

# LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

## *Sharing the Fire:*

Making beacons,  
lighting paths  
for others  
to discover  
the Way.

### *Inside:*

- The Camino comes to St. Augustine
- Oh Shenandoah!
- Welcoming a new chapter
- Fires in Galicia

AUTUMN 2022



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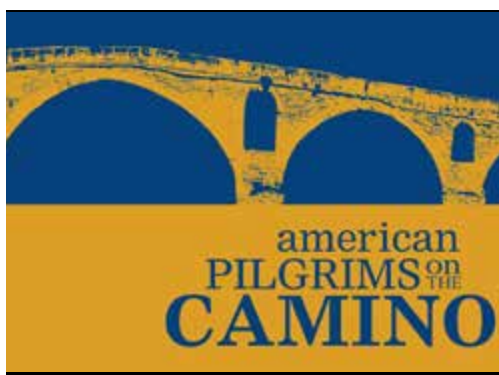
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COVER Photo: Santiago de Compostela floor inset. Photo by Thom Ryng.

AT RIGHT: On the Camino Primitivo. May 2022  
Photo by Thom Ryng.

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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.

# LA CONCHA

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Sara Gradwohl, Thom Ryng,  
Gigi Oyog, and Zita Macy*

Dear Fellow Pilgrims,

Summer is such a fruitful time, and this summer was no exception. As the challenges of travel eased, pilgrims began returning to the Way and reigniting the joy that is in the journey, the encounter, and the reflective transformation that follows.

Even if pilgrimage is in some ways a deeply solitary experience, it is also deeply social. We are invited along the Way to break bread together, to sing together, and to find ourselves in step with one another. And when the journey to Santiago ends, we find ourselves compelled, each in our own way, to share the passion that has been ignited within us with others.

There are countless ways pilgrims tend and share the fire of their spirit with others. The many pilgrims who contributed to this issue speak of or represent many of them. Some share their time and talent with others through song, art, or the written word. Others speak about their work demonstrating hospitality, coordinating events for pilgrims to gather, organizing pilgrimages for veterans, founding and directing new pilgrim houses in Spain. Still others illustrate the ways that they serve through the aegis of American Pilgrims by serving as a hospitalero or a chapter coordinator, and joining American Pilgrims to directly support our grants program.

As a completely volunteer-driven organization, American Pilgrims on the Camino is extraordinary—both in its purpose, and what it accomplishes on behalf of the global pilgrim community. But as with any organization, we are capable of achieving so much because we, individually, exhibit what pilgrims seem to always do: to be a pilgrim is to enthusiastically share your fire to light the way for others. So kudos to you.

Ultreia et suseia,

*Meg*

Megan Muthupandiyam, Editor-in-Chief



## American Pilgrims on the Camino

120 State Avenue NE #303  
Olympia, WA 98501-1131  
Fax: 1 650 989-4057  
americanpilgrims.org

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Steve Lytch,  
Chair of the  
American Pilgrims on the  
Camino Board of  
Directors.

A few years ago, I had the good fortune of being in Santiago on July 24 after completing the Camino Francés. That night, the eve of St. James's Day, in front of the cathedral, I witnessed the most spectacular display of fireworks I've ever seen. It was a fitting expression of what my Camino family and I were feeling—that sparkling exultation of finally completing our pilgrimage and arriving at our goal.

Two days later we headed for home, but that fire within that had been reflected brilliantly over the Plaza Obradoiro was still smoldering. Something so special, so transformative, couldn't be just for myself. How could the Camino reach beyond my own personal experience? How was the world going to be a better place for what the Camino had given me?

Fire burns brighter when it is concentrated in a kiln, is tended, and has resources to sustain it. That is why I became involved in American Pilgrims on the Camino. I needed some place to hold and share the fire.

You can feel the sparks when pilgrims get together in local **CHAPTERS** or at the annual **GATHERING**. The information we share through **LA CONCHA**, our **WEBSITE**, **FACEBOOK**, and other **SOCIAL MEDIA** draws people to the flame and inspires us to bring the values of the Camino to our daily lives. Hospitaleros stoke the fires with their hospitality and kindness. Many of them serve in albergues that have been made more welcoming by our grants.

American Pilgrims on the Camino is working to provide more ways that we can share the fire. Next year we'll be expanding our grants program, taking on larger projects to improve the Camino's infrastructure. We're strengthening our networks with associations in other countries to connect us more closely with the global community of pilgrims. We're making it easier to find hands-on ways to give back to the Camino through improved volunteer engagement. The fire burns brighter when we stoke the flames together.

Buen Camino,

*Steve*

Steve Lytch  
Chair, Board of Directors

## EVENTS!

### Open House

**American Pilgrims on the Camino will be holding its 2nd Annual Holiday Open House on Saturday, December 10th at 11:00 a.m. Eastern Time!**

We are honored to be able to share an hour with John Brierley, author of *Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino*. During this live virtual event, John promises to share his inspiration and insight, from how the Camino is emerging from the COVID-19 years to his powerful personal reflections on the healing power of the Camino. So many of us have been guided by John's guidebooks, and the Holiday Open House promises to guide us positively as pilgrims.

A significant portion of this live Zoom session will be dedicated to answering your questions.

Look for more information on how to register for the event through the American Pilgrims Facebook Group, on our website, and in your email inbox in November!





## St. James Statue Enshrined at Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine Designated Official Starting Point of the Camino in the U.S.

*by Terry Williams  
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL*

In July 2022, a delegation from the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine, Florida, traveled to Spain to formalize the cathedral's membership in the Alliance of Cathedrals situated along various Camino routes in Spain and the Americas. The purpose of the alliance is to promote greater spirituality and understanding amongst people of the world.

Following the official signing ceremony at the cathedral in Córdoba, the U.S. delegation visited other participating cathedrals along the Way of St. James in Madrid, Alcalá de Henares, Avilés, Oviedo and Santiago de Compostela.

They carried with them a statue of St. James the Greater, carved by Spanish sculptor Juan Vega. The statue was blessed at the cathedral in Córdoba following the official signing ceremony. It is carved in Romanesque style from a single block of cedar wood and is fashioned after the statue of St. James depicted above the Tree of Jesse in the Portico de la Gloria in Santiago de Compostela Cathedral.

Following the delegation's return to the U.S., The Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine celebrated the temporary installation of the statue in the cathedral at a special Mass on July 25th, the Feast of St. James the Greater. Members of the Jacksonville Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino attended the installation Mass celebrated by Fr. John Tetlow.

The Cathedral Basilica is in the process of planning for a more permanent structure for the statue. Their goal is to build a special shrine dedicated to St. James in the West Courtyard of the Cathedral Basilica.

It's fitting that St. Augustine, founded in 1565 by Spanish Admiral Pedro Menendez de Avilés for King Phillip II, with the earliest Christian congregation in the contiguous United States, should be chosen to house the shrine to St. James in the U.S.

The Alliance of Cathedrals has designated the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine as the official starting point in the U.S. for the Camino de Santiago. The Cathedral Basilica is also the terminus in the Americas for the Camino del Mestizaje, which seeks to link historical trails and paths from Santiago de Chile, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia north to Florida, and ultimately to Santiago de Compostela.

Pilgrims beginning their Camino in St. Augustine will be able to visit the shrine to St. James, have their passports stamped at the Basilica Cathedral, and steep themselves in St. Augustine's rich history. Buen Camino!

Signing the documents for the Alliance in the Cathedral de Córdoba, Cordoba, Spain. Photo by Susan Egan.



Members of the Delegation who accompanied the statue on its own Camino include (L to R, in the rear) Jon Carres, Director of the National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche; Fr. John Tetlow, Rector of the Cathedral of St. Augustine, Florida; Deacon Michael Ellison, chancellor of the Diocese of St. Augustine, and Francisco Guitard, President of Instituto Nauta, promoter of the project. Photo by Susan Egan.



Members of Jacksonville Chapter, American Pilgrims on the Camino, Cathedral Basilica St. Augustine. Photo submitted by Terry Williams.

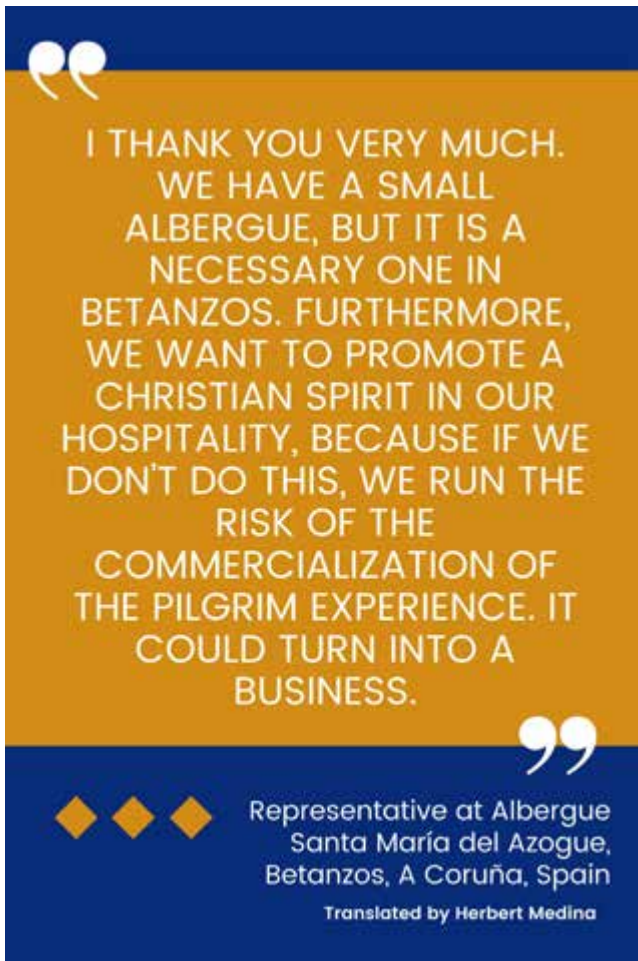


## MEMBERSHIP

### Why Become a Member Of American Pilgrims on the Camino?

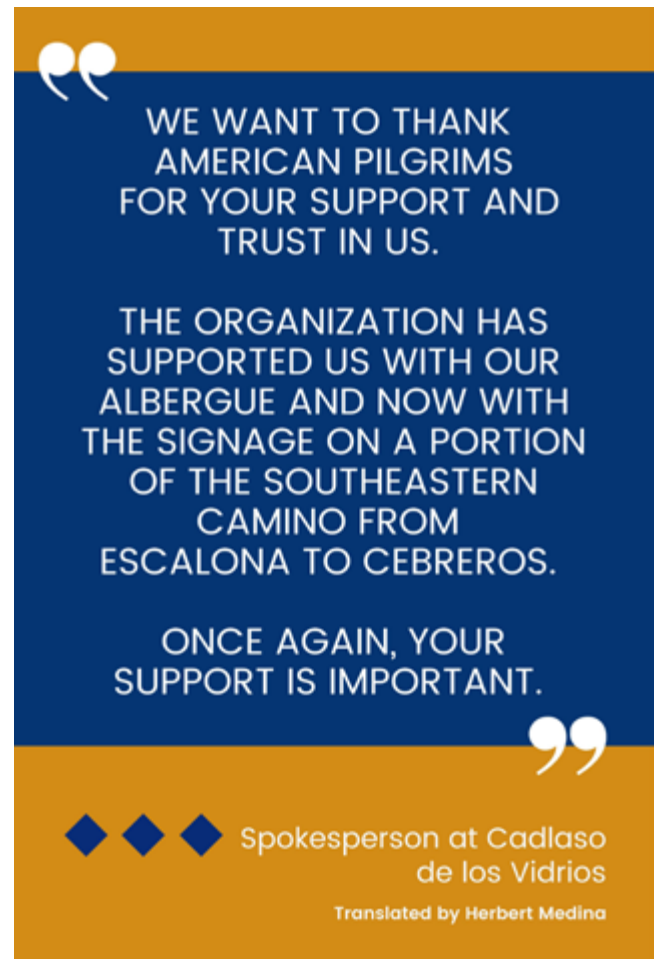
*If the Camino has enriched your life, give back to the Camino by joining our pilgrim family of American Pilgrims on the Camino. Your membership fees help fund much-needed, non-profit facilities on the Camino, support our hospitalero training program, facilitate fellowship among pilgrims at local chapter events, national gatherings, and more.*

*Here is a link to join [NOW](#). Your membership is very much appreciated.*



I THANK YOU VERY MUCH. WE HAVE A SMALL ALBERGUE, BUT IT IS A NECESSARY ONE IN BETANZOS. FURTHERMORE, WE WANT TO PROMOTE A CHRISTIAN SPIRIT IN OUR HOSPITALITY, BECAUSE IF WE DON'T DO THIS, WE RUN THE RISK OF THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE PILGRIM EXPERIENCE. IT COULD TURN INTO A BUSINESS.

Representative at Albergue Santa María del Azogue, Betanzos, A Coruña, Spain  
Translated by Herbert Medina



WE WANT TO THANK AMERICAN PILGRIMS FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND TRUST IN US.

THE ORGANIZATION HAS SUPPORTED US WITH OUR ALBERGUE AND NOW WITH THE SIGNAGE ON A PORTION OF THE SOUTHEASTERN CAMINO FROM ESCALONA TO CEBREROS.

ONCE AGAIN, YOUR SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT.

Spokesperson at Cadlaso de los Vidrios  
Translated by Herbert Medina



## || NEWS FROM THE BOARD ||

### Summary of the July 2022 Board Meeting

The board of American Pilgrims on the Camino met at the Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery in St. Paul, MN between July 28-30, 2022. The board welcomed coordinators and key volunteers from the Minnesota Chapter in an informal setting to discuss chapter activities and ideas around leadership development.

The board discussed how, on a combined basis, year-to-date membership revenues and donations are 39% higher than last year, due to strong growth in membership and the continued generosity of donors. Consideration was given to a potential increase in financial support provided through the grants program, material aid for a planned albergue and Camino welcome center in Madrid, and expansion of the Michael Wyatt Service Grant program to enable American pilgrims with demonstrated financial need to serve as hospitaleros or with the Ribadiso Welcome Service.

In addition to its regular review of the organizational policy manual, the board adopted a new policy on social media and shared digital assets, which will be incorporated into the current manual and then disseminated. A shift in the quarterly publishing schedule for La Concha was also discussed.

Planning teams provided updates regarding the 2023 Annual Gathering of Pilgrims in Lake Tahoe, NV, April 13-16, 2023, and a potential international gathering, which is currently being discussed with the Canadian Company of Pilgrims. There was also consideration of proposed joint efforts with Spanish associations and the results of the recent membership survey.

The board created job descriptions for a wide array of volunteer positions. An application to create a new Shenandoah Valley Chapter, centered around Harrisonburg, Virginia, was unanimously approved.



Camino Primitivo. May 2022. Photo by Thom Ryng.

## || HOSPITALERO CORNER ||

### Fires, Fires Everywhere

by Paula Jager  
Owosso, MI

Fires, fires, everywhere! While serving as a hospitalera in the beautiful town of Estella-Lizarra, Navarra, Spain, fires broke out! This was during the second half of June this year, and the Camino was busy. At one time, there were more than 30 fires burning all at once in Navarra.



The fires that most affected Estella were near Puente la Reina, which sits between Pamplona and Estella on the Camino Francés. The Guardia Civil closed all Caminos in Navarra for about two and a half days; they were issuing fines to pilgrims found walking. While I didn't meet any pilgrims who had received fines, we did have pilgrims in the albergue, who were picked up on the Camino and brought to us by the Guardia Civil.

One afternoon, many pilgrims arrived by bus from Puente La Reina. They had been moved in the middle of the night from the albergues too close to the fires and taken to other shelters for their safety. The next day they were told to take the bus and go to Logroño (leaving Navarra). Many pilgrims chose to stop and stay in Estella, hoping to be able to walk the next day. Due

to the closure of the Camino, many albergues were closed as well. We remained open and had 26 pilgrims in the albergue that night, most of whom were traumatized from the experiences of the night before. While they were hoping to continue walking their Camino the next day, it remained closed and so back on the bus they went to get away from the fires and smoke.

The skies, while usually a bright blue with hardly any clouds, were filled with smoke "clouds" from the fires. The photos of the skies above the albergue where I was serving were filled with smoke and I took the photos with my phone camera. The photos of the fires burning near Puente La Reina were taken by a pilgrim and shared with me, but I do not know his name.



If you walk through Estella, stop in at the parochial albergue San Miguel de Estella. It is a very clean and well cared for donativo albergue that sits off the Camino up a hill—very much worth the climb!

Buen Camino!

Photos provided by author.



# GRANTS REPORT

The association Leonesa de Amigos del Viejo Camino de la Montaña a Santiago, a 2022 American Pilgrims Grantee, has acknowledged our recent gift. Find it at the bottom of their flyer!



**Asociación Leonesa de Amigos del Viejo Camino de la Montaña a Santiago**  
Camino Olvidado

**CASA DE ACOGIDA en La Magdalena**  
685 920 895 | Guadalupe  
DONATIVO

**CASA DE ACOGIDA en Vegarienza**  
(a 28 kms de La Magdalena)  
680 799 927 | Estela  
ACOGIDA Y DESAYUNO - DONATIVO  
Edificio medieval acondicionado para el peregrino.

**Casa de acogida en Vegarienza**

**COLABORADOR ESPECIAL**  
Asociación de "American Pilgrims on the Camino"

**Hostal Restaurante "Río Cea"**  
987 703 521 | Puente Almuey

**Hostal "Moderno"**  
987 700 170 | Cistierna

**Hostal "Inés"**  
987 735 086 | Boñar

**Casas Rurales "Emilio de Celis"**  
987 581 232 | La Magdalena

**Hostal Restaurante "Santa Lucía"**  
987 693 378 | La Magdalena

**Gasolinera "Cargosa"**  
987 581 058 | La Magdalena

**Farmacia "Loreto"**  
987 581 126 | La Magdalena

**Ferretería y Materiales de Construcción "Gersán"**  
987 581 551 | La Magdalena

**Supermercado "Ángel"**  
987 581 275 | La Magdalena

**Churrería "Rosa"**  
669 314 598 | La Magdalena

**Panadería "Luciano"**  
987 581 014 | La Magdalena

**Supermercado "El Maná"**  
601 402 585 | La Magdalena

**Estanco "Tamara"**  
987 581 034 | La Magdalena

**Floristería-Copistería "Mycos"**  
987 119 111 | La Magdalena

**Cafetería "El Cruce"**  
610 884 341 | La Magdalena

**Supermercado "Larpi"**  
987 580 744 | Riello

**Bar-Restaurante "El Rincón de Manolo"**  
987 580 780 | Riello

**Restaurante "Resthy"**  
987 580 722 | Pandorado

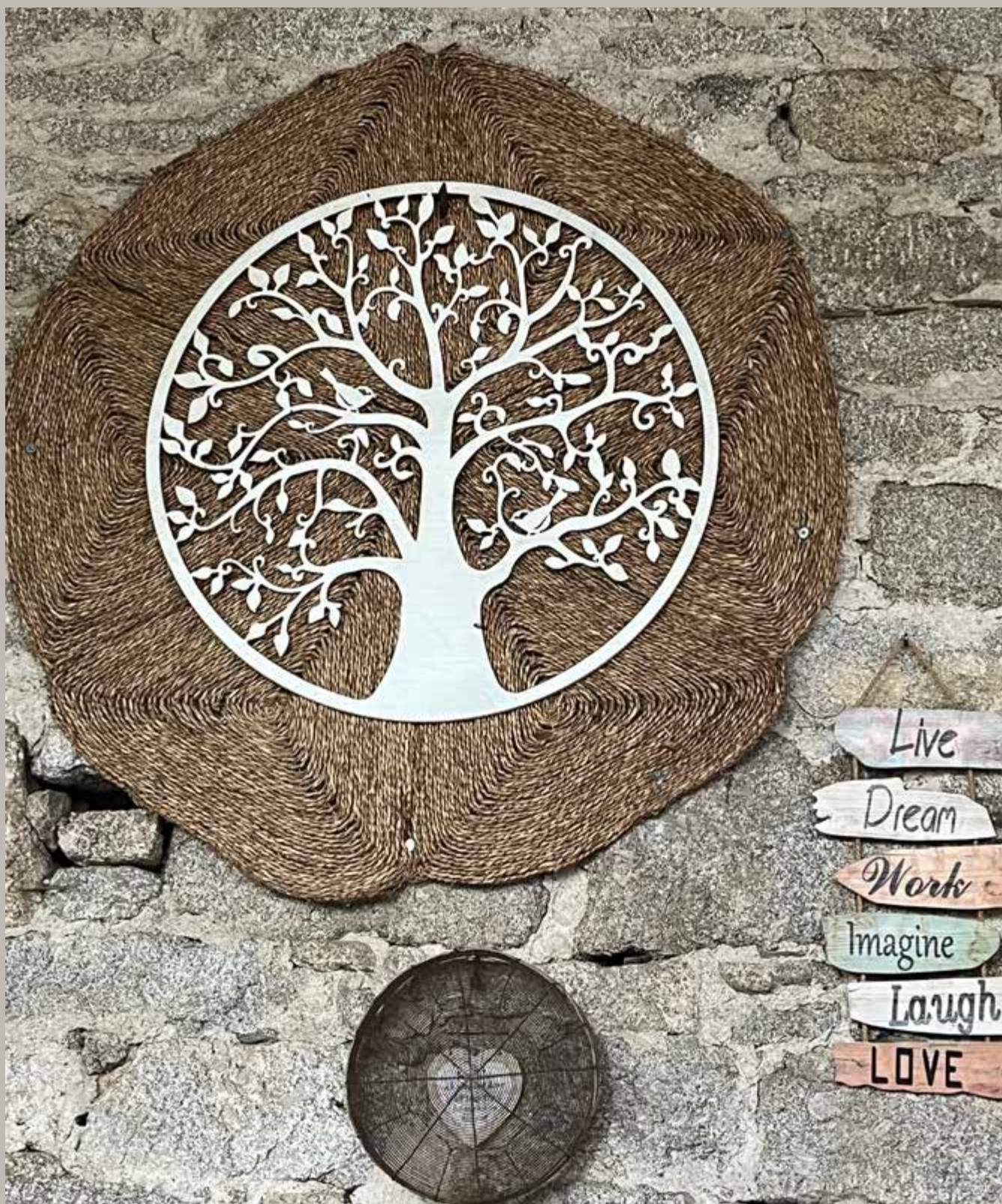
**Casas Rurales "Aguas frías"**  
639 546 562 | La Omañuela

**Bar-Restaurante "Hermanos Prieto"**  
686 190 471 | El Castillo

**COLABORADOR ESPECIAL**  
Asociación de "American Pilgrims on the Camino"

**viejocaminoleon@gmail.com**





## Chapter News





### Oh Shenandoah!

by Joe Curro  
Arlington, MA

We welcome a brand new chapter, Shenandoah Valley Chapter, which is led by founding co-coordinators Russ Eanes and Donna Mast. The chapter is centered around Harrisonburg, Virginia and can be reached at [SHENANDOAHVALLEY@AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG](mailto:SHENANDOAHVALLEY@AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG).

In addition to Russ and Donna, the following pilgrims have stepped forward to help lead their chapters:

**Cathy Goins** (Spokane, WA)

**Brice Perry** (Spokane, WA)

**Paula Steele** (Albuquerque, NM)

Our local pilgrim communities owe a debt of gratitude to these individuals and to all of the other veteran coordinators who have served and who continue to serve.



Section cover photo: In the Asturias region at a private casa rural in Vilar de Cas. Above: As seen near Arca.  
Photos by Thom Rynge.



### Simulating the Camino Experience to Share the Fire

*by Amy Elizabeth Horton  
Warrenton, MO*

In June, our St. Louis chapter hosted a two-day hike on a section of the Katy Trail State Park, a rail-trail built on the former corridor of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad.

Day 1 began at the Treloar, MO trailhead, with a midway refreshment break at the refurbished Peers Store museum. We stopped for the day in Marthasville, MO, where we enjoyed a leisurely lunch at the KT Caboose, then checked in at the Happy Apples Bunkhouse for our albergue-like accommodations. We ended the evening with a pilgrim table meal at Nobletons Distilling House at Happy Apples Orchards.

On Day 2, we continued to Dutzow, MO, with a breakfast stop at the Dutzow Deli, then celebrated the conclusion of our journey at Good News Brewing Company in Augusta, MO. This group hike event helped simulate for prospective pilgrims what a couple days on the Camino and a night in group lodging might be like. It was also a great way to rekindle a bit of Camino spirit for pilgrims who have walked before.



At left: The Happy Apples Bunkhouse provided albergue-like accommodations for our Camino simulation two-day hike. Photo by Amy Horton.



At right: St. Louis pilgrims reach Augusta, the end of our two-day hike. Photo by Amy Horton.





## CHAPTER NEWS



Day 1 at the Treloar trailhead. Photo by Ed Reidy.



St. Louis pilgrims on the Katy Trail between Treloar and Marthasville. Photo by Amy Horton.

St. Louis pilgrims hanging out at the Happy Apples bunkhouse. Photo by Amy Horton.





**-Fred Rogers (Mister Rogers)**

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## Good Luck Along the Way

by Dennis Brooke  
Tacoma, WA

The best parts of a Camino are often unplanned: the people you meet, the village market you didn't expect, or the posh wedding you happen upon.

One June morning we departed the coastal town of Llanes for Ribadesella on the Camino del Norte. It was one of those rain gear on-again, off-again days that can sap your spirit. But mid-morning, we encountered a Saturday market and procured supplies for a picnic. Soon we started up a hill with a large church upon the crest. We could see a crowd milling about the building, which was a bit odd for a Saturday. When we arrived, we heard bagpipers and saw people dressed in beautiful clothing: it was the start of a wedding.

We found space on a wall a short distance away to enjoy our picnic and watch the proceedings. Soon, one of the finely dressed women approached us with a smile and spoke to us in Spanish. We caught the words "buena suerte," or "good luck." We've heard that pilgrims can be considered good luck and we were glad to provide some.

A father pushing a stroller with a toddler approached us. He spoke excellent English and told us a bit about the couple. Then he pulled out a jar of baby food and asked if we happened to have a

spoon. The only makeshift serving implement he had to feed his daughter was an oyster shell. Fortunately, we had a spare we were glad to give him. As he fed her, he chatted with a friend and we again overheard, "buena suerte."

About this time, a gray Mercedes pulled up and the bride emerged. The bagpipers started another tune, the crowd retreated into the church, the bride processed in, and our lunchtime show ended.

Ninety minutes later, we walked past a farm where they were setting up for what looked like a party. I speculated it might be the location of the wedding reception and fleetingly suggested we, as harbingers of good luck, should invite ourselves in for champagne and appetizers (though we did not). Five minutes later, vehicles started to pass us on their way to the farm—loaded with guests we recognized from the wedding.

At dinner that night, we relayed our story of the wedding to pilgrim friends who had been an hour behind us. They had the best luck—when they passed the reception, they were invited in for beer, ham, and a photo with the newlyweds.

*Editor's note: Dennis and his wife Laurie started the Camino Podiensis in Le Puy en Velay, France, in April 2022, and completed their 1000+ mile trek to Santiago via the Camino del Norte ten weeks and two days later. They write about their Caminos and other adventures at [WWW.WORLDDROVERS.COM](http://WWW.WORLDDROVERS.COM). They are based in Tacoma, WA.*



The wedding at the Parroquia Católica San Pedro de Pria near La Pesa, Spain (Asturias). Photos by Laurie and Dennis Brooke.



## The Gift of a Father-and-Son Camino Keeps on Giving

by Ruben Barron  
Yorba Linda, CA

I am blessed to have walked the Camino with my adult son, twice. For a thousand miles, we shared the anguish of blisters and sore muscles and the joy of long daily walks in an intriguing country. Experiencing the subtle, unconscious process of transformation together was the ultimate, unexpected gift. Neither of us could have imagined the fullness of the Camino from reading or hearing about it.

When did I ever spend comparable quality time with him growing up? Never. I was an involved dad, even coaching his soccer team when I knew nothing of the sport. But my work schedule grew tighter, and the years flew by. The Camino brought us together the entire day, in places neither of us had ever been, sharing every meal, sleeping quarters, showers, and daily chores. The Camino fire started the day we set foot in St. Jean Pied de Port, France. Our introduction was a long, winding climb on the Pyrenees with their magnificent views of nature, global camaraderie, and physical struggles.

We spoke Spanish and interacted freely with our Spanish hosts, listening to their stories and their impressions of the millions of pilgrims who take unforgettable memories and leave their footprints on the Camino. Historically, it's been a profound means of mutual sharing among hosts with visitors and visitors with their hosts.

Our initial Camino experience was eight years ago, yet we still share vivid memories and Camino-like observations with each other seemingly out of nowhere. The trigger may be the sky's mottled hues, a particular cloud formation, a bright moon breaking through the darkness, or a cold drizzle that awak-



Father and son somewhere along the Camino. Photo by a generous pilgrim.

ens the senses. The unexpected relief of a welcome breeze when you most need it, hunger pangs worthy of a long hike, or the sight of a large fresh salad can all rouse faded feelings. Somehow, the mind remains prime to draw from the rich reservoir of the Camino and deepen otherwise ordinary experiences. Its influence endures and continues to mold us.

## Getting Ready

by Roberto A. Lage  
Miami, FL

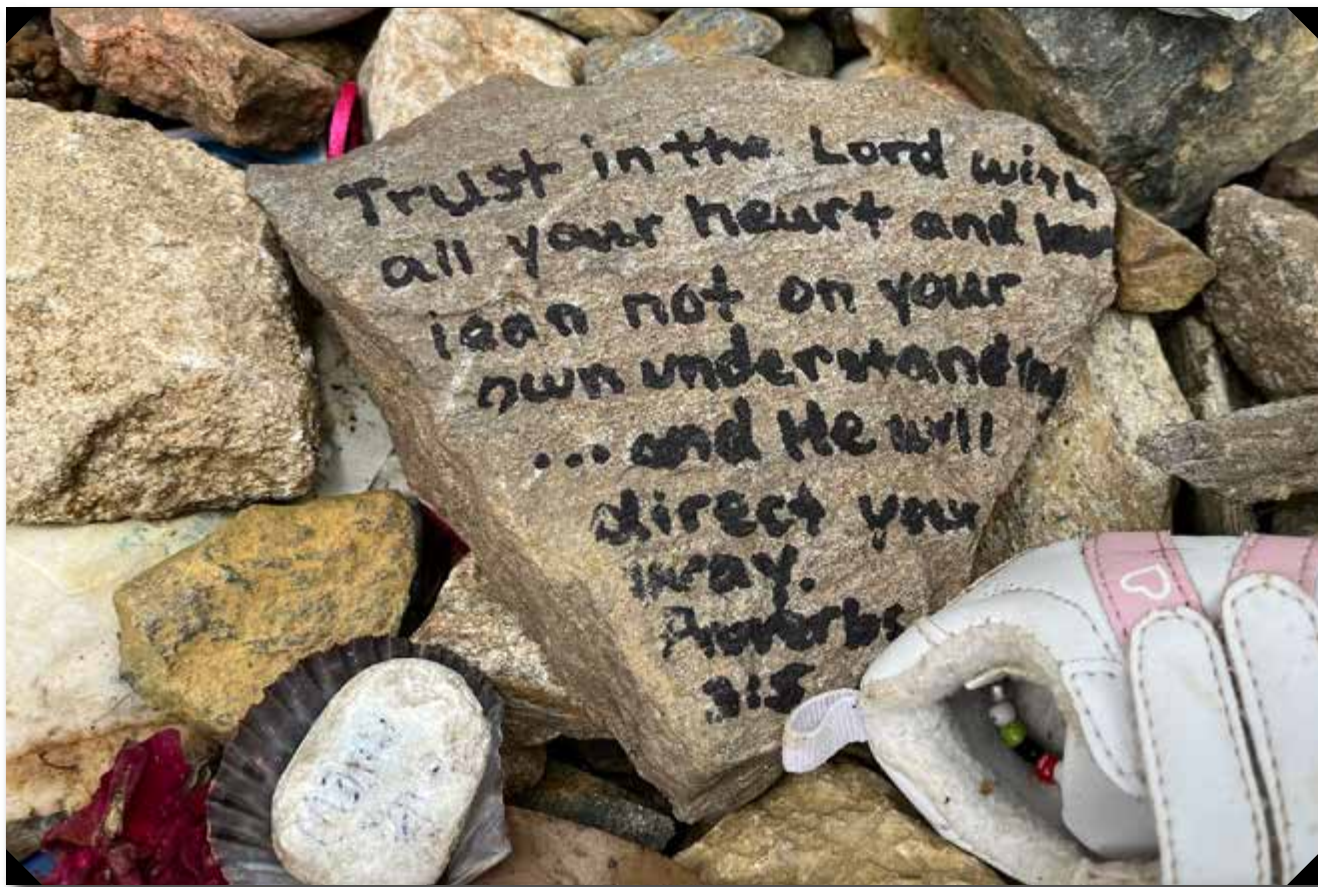
I was fifteen years old the first time I heard about the Camino de Santiago. I was in a theater in Madrid watching a documentary of its route from the village of Roncesvalles in Navarra to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia.

Little did I know that forty-seven years later, I would actually walk it. In 2016, I finalized my journey from the City of León to Santiago de Compostela.

In that year, it was an emotional journey for me when I arrived at the Cruz de Ferro. The path curves and suddenly the cross was standing there in all its glory. Tears flooded my eyes as I placed a stone at the base of the cross and said my prayers. Approaching Santiago de Compostela, I was also very emotional as I reached the Plaza de Obradoiro and saw the Cathedral in its magnificent grandeur. *Continued*



## || SHARING THE FIRE ||



At a shrine along the Primitivo. Photo by Thom Ryng.

I decided then that I would walk the entire Camino from Roncesvalles to Santiago de Compostela for my 70th birthday in 2022. My plans changed when my daughter, Jennifer, decided to do the Camino with me, but she wouldn't be able to walk the entire 790 kilometers and asked if we could start halfway. We had to make it work as I could not deprive her of fulfilling her wish to do the "Camino with her Dad." With that in mind, we decided to start the Camino in León. I am very proud to walk the Camino de Santiago with her, especially since the Holy Year for the 2021 St. James Jubilee was extended until the end of 2022 due to the pandemic. We will be taking advantage of that and will have Holy Communion at the Cathedral and walk through the Holy Door.

The Camino de Santiago for me is a quest. I have been thinking of nothing else since I finished the last one in 2016. Now, the thought that I will soon be walking with my daughter and going to Mass and having Holy Communion on Sundays fills me with joy. This journey will definitely strengthen the spiritual bond between my daughter and me. The Camino for us is not only a pilgrimage, but also a way to meet new people and to share new experiences. We will be staying in hotels, hostels, and alberges and sharing meals and new experiences. Hopefully, in the future I will get to partake in this experience again.



Jen and her dad Roberto getting ready for Camino. Photo by Mercy Lage.



## How I Found My Art on the Camino de Santiago

by Brien Crothers  
Hidden Valley Lake, CA

The Meseta, July 2015. Hot, you might ask? Well, yes. What does that have to do with art, you might ask? Soon enough, my friends. I started that first Camino in St. Jean Pied de Port. Recently retired, an amateur ultra-distance athlete, and an adventurer, I had read the books and seen the movies that draw us to Spain.

I'm an average American male—of average height, build, and education. I'm fair skinned, only moderately athletic, and, well, plain old average. Now, I apologize. There's nothing wrong with being average. It's just not for me. As an engineer, writing bored me to tears, was painful, and was easily put off.

After retiring, I started traveling the globe for one adventure or another. Places like Tibet and the North Face of Mount Everest. Things like kayaking in Vietnam, mountain bike racing in South Africa, and running across the Sahara Desert.

But the one path that truly changed my life's direction was, of course, the Camino de Santiago. The Meseta in July can be hot, horribly hot. But if you're conditioned properly, it's not so bad. Yet, that wasn't enough of a challenge. To meet other commitments that summer, I had to hike from St. Jean to Santiago in 20 days. That's about 25 miles per day.

But what does this have to do with art, you ask politely? In a moment, please. The thing I love about a physical challenge is how it breaks down my reticent nature when around other people. On the Camino, I learned to talk to people, I learned from them, and I became friends with many. Through those interactions and the challenge of walking the Camino Francés during that scorching July, I unearthed that energy we love so much. I think of it as a mystical flow left behind by the scores of pilgrims who have walked before me, like glitter that clings to you when you follow behind a horde of celebrating pix-

ies. In that flow, that pull, all is possible.

As I said, I didn't like writing. Not one bit. But somewhere, during a hot, 39-mile day on the Meseta, my art came to me. It said, "Write about your experience. Write about the Camino." Since returning home that summer, I have been writing, mostly about the Camino. That is the art I found on the Camino de Santiago, my writing art.

## Asking for Help the Camino Way

by Deborah Weltman  
St. Louis, MO

It wasn't obvious to me that I would be going on pilgrimage to benefit others as well as myself, but I was. After a ten-year flirtation with all things Camino, when my determination to really travel the Camino finally hit me, I had no money saved, and I wasn't prepared physically. What to do? I chose to stand behind my deep desire, and to do everything to make my Big Dream a reality. Somehow I knew the Camino pilgrimage was my opportunity to have a big life, a full life, to make my difference in the world. It was important!

The hardest thing I had to do—harder than morning prep walks in the winter cold (my out-of-shape lungs complaining), harder than climbing the Pyrenees, harder than finding my way with no way-finding skills, harder even than eventually saying "Adios" to my "Camino family" and to Spain—was to first ask my home family and friends for help so I could afford to go. It was necessary. To make my Camino dream a reality, I would need help.

I asked for help in whatever way each person felt comfortable: money, frequent flyer miles, watching my home while I was gone, lending needed items, prep walks with me, etc. And if they chose not to do any of the above, I asked for their prayers. With their help I did get to go, to walk my pilgrimage, to learn my Camino lessons.

Upon my return I was determined to share what I had learned. I gave talks and photo presentations, shared my stories, and wrote a book about my experiences and all I had learned while *Continued*



Ascending the Pyrenees. Photo by Deborah Weltman.

on the Camino. At the book launch party I spoke a few words about the most important lesson I had learned: that when asking for help, especially for help to do something personally meaningful, something that felt like my soul's work to do, people wanted to help me!

I learned that we all want to help move humanity forward by helping others (and ourselves) to become our "best selves." I was thrilled when a friend who heard my "ask for help" words at the launch party told me she now knew what she had to do to move "her work" forward. She would ask for help, too. It felt great to help her!

### The Last Patrol: A Pilgrimage of Brotherhood

by Rick McAllister  
St. Augustine, FL

A combat veteran comes home with scars. These scars can be external, they may be internal, or in many cases both.

In 2012, I had a triple-bypass, open-heart surgery to repair damage to my heart that was a result of exposure to Agent Orange during my military service in Vietnam. While recovering and rehabilitating from surgery, a good friend recommended the Camino de Santiago as a healing experience. I made my first Camino Francés in 2014, followed by a second in 2016, and another in 2018. These Caminos were life-changing for me, and my soul experienced the most profound warmth and clarity—something not easily explained to anyone, particularly aging veterans.

Over the last couple years, I have been massaging the idea that I need to share this experience with other Vietnam veterans. In September 2023, I will lead five fellow Vietnam vets on a special pilgrimage of brotherhood on the Camino Francés, giving them an opportunity to experience the special spirituality and beauty of this journey and combine it with that unique bond experienced by

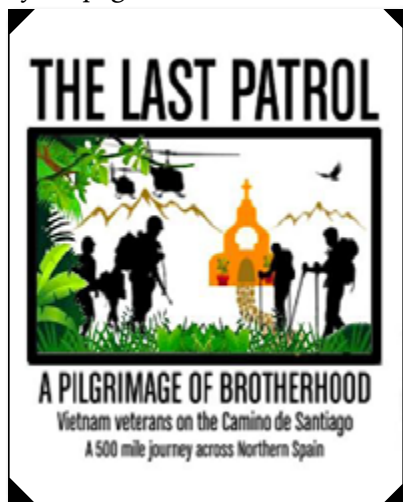
*Continued on page 23*



Preparing the Botufumiero to be swung at a private Mass at the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. May 2022.  
Photo by Francine Mastini



*Continued from page 21*



brothers-in-arms. Ultimately, I hope they will feel that same wonderful inner peace that wrapped around my heart and soul when I arrived at the altar of St. James in Santiago de Compostela.

The intrepid warriors have been selected. We are active in the planning stages and starting to get our old legs into gear. A support van will shadow our path, just in case. We also plan to capture a video of the journey so that it may be shared as encouragement with other veterans. Just witnessing six 80-year-old guys making their way across Northern Spain should make a good story.

We have an amazing, growing support group, particularly among Vietnam veterans. Many would love to make the journey with us, but the myriad health issues at our age restrict many from such a physical undertaking. We will take them with us in spirit. After all, every American veteran knows we “leave no man behind.” I think we are good for one more patrol.

## Teaching Through the Camino: Lessons on Reflection

*by Thomas Salamone  
Needham, MA*

As an educator, I consider myself a perpetual student, and it is this same notion I try to instill in my students. We are all students in some fashion, and nowhere is this truer than on the Camino. In 2017, I decided to embark on my first Camino, the Camino Francés. I would later walk the Camino Portugués and the Camino Inglés. You could say I caught the Camino spirit. I was also grounded in the knowledge that, around each corner, through each small village, I had a goal: to put one foot in front of the other and enjoy this gift of time for boundless reflection.

During my undergraduate studies at a Jesuit university, the state of reflection was peppered around as something to which one should aspire. Perhaps it was meant to be a state of mind where one encounters some sort of elucidation pertaining to one’s life journey. More profoundly, perhaps, it is meant to help center one’s thoughts, affording oneself a direct line to the soul. It was not until I walked my first Camino that I realized the power of reflection—the blissful tranquility it offers as one discovers, and rediscovers, who one is. We know the Camino offers plenty of hours of reflection; however, what does one do with these reflections?

Having returned home from a few Caminos now, and impatiently awaiting my next opportunity to cast off toward Santiago de Compostela, I have brought this idea of reflection back to the classroom. With a new school year upon us, I urge my fellow educators to do the same. Talk to your students about reflection and how powerful it is, how it can help one’s mind, and, by extension, one’s life. Reflection helps students set goals, and provides space for them to “get messy.” It helps them realize that not everything falls neatly into place all of the time, and dedication is needed to pursue one’s goals. It is not a perfect practice, but through reflection, we can propel ourselves forward. With this in mind, as we emerge from a global pandemic, I remind my students to “put one foot in front of the other” and enjoy the Way.



## SHARING THE FIRE



Santa Susana and the Ferris wheel in Alameda Park, July 2022.  
Photo by Anna Noon.

Rev. Anna Noon, at center wearing stole, welcomes youth groups from St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Florence, SC, and Bethesda-by-the-Sea, Palm Beach, FL, to Santa Susana. Photo by Rev. Becca Kello.





# Creating a Space to Share the Fire in Santiago

by Anna Noon  
Santiago de Compostela, Spain

Walking my first Camino in 2019 on the Inglés reinforced my desire and plan to walk a longer Camino in celebration of my 50th birthday. Born in 1970 on St. James Day, the year 2020 was to be a turn of the decade and a turning point in my life, but not in a way I ever could have imagined.

The death, trauma, and accompanying grief and isolation that permeated my life as a solo priest at an Episcopal parish in New Jersey during Covidtide was not unique. By the spring of 2021, my physical, emotional, and spiritual health required a change. After resigning my post and putting the contents of my home in storage, I drove to my mother's house to begin a year of sabbatical for rest and recovery. With the encouragement of a host of pilgrims and friends, I booked a ticket to Spain when the borders reopened and began my long-awaited journey on the Camino Francés that August.

Feeling beat down and unsure of what was next in my life, I started my walk from St. Jean Pied de Port, trusting that with each step, the clutter in my mind and heart would begin to clear. I engaged in serious conversations with the Spirit, asking for clarity of purpose for my life as a minister. Encounters in the beauty of nature and with Camino angels in the guise of locals and pilgrims restored my soul, even as my body struggled and strengthened. And then somewhere along the Meseta, I received a message from the president of the Friends of the Anglican Pilgrim Centre in Santiago, asking me to consider starting a ministry for pilgrims there. I spent the remainder of my Camino discerning whether to move to the Camino. Ultimately, I took a leap of faith and said yes!

On Easter Day of this Jacobean Holy Year, I began as a missionary in Santiago and director of pilgrim ministries for the Spanish Episcopal Church, a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion. We welcome individual pilgrims, groups, and seekers of all faith traditions or no tradition at all. Our small but resourceful team in Santiago has identified a building we want to purchase and transform

into an ecumenical center for hospitality, healing, learning, hope, and love. It will be a place for fire-keepers to tend the sparks of transformation so many pilgrims experience.

Meanwhile, with the kind permission of the Archbishop in Santiago de Compostela, we make use of Santa Susana, an old church building that sits atop the hill in Alameda Park, next to where the Ferris wheel spins during festivals. We share this holy space with Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox immigrant communities. A spirit of sharing and caring is at the foundation of this place, and we are privileged to keep that fire burning.



Anna Noon in Santiago.

If you had asked me a year ago where I'd be and what I'd be doing, moving to Spain and building a pilgrim center was not something I could have imagined. No one can walk our journey for us. Though when taking a leap in life toward a new direction, it helps to experience a bit of the paths others have traveled. In their footsteps, we discover we are never really alone. To make a dream a reality, we need help along the way. When we share the light and fire within us, the Divine Spirit is working to bring about the healing of the nations, one person at a time, one step at a time.

When you're in Santiago de Compostela, if you need someone to meet you where you are, if you need a quiet place for conversation, worship, reflection, or meditation, we welcome you. If you know someone embarking on their Camino who may need a friend on the ground, connect them to us. This is what the community of pilgrims can do to share the fire that burns within us, so that others might also catch fire for a transformed life.

*Editor's note: To connect with Anna in Santiago, visit*  
**[WWW.ANGLICANCENTRESANTIAGO.ORG/CONTACT](http://WWW.ANGLICANCENTRESANTIAGO.ORG/CONTACT)**

## Letters from the Camino: Virtual Summer on the North Atlantic

by Leah G. Wilkinson-Brockway  
Spokane, WA



Photo of the author in Lourdes, France.

Dear Pilgrims, greetings from Milepost 3,701 on my virtual Camino. I have reached the midway point in the North Atlantic Ocean between the southern tip of Greenland and the southern tip of Ireland. Only 700 more miles until I reach Crookhaven, County. Cork, Ireland. Happy Summer!

By virtual, I mean that I am progressing on this Camino in my mind, as a soul's journey. In reality, I am actually walking the miles wherever I am, usually around my home in Spokane. For instance, one morning this week, I actually walked with friends on the Bluff Trail overlooking Latah Creek in Spokane. On the western slope, largely sheltered by ponderosa pines, it was shady, dry, and pleasant in the summer heat. Actual location: Spokane. Virtual location: North Atlantic Ocean.

In May, my actual location shifted from Spokane to Lourdes, France. I was invited to be a medic on an amazing pilgrimage known as Warriors to Lourdes. Lourdes is where, in 1858, a young shepherd girl, Bernadette Soubirous, experienced 18 apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She unearthed a spring in the cave where these apparitions took place. The Roman Catholic Church has officially recognized 70 miraculous, instantaneous, and lasting cures relating to washing in the waters of that spring. Visitors to the sanctuary grounds and grotto at Lourdes have also reported thousands of unofficial miracles. Yahoo reports, "Today, over three million people visit Lourdes each year, including 100,000 volunteers and 80,000 malades, the ill and/or disabled."

Warriors to Lourdes is a program of the Knights of Columbus and the Archdiocese for the Military Services to bring military service members, veterans, and their families—especially those sick or injured in any way—to Lourdes. It coincides with the Inter-



Our Lady of Lourdes statue in Grotto of Lourdes.

national Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes. Military members from more than 40 nations participate in a multi-day program of homage to Our Lord and to Mary the Mother of God. A Festival of Music, with high-spirited singing and military bands marching all day through the narrow, picturesque French streets juxtaposed the hushed reverence of an international Mass and the candlelight rosary procession in the Lourdes Sanctuary.

The Pyrenees rise steeply around Lourdes. Hardwood trees flank the lower mountainsides, and snow caps the heights. There is wonderful walking and praying all around Lourdes. May the Lord heal all that ails us and grant us another day of walking joy! Our Lady of Lourdes and St. James, pray for us. Love, Leah

*Editor's note: This is the 13th reflection from Leah G. Wilkinson-Brockway about being a pilgrim in her own town*

*(or wherever she happens to be) as she walks daily to travel the collective distance, as the crow flies, from her home in Spokane, WA, to Lourdes, France (approximately 5,097 miles). This is her Camino for now. Ultimately, her goal is to walk a pilgrimage from Lourdes to Santiago de Compostela. You will find Leah's previous reflections in La Concha from June 2019 to the present.*



Basilica rising over the Grotto of Lourdes. Photo by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway.



## The Camino Classroom

by David Jennings  
Incline Village, NV

I awoke one morning on the Camino Francés and opened my Brierly's Bible—as I and some other pilgrims affectionately refer to John Brierley's *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago*—to see the plan for the day's trek. Eureka! It looked like the perfect Camino day. Before getting to the day's destination, we would pass through three other towns. I imagined we would walk for an hour or so and stop for a café au lait in the first town. A couple hours later, we would stop at the second town, relax, take off our boots, and in another hour or so could stop again for maybe a beer and a snack. This would be a great day.

Having expectations was my first mistake. Upon arriving at the first town, we found it totally deserted, with no services available. We continued on to find the second town to be just like the first. Nada, zero, zip in terms of pilgrim amenities. Forget stopping for a coffee, beer, or to wiggle my toes. The third town too felt like it had been evacuated. Nobody was around.

At dinner that night, I said, "What's wrong with these people? A hundred thousand pilgrims passing by and no services? If this was America, we'd be out there selling muffins, there would be a Starbucks and a McDonald's. Don't they realize how much money they could be making?"

By the next morning, I realized my second error: judging the situation through an American lens. Perhaps these were two of my many Camino lessons.

Karen Kiser, sixth from left, with fellow pilgrims of the San Diego chapter during a hike in Escondido, CA. Photo by a generous pilgrim.



Passing through the town of Seyssel, France along the Via Gebennensis.  
Photo by David Jennings.

## Reach Out, Volunteer, Share

by Karin Kiser  
San Diego, CA

Since my last Camino in 2019, I've had many opportunities to share the pilgrim spirit with others. I do that in three ways: volunteering, sharing, and reaching out.

Prior to the global events of 2020, I had volunteered at an albergue in Galicia and at the Pilgrim's Office in Santiago. Not being able to travel to Spain these past two years meant I had time to start volunteering here at home. I became more involved with the local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino and volunteered to lead hikes. Twenty-six months and 17 hikes later, I still find great pleasure in scouting out local off-the-beaten-path parks and trails and sharing them with others.

Sharing is another way to keep the Camino spirit alive. Each time I walk the Camino, I am reminded that it is natural to share and that people are innately kind. I regularly challenge myself to look for new ways to share what I can. I now carry adhesive bandages in my car and in my pocket for anyone in need. In the last year, I've donated more than 1500 Spanish and English copies of my pocket Camino guides to migrant programs, bilingual schools, little free library boxes, and other nonprofits.

Reaching out is the third way I keep the Camino fire burning. For me, reaching out goes beyond volunteering or sharing. It means actively seeking to connect with others and all of life. During the global lockdowns, I started a pro bono Power of One Project to demonstrate how one person can reach thousands and positively impact the world. We now host a Dedicated Day of Kindness each month, lead loving kindness meditations, and have raised

funds to plant nearly 2000 trees around the world. And we're just getting started. It's truly amazing how the Camino can change the course of your life, even years after you have returned from Spain.



## Finding and Sharing a Healing Fire on the Camino

by Fr. Steve Rindahl  
Cibola, TX

When I was retiring from the U.S. Army, I walked the Camino. My only plan was to get off the plane, begin walking, and pray about future ministry. I had served in the Army a long time and almost all of my ministry experience was in the context of Army chaplaincy. Ministering to soldiers was “what I do” and that was coming to an end. Like so many people facing a major life transition, I walked the Camino trying to discern what was next.

Arriving at the Cruz de Ferro, I found the chapel locked. I went to a nearby picnic table and set up to celebrate the Mass. One thing military chaplaincy will teach a priest is that any flat surface can be used for the Mass when it needs to be. As I celebrated Mass, I offered up special intentions using a series of stones, one for each of the soldiers my battalion and the soldiers’ friends, families, and loved ones had lost because of our war in Iraq. Then, I gathered the stones from the table and carried them to the great pile of stones left by untold numbers of pilgrims who had walked before me and had laid down their burdens at this place. Taking each stone, I named it for one of the soldiers lost, then I laid them all at the foot of the cross.

As I walked away from the Cruz de Ferro, I immediately sensed a burden lift. Soon, I was flooded with questions. How would it be possible to bring veterans on the Camino? How could I help give other veterans the opportunity to experience the unique healing possibilities of the Camino de Santiago? How could I share this special Santiago fire with others? Though there would still be many details to work out, the flame of Warriors on the Way sparked that day.

Since then, Warriors on the Way has made three pilgrimages (and plans for a fourth in September 2022, just after the deadline for this issue of *La Concha*) with combat veterans seeking healing from their experiences and the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and moral injury. Many have expressed that the most profound day of their pilgrimage was the day at Cruz de Ferro when they left behind stones representing their burdens. All of them tell their stories to their friends, family, and loved ones—further sharing the fire found on the Camino de Santiago.

*Editor’s note: Fr. Steve is a retired U.S. Army Chaplain, founder and director of Warriors on the Way, and a lifetime member of American Pilgrims on the Camino. When not on the Camino, Fr. Steve is a spiritual director helping guide people through the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, which he considers a spiritual pilgrimage made through contemplative prayer.*



Warriors on the Way pilgrims leave their burdens at Cruz de Ferro, 2018. Photo by Fr. Steve Rindahl.



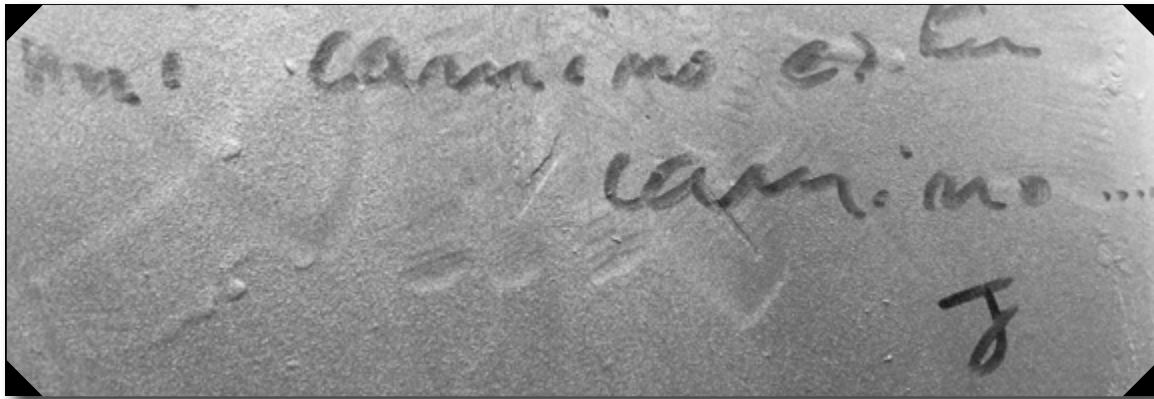
## Graffiti Messages from God

Anne Uglum  
White Plains, NY

Dear Mom and Dad,

I wish I could say that every mile of the Camino is beautiful, breathtaking, and memorable—unfortunately, it is not. I pass poverty and rank smells. Those sights and smells, however, do not irritate me as much as when I walk next to a busy highway with screaming motorcycles and loud trucks that just make too much noise.

I almost missed my graffiti message of the day, written, appropriately enough, on a cross, for the most ridiculous of reasons—it was written in Spanish. I'm not sure where I formed the idea that my messages from God would all appear in English. Maybe it was because I assumed God realized my inability to learn languages is titanic in nature. But this message in Spanish was something that even I, with my official 25% fluency rating from Duolingo, could understand.



*Mi camino es tu camino.*

How simple and how true. *My Camino is your Camino.* The more I reflected on the message during today's walk, the more I realized it was true on two fundamental levels.

The first level has to do with the words. While, in a very physical and spiritual sense, this Camino is mine, it is also my husband's, knowing he has given me the enormous gift of time while he takes care of responsibilities at home. It is my children's Camino, as I hope I will be a better parent to them when I return. It is yours, as I hope to be a better daughter. You are all the closest to my heart, but this Camino is also for my colleagues at work who encouraged me, supported me, and inspired me. And lastly, this Camino is for those who so desperately need this type of mental, physical, and spiritual healing, but can't walk it for themselves. So in a very true sense, My Camino is your Camino.

The other level on which my graffiti message is true has to do with the language it was written in. Everywhere I go, I hear so many languages spoken—French, German, Korean, Japanese, and, of course, Spanish. People from all over the world walk this Camino, as evidenced by the pins stuck into world maps posted on the walls of churches and tourist offices. The Camino does not belong to a single country or one religion.

It is for everyone, and it is universal.





# Arts & Culture

Traditional Asturian meda at the **ETHNOGRAPHIC MUSEUM** in Grandes de Salime on the Primitivo. May 2022.  
Photo by Thom Ryng.



# What Draws Us Back?

*by Cary Stage  
Reedsburg, WI*

What draws us back ~ to this Camino?

Waking each morning ~ no decisions to be made?

Hardly even ~ knowing the day?

Or how far we'll be ~ by our morning café?

.... where will we lay ~ tonight?

Stepping onto the trail ~ we walk

The sun rises ~ we walk

Comes a village fountain ~ we fill our water ~ and we walk

A shade tree, a bench ~ we take off our shoes ~ we rest ~ then walk

No thought for tomorrow ~ for tomorrow will take care ...

.... we're here now ~ walking

Pilgrims walking! ¡Buen Camino!

.... all following the same path ~ the same direction

How far today ~ we'll know ~ when we get there

We're here now ~ as friends ~ talking, sharing, walking

What's happening on this Camino?

.... a quiet appreciation for Now

Where we belong ~ Now

Because here on this Camino ~ Now is all there is...

¡Buen Camino!

## ARTS & CULTURE

### *The Way, My Way a Camino Memoir*

### Book Review

*The Way, My Way a Camino Memoir*

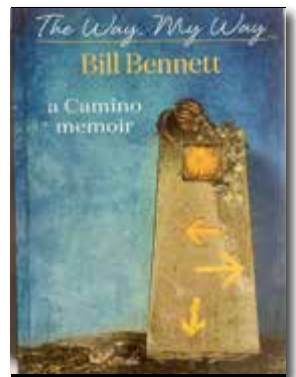
by Bill Bennett

Createspace Independent Publishers, 2014

300 pages

*Reviewed by Jerald Stroebele*

*Anchorage, AK*



My brother recently invited me to take home some of his Camino books. The pleasing cover of this one immediately caught my eye. Bennett is an Australian film producer who walked the Camino Francés, I think in 2012, where he learned humility and to be non-judgemental of his fellow pilgrims. The book could be subtitled “Calming one’s fears on the Camino,” or “An Ode to the Meseta.” Bennett fears financial failure in his profession, personal failure in his life, failure to be able to complete this Camino (he calmed all his fears by the time he watched the Botafumeiro swing.). He expresses all his fears in conversations, often humorous, with himself: “What’s so bad about sleeping in a barn, or under a tree? This was Spain, after all, not Australia. In Australia it’s dangerous sleeping in barns, or outdoors. There are snakes, and deadly spiders, and crocodiles and Great White Sharks. Spain’s got none of these. So what’s to be scared of?” He kept a nightly journal enabling this book to be filled with delightful conversations with fellow pilgrims. I read the book just weeks after walking the Meseta. Bennett found the Meseta similar to the sparse landscapes of Australia. “. . . I saw beauty in the shift of colors, as occasional clouds passed over the sun. I saw the subtler movement of hills as I walked. I saw the precision of the plough in fields under cultivation. Everywhere I looked, I saw something magnificent.” Me too! I hope Bill Bennett walks another Camino because I would love to read another book by him. And I look forward to reading more memoirs from other pilgrims from Down Under. ¡Buen Camino!





# Ambulando

*by Shannon Nicole Bobo  
Carlsbad, CA*

I walk because I can.  
I walk because I must.  
I walk to reclaim myself.  
I walk to remember my truth.

I walk when everything isn't okay  
and when everything is just right.

I walk to forget,  
to release trauma,  
to let go of grief.

I walk to clear my head.  
to listen to my body,  
to connect with my heart  
and revive my spirit.  
I walk as a moving meditation  
because my feet offer the most honest prayers.

I walk to dream again.  
I walk to explore.  
I walk to let the wildflowers teach me  
about the persistence of hope.

I walk to be mentored by nature since I am still learning what it means to  
be fully human.

I walk because my bones remember that  
my ancestors were gypsies and nomads.  
I walk to find my way home.



## Shadow of a Pilgrim

## Book Review

*Shadow of a Pilgrim: An Apostate Walks Two Caminos in Spain*

by Thomas F. Connell

Shadow of a Pilgrim Press, 2018

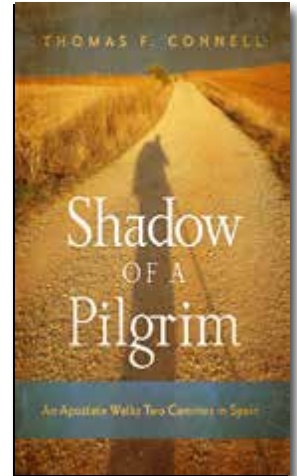
563 pages

*Reviewed by Joseph A. Curro, Jr.*

*Arlington, MA*

In *Shadow of a Pilgrim*, author Tom Connell abruptly retires from a lucrative law career and ultimately walks the Camino Francés and the Camino del Norte. His book grew out of emails he wrote to his sons, which partly explains why many of Connell's frequent witticisms land like "Dad jokes."

Very beautiful and imposing, *Shadow of a Pilgrim* sets itself apart from many self-published titles, starting with its hardcover format and colorful dust jacket with a thematically appropriate view of the path with the long shadow of the walker/photographer.



The book has wonderful typography, decorative artwork, and color photography from the author's two Caminos. Its size and heft approach those of a typical coffee table book, recalling the author's training regimen of weighing down a backpack with old law books.

This is not a book about Camino families or enduring relationships struck up along the Way, although the author does have brief encounters with a number of people, including fellow returned Peace Corps volunteers. Connell is—with rare exception—not one to laze about in the Camino's coffee bars, engaging in long, deep discussions with other travelers. Indeed, he tends to take his breakfast and lunch on the run, and he is fastidious about walking every step of the trail. At night, he savors sitdown meals, which he describes in detail, accompanied with full bottles of wine or other alcoholic drinks. His best friend on the trail is "Big Stick," his walking pole, for which he unsuccessfully seeks a new name before reluctantly parting with it in Santiago.

By his own admission, Connell is an "old cynic." He describes at length and frequently reminds his readers about his problematic relationship with religion. He often writes the word "pilgrim" in quotation marks, and he ranges from dismissive to mocking of beloved Camino traditions like the laying of stones at the Cruz de Ferro and the swinging of the Botafumeiro. He does, however, have a soft spot for the great cathedrals and other churches he is able to visit.

Connell vents a little too much about loud "Frenchmen," a snoring "Great Dane," and other annoyances, although complaints about his booking agents have merit.

This book is primarily a travelog. The author's interest in and knowledge of architecture and history, along with his stirring photos and trail descriptions, shape this work and smooth some of its otherwise rough edges.



# The Camino Continues

by Cathay Reta  
Spokane Valley, WA

Have you ever read a story  
That you thought you'd like to be a part of?  
Have you ever walked through open fields  
That have no end?  
Have you ever climbed a mountain  
'Til you thought your back would end of breaking?  
Then rose one early morn' to climb it once again?  
Then you know just what I mean.

*I penned those words for a song in the '70s. Who knew they were so prophetic? Who knew they were foretelling my pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago more than 40 years later? I didn't. I didn't quite understand the words back then. I read them now in awe. I guess it's one of those Camino things—the magic, the mystical intertwining of the Camino with the lives of those who experience it. Once engaged, we are never the same again. May we always be willing to rise and climb again, no matter what mountain is ahead of us.*



Fields that have no end. Photo by Cathay Reta.

## Pilgrim

## Book Review

*Pilgrim*

by Brad Batten

FriesenPress, Altona Manitoba, 2022

232 pages

Reviewed by Brien Crothers

Hidden Valley Lake, CA

It's the late 1980s. Dara, who had lost more than one can possibly imagine, began a global journey, to scatter his father's ashes, and find a new path. He had survived a horrible accident when others had not.

Brad Batten's *Pilgrim*, a work of fiction and a "reboot" of one of his previous works, is more of an open-heart, soul-searching, and trans-grief story designed as a linear travelog yet paced to a poetic metronome. The author's love of poetry, religious studies, and the Camino de Santiago spread gloriously on these pages.

*Pilgrim* may be fiction but it is epic in scope, style, and depth.

Consuming this author's prose is like lapping up thick, delicious pudding. His writing style fills every page with grand imagery, touching emotion, and enlightened humanity.

We begin our journey with Dara as he leaves home in Canada for the US, through Illinois, and California. He crosses the Pacific towards New Zealand and then Australia and eventually on to Europe, first in Greece, then Italy, and finally France.

Dara's story unfolds through the moments shared with the people he met along the way, among them a priest in Chicago, a Vietnam veteran in Los Angeles, a Russian émigré in Australia and sugarcane farmers in the South Pacific. He works for his room and board, doing menial labor that no one else wants. And he listens to his many guides whose stories help him to navigate his grief. They help him find his way and himself.

The author (Question: the author or the character Dara? In the last sentence of this paragraph, it is not clear to me who the "he" is.) does not recoil from the oddities and proclivities of people, their rough language and habits or vices. Rather, he embraces them, delving deeply into them as he seeks to renew his spirit.

It's nearly two thirds through the pages of *Pilgrim* before Dara begins walking the Camino de Santiago from Arles, France. But the adventures he lives, sleeping in barns and huts, and meeting simple folks, while leaving pinches of his father's ashes behind, make the wait seem too short. This wonderful, heart-wrenching at times, yet eventually, a love story, culminates at Finisterre but does not end there. A new life takes shape for Dara back in Toronto.





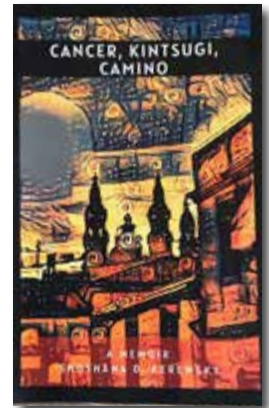
## || ARTS & CULTURE ||

### *Cancer, Kintsugi, Camino*

### Book Review

*Cancer, Kintsugi, Camino*  
by Shoshana D. Kerewsky  
Lockweed Press, 2022  
369 pages

*Reviewed by Amy Elizabeth Horton*  
Warrenton, MO



This is a memoir about cancer. It's a memoir about the Camino. It's a memoir about how one's cancer experience prepares one for the Camino. It's about how the Camino helps one see the scars and cracks of life with "a fresh perspective, one that is different, not damaged; in the way of kintsugi . . . Japanese gold lacquer repair . . . it has become better than it was before the breakage. . ."

"Is it all about the Camino?" a prospective reader—or perhaps the author herself—asks. "Isn't it all about the Camino?" the pilgrim wisely answers.

As both cancer memoir and Camino memoir, it's not a typical narrative. The author writes in lyrical prose, sprinkled with poetry and a few bits that blur the line between fantasy and reality. She describes her form as "peripatetic, peregrinative, wandering, exegetical . . . mosaic, bricolage." It is also multidimensional and dissectional. And most certainly metaphorical.

"I can't write about cancer without writing about travel, nor the reverse," the author explains. "Is cancer like a journey? Is the memoir like cancer? Is the journey like cancer?" Throughout the book she explores these questions.

"Cancer and journey are similar because sometimes you're bored and self-critical for not leaping up to do something necessary or interesting, for wishing you were home again. . . . Travel is like cancer because there are parts where you don't get to stop once you're underway."

"There is a packing list for chemo days, later a good model for pilgrimage: Pack a snack. Pack your glasses. Will you meditate, read, or talk with the others while you wait? Don't forget . . . socks. Will they have potable water?"

"Packing for the Camino is like packing for a visit to the chemotherapy infusion center. Do I have my paperwork? Have I reviewed the manual of instructions? . . . Who will answer my questions? Will everything be okay?"

"Cancer and the Camino are secret societies: We recognize each other by our symbols and signs. Cancer is a question with no compelling answers. The Camino is answers without knowing all the questions."

"The Camino is like cancer, resulting in sleep disruption, early morning awakening. Preoccupation with body parts, their action and deterioration. The albergue is like a cancer ward, each of us in her own thoughts, sometimes talking, praying, taking notes, asking questions, sometimes just sitting together."

This is a memoir about cancer. It's a memoir about the Camino. And it's about so much more than either one of those things.

# FINAL REFLECTION

## A Host of Angels

by Shannon Nicole Bobo  
Carlsbad, CA

We heard them coming  
One hundred strong  
With sounds of teens  
Whose voices were yet to change.

The boys in front  
Kicked soccer balls to each other  
As they ran up and down  
The hilly path to *Santiago*.

Señorita Honk-honk with curly black hair  
Signaled the “beep” sign to the trucks and cars  
In the small towns and they responded.

One boy walked with no one  
Had his blue hood over his head  
His face in shadow  
Sauntered with an attitude of resignation and resentment

Girls who were proud of their English  
Talked to us about Los Angeles  
And Hollywood and passed us with “buen Camino?”

We pulled over to hydrate and met the turtle girls.  
Last ones in their school back behind their teacher  
They wanted our photo and we shared the finger heart sign.  
My friend smiled from deep inside. Clear and pure beauty

When they skipped away to catch up with their group  
They yelled, “we love you” loud and clear and then were gone  
The trail was soft. The day warm. My mind quiet and reflective

They stopped for lunch at an inn and we kept walking.  
In the afternoon they passed us again surprised  
We had gone so far ahead of them  
We let them pass.

The Turtle girls yelled “see you in Santiago! Buen Camino!”



We met 100 students (13-15 years old) and teachers past Padron on the Camino Portugués in April 2022. Many shared their experiences. Image by Elin Babcock.

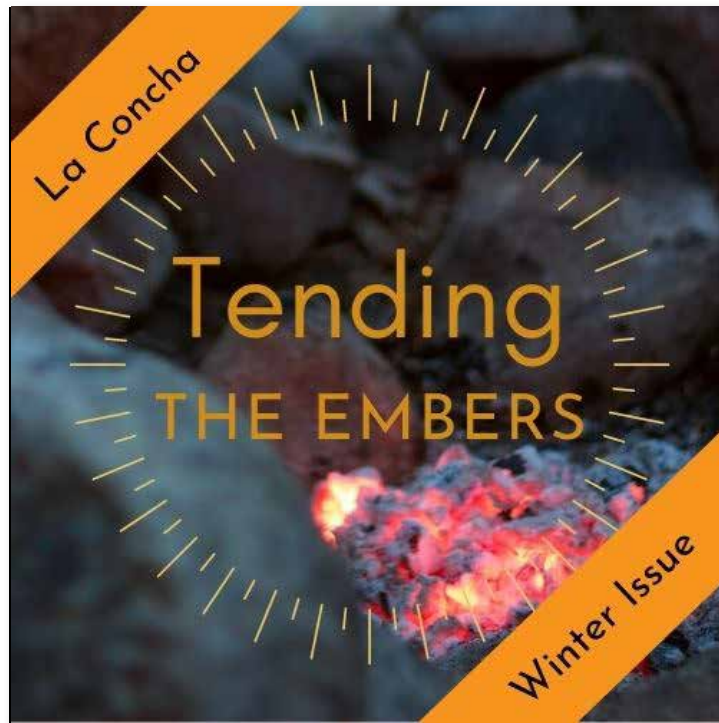




## || NEXT ISSUE ||

The Winter *La Concha* theme is  
Tending the Embers.

Submissions to our Winter issue close on November 21, 2022, and we would love to receive your reflections!



Please explore this theme for the **Winter 2023** issue by sharing images and reflections on how you've moved out of the activity of "being on pilgrimage" and into the heart space of "being a pilgrim," an identity which is perhaps fragile, but full of passionate commitments. What lifelong commitments and ways of seeing the world did you adopt when you embraced your identity as a pilgrim? What do you do to continue to tend your identity's fire?

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](http://www.americanpilgrims.org)