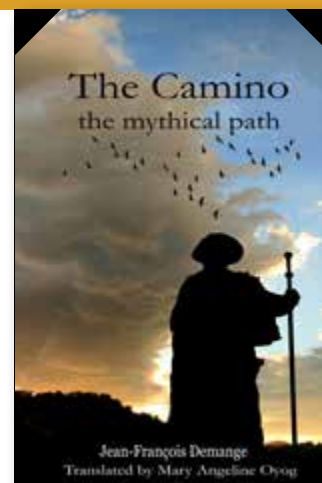
Although I have yet to take a step toward Compostela, my path has put me right on the Camino. And along the way, a slice of a dream came true.

Ten months ago, a friend told me he was writing a short book on pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela during the Middle Ages. Jean-François Demange, a French author, has accumulated a vast knowledge of the Medieval period during more than 30 years of carving made-to-order pilgrim staffs.

While not a translator by training and only after much hesitation, I nonetheless dared to offer my services to translate his new book into English. I feared falling into the same trap as the unknown person (*cont.*) who incorrectly translated “carottes rapés” in a French manuscript as “raped carrots” instead of “grated carrots.” In truth, Jean-François was not at all soliciting a translation, but I felt the urge for a new adventure. With a past career in journalism, a current position among translators and revisers in a Paris-based international organization, and respectable fluency in French, I thought the blend of all three could help me produce decent work.

And so through the course of translating, I traveled back some nine or ten centuries in time, when pilgrims set out on their journeys to pay for a sin or a crime, in gratitude or supplication. I entered a world in which they hid the little money they had under the lining of their clothes, carried their shoes to keep them from wearing out, and slept four by four on a bed beside the healthy or ailing. I walked a path when monk-knights defended pilgrims as they approached the cathedrals they sought, and when pilgrims also returned home on foot. Traces of that old world have disappeared, but some have endured, such as people’s hospitality and vestiges of the ancient Roman roads. American pilgrims on the French Way may have even stumbled upon them.

A few weeks ago, I received an image of the front cover of “The Camino: The Mythical Path.” There was my name where I had not expected to see it. I thought if at all, it might appear lost somewhere among the inside pages where translators are usually credited, but Jean-François chose to place it in the ultimate place of honor: under his own name on the front cover. Almost every writer dreams of publishing a book, but I have none to my name. This is then the closest I have gotten to seeing my name on a book’s front cover. The moment was sacred, almost like I imagine the moment when I finally walk through the Cathedral door in this Jubilee year. ☞





The Steps and Stations of Rocamadour

By Hany Farag
San Bruno, CA



Grand Staircase, Rocamadour, May 2018.
Photo by Hany Farag.

The Ways of Saint James in Europe are collectively recognized as UNESCO World Heritage sites. In France, the sanctuary of Rocamadour in Chemin St Jacques is a monumental treasure of the Midi-Pyrenees. One thousand years ago the site became a pilgrimage destination, after the undecomposed body said to belong to St. Amadour was found in a crypt. The heart of the sanctuary is the Chapel of Our Lady of Rocamadour, which houses the statue of the Black Madonna.

Rocamadour is reached through the Way from La Puy. The site, which played a vital role in culture and religious exchange in the Middle Ages, possesses both rich architectural beauty and records the history of notable pilgrims. Each year about a million tourists and pilgrims visit the site, seeking joy and blessings.

At the entrance to the site stands the Chapelle de l'Hospitalet. It was a hospital used through the Middle Ages to treat pilgrims; now it is a church. The walls are covered with posters depicting the routes to this point, which help the pilgrim see where they have come from, and what will come next.

After passing through a few gates into the valley, the first ritual is to climb the 214 stone steps leading from the lower town to the level of the sanctuary. Historically, pilgrims climbed these steps on their knees as a form of penance, and in camaraderie with those who were making this effort.

Within the sanctuary, there are several chapels built into the rock. Pilgrims visit them seeking miracles and blessings. Many stop at the feet of the wooden statue of the Black Madonna along the way.

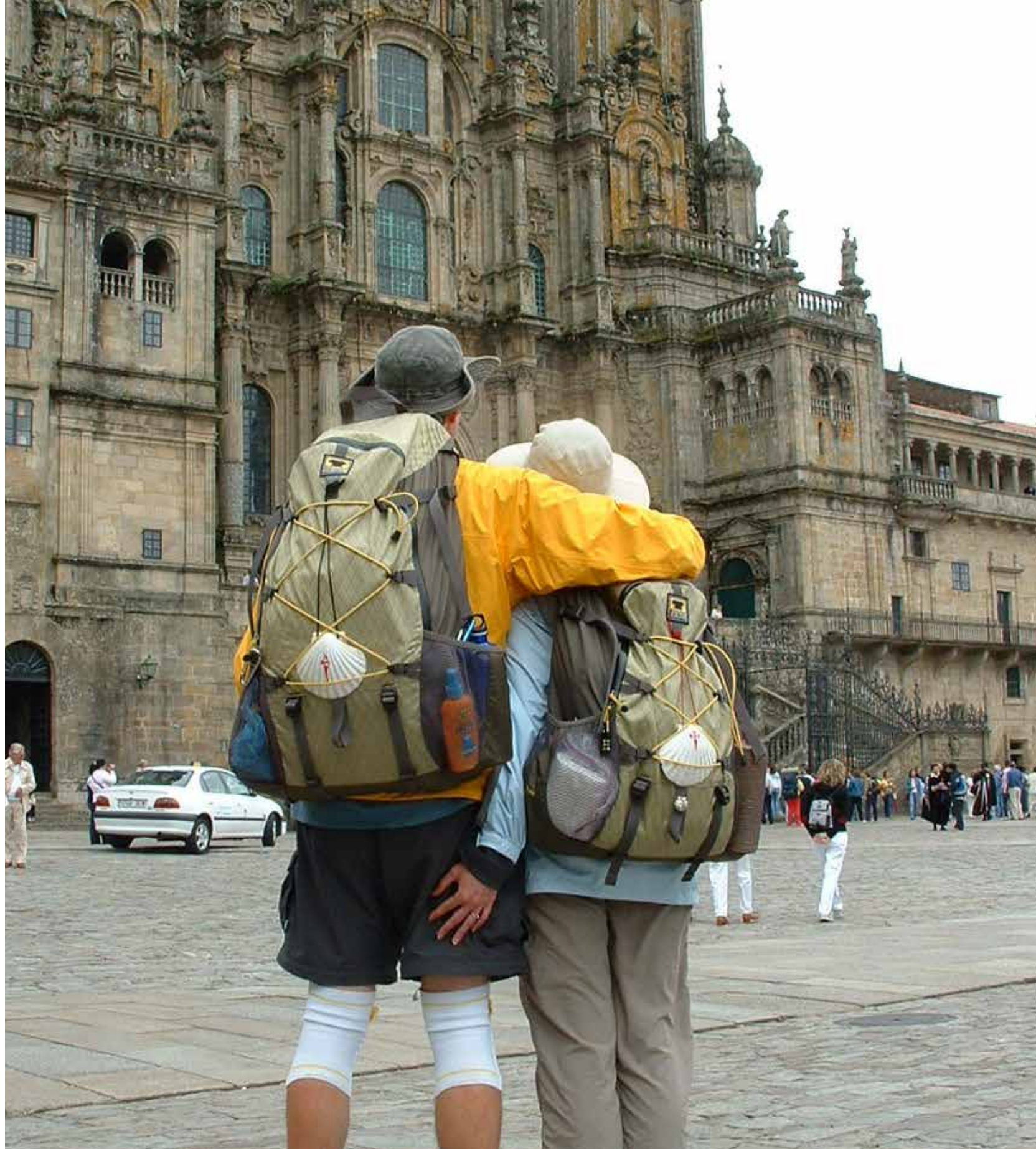
Continuing from the sanctuary level to the chateau on top of the cliff goes through the Way of The Cross (Chemin de Croix). Pilgrims walk up a winding road, where a station stands in each turn. A mosaic in each station represents the story of Christ's last days from the Last Supper to Resurrection. Engaging in the ritual of contemplation and prayer while moving along these stations is a spiritual boost.

As night falls, tourist activities dwindle, leaving only the pilgrims lodged in Notre Dame Le Relais du Pelerin. Before departing the village, grabbing a chunk of Rocamadour local goat cheese to enjoy along the Way is the final ritual. The memory and taste of this visit will last for a long time! 🧀



Way of the Cross, Rocamadour, May 2018.
Photo by Hany Farag.

Previous page: The Sanctuary of Rocamadour, May 2018.
Photo by Hany Farag.



arts & culture

Where the Arrows Lead

By Adam Bailey
Concord, MA

I hobbled into the refugio in Santo Domingo de la Calzada on the twenty-second of June and met my third American along the Camino, a guy in his early fifties, maybe. He was standing at the entrance to the refugio, an old stone building that could have been a converted monastery. It lay in the shadow of the town's cathedral tower that soared into the sky, connecting the cobblestone street to the clouds above. He must have recognized me as a fellow American from my face or from my dress, or from the way that we Americans walk or carry ourselves, but whatever it was, he came right up to me and asked the most peculiar question.

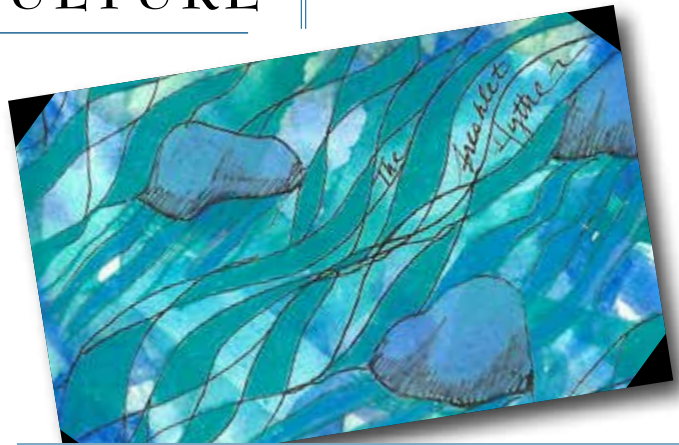
"Is your name Adam?"

Whoa. That was weird. It is one thing for a complete stranger to guess your nationality, but completely another to guess your first name. Who was this guy and how did he know my name? As I stood there stunned and before I could answer, he followed up with, "Are you getting married in Santiago?"

"Uhhh...errr...yes," I stuttered, not knowing if I was perhaps divulging more information than I should. But before I could ask how he knew this, he told me that he had heard from another pilgrim, one he was walking with a few days earlier, that there was an American walking the Camino with the intention of meeting his fiancée along the road and then getting married when they arrived in Santiago and that the American's name was Adam.

He introduced himself and told me his name was Jim Callahan from California. Like me, Jim had not seen many Americans on the road, so, when he saw me approaching, he guessed that I might be that guy he heard about. He described the pilgrim who told him my story, but I did not recognize that person from his description. All I can guess is that I told my story to someone along the way, who then told someone else about me, and perhaps the story was passed on a few more times before it reached Jim. What was entertaining to me was that my story arrived at Santo Domingo de la Calzada before I did!

Previous page: A very long walk down the aisle. Photo of Adam and Julie Bailey by unidentified pilgrim. Top right: "The Freshlet Hythe." Watercolor and ink on paper. Megan Muthupandian, 2018.



Stepping Stones in the Stream

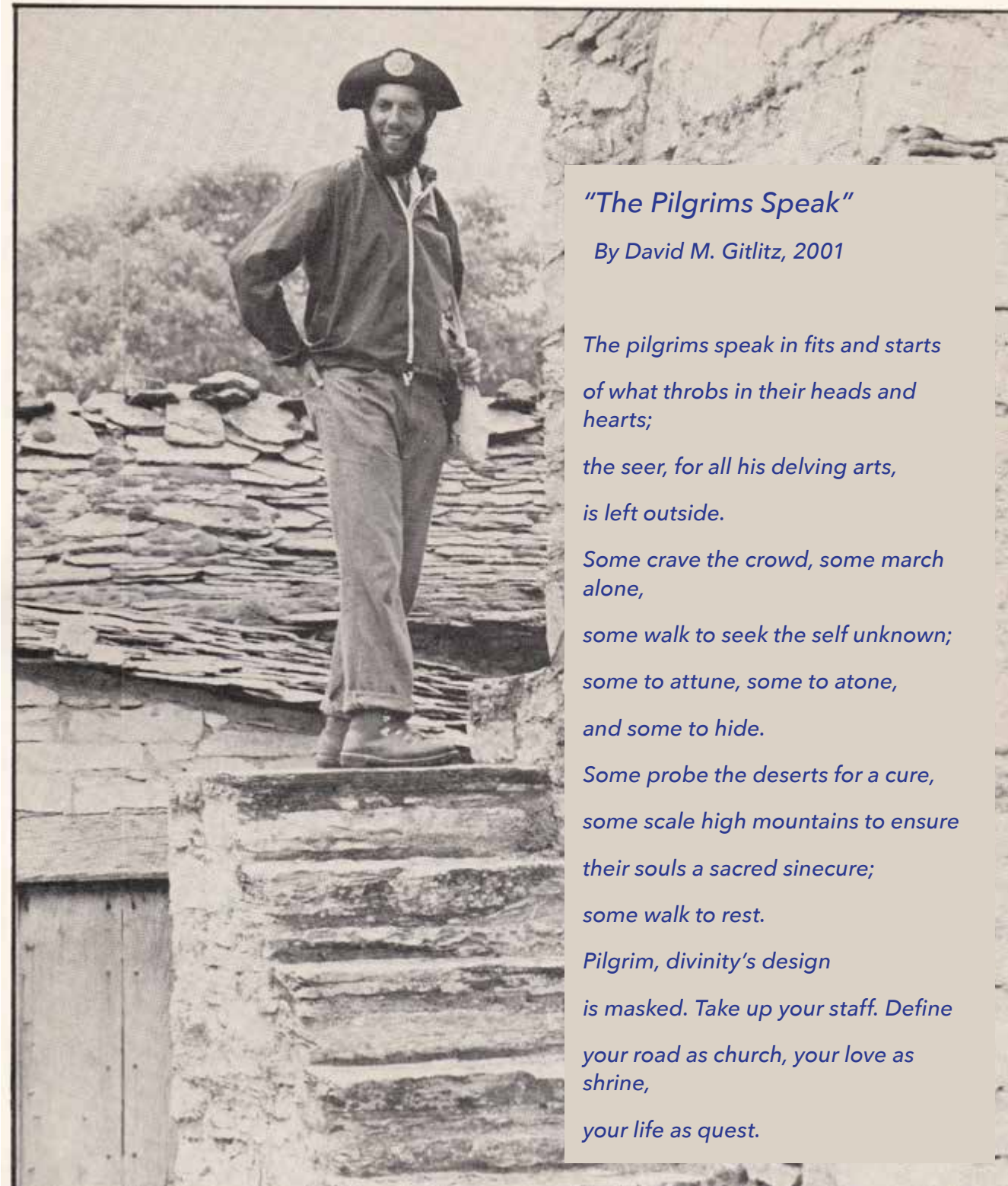
By Cathy Hollister
Hermitage, TN

Younger woman wakes in top bunk,
chirping
warblers accompany dawn, café
owner with morning's rush over
drives injured girl to next town, ripe
figs – sweet
lavender repels bed bugs, hot café
con leche and cold
cerveza, host carries heavy pack
upstairs, skilled
and patient blister woman tends to
sore feet, cool
water fountains, roadside stands,
sellos, green shade trees, hot
showers, peaceful
nuns in blue habits sing vespers in
practiced harmony, old woman
both stooped and slow offers
cinnamon crepes as gnarled hands
extend
with "donativo," church spire rises
on the horizon – day is nearly done,
clothespins
hold socks fast, shrimp paella with
crispy bottom,
vino tinto flows
to all who trod the Way –
the Camino gives and gives and
always gives.

Nebraska

Alumnus

September/October 1979



"The Pilgrims Speak"

By David M. Gitlitz, 2001

*The pilgrims speak in fits and starts
of what throbs in their heads and
hearts;*

*the seer, for all his delving arts,
is left outside.*

*Some crave the crowd, some march
alone,*

*some walk to seek the self unknown;
some to attune, some to atone,
and some to hide.*

*Some probe the deserts for a cure,
some scale high mountains to ensure
their souls a sacred sinecure;
some walk to rest.*

*Pilgrim, divinity's design
is masked. Take up your staff. Define
your road as church, your love as
shrine,
your life as quest.*

David M. Gitlitz on the steps of the Mozarabic church at Peñalba de Santiago. Univ. of Nebraska Alumni Magazine. Photo by Mike Davis.

Davidson, Linda Kay & David Gitlitz. *Pilgrimage: from the Ganges to Graceland: an encyclopedia*. 2 vols. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002. 1: v.

Remembering David Gitlitz: Personal Reflections

By Maryjane Dunn, Arkadelphia, AK
and Lynn Talbot, Blacksburg, VA

The memorial for David Gitlitz, published in the March La Concha, portrays the invaluable academic contributions he made to pilgrimage studies but not to teaching. As a professor, he changed lives by initiating students into the Camino, leading students along the Way in 1974, 1979, 1987, 1993, and 1996. Pilgrims with David on his first two academic Camino pilgrimages, we wanted to share a few of our experiences.

The trips were advertised as recreations of a fifteenth century pilgrimage. Each day one student would drive ahead to secure lodging, organize meals, and transport the group's gear and books. Afternoon classes were held based on the surroundings — history, art, architecture, literature, geography, religion — whatever the terrain or pueblo warranted. No church went unvisited, and we attended Mass each evening.

Lynn: In 1974, I arrived with six other students in St Jean Pied de Port, with excitement and trepidation. In those days before yellow arrows, we occasionally got lost – crossing the Pyrenees, blundering in the fog of the Montes de Oca, and stumbling onto a military base near Burgos. Unused to seeing pilgrims, people in the villages often asked us to “hug the Apostle” for them in Santiago. My favorite memory is walking from Villalcazar de Sirga to Carrión de los Condes in the blustery pouring rain while David recited from memory traditional ballads to keep up our spirits.

Maryjane: David promoted experiential learning and required us to speak only Spanish the entire journey. He allowed English only once, when we unexpectedly had to ford a deepish, fast-moving river and survival instructions were paramount. In 1979, without the constraints of yellow arrows, we were free to go off-Camino to climb to the top of a hill to search the plowed fields for pottery shards and to imagine life in a castro (hill fortress).



Siesta: Lodging and lessons in Calzadilla de la Cueva, June 20, 1979. Photo by Mike Davis.



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

In 1974 only 108 Compostelas were awarded, and 271 in 1979. By his 1996 pilgrimage David had become jaded about the numbers of pilgrims (23,218) and their lack of historical and cultural perspective. His aversion to “turigrinos” inspired him to write the “The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago: The Complete Cultural Handbook”, incorporating the lessons he had taught to his pilgrim students. David never really participated in the modern Camino phenomenon except as a bemused observer.

David was, above all, a down-to-earth encourager and teacher who saw everyone as a potential student. In retirement he continued to inspire persons young and old as a docent of the Reserva Natural “La Mesita” and through

his daily birding walks around his community of San Pablo Etla (Oaxaca). And yes, on our last visit to see him (January 2020), we visited churches, climbed hills, and brought home a few shards of Mesoamerican pottery. Although he left the physical Camino behind in many ways, he embodied its lessons throughout his life.

Breathing In

By Shoshana Kerewsky
Eugene, OR

*I breathe in the om
I breathe out the om
in the ether 5000 miles from home,
into and out of
the rarified air.
Into the air, into
the sunset glare
5000 miles from home.*

*Shall I wrestle death?
Why? We die,
by flaming sword,
by burning bush,
by flood.
I throw an angel
off the world's
wet edge.*

*So, my love, we create
mythology,
signs and numinous
eschatology*

*in our instant of glitter,
neuron spark to dark.*



"The Clay is the Same." Metallic ink on cardstock.
Megan Muthupandiyen, 2021.

Sauntering to Song

By Kevin Hargaden
Greenville, GA

During the Holy Year in 2016, I decided to make a pilgrimage again along the Camino. In the little town of Población, only three kilometers into the day's walk, a bird was singing. It followed me along for at least five minutes. I had been wondering why I was walking again. I was wondering why I put myself through it. The bird just kept sweetly singing over me. "Cuckoo... Cuckoo...." And I had to laugh! I wasn't the only one who thought I was crazy for doing this pilgrimage once more. And with a smile on my face, I sauntered on to Santiago.

"The Perch." Watercolor and ink on paper.
Megan Muthupandiyen, 2018.

Deep Thoughts

*By Julie Gianelloni Connor
Houston, TX*

Before I went on the Camino, I read a number of books by other pilgrims. I was struck by how many of them — all of them, really — reported having some sort of deep, spiritual revelation or experience along the way.

I fully expected that I, too, would have such “deep thoughts.” As I walked along the Camino, I thought about various things.

One thing I kept thinking about was my house. After having lived in my post-retirement home for two years, I had gradually come to realize that the house, while wonderful, was not quite perfect. It could stand a few alterations.

It has no covered, screened porch or patio, and there are times, particularly early mornings and at twilight, when I would like to sit outside and read, without having to worry about sunburn or mosquitos. I thought about whether I could add a front porch or a covered back patio.

My house has a small home office, but really I need a bigger office. I have too many books, too many files, too many diplomas and awards and other work-related items. While I was working, I kept most of those items in my office at work. Now, they sit in boxes in closets. I thought about how I could add on to my house so as to have a bigger office.

Besides thinking about the house, I thought about getting home and hosting a big Spanish dinner. I thought about who I would invite to the dinner and what food and wine I would serve. I thought about how I would decorate the table and what stories I would tell about the Camino.

As I neared the end of my Camino, I began to fret about not having had any “deep thoughts.”

When I got home, I laughingly told people that, clearly, I am a shallow person, because my deepest thoughts concerned remodeling my house and giving a welcome home dinner party. But I spoke too soon. I finally think I have parsed out the meaning of the Way for me.

In an earlier chapter, I recounted the story of the “Almond Man.” My meeting with him on the Meseta was just one example of the unexpected, unusual kindnesses that ordinary Spaniards regularly bestow

on the strange foreign travelers in their midst. Spontaneously, without any hope of recompense of any kind, except of course perhaps in heaven, everyday Spaniards extend help to the pilgrims who flood their country.

Another time my son and I gratefully took a seat in the shade of a big tree for a brief rest. As soon as the couple in a nearby house saw us, they began pressing offers of beverages and then food on us.

“Take a cold beer! It will revive you for the rest of your walk!” offered the husband.

“Thanks,” I replied, “but I’ll curl up and go to sleep in this marvelous shade if I drink a beer.”

“Well, how about a sandwich? I’m sure you are hungry,” said the wife.

And on and on the offers rolled, from two elderly folks that I could see had little to spare. Despite their limited means, they were willing to share what they had with us.

These small acts of kindness happened all along our Camino and are a tribute to the bighearted character of Spaniards of all ages and socioeconomic groups.

I was thinking of this recently, as I listened to a story on NPR about a man in France who provides free lodging in his apartment to “illegal” refugees from the Mideast.

Then I saw part of a documentary about a Greek coast guard captain whose daily task was to rescue migrants or, if necessary, to pick up their bodies from the cruel seas off the Greek islands.

As I think of all those Europeans trying to help refugees, I can’t help but wonder what I can and should do to repay those many kindnesses I received in Spain, such as perhaps by volunteering with refugees, who — like the pilgrims of the Middle Ages — embark on long and uncertain journeys with no guarantee of reaching their goal. Perhaps such small kindnesses are the real purpose of the Camino: to give people the opportunity to offer and receive help from strangers, thus reaffirming the proposition that Rousseau, not Hobbes, was correct about the essential goodness of humanity. I guess I have had my “deep thoughts” after all, though it took perspective, world events and a year for them to bubble up to the surface.

ARTS & CULTURE

By Shoshana Kerewsky
Eugene, OR

*Learning to follow
las flechas amarillas,
Maria's watchful.*

*Did the roast chickens
re-feather, or dance
in flames
like Abednego?*

*I couldn't find St.
Agueda, and I'd
lost my
own breasts
already.*

*The castle?
Ruins
warp in hot air, no closer.
Mirage? Miracle?*

*Standing in a stand
of ripe grain, I eat stale bread,
golden in the mouth.*

*God on the iPod,
davke. God, it's hot. Shabbat
on the Meseta.*

*A smoldering field.
Helicopters dump water.
Blinded, facing west.*

*Angels in angles.
Gaudi's bright Gothic. Blue glass
cools the July light.*

*Conversations in
the present indicative,
the Way is just now.*

*I shout, my voice thin
on the wind. He doesn't hear
me; he's gone, gone on.*

*Too cloudy to see
the Cathedral from Monte
de Gozo. It's there.*

*I begin with one
Camino story, gather
more. I end with none.*

"Rhapsody in Bloom." Ink on Watercolor.
Megan Muthupandian, 2018.

Kenotic Walking: Flow and Communion on the Camino

By Kip Redick
Carrollton, VA

Some pilgrims have the rare experience of what scholars refer to as flow, wherein our actions merge with awareness. In flow, awareness is fully present in each moment. Flow cannot be induced or produced. The after-experience, however, may involve reflection or contemplation of memories from the time in which the flow occurred.

As a scholar of pilgrimage and long-distance hiking, I have explored the experience of flow and how people process the experience through reflection. I have done so through phenomenological research. Phenomenology is the study of experience and meaning-making. Phenomenologists attempt to experience the “things themselves,” as those things occur, beyond conceptual framing.

In my studies I refer to flow and the experience afterwards as kenotic and reflective walking. Kenotic walking, or walking-self-emptying, decenters the self. Kenosis is the Greek term that St. Paul used in his letter to the Philippians when pointing to Christ’s emptying himself of his equality with God, becoming a servant and suffering on the cross. Kenosis in pilgrimage unfolds in the practice of walking/waiting rather than through a focusing of consciousness. Pilgrimage, as a liminal frame, meaning a time between or belonging to two different places, states, etc., facilitates rather than induces or produces kenotic walking.

Various Camino guide books refer to the “mystical path.” This “way” or mystical path opens to us when we enter a liminal frame, when we exit the familiar, become immersed in the walk, and wait in places not of our making; Celtic people refer to such places as “thin places.” When engaged in social exchange, whether mediated by our smartphones or chatting with others along the way, we are still immersed in places of our own making; we are not waiting. In this way, we are in a liminal space--two different spaces at once. Henry David Thoreau’s admonition to enter the woods fully when we go rambling makes this point. He writes,

I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the wood bodily, without getting there in spirit. In my afternoon walk I would fain forget all my morning occupations and my obligations to

society. But it sometimes happens that I cannot easily shake off the village. The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is — I am out of my senses. In my walks I would fain return to my senses. What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?

Thoreau draws attention to the spiritual and the mystical, the walker’s full and waiting attention embodied in the ramble. The mystical opens pilgrims to an alternative “village” beyond self-absorption in which pilgrims participate in a more inclusive community. In addition to kenosis, the emptying of self, St. Paul also points to a mystical participation with Christ, *koinonia*, that is, communion or fellowship. The mystical path brings pilgrims into communion with those who are wholly other.

In addition to people wholly other than ourselves, whose language is not our own, whose history we do not share, communion might happen with non-humans. Kenotic walking is a full and undivided participation, similar to an orchestra. Pilgrims and companions, both human and non-human, become fellow musicians following the direction of an unseen conductor. Each pilgrim footfall resounds as it contacts gravel, sand, log, water. Wind passes through trees, and the leaves clap; wheat fields reveal eddies in the atmosphere, and a chorus of grasses sing. The orchestra becomes what it was for the ancient Greeks, a dancing place, as bodies interact rhythmically. Swallows dart here and there in the sky over pilgrims stepping along a twisting path. Evelyn Underhill, in her classic work on mysticism, writes, “The mysterious vitality of trees, the silent magic of the forest, the strange and steady cycle of its life, possess in a peculiar degree this power of unleashing the human soul.” Unleashed, we find ourselves as fellow creatures among an expanded community.

In kenotic and reflective walking, we cast off preconceptions and open ourselves to our fellow creatures along the way, both human and non-human. In becoming decentered, we learn to cooperate with one another in the process of meaning-making. We become co-authors with fellow sojourners and with other participants in the journey in creating a mutual story. We return home transformed.



FINAL REFLECTION

Commemorating St. James' Way

*By Steve Lytch, Vice Chair, American Pilgrims on the Camino
Lancaster, PA*

For many pilgrims, the extraordinary path of the Camino leads to humbleness. Blisters and aching muscles remind us of our physical limitations. Those final kilometers at the end of a long day test our mental stamina. During stretches of solitude when we are accompanied by no one but ourselves, we are confronted with struggles of the spirit that we have managed to squelch with the distractions of daily life back home. We soon learn that no pilgrim is invincible, and we learn to rely on each other — the Camino provides.

Pilgrims resonate with St. James's path to humility. The gospel of Mark says that Jesus gave James and his brother John the name Boanerges, which means "Sons of Thunder." We're not told why they deserved that nickname, but it's likely that it says something about their character. Perhaps they were known for loud, rumbling outbursts. Mark gives a vignette that supports that theory. Just before Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Sons of Thunder asked if they could have places of honor alongside him when he came into his glory. Jesus responded, "whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant." James obviously took that to heart, becoming the first apostle to die as a martyr.

During this Jubilee Year, I am reminded how James's life was transformed by listening instead of expounding, how he found glory in simplicity and greatness in serving. Most of our commemorations recognize notable achievements. We honor graduations, retirements, birthdays and anniversaries. We prize our Compostela, that certificate that impresses friends when we tell them how far we had to walk or cycle to earn it. But we know that what our Compostela really signifies is not so much recognition of something we've accomplished as the beginning of a journey to discovery. We discover that from inside ourselves, from the graces given by others, from the beauty and unexpected delights we encounter along the Way. St. James's Way humbles us so we can discover what truly matters.

NEXT ISSUE

Submissions to our September 2021 issue close on August 25th, and we would love to receive your reflections!

The September theme is **LETTING GO OF OUR BURDENS**

Pilgrimage is an invitation to pack lightly — to gently let go of or set down what does not serve us — to travel lightly and let go of what we do not need.

From laying stones at the foot of the Cruz de Ferro to burning clothing at Fisterra, we are invited, throughout our journeys along the Way, to let go of those things which are burdens.

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

- What you've learned about burdens — both carrying them, and letting them go, from being a pilgrim.
- How you continue to practice laying down your burdens as a consequence of becoming a pilgrim.

Please limit essays to 400 words maximum.

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

www.americanpilgrims.org

