

LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

Tending the Embers of our pilgrim spirit

Inside:

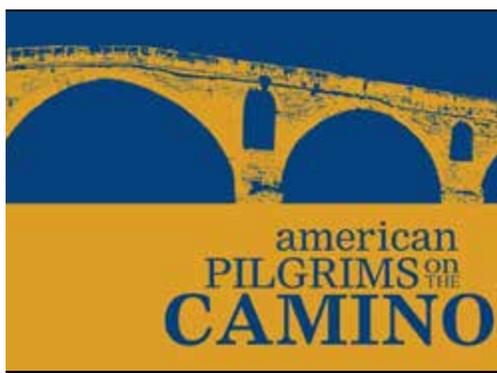
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- Reflections from a busy hospitalero season.
- The impact we're making: a testimony from Spain.

WINTER 2023

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COVER Photo: Forward. Photo by Henny de Knegt, August 2014.

AT RIGHT: Keeping the Embers alive at home in Spokane. Photo by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway

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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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Dear Pilgrims,

The creative communication volunteers within Team *La Concha* are delighted as we enter another year of shared reflections. As you read the "Tending our Embers" issue, we invite you to also be thinking ahead to how your personal experiences, scholarship, skills, and knowledge intersect with the themes *La Concha* will be exploring in our upcoming seasons. Read more on them below!

Go Your Own Way (April 2023): What makes a pilgrim? In this issue, we will look at the varied ways (horseback, ship, bicycle, etc.) in which pilgrimages occur, with a special focus on how those with a disability, health challenges, and mobility options navigate their Caminos.

The Ways Less Traveled (July 2023): What's off your beaten path? In this issue, we will present special features and reflections on "the best of" from lesser walked Caminos—sights, spots, experiences, and people.

Seasons of the Way (October 2023): in this issue, we will carve out a space for pilgrims to share their delights in taking pilgrimage in every season, from the flora and fauna they see, to the foods and festivals they can enjoy. Special focus will be placed on pilgrimage during different seasons of life or seasons of history.

The Artist's Way (Jan 2024): What is the way of the artist-pilgrim? In this issue, we will invite pilgrims to explore the relationship between art and creativity on pilgrimage. We will provide profiles about people who process their pilgrimage experiences through visual arts, music, poetry, and other art forms.

American Pilgrims members who have had unique pilgrimage experiences or have insight into any of these themes are encouraged to submit a 400-word reflection, creative work, or photographs! Be sure to look for the call for submissions sent out to members via email and within each issue; deadlines will be posted via these communications. If you are a pilgrim who would like to submit materials but who is not yet a member of American Pilgrims, you are welcome to find out more about membership [HERE](#).

In peace,



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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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Recently the board of directors did a thorough review of how American Pilgrims on the Camino is carrying out our mission to foster the enduring tradition of the Camino. It was striking to see the list we compiled of all the ways our member volunteers are keeping the pilgrim spirit alive. The grants team administers our program that gave \$78,000 this year to support the Camino infrastructure. Hospitaleros nurture the Camino spirit at donativo albergues. The *La Concha* team provides this forum where we can share our experiences and dreams and resources for pilgrimage. Coordinators gather pilgrims together and mentor future pilgrims in 58 chapters across the country. Facebook moderators cultivate a lively and respectful community among our 30,000 followers. Dozens of volunteers run the annual Gathering, curate our website, and give back to the Camino in many other ways. (If you'd like to explore volunteer opportunities with American Pilgrims, check out our newly improved web page at [HTTPS://AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG/VOLUNTEER-OPPORTUNITIES/.](https://americanpilgrims.org/volunteer-opportunities/))



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

The board also identified trends and aspirations that are emerging in our pilgrim community. Based on those, we set three goals for 2023. They are:

1) Increase international outreach by:

- planning events, such as an international Gathering of Pilgrims, with other pilgrim associations around the world.
- exploring guided pilgrimages with local associations in Spain.
- expanding our grants program, including supporting major projects like a proposed albergue/welcome center in Madrid.

2) Expand the diversity of our membership by:

- holding a focused conversation about how to inspire all who seek the spirit of the Camino to connect with the global community of pilgrims.
- looking into grants and scholarships as a way of making the Camino more accessible.
- supporting those who work with veterans through pilgrimages of healing.

3) Retaining our members by:

- making sure everyone who requests a credential is familiar with the mission of American Pilgrims on the Camino.
- increasing awareness of our mission among members.
- improving contact with those whose membership is up for renewal.

Also at our October meeting, we said adiós and gracias to Megan Muthupandiyam who is leaving the board (but staying on as pre-production manager of *La Concha*!), and we elected Tom Coleman as a new board member. I was asked to serve another year as chair. Ruben Mendoza is our new vice chair. Allison Venuto is staying on as secretary. Bill Artz continues as treasurer.

Thank you, everyone, who gives so generously of your time, skill, and resources.

Buen Camino,

Steve

Steve Lytch
Chair, Board of Directors



October Board Meeting Review

Prepared by Allison Venuto, Secretary, American Pilgrims on the Camino

The Board of American Pilgrims on the Camino met in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, the weekend of October 27, 2022. The Board met with local chapter leaders and area volunteers and enjoyed conversations about future initiatives. The group discussed ways the organization can continue to support chapter initiatives and streamline procedures.

On Friday, the External Relations committee presented updates on developing relationships around the world. To that end, two board members will attend a conference of international Camino associations in Spain in March 2023. The board heard updates regarding the 2023 Gathering and the work of the Chapters and Membership Committees. For the latter two, the board is looking at ways to support leadership succession and member education respectively, including an update to the volunteer opportunities page on the website. Next, the Finance Committee provided an update on our positive position which includes plans to extend additional funding opportunities for Camino support in 2023.

On Saturday, the Board set goals for the coming year. The overarching areas of focus for 2023 will be increased international outreach, encouraging diversity in membership, and ways the organization can increase membership retention. Information will come soon regarding these areas that will continue to foster the Camino spirit for years to come.



Lake Tahoe Zephyr Point Retreat Center. View before the storm.
2020 Gathering. Photo by Francine Mastini

OUR MISSION

American Pilgrims Makes An Impact

by Manuel Barea Patrón, Presidente de la Asociación Vía Augusta; translated by Joseph McClain, member of American Pilgrims Grants Committee

Mejorando los Caminos Jacobeos en la Provincia de Cádiz

La Asociación Gaditana Jacobea “Vía Augusta” se fundó en el año 2009. Su sede está en la ciudad de Cádiz y tiene 60 socios que con sus cuotas anuales ayudan a sus gastos (alquiler de sede, folletos, señalización caminos, etc.). Es responsable de tres caminos provinciales: Vía Augusta (Cádiz-Sevilla); Vía del Estrecho (Algeciras-Puerto Real y conexión con la Vía Augusta); y Vía Serrana (La Línea-Sevilla). En Sevilla estos caminos se unen a la Vía de la Plata hacia Santiago de Compostela.

La primera señalización fue con pintura de flechas amarillas. Poco a poco, y con dificultades, fuimos convenciendo a los ayuntamientos locales para mejorarla: flechas y azulejos de cerámica e hitos de hormigón. No resultó una tarea fácil, nos ha llevado años de gestiones y visitas.

Una vez convencidas las instituciones, y con la ayuda básica de American Pilgrims on the Camino, hemos podido mejorar la señalización. Para ello, y con las subvenciones concedidas en 2020 y 2021, se ha señalado la Vía Serrana (solamente queda un ayuntamiento, San Roque, que no lo ha autorizado hasta el momento). Se han entregado hitos en Jimena de la Frontera (Cádiz) y Ronda (Málaga), que están pendientes de instalar. Desde Ronda a Sevilla está totalmente señalizada esta importante Vía.

Nuestro próximo objetivo es la Vía del Estrecho. Estamos en contacto con las administraciones locales para instalar flechas, azulejos e hitos, comenzando por Algeciras y finalizando en Puerto Real (Cádiz), por lo que volveremos a solicitar la ayuda de American Pilgrims en 2023.

Un hito importante logrado con la ayuda del año 2021 ha sido amueblar el albergue de peregrinos de Tahivilla (Cádiz), en la Vía del Estrecho. Se ha comprado una litera con dos camas; colchones, almohadas, mantas y edredones; dos calefactores; un buzón de sugerencias y un libro de firmas. Hubo un acto de inauguración al que asistió el alcalde y un vecino local muy implicado en el camino.

EN LA PÁGINA WEB DE LA ASOCIACIÓN, que actualizamos semanalmente, se pueden ver las actividades que desarrollamos, las visitas de peregrinos a la sede y la descripción de los tres caminos con sus etapas, recorrido, alojamientos e instrucciones para los caminantes. Asimismo, se ha editado el libro: *La Vía Serrana. El camino jacobeo más meridional de Europa*, por la editorial Punto Rojo, del que soy autor, sufragado personalmente.

Una labor altruista de la Junta Directiva de la Asociación que hacemos en beneficio de los peregrinos jacobeos que comienzan sus caminos en la provincia de Cádiz.

(For English Translation, see Page 7.)



With the generous help of American Pilgrims grants in 2020 and 2021 the association has completed the signage on the Vía Serrana. Photo contributed by Manuel Barea Patrón.



|| GRANTS REPORT ||

American Pilgrims' Grant Makes Major Improvements to the Camino in Cádiz Possible

Our Asociación Gaditana Jacobea “Vía Augusta” was founded in 2009 with headquarters in the city of Cádiz. We have 60 members whose yearly dues support a variety of important activities. We are responsible for three provincial Caminos: The Vía Augusta from Cádiz to Sevilla, the Vía del Estrecho from Algeciras-Puerto Real connecting to the Vía Augusta and the Vía Serrano from La Línea to Sevilla. These stretches of Camino meet the Vía de la Plata in Sevilla on the way to Santiago de Compostela.

Our first project with way signs was painting the familiar yellow arrows. Little by little, with much difficulty, we began trying to convince the local governments to improve the signage with more yellow arrows, ceramic tiles, and concrete milestones. It has not been an easy task and has taken us years of working with the authorities to make improvements.

Once we were able to convince the authorities, and with the help of American Pilgrims on the Camino, we have actually been able to make major improvements to the way signs. With the generous help of American Pilgrims grants in 2020 and 2021 we have completed the signage on the Vía Serrana, with the exception of one area where we are still waiting for authorization from the City Council of San Roque. Concrete milestones have been delivered to Jimena de la Frontera (Cádiz) and in Ronda (Málaga) and are awaiting final installation. We are delighted to let you know that on the important route from Ronda all the way to Sevilla all the signage has been installed!



Members of the association honor American Pilgrims on the Camino for their help with improvements. Photo contributed by Manuel Barea Patrón.

Right now we are working with the local governments for authorization of work on the Vía Estrecho. With their approval, we hope to be able to turn to the American Pilgrims grant program in 2023 for support of installing signage beginning in Algeciras all the way to Puerto Real.

A huge step forward for us was made possible by the grant we received from American Pilgrims in 2021. This grant made it possible for us to furnish the pilgrim's albergue in Tahivilla (Cádiz) with beds, mattresses, pillows, blankets and bed linen. We will be able to fight off the cold with two new heaters. And we have been able to provide a suggestion box and a book for pilgrims' signatures. We are proud that the inauguration of the albergue was attended by the city mayor and many neighbors whose lives are greatly impacted by the Camino.

Please check out our website: WWW.ASOCIACIONJACOBECADIZ.ORG if you would like to see the activities we are developing, including visits of pilgrims, excellent descriptions of three Caminos broken into stages, lodging and general instructions for pilgrims. Yours truly has also just written a book, *El camino jacobeo más meridional de Europa*. It has been published by Punto Rojo.



With the help of American Pilgrims on the Camino we have actually been able to make major improvements to the way signs. Photo contributed by Manuel Barea Patrón.

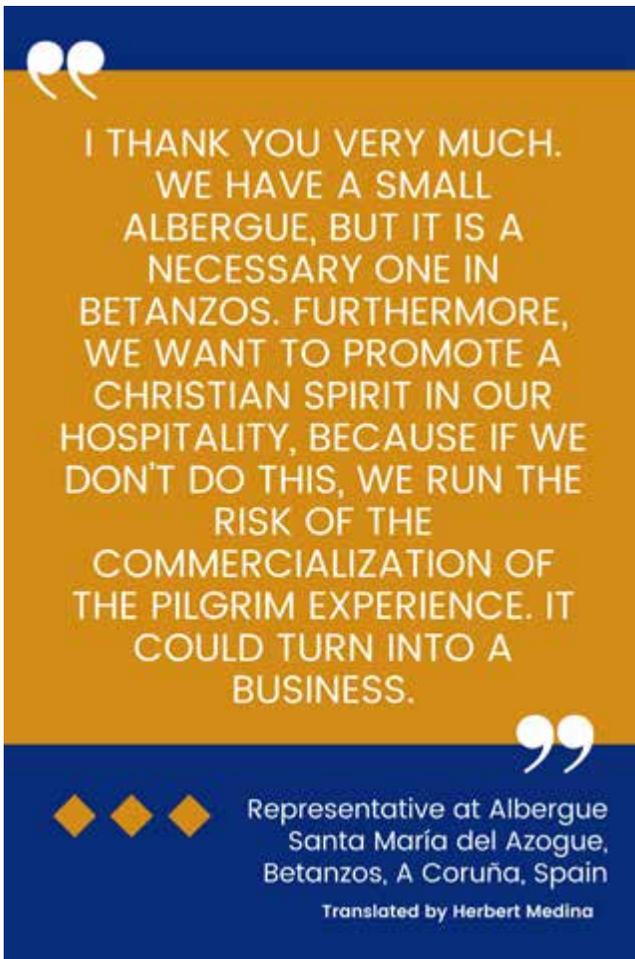
This work, accomplished by the Board of Directors of our organization, is done from our hearts for the benefit of pilgrims who begin their Caminos in the Province of Cádiz.

MEMBERSHIP

Why Become a Member of American Pilgrims on the Camino?

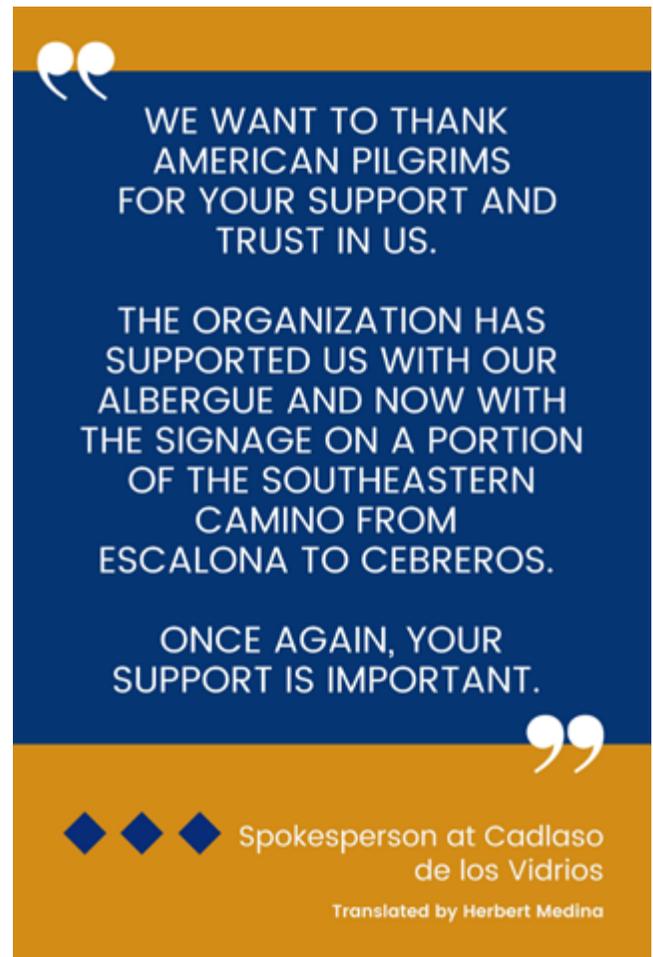
If the Camino has enriched your life, give back to the Camino by joining our pilgrim family of American Pilgrims on the Camino. Your membership fees help fund much-needed, non-profit facilities on the Camino, support our hospitalero training program, facilitate fellowship among pilgrims at local chapter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

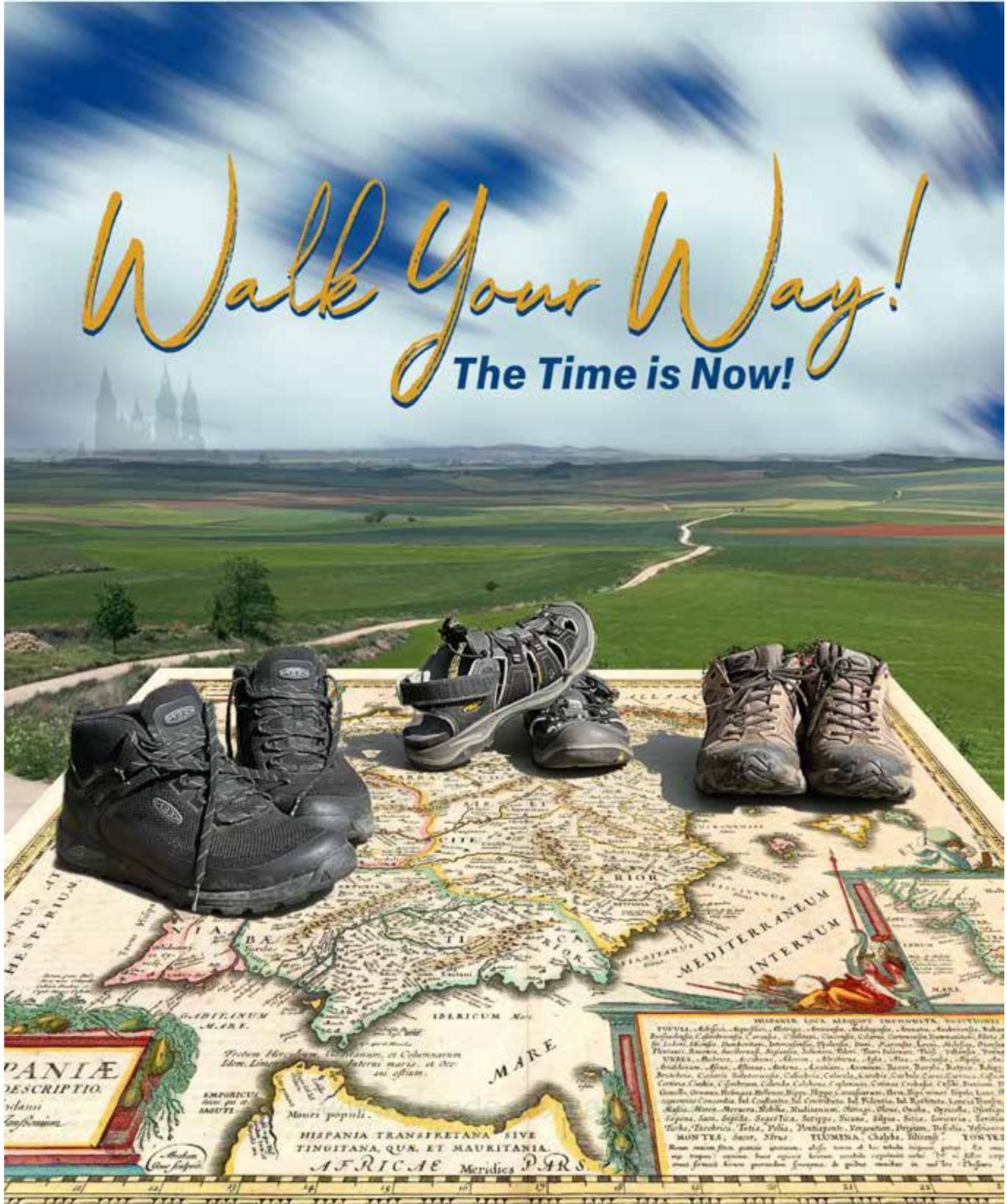
THE ORGANIZATION HAS SUPPORTED US WITH OUR ALBERGUE AND NOW WITH THE SIGNAGE ON A PORTION OF THE SOUTHEASTERN CAMINO FROM ESCALONA TO CEBREROS.

ONCE AGAIN, YOUR SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT.

◆ ◆ ◆ Spokesperson at Cadlaso de los Vidrios
Translated by Herbert Medina

|| ANNUAL GATHERING ||

Walk Your Way!
The Time is Now!



American Pilgrims on the Camino
Annual Gathering of Pilgrims 2023

April 13-16, 2023
Zephyr Point Conference Center
Zephyr Cove, Lake Tahoe, Nevada



|| ANNUAL GATHERING ||

Join us for the 26th Annual Gathering of Pilgrims!

Mark your calendars, pilgrims!

The 26th Annual Gathering of Pilgrims will be held from Thursday, April 13 to Sunday, April 16, 2023, and will return to the Zephyr Point Presbyterian Conference Center in Zephyr Cove, NV (on the shores of Lake Tahoe), the site of the 2020 Gathering. The theme of the next Gathering is “Walk Your Way! The Time is Now!” The planning team is hard at work and it’s sure to be another fantastic weekend. We look forward to seeing you at the Gathering!

When can I register?

Registration for the 2023 Gathering of Pilgrims opened January 14, 2023 and must be booked through [AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG](https://www.americampilgrims.org).

What’s included?

Full registration includes all plenary and breakout sessions, entertainment, receptions, three-night stay, and eight meals (Thursday dinner through Sunday breakfast). Commuter registration includes everything but lodging and breakfast. We have a fantastic program with engaging and inspiring speakers including Maryjane Dunn, Lynn Talbot, Adam Wells, Shawn Norris, Kathy Kehe, Fr. Steve Rindahl, Anne Born, Elaine Hopkins, and Victor Prince. We’ll have breakout sessions of interest to first time pilgrims as well as those of us who’ve done multiple Caminos. Actress Celeste Mancinelli will delight us with an encore performance of her one-woman show, *Crying on the Camino*. There’s truly something for everyone!

What does it cost?

- \$425 Member-Full Registration (shared room)
- \$225 Member-Commuter
- \$525 Non-Member Full Registration (shared room)
- \$350 Non-Member Commuter

Need more ways to participate?

We will hold a raffle and silent auction again in 2023 and would appreciate your donations of items. All monies raised from the raffle and silent auction help fund our Camino programs, including our Grants, Ribadiso and Hospitalero Training programs. If you’d like to donate an item to the raffle or silent auction, [FOLLOW THIS LINK TO THE DONATION FORM](#).



We also have limited-edition 2023 Gathering t-shirts and long-sleeved t-shirts, and crewneck and hoodie sweatshirts in a rainbow of colors. Special thanks to Martin Pena for designing our 2023 sello. Follow this link to [ORDER A 2023 GATHERING SHIRT OR SWEATSHIRT](#).

|| HOSPITALERO CORNER ||

Gordon's Backpack

by Becky Rush-Peet
Enumclaw, WA

Serving as a hospitalero is, I believe, one of the most perfect ways to “tend the embers” and pay forward the Camino spirit. It is a chance to tend to current pilgrims and share a part of their own Caminos; I highly recommend taking the training and donating a few weeks in an albergue.

Last September I served as a hospitalera in the small donativo albergue in Viana, Spain. Viana is located about a week onto the Camino Francés, between Los Arcos and Logroño. Pilgrims slept on mats and shared a communal dinner. We had a storage closet that held cleaning supplies and donated goods that perigrinos left behind.

One pilgrim who stayed there was an Aussie named Gordon; he had developed blisters early on his Camino and used mochila transport for a few days to lighten the stress on his feet, buying a daypack to use for those days. His plan worked well; by the time he reached Viana his blisters had improved, and he was ready to resume carrying his full pack. He donated the daypack and ruthlessly trimmed his load.

Some days later, another Aussie, Loz, checked in. She had lost her entire pack on a bus at the beginning of her Camino, retaining only her fanny

pack with money and ID. She had gathered a few donated items in her first week (a shirt, a pair of shorts), and was truly experiencing living with less. We gave her the backpack! It fit her well, and her minimalist belongings fit perfectly in the tiny 20L pack. She was ecstatic! What a joy it was to see her face light up.

She shared a story with us: a children's book in Australia tells the story of a little backpack named Gordon and its adventures. She nick-named her new daypack “Gordon” after we told her that was the name of the pilgrim who left it. We were even able to put her in touch with the original Gordon on WhatsApp (it seems that everyone on the Camino is on WhatsApp these days).

At the end of their Caminos, Loz and Gordon met in person at Muxia! What a Camino moment. And I treasure being part of that while serving as a hospitalera.



Loz and the hospitaleras with her new pack. Viana Spain, Sept 2022.

From left to right: Anita Baan (hospitalera), Loz, a Korean pilgrim, and Becky Rush-Peet (hospitalera). Photo provided by Becky Rush-Peet.



Communal dinner at Viana albergue, September 2022. Photo by Becky Rush-Peet.

A Hospitalero Story

by Anthony Read
Advance, NC

To understand why I wanted to become a Hospitalero I must go back to my Camino experience. My Camino was in 2019 prior to the Coronavirus disruption. Like for many, it was transformative. My main takeaway was to experience a level of self-awareness that either I hadn't previously known or recognized. Not to say when I returned home that all was perfect. Excuse my French, but life can be a bitch—ups, downs, in, outs and those lousy curves just when you least expect. But hope is a powerful thing. It can turn negative to positive, pessimism into optimism, and can't into can. Just that knowledge, just knowing what is possible can keep you moving forward if you accept the mantra "everything will be alright in the end, so if it is not alright, it is not the end." (See *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*.)

In essence, if the Camino is a state of mind, it can be achieved anywhere. So, what to do? More Caminos? I decided no. Being over 60, I thought my path should be to try to help others achieve "their" Camino. How to do it? Become a hospitalero.

The path to becoming a hospitalero started in 2019 when I visited Grañón. I was on day eight of my first Camino and perhaps a little over confident. In search of a place to stay, the last option was the donitivo of San Juan Bautista. First impression, what a dump. Mats on the floor, crumbling structure, no hot water, etc. But we cooked together, ate together, washed clothes together, shared together, and slept together. Although in disrepair, there was a vibe that made the albergue a palace. A place that heightened awareness, broke down barriers, and created the essence of the Camino. I met the hospitalero and mentor Roberto. He provided information, answered questions and encouraged me to take his path. Becoming a hospitalero made my "to do" list. The virus brought the reality that life was dynamic and waiting wasn't an option and that I must seize the day.

In 2022, I attended hospitalero training in Black Mountain, North Carolina with 18 other candidates

and three experienced instructors. We had handouts, exercises, and testimonials in a secluded location where we ate and slept. Great training. And upon completion we were given prospective locations on the Camino, and a contact to whom we could apply. All went as advertised and I secured a spot in July at Bercianos de Camino Real between Burgos and León. So now I was a hospitalero, or was I?

My trip to my assignment went as planned: a flight to Madrid, a train to León, and a walk 42 km east to Bercianos de Real Camino as a contrario. My arrival as a non-Spanish speaking, enthusiastic, extroverted American must have had the present non-English speaking Spanish hospitaleros rolling their eyes. We spent a day and a half in knowledge transfer. I had my training and their albergue-specific routine on morning breakfast and pilgrim departure, cleaning, shopping, greeting new pilgrims, meal prep, meal cooking, meal cleanup, Pilgrim sharing time, sunset, and breakfast prep. Definitely a full day. My fellow hospitalera arrived, Marjan from the Netherlands, and our predecessors departed, and we were on our own. Marjan spoke many languages, including Spanish (lucky me), and had her ideas on how things should be done. She had done many Caminos and was a self-described "Camino Junkie."

Things came fast and furious. With 30 pilgrims a night, that's over 400 people in two weeks. Cooking and cleaning, talking and listening, hellos and goodbyes and hellos. Marjan and I quickly learned our training had prepared us for a "generic" experience but the real thing was ever-moving and dynamic. It required us to check our egos and experiences at the door and adapt to the situation. We had to recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses and divide up our duties to optimize the experience for the pilgrims. We couldn't "dictate" but had to "guide" the experience. This wasn't our Camino, but the pilgrims' who were walking. With this realization, we went from only cooking and cleaning, etc., to singing and dancing, sharing and caring, helping and comforting. In essence, by engaging with my partner, creating a welcoming environment, and focusing on the pilgrims' needs, I finally became a hospitalero. (*continued*)

|| HOSPITALERO CORNER ||

In reflecting on my experience, I would encourage defining your individual Camino and asking how you can experience it while serving as a hospitalero. There is no walking; it's a stationary Camino. It's important that you are willing to take a supporting versus a participant role.

I wish there was a recipe for the hospitalero experience, but unfortunately, I believe, it is ever changing due to location, culture, etc. I imagine every experience is different. The training is great, but like I explained to one of my instructors, it is like reading about love. Reading books or taking training can outline the mechanics of love but it takes you finally experiencing it to realize, "oh, that's what they meant." Be open to on the job training. I think it goes with the territory.

As you focus on the pilgrims and operation of the albergue, it can be all for naught if you do not focus on creating a good working relationship with your partner. You don't have to be best friends. But you

do have to be honest, open and respectful. I liked listening to music when cleaning; Marjan thought it was noise. So, we altered our cleaning duties so I could jam out and she was at peace. She slept later and showered in the morning, so I got everyone out and stripped the beds. I went to Bar Sueve to have a beer and call home every day at 5p.m., and she made sure I was out the door. We had each other's back, no doubt.

For the pilgrims, our number one duty was to create the welcoming environment. I think back to my time at Grañón. It wasn't the facility but the environment the hospitaleros created that made it a special experience. Contrary to conventional opinion, they had "turned a sow's ear into a silk purse." What I learned is that if you understand your Camino, get good training, work well with your partner, allow events to evolve naturally, and understand you are serving others, you can create a vibe that enhances the pilgrim experience.



Anthony(L) and Marjan(R).
Photo by Anthony Read.



Right: Sunset. Photo by
Anthony Read.

Below: Donitivo Bercianos
de Camino Real. Photo by
Anthony Read.





Chapter News



The Camino Provides

by David Cook
Indianapolis, IN

On September 8, 2022, Hoosiers on the Camino (HOTC) gave a Camino talk before the International Women of Indiana, an organization made up of ladies interested in other cultures, and who have lived in or traveled to foreign countries. The purpose is to promote cultural understanding and help “foreigners” assimilate into the Hoosier State. The interest group invited us to address the “Religion and Mysticism” section, even though the subject was above our pay-grade.

We shared experiences of hiking portions of the Camino in 2012 and 2016 and then serving as Hospitalero in 2017, touching briefly on “religion and mysticism.” The talk seemed to go over well.

After the meeting, an older lady approached to explain that she and her husband had been world travelers to places like Angkor Wat, Machu Picchu, Petra, and ruins in Mexico. Her husband got his initial start going abroad during service in France in World War II and then Korea. He had always talked about doing the Camino in Spain, but a stroke in 2006 left his left-side paralyzed, making that dream impossible to fulfill.

Over the next five years he would mention that if he couldn’t do the Camino, perhaps the next best thing would be to have his ashes spread somewhere along the Camino. He wasn’t asking her to do the Camino for him, but to somehow get his ashes over to Spain. He passed away back in 2011. She was simply sharing her Camino story, not asking that anything be done. But her willingness to share this very personal information reminded us of the 2010 movie *The Way*.

I explained that Hoosiers on the Camino (HOTC), our local chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino, Inc., have members traveling to Spain periodically, and I was certain one would be willing to help her fulfill her deceased husband’s request. She still had a small amount of ashes in a drawer that she opens frequently reminding her of his unfulfilled request. She soon obtained a proper container for some willing Peregrino to carry the few added ounces to the Camino de Santiago.



The ashes were taken to Portugal and Spain in September of 2022 by Brian Wong, Hoosier Chapter Coordinator. A Compostela was issued for William S. Summitt, deceased, dated October 9, 2022. Another example of how “the Camino provides.”

Beverly Summitt with Compostela for Wm. Summitt. November, 2022.
Photo by David Cook.



CHAPTER NEWS



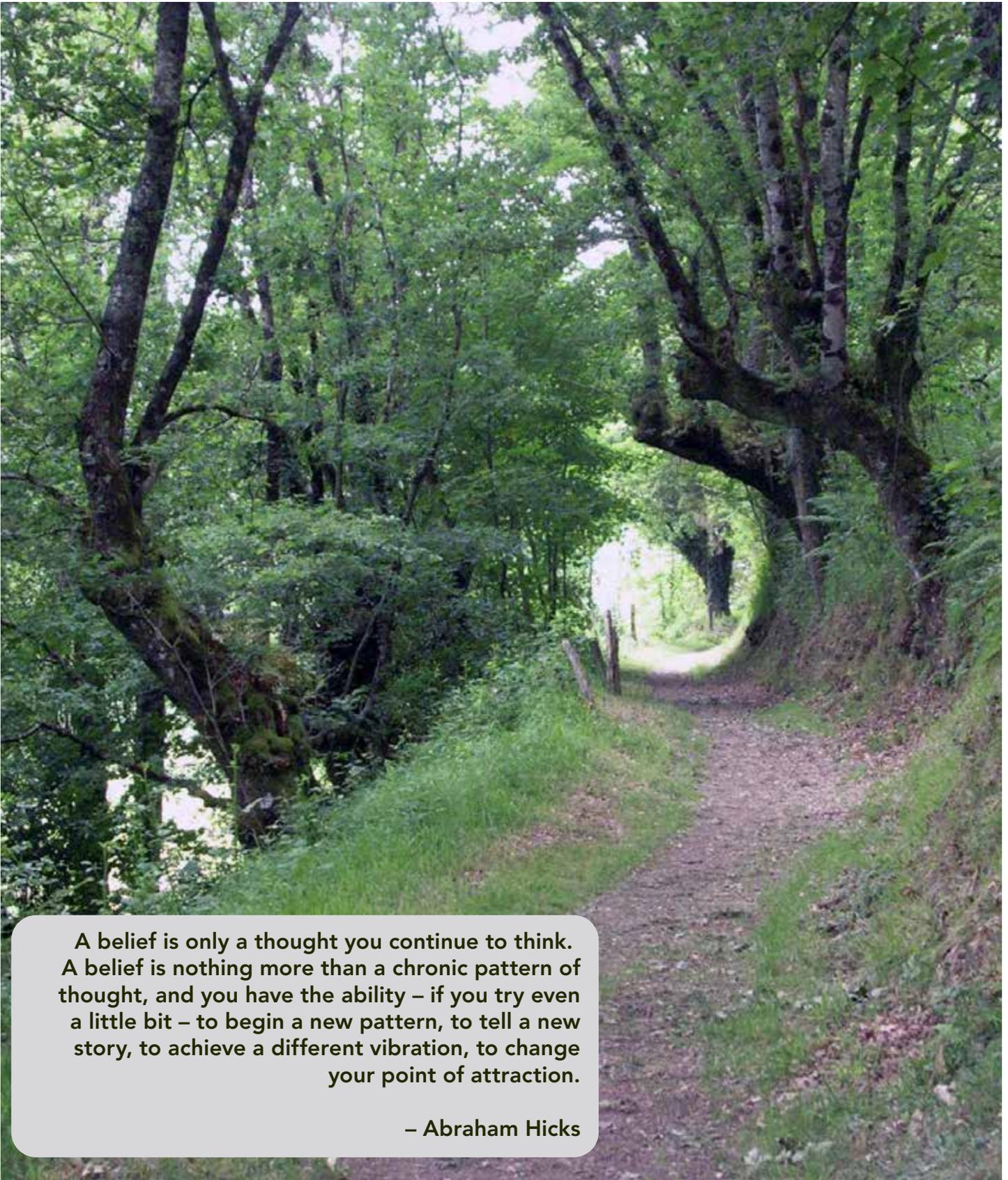
Capital Area Chapter Group Hike and Gear Demo from Fort Hunt to Mt. Vernon, led by Chapter Coordinator Jim Larocca. November 12, 2022.
Photo shared by Angela Amos.



Capital Area Chapter Group Hike and Gear Demo from Fort Hunt to Mt. Vernon, led by Chapter Coordinator Jim Larocca in November 2022.
Photo by Angela Amos.



Second annual Old Pueblo Pilgrimage to San Xavier del Bac Mission in Tucson Arizona. walked in honor of "Gratitude." Photo submitted by the Old Pueblo coordinators.



A belief is only a thought you continue to think.
A belief is nothing more than a chronic pattern of
thought, and you have the ability – if you try even
a little bit – to begin a new pattern, to tell a new
story, to achieve a different vibration, to change
your point of attraction.

– Abraham Hicks

Tending the Embers

The Camino is a Small World

by Bruce Castle
Albuquerque, NM

In the Fall of 2021 my wife Mary and I walked the Camino Francés and Camino Finisterre. We met new friends Philipp and Marta Haas from Switzerland about half-way through our pilgrimage and walked with them frequently. They even kindly waited an extra day for us in Fisterra so we could celebrate the completion of our Caminos together over dinner and wine. They are a lovely couple with fascinating interests. We have occasionally stayed in touch with them via WhatsApp since that time, but I was unaware that they were planning any future pilgrimages.

This Spring, the New Mexico chapter of the American Pilgrims sponsored a one-day pilgrimage during Easter Week to the Santuario de Chimayo, a sacred and beautiful spot in the mountains of northern New Mexico, where the dirt in the chapel floor is believed to possess miraculous healing powers. During that pilgrimage I met Anthony and Carol Castillo from Los Lunas, NM, just south of our hometown of Albuquerque. I walked a number of miles with Carol and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know both of them. They planned a Fall 2022 Camino.

Out of the blue in October we received a text from Philipp that he had been walking a solo pilgrimage on the Camino Primitivo and ran into two people from New Mexico. He explained to the couple that he had met Bruce and Mary from New Mexico the previous fall, and his new friends turned out to be Anthony and Carol. He sent the following photo, with Philipp in the center flanked by Anthony and Carol.

What were the chances of those people meeting? I marvel that Philipp was walking another Camino at all, and that they were all walking the same somewhat less-traveled Camino at the precise same time. And then happened to talk about New Mexico? Was it an amazing coincidence? Or was it one of those minor Camino miracles that seem to happen? Either

way, we were delighted that such nice friends, living thousands of miles and an ocean apart, could share a “small world” moment on their Camino. And keeping in touch with fellow pilgrims like Philipp, Marta, Anthony, and Carol is one way we’ve been able to keep the spirit of the Camino alive.



From left to right, Anthony, Philipp, and Carol on the Camino Primitivo. Photo by Bruce Castle.

Tending the Flame

by Joyce DeToni-Hill
St. George, UT

In September 2022, I led a group of six clergywomen and one laywoman on a pilgrimage from Sarria to Muxia. We were from four different states, and most had not met before. We were called to transition from a place of pandemic fatigue into a place of new beginnings. We were called to a jubilee reset. The women confessed that while they were *Continued*

Tending the Embers: A Clergywomen’s Pilgrimage. September 2022. Submitted by Joyce DeToni-Hill.



Section cover: The Swirling Path.
Photo by Deborah Weltman, April, 2011.



"Muxia" by Margaret Gilliken. Photo by Margaret Gilliken. Submitted by Joyce DeToni-Hill.

called to walk, they didn't "get it" at first, but the Camino "got us."

Along the pilgrim way, Margaret, an artist, revived her love for painting as she captured her memories in art. Recovering from illness, she had been convinced that she could not walk more than a mile but learned to pace herself and discovered she was stronger than she knew. Janine captured the power of vulnerability, trusting in others to support her after a knee injury. Emily and Cheryl's intentions were to slow down their busy pace, smell each rose, and explore every spider web. And they did. Emilee rediscovered her playful self. Mary conquered the demons of her inner voice that insisted she couldn't accomplish big things. Sue received a breast cancer diagnosis three days before the trip and found in us camigas a community of support.

We left for our homes with the knowledge that the end was our beginning.

We are continuing our pilgrimage through WhatsApp and Zoom calls. Janine is telling her story of power through vulnerability and trust through community talks. Mary sends prayers and scripture encouragements. We wear pink together on Sue's Chemo days. Emilee and Emily go out for fun together. Cheryl has recently received a serious cancer diagnosis. We assure her of our love and journey with her anew. This week each of us received a large package from Margaret filled with paintings. She sent us a large painting of our favorite photo along with a packet of note cards featuring everyone's favorite painting.

It's true. While we may not "get it" at first, the Camino "gets us," transforms us, and the journey continues.

Finding the Camino Spirit That was There All Along

by Joseph A. Curro Jr.
Arlington, MA

I sit on the hard, wooden choir bench before the altar and breathe in the incense that fills the air. I feel the joy of being an arriving pilgrim once again. But, instead of eight, strong, red-robed tiraboleiros hoisting the mighty Botafumeiro above me, a diminutive nun slowly bows to a handful of congregants and swings a small censer in our direction. One, two, three times it lightly clinks against the thin chain that she holds in her age-worn hand.



Chapel of St. Anne, Arlington, Massachusetts, by Daderot. This photo is in the Public Domain and taken from the Wikimedia Commons.

This little chapel is not the mighty cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, but it carries its own story... built a century ago by volunteers from rocks found on the grounds of this suburban Boston convent and former school for girls.

I hear echoes of the religious order that began as the dream of a children's book illustrator in this same suburb, spread around the world, and gradually came back to the place where *Continued*

|| TENDING THE EMBERS ||



it began, left in the care of the four surviving Sisters of St. Anne-Bethany.

The Sisters made their own pilgrimages, traveling as young women from their homes and families in the Philippines and the Bahamas to care for other women and girls in need here in the United States. They embody the virtues that are so familiar to me from the Camino: hospitality, kindness, and service, all shared freely with any and all.

Like so many of my fellow pilgrims, I have traveled across the globe in search of this spirit, only to learn the lesson that it is with me already . . . if only I am open to seeing and receiving it.

On the Camino we walk in the footsteps of the millions who have gone before us. We keep the tradition alive.

At home, I work with others who likewise appreciate the rich legacy that is being passed to us. We do this at Bethany House of Prayer, where our mission—in cooperation with the Sisters—is to “offer a ministry of prayer and hospitality to all who seek to deepen their relationship with God — **both seasoned pilgrims and those new to the spiritual journey.**”

Our challenge is to recognize the waymarkers that lead us forward, step by step, and allow us to share in companionship and spiritual renewal with friends whom we have had all along... but may not yet have met.

What better way to keep the Camino embers glowing?

Intangible Relics

by Fred Brill
Berkeley, CA

After completing 500 miles on the Northern Route of the Camino, my wife Mimi and I wondered what we took with us beyond our framed

Continued

Aguas Santas, Palas de Rei, Galicia May 21 2022
Photo by Thom Rynge.

|| PILGRIMS WAY ||

Compestelas, well-worn backpacks, and a couple of yellowed scallop shells?

We think back to one fine day in the Spring of 2022. We began a 13.7-mile jaunt from Villaviciosa to Llorea through clouds and gentle rains. After climbing 2,400 feet, we lunched at Pedrito's, hoping to refuel and dry ourselves out.

Following the yellow line on the Buen Camino app is different from skipping down a "yellow brick road." We preferred the reliable guidance from the abuelas gesticulating from open windows. While I don't speak Spanish, I think they were saying: "Americano, you schmuck, take a right when you see the yellow arrow pointing in that direction!"

Toward the end of the day, the heavens opened up, and we found ourselves soaked, cold, and grouchy. Time to switch to Google Maps to take us the final two miles! (Spoiler alert: Google is not always right.) About a mile into our Google-informed hike, we happened upon our first obstacle: a barbed wire fence. While Mimi is a strong and youthful 57 years old, she was none too thrilled about climbing rusty barbed wire. Nevertheless, with a little coaxing, she made it over the fence without incident. Unfortunately, we had slipped down a rabbit hole . . . or was it a bovine hole? We found ourselves in a cow pasture with two angry-looking cows—or bulls—glaring at us. Fortunately, I'd seen City Slickers, so I knew all about cattle drives. 'Hah!! Yah!!' It worked!

We searched for a way out of the treacherous pasture that was teeming with cow patties the size of a cow's head. In addition to an electric fence on the perimeter of the field, there were sticker bushes three feet thick. With steam rising from Mimi's head, I didn't dare ask her to cross those barriers.

Fortunately, we saw a forest up ahead, which—according to Google Maps—would bring us to the road, a mere 50 yards away. Of course, the incline was steep, and sticker bushes were strategically planted to inflict maximum damage. While Mimi was wearing extra-thick, double-layer tights, I was wearing shorts. So what if my legs looked like raw hamburger meat.

Being a chivalrous husband, I offered Mimi my

walking stick to help her bushwhack through the underbrush. This was the same stick I'd whittled to the smoothness of a baby's bottom; it had escorted me more than 250 miles through Northern Spain. As we encountered another barbed wire fence in the middle of our forest, Mimi asked, "Now what, Brainiac?"

I responded through gritted teeth, "I'll buy you a nice dinner if we make it to our room before dark." She did it!

After making our way over the crest, through the sticker bushes, and down the road, two muddy, bloody pilgrims emerged in a pristine hotel lobby. We were blinded by white tiles, white couches, and lovely hoteliers in white dresses. Mimi had surprised me by booking a beautiful hotel! Over soothing classical music, I apologized for our muddy footprints and trails of blood, offering "If you can



A Spa Surprise. Photo of Fred Brill and Mimi Melodia, May 2022.

rustle up some paper towels, I'll gladly wipe it up before it coagulates."

The hotelier ignored my apology, asking "Are you interested in the spa this evening?" A spa? My wife is a spa-booking goddess! I was overcome with love and gratitude.

For the next two hours, we baked our bodies in different saunas and soaked in a dozen hydro-therapy stations. I felt bad that I

Continued

|| TENDING THE EMBERS ||

turned the smallest pools pink.

Back in our hotel room, I plucked thorns from my legs and slathered Neosporin as if it were sunscreen. We put on our cleanest clothes, which were not so fresh on Day 19, and we enjoyed a candle-lit dinner with a bottle of *vino tinto*! It was then that I was struck by a wave of dread.

“Um, where’s my walking stick?” I asked.

“I must have left it somewhere in the enchanted forest,” Mimi replied.

“That stick was like a child to me!” I cried out.

“Lemme get you a flashlight so you can retrieve it,” she offered. “I’ll wait here.”

Grrrr!

It was not an easy transition coming home, but whenever we get lost or things get a little rough for us, I remind Mimi that we successfully made it over barbed wire, past angry bulls, between rain-soaked cow patties, beside electric fences, through vicious sticker bushes . . . without a walking stick!”

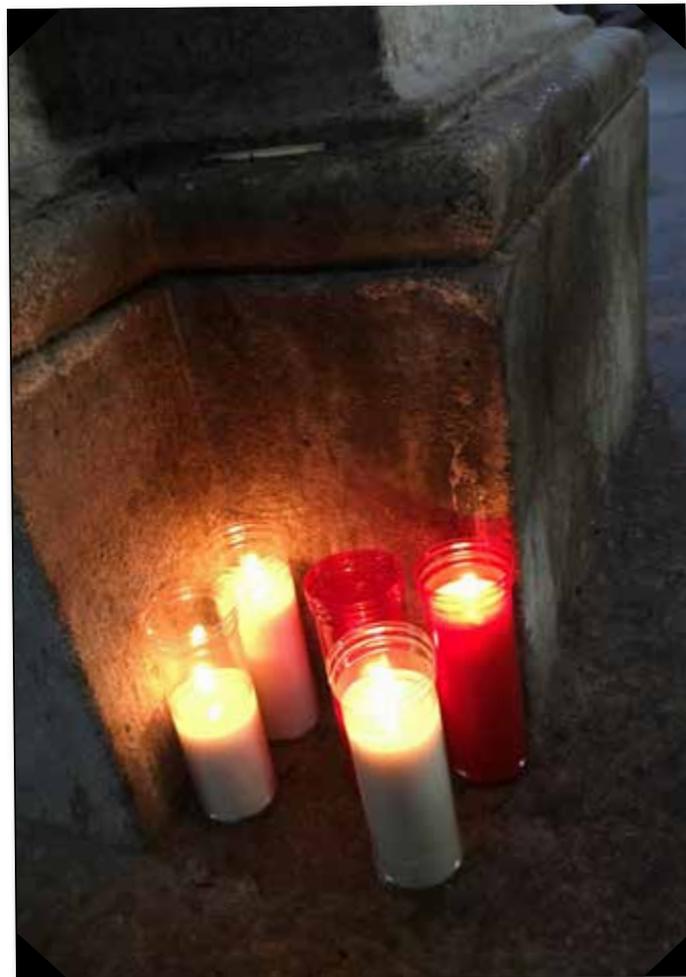
While we don’t always end our days soaking in a spa, we are learning other ways to tend our embers!

Just Walk

by Carol Adams
Cincinnati, OH

I light a candle. The flame extinguishes. It appears as though there is not enough wax left at the bottom of the container to support the flaming wick, but I find if I swirl the wax against the glass, I can expose the wick just enough to keep the flame burning, at least for a while longer.

The same is true with my ongoing desire to be a pilgrim just a while longer. After each of my three short Caminos, I have felt the need to keep the wonder and joy of the experience deep in my heart. In simplest terms, I do this by just walking. It takes no special skill, and it’s something I have become pretty good at, seeing that I have been doing it for

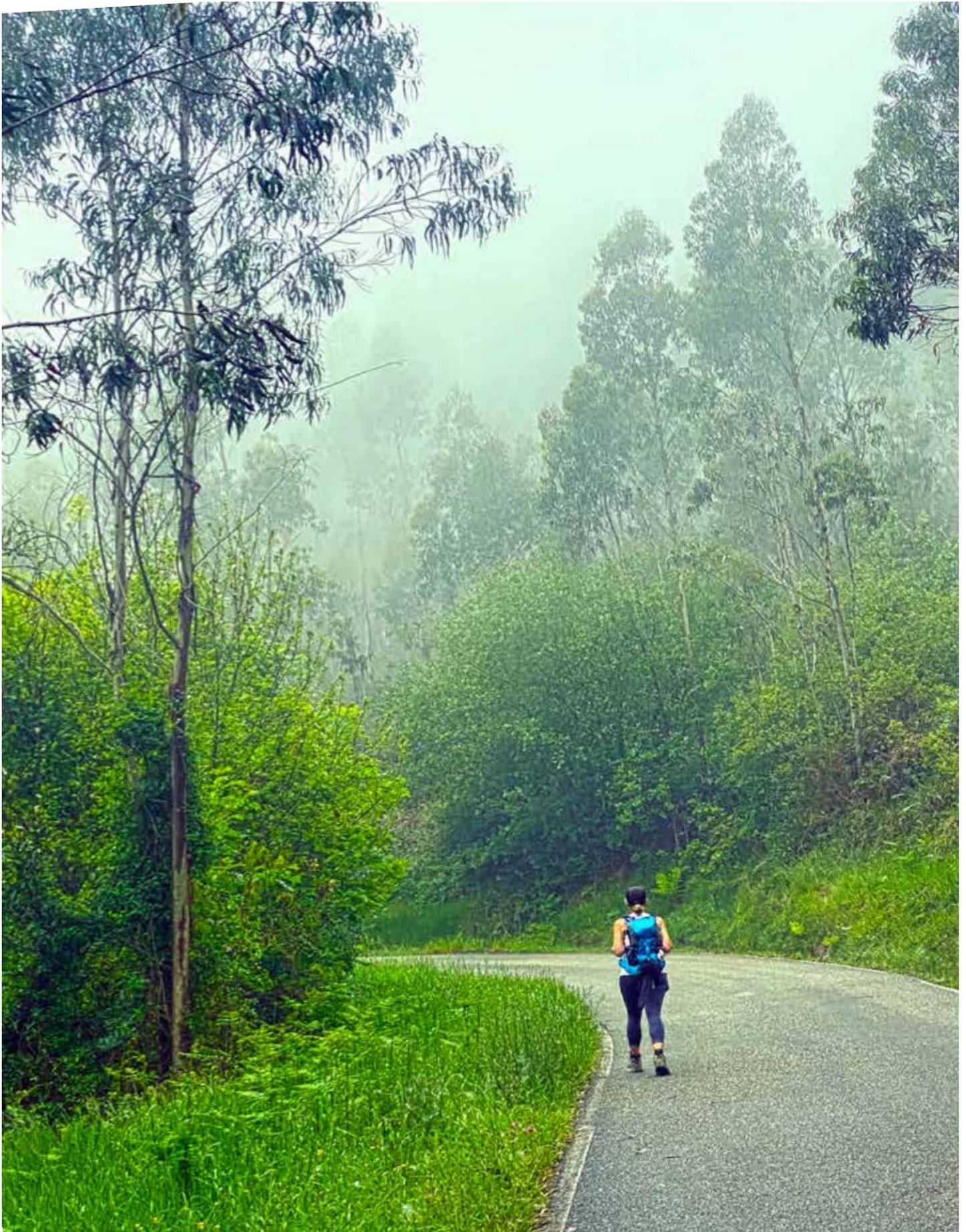


Shine in the Darkness.
Photo by Carol Adams.

nearly eight decades!

I walk in my neighborhood and down along the river trail that I am fortunate enough to live near. Sometimes, my walking becomes “hiking,” when I choose to visit some of our glorious state or national parks. My legs and heart are strong, and my feet are just callused enough that blisters would have a hard time knowing where they could do the most damage!

I am thinking that my next Camino will be a domestic one, however. I’ve been researching various pilgrimage routes here in the U.S. My experiences in Spain and Portugal allowed me to gain clarity in my spiritual life and in my family life. They added a richness that only another culture could offer, but I think it’s time to continue my journey and tend the embers here at home.



Through Clouds and Gentle Rains. Photo of Mimi Melodia by Fred Brill, May 2022.

Keep the Embers Burning

by Fr. Steve Rindahl
Ciblo, TX

I walk the Camino each September/October while leading Combat Veterans on a PTSD and Moral Injury healing pilgrimage as part of the Warriors on the Way (WWW.WARRIORSONTHEWAY.ORG) program. To be on the Camino every year is a blessing, but what about the months in-between? And, what about those who have longer spaces between their opportunities to be on the Camino? Even more, what about those who are still aspiring to go on the Camino but do not know when that opportunity might come? Whether the time between Caminos consists of shorter spaces, longer spaces, or an undetermined amount of space before being in that sacred place called the Camino, how does one keep the pilgrim embers glowing so they might become fire again when the Camino calls?

Never stop being a pilgrim! Why did you (or do you) want to walk the Camino the first time? Different people give different answers, but rarely is the answer the full story. Regardless of the tangible reason for going (religious/spiritual or otherwise), including major life changes and other personal matters, there is something intangible about the Camino that draws us all. A sensed consecration of the path that has developed over centuries of pilgrims walking “the Way” to Santiago allows us to each make a connection and find a place within this larger movement. We are part of something much larger than ourselves while on the Camino, and we are moving to connect with/be transformed by something larger still.

This is why many say that, once arriving in Santiago, your Camino has just begun. We can keep those transformative embers burning by being intentional in seeking connections (with those around us and where we place our faith) and exploring how those connections can make us more than we already are. Turning our attention directly to the Camino, we can keep those embers burning by connecting with other pilgrims.

Have you joined your local American Pilgrims

chapter . . . or considered starting one? There is an endless supply of Camino books, blogs, videos, and amazing Camino podcasts through which we can grow our Camino community and keep the embers burning. The Camino is everywhere if you look. Not a day goes by that I do not see a shell of St. James or some other reminder of the Camino. If it is true that the Camino gives you what you need, it is also true that the Camino finds you where you are when you look.

Letters from the Camino: A Cold and Snowy Solstice

by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway
Spokane, WA

Dear Pilgrims,

Greetings from Milepost 3,928. A thought is beginning to crystallize in my mind that my virtual walk from Spokane to Lourdes will end one day. When at last I walk the Camino Francés, it too will end. My reaction to this awareness of finality is to slow down and savor it. It’s all about the journey. Then another journey?

Walking is so integrated into our lives that we barely notice how amazing it is until, suddenly, we do. For me, the wonder began as a child spending summers in the mossy mountains of western North Carolina. Those happy experiences have drawn me toward hiking all my life, even to this pilgrimage.



Now, daily, I traverse the rawness of urban life, beauty of nature, and joy of ordinary existence.

Notice walking in fresh ways. Blue-clad wheelchair-pushers rolled my sister through airports on our trip to Maine.

Continued

First snowfall in the park. Photo by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway.

|| TENDING THE EMBERS ||



Winter Greetings from my Home. Photo by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway.

They expertly managed luggage, rest stops, and food breaks; I tagged alongside. In Spokane, I go with Missionary of Charity sisters to deliver love with food to homeless people, immigrants, shut-ins, and children. Always, we are talking and God-blessing. At other times, I walk alone. Imagine me pushing a loud, cantankerous snowblower as loads of fluffy sparkling flakes spew from its stack on a subzero December evening. When

the temperature rises above freezing, I am forced to shovel the wet, heavy snow. That is like the slow grind of climbing uphill. All is walking. All, pilgrimage.

Christmas lights lift my spirit in the exceeding cold and dark. A bright-starred Christmas tree sits beside a nearby school. A giant star gleams high on the church tower. Enchanting lights spread through the woods of the park and glitter far into the leafless night. The feeling of burning, numb, gloved fingers in the arctic cold reminds me that the waltz of the planets will bring the blessing of heat on the next solstice.

Who can walk very far without contemplating all of creation and the Creator? Much earlier, I dedicated my Camino to our Lord Jesus; and now He whispers back, “No, I gave it to you.” “For You,” I insist. We may go on arguing like this for many more miles, but He always wins. Our Lady of Lourdes and St. James, continue to pray for us. ¡Feliz Navidad y Año Nuevo! ¡Buen Camino siempre! Leah

Editor’s note: This is the 14th 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.



Gondar, Lugo, Galicia. May 18, 2022.
Photo by Thom Ryng.

Los Tres Amigos

by Tim Will
Rutherfordton, NC



The Monastery/alburgue at the small town Sobrado, in the province of Asturias from a photo taken by Pete King and recreated as a painting by Mary King. Photo contributed by Tim Will.

said he wanted to go with me.

Early the following May we departed, joined by Pete’s friend Russ, who took the *nom de guerre* Rocinante. We met up in an *albergue* in Irun. There we were with backpacks and conchas, all fighting the approaching 70’s, hiking the cliffs above the Bay of Biscay. Up and down the water-shedding hills, through the maritime rain and cold, across the farmlands and within the pine and eucalyptus forests, we were absorbed within some of the most beautiful landscapes on earth. Often it felt like we were walking through a postcard, albeit, at times, a soggy one.

Through it all, Pete and Rocinante experienced “equipment” breakdowns. Pete had shin splints, his first since the Army, and Russ with plantar fasciitis. These were painful conditions but allowed all of us to experience the respect and the loving care given to the peregrinos by the Spaniards, be they Basque, Asturianos, or Gallegos. And I witnessed the mettle of those “*Los Tres Amigos*” who struggled, limping but lighter, and spiritually purified, into the Praza do Obradoiro and then the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

We took a lot of pictures on that cleansing and rejuvenating journey of a lifetime. Pete’s wife, Mary King, is an artist. Inspired by the photos and the tall tales that she heard spun detailing our Camino adventures, she created a series of paintings from the pictures; I believe that she captured glimpses of the Spirit of the Camino.

Tim Will walking in the rain on the Camino Norte along the ocean highway outside of San Vicente de la Barquera in Cantabrica from a photo taken by Pete King and created as a painting by Mary King.

We were separated during the Vietnam War: I was drafted, and my best friend from grade school, Pete, always the smart one, joined the Army Reserves.

We were destined not to see each other again for almost 50 years. At a serendipitous reunion after we both were hesitantly retiring in 2016, Pete inquired as to what was keeping me busy, and I explained that I was wearing out my Merrill Moabs in preparation for a pilgrimage on El Camino del Norte in Northern Spain. On impulse, he immediately



The Band Gets Back Together. A painting inspired by the Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young that includes from left to right: Polk Lafoon (USA) Pete King (USA) Sarah Hodapp (Germany) Huub Gormans (Netherlands) Dr. John Sacco (USA) Tim Will (USA) Russ Schnuer (USA).





Magic, Fairytale, and Pilgrimage Embers

by Deborah Weltman
St Louis, MO

When I reminisce about my magical Camino, I tend the embers of the flame that forged Pilgrim-Me.

The Camino is a modern-day fairytale, an adventure for body and soul, a mythic trust exercise, a hero's journey. There is a soul-purpose to walking pilgrimage. What would mine be? Would I meet people I "needed" to know? Would I gain good health? Self-esteem? Adventurousness? Would God walk with me?

On my Camino I saw ancient views from mountaintops, from medieval city walls. Alongside the well-worn path, long-standing trees arched overhead, creating a canopy of branches swirling off into the distance . . . swirling off into a dappled, magical unknown. Cloud-filled skies floated both high above and below in placid canal waters. I was living in a dream world, one filled with fresh air and ancient beauty. I bounced back and forth between its earthy juiciness and its other-worldly fog and mist.

The magical "Floating Islands" looking down from O'Cebreiro. Photo by Deborah Terra Weltman, May, 2011.

No mythic beasts attacked me. Only friendly sheep, cows, dogs, roosters, and a large-ish salamander crossed my path. I encountered "fairytale" creatures: cuckoos, storks, and one tiny brown bird who waited on the path for me, a message from God in answer to my walking prayer.

The challenges of my "Hero's Journey" were modern: an ill-fitting back-pack; running out of funds while on the path. Magical people appeared to assist me. Knights (in hiking gear) became dear friends. A new South Korean friend was, it turned *Continued*



Peaceful Canal Along the Meseta. Photo by: Deborah Terra Weltman, May, 2011.

|| PILGRIMS WAY ||

out, a court jester. A British friend, a troubadour.

Daily, we pilgrims accepted the unknown, reveling in that excitement! Open to this mystery, this magic, we understood that anything could happen at any moment: that fairytale creatures do exist, that a forest of eucalyptus trees could exorcise the pungent odor of dung, that our soul-friends the world over, the ones we had yet to meet, would show up at the perfect time to aid us, to encourage us, to make us feel beloved. We trusted that we would be led to perfect-for-us experiences, that our way was Divinely Guided, that it led to our soul's growth. The Way provides each pilgrim a unique learning.

It is Camino Magic, this time-out-of-ordinary-time. The daily forays into fairytale nature and the unexpected perfection of each day are the Camino's embers that reside in my soul. Perhaps I will walk the Camino again? If I tend my embers well, perhaps the Camino's magic will be within me wherever I go.

My Pilgrim's Cross

by Rev. Dr. Mark LaRocca-Pitts
Atlanta, GA

"Today I cried." This is how my journal on Day four of my 2018 Camino Francés began. I was in the small mountain top church in Zabaldika, and God touched me. Most pilgrims bypass this church, taking the river trail instead of climbing the steep and narrow path up the mountain. I'm glad I went the traditional route. Inside the church was a life-size wooden crucifix surrounded by yellow post-it notes filled with pilgrims' prayer requests.

After touring the little church, I asked the attendant if I could touch the crucifix with my brass cross. This cross I call my "Pilgrim's Cross." It is made of brass plumbing parts. To fulfill a vow, I carried this cross in my hand every step of the way from St. Jean Pied de Port to Compostela. Throughout the Camino, whenever I reached a place of significance to me, I would touch my cross to something meaningful in the place. It was my way of connecting, of mingling our energies, of making the moment sacred. In this small church in Zabaldika, I wanted to touch the

crucifix with my cross, so when the attendant indicated it was all right, I held out my cross. But I hesitated, thinking, "Where should I touch him?" And then I knew: I touched Jesus' heart. A soon as I connected, a flood of emotions

overwhelmed me, and I wept—a very rare experience for me. They were not sad or joyful tears, but tears of simply being connected to Jesus, of being loved and accepted, of being at the right place, at the right time, and doing the right thing. Those tears ran down my face as I walked down that mountain—and threaten to rise again as I write this.



My Pilgrim Cross at the end of the Way.
Photo by Mark LaRocca-Pitts.



Carrying my Pilgrim Cross in my hand.
Photo by Mark LaRocca-Pitts, Spring 2018.

For me, I am a pilgrim, not only on the Camino, but in life. I cannot live in God's embrace all the time, but in those rare sacred moments when God touches me, I can experience God's presence. My Pilgrim's Cross is a constant reminder of God's presence, and when I touch it, I believe God is touching me back, whether I feel it or not. I now carry my cross in my pocket every step of every day. It is a constant reminder that I am a pilgrim. In the spring of 2023, it will be in my pocket with the stone I will leave at Cruz De Ferro as I walk from Paris to Santiago. *Buen Camino!*



My Pilgrim Cross on a Way marker.
Photo by Mark LaRocca-Pitts.

Twin Projects: Processing My Camino and My Father's Passing

by Rebecca Balcarcel
Bedford, TX

When I walked out of the pilgrim's office in Santiago de Compostela, I staggered, in awe of what I was holding. A Compostela and a distance certificate for my 260k walk from Astorga. I loved the parchment-type paper, the colorful vegetation winding up the margin, and St. James standing in the upper corner. I took photos. I took a video. Then I rolled up the papers and slid them into their cardboard tube.

I didn't take them out for over a year.

I'm not sure why I didn't. At first, I might have said that the papers were not the important thing; the journey itself was. True, but also, life got busy. Once my friends heard my Camino stories a couple of times, that was enough. My pilgrimage became old news.

The Camino *had* changed me. After packing so light, I loaded my car with items to donate. After deep conversations with fellow pilgrims, I looked at people with more respect, aware that everyone has unfathomable depths. But just as the certificates remained tubed, some deeper meaning of my pilgrim experience remained concealed.

Then came the one-year anniversary of my father's death. I had walked my Camino as he struggled with late-stage Parkinson's disease. He flashed one of his last real smiles upon hearing that I had been to Spain, fatherland of the Balcárceles. I told him about Río Valcarce, Vega de Valcarce, and a crypt in Montán labeled "Familia Balcárceles." The names gave us a sense of connection to Anacleto Balcárceles, our ancestor who crossed the Atlantic six generations ago. Dad also admired the physical feat of a long-distance walk. My Camino made him proud.

After returning from Spain in mid-July, I put Dad to bed every night, swinging his legs up and situating the covers. He reminded me to pray for all suffering people and to look after my mother. I promised. He died September 25.

When September cycled back onto the calendar, I found myself contemplating both my father's picture and the tube. In my mind they were linked not only because Spain meant so much to him, but also because like the Camino experience, death has a way of clarifying the mind. It reorients us. It prompts us to look beyond the drama to see what really matters.

I'm planning a Camino for 2023, and taking a handful of my father's ashes. I don't know where I'll sprinkle them. I do know that I've framed my Compostela and certificate. I've slowed down my life and said yes to things that mean the most. To my spiritual routine, I've added a daily bow to my father and a smile to the Compostela that stands for both my ancestral connection to Spain and to living a deliberate, mindful life. The meaning of the Camino is still unfolding, but I feel that my steps are on the path.



Snails on the Road

by Michael Burriss
Spartanburg, SC

As I sit here looking out over the Atlantic near Praia das Maças in Portugal, I realize that it has been almost five years since my last Camino. One reason for this hiatus is due to having experienced profound loss over these last few years. First, it was my grandfather, then my father, then my grandmother's passing. I don't offer this to be depressing, but rather to frame my state of mind coming into this trip.

As I sit here on this cliff on what is just my second day of hiking. I couldn't tell you what sparked the decision to take this trip other than just a "divine tap on the shoulder" as my old professor used to say. I always knew that there was a coastal route from Porto to Santiago, but I was curious if there was a coastal route from Lisbon to Porto. I researched, read, and talked to other professors, but no one was sure.

I didn't let that get me down though. I kept feeling the nudge to just go. To not worry about "what if" and just go. I needed to reconnect with the life-changing force of the Camino that I first experienced in the Winter of 2003. As most who have walked the Camino before can attest to, it's not just the actual days of walking the trail that make up what we know of as the Camino, but it is the process that starts when we first set out down the Path.



An "official" Camino arrow near the steps of the Church of Santiago in Lisbon. Photo by Michael Burriss.

A few days later I have arrived in Nazaré. I have met some of the most amazing people who have opened their doors to me, tried some of the most amazing food and actually had time to walk in silence and just reflect.

Since this year's theme is "tending the embers" I thought that my experience this December was very appropriate. While

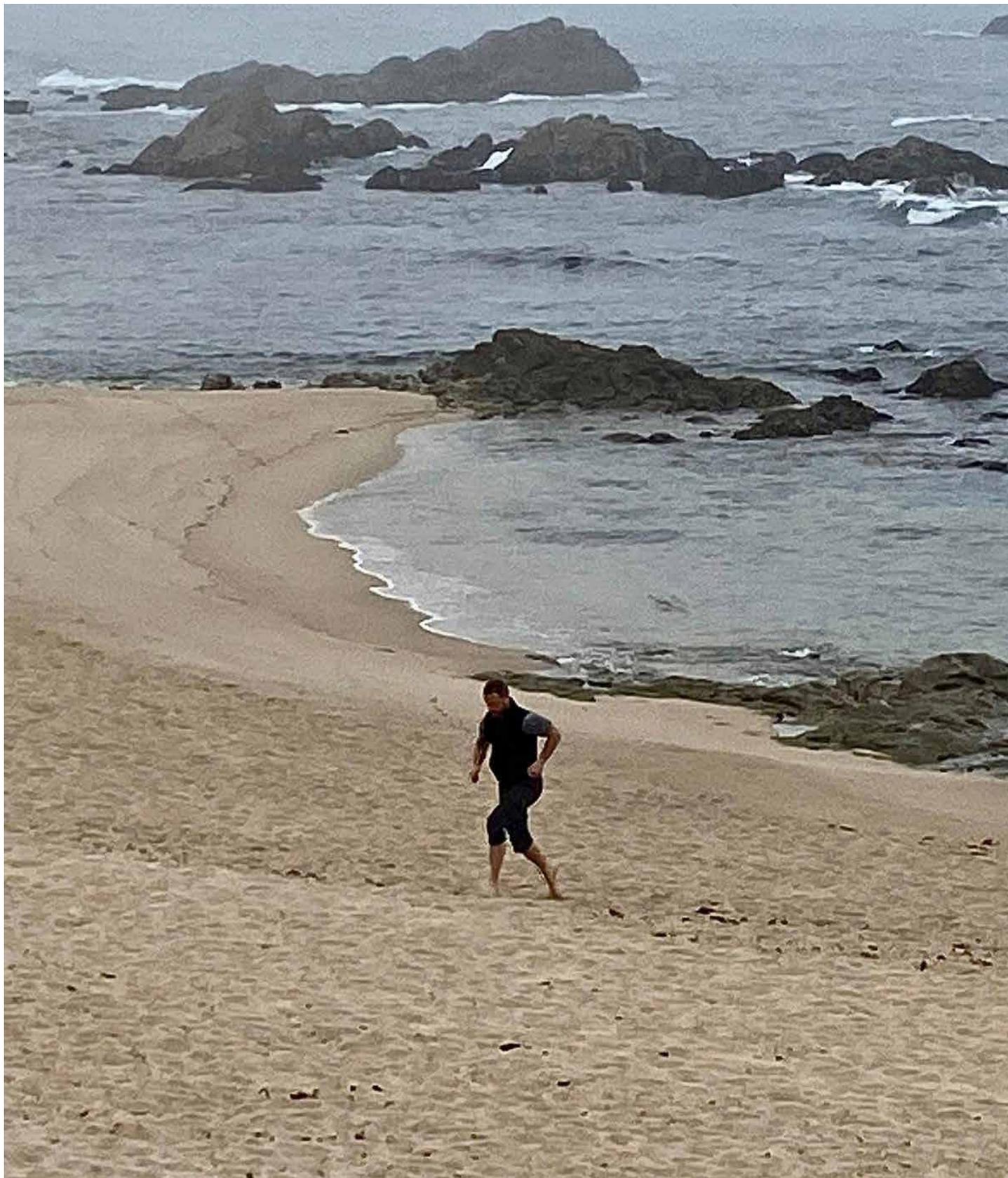
I didn't find any Camino evidence, I did wind up reconnecting with the Camino. Among other amazing sites and beautiful trails, I did find lots of arrows and snails on the road. The arrows belonged to what I will find out later as the European Long-Distance trails. And the snails? Well, they made me remember to slow down, focus on what's important, and keep on moving.



Trail leading out from Praia das Maças
Photo by Michael Burriss.



Typical arrow I would see on the trails.
Photo by Michael Burriss.



Arts & Culture

Walking Steps in Faith. Photo by Mark Lane-Holbert.

ARTS & CULTURE

Come With Me on a Pilgrimage of Recovery

by Bob Shea
Tampa, FL

Come with me on pilgrimage. Walk and run through long sessions of silence. The kind of silence that merges with expressions of the love of being in nature. Or the groans and then appreciation of nearly forgotten hardships endured.

Come with me on pilgrimage. Encounter rogue paths off the intended course, adding lengths to our long journey. Follow the sounds of the enduring mantras of our footsteps, rhythms that are swallowed up by the course of nature. The fields, forests, rivers and beaches have their own mantra. We sound together. Footsteps interrupted by the songbird. The mantra slowed down by the song of the springs gurgling as she winds her way to unimaginable places.

Come with me on pilgrimage. Find what you don't expect. Be willing to lose what you hold on to. Along a country path, gaze off the trail into the thick forest: dark and clogged with life. A trillion shades of green moss blankets the forest floor, wrapping around each stone, shrub, and tree like a warm blanket. The forest floor covers up all history. That's the mystery. So let the mind wander. And then turn back to the road ahead.

Come with me on pilgrimage. "Are we there yet?" "No," is the response in the mind. Keep walking. You've had more difficult times in your life. Take a rest. Stop. Slow down even more. Take in the micro-moments in place. Rest. It's time for a vacation anyway. Look back. Then come back to where you're sitting. Draw some nuts and water from your satchel. Become a silent partner in the community of nowhere.

Come with me on pilgrimage. Right where you are. Taste the moment no matter where you are, or what it reveals. Enjoy the hardship. Look around. Feel the things that are touched. Note the contours and the spirals of whatever you're looking at. Seek the patterns that are replicated from the microorganism to the broader universe. Drain your thoughts into the springs of time. Reflect and project, being careful not to hang on to the pain, experience it and move into the joy. The joys of mind. Of pilgrimage.

Oh, come with me on pilgrimage. And observe the faraway horizon. The long anticipated images that never disappoint if you don't expect. Just imagine. Walking through as the horizon gives way to the next, and then the next, and then the next. Knowing that when you look back, you'll only see them disappear, with gratitude. Look back with me and see the landscape from the other side. Perspective: it is ever-changing and beautiful, when looked upon with Love and grace.

Come with me on pilgrimage. And meet new pilgrims. Local pilgrims. Pilgrims from distant lands. All these pilgrims with a myriad of ideologies, philosophies and intentions. Come with me on a path to change. Realizing that time and space cannot reflect or project with hatred. Each pilgrim I walk with I listen to their fathers' souls. The souls of their villages and footprints. Integrated into their own sensibilities. And I change.

Come with me on pilgrimage, and leave yourself behind.



My All Together, All for One.
Photo by Mark Lane-Holbert.



The path to wholeness.
Photo by Mark Lane-Holbert.

Sinning Across Spain, Walking the Camino

Book Review

Sinning Across Spain, Walking the Camino

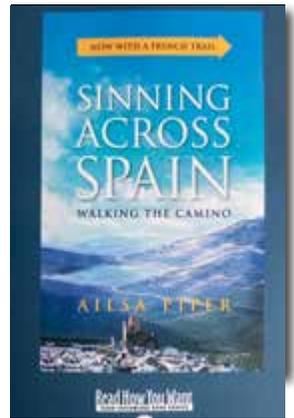
by Ailsa Piper

Victory Books, 2017

435pages

Reviewed by Jerald Stroebele

Anchorage, AK



My Camino reading wish list finally came true! I have read many Camino memoirs written by Australian men, but it seems I have met many more Australian women on the Camino than men. I have long wanted to read a Camino story by one of these hardy women from Down Under. When I saw the luring title of this book and then learned it was about walking the Camino Mozárabe I ordered it immediately.

My non-prurient reason was because my wife and I plan to walk the Mozárabe in February.

After walking the Camino Francés Ailsa Piper longed to walk another Camino, but for an even more significant purpose than a penitent pilgrimage. Always longing to help others since her early childhood, in 2012 Piper decided to walk off the sins of others, earning them indulgences by walking 1200 kilometers from Granada to Santiago. Not just any mortal sins, but the Seven deadly sins: Pride, Anger, Greed, Sloth, Lust, Envy, Gluttony. At the beginning of the book my mind reeled with pilgrims' possible sins: "Not leaving anything in a donativo albergue." "What happens in the albergue stays in the albergue." But her sinners were not pilgrims but Australian friends.

Piper explains the medieval history of pilgrims walking to Santiago (and then back home) to earn indulgences for wealthier patrons. When Piper asked friends to contribute to her expenses in return for walking off their sins, she did get financial help but also a lot more true confessions than she ever expected. As she walked, Piper regularly messaged her sinners about her progress by email. She was carrying their sins and a heavy backpack. Whenever she flagged physically or emotionally, they encouraged her by thanking her for helping them in atonement. Fluent in Spanish, she met many other pilgrims and others all along the way and formed close friendships. This gifted writer shares poignant observations of Camino life in the albergues. She also shares her innermost thoughts, angers, worries, and desires in raw revelations. But the story ends with a stunner. It's not a sin to read it.



ARTS & CULTURE

Ode to Day 8

by Patrick Dillon
East Lansing, MI

On a summertime stroll from Caldas to Padron
There are pilgrims in couples, in groups, or alone.
For some it's day nine, or day four, or day 8,
The second to last, it's the penultim8.

Day seven was brutal, the heat and no food,
But the offers of help or hugs lightened the mood.
Tomorrow has hills and the church at the end
That welcomes with incense worn women and men.

Tween the tough walks that make up days seven and nine
Day 8 is a respite, its slopes all benign:
The hills sleight of height, no rhymes with 8 here,
Let the w8 on your back and your legs disappear.

Day 8 needs some honor, a poem with its rhyme,
Like Shakespeare, his scenes end in one all the time,
As do verses from Gaelic by Bill Butler Y8s,
Or Grecian Ode lines from John (past tense is K8s)?

On tomorrow's novena the worst pain ab8s,
The Camino is over, God's love reson8s,
Like Laetare, Gaudete, day 8 design8s,
An early thanksgiving for the grace that aw8s.

On a summertime stroll from Caldas to Padron
Though I walked by myself, I was never alone.

Poet's note: In July of 2014, I walked the Camino from Porto to Santiago over nine days, alone and injured, over the hills and through an intense heat wave. I was helped by dozens of strangers on the way, relating their help in the book Limping to Santiago. Days seven and nine were especially brutal, but not so Day Eight. The day was not easy, but it was by far my easiest day of the Camino. The day had had no dramatic events, no getting lost, no steep climbs, and even the weather had cooled a bit. In tribute to the respite it provided, here is my poem dedicated to this day with so little drama.

Footfalls: Poems of the Camino

Book Review

Footfalls: Poems of the Camino
by Suzanne Doerge
Shanti Arts Publishingm 2022
111 pages

Reviewed by Amy Elizabeth Horton
Warrenton, Missouri

The poetry shared in this collection offers something for the weary pilgrim, prospective pilgrim, and armchair pilgrim alike.

Inspired by and written along the Camino Francés, these poems range from the ethereal (“Shadow Pilgrim”) and deeply human (“The Way”), to the practical (“Packing Instructions”) and downright humorous (“Orchestral”).

Doerge has organized the collection into sections that follow the same path as the Camino Francés—through Navarre, Rioja, Castille y León, and Galicia to Santiago and the Ends of the Earth.

In Navarre, the pilgrim acclimates to the newness of the Camino—taking in the sounds of walking sticks, observing other pilgrims along the way, and adjusting to communal accommodations.

In Rioja, the pilgrim is beginning to find her own pace, starting to see herself in communion with fellow pilgrims, and getting comfortable walking her own way.

In Castille y León, the pilgrim witnesses how the Camino provides, recognizes the importance of pausing occasionally to look back, and experiences how making a sandwich is a form of prayer.

In Galicia, the pilgrim can sense magic through the mist.

In Santiago, the pilgrim becomes another droplet joining a great wave of pilgrims to discover that the Camino doesn’t actually lead to Santiago. “The Camino is everywhere.”

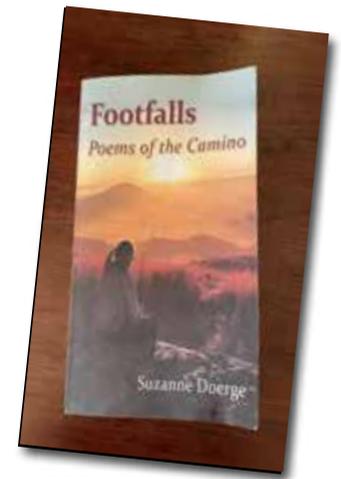
Sprinkled throughout the collection are black and white photos taken along the Camino, providing a visual accompaniment to Doerge’s verse. Doerge also provides a glossary appendix, helping make the collection accessible to the uninitiated pilgrim who may not be familiar with Camino lingo.

The end of Doerge’s collection reveals the beginning of another journey:

The Return

*It’s not easy, this return
to the busy highway we left behind.
Bones and muscles settle
Eyes see only as far as our daily lives—
backyards, walls and computer screens.
Ears hear only languages we ourselves speak
as we lay down to sleep.*

*Feet, tucked under desks like obedient pets
or shackled to gas pedals like handcuffs to briefcases,
carry remnants of blisters that chart vanishing*



Continued

*maps of the landscape we journeyed through.
Four regions of Spain hide in our closets
having snuck through customs
on the soles of shoes.*

*What has become of the simple routine—
walk, rest, eat, sleep?*

*We are back to some good things—
a familiar bed, steady roof overhead,
being with the ones we love who know
where we are from.*

*But as we walk the streets, grocery aisles,
cathedral vestibules, universities and factories,
even the fields and hill just outside of town,
it is our souls that refuse to fully return;
they continue to stroll
with all the souls of the Camino
to Finisterre, the ends of the Earth.*



Whether and how to bring the Camino home. That is the great lesson of a journey still underway, and on which this collection of poetry could serve as a companion.

book reviewers wanted.

Interested in writing an occasional book review for American Pilgrims?
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CAMINO

Keep Walking, Your Heart Will Catch Up: A Camino de Santiago Journey

Book Review

Keep Walking, Your Heart Will Catch Up: A Camino de Santiago Journey

by Cathay O. Reta

BookBaby Publishing, 2020

170 pages

Reviewed by Allison Venuto

Dallas, TX

In *Keep Walking, Your Heart Will Catch Up: A Camino de Santiago Journey*, Cathay O. Reta weaves her pilgrim story of mourning with her journey of finding herself. Along the way, she shares stories of her inner development as she walks her French Camino.

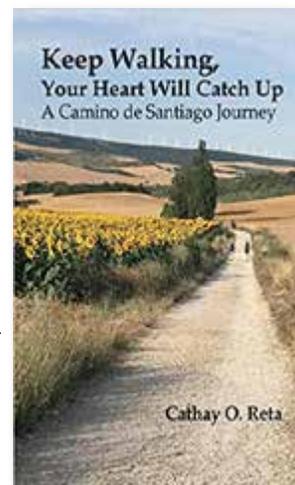
From the dedication page, Reta's reflective honesty and voice shine through her story of walking after the loss of her beloved husband. Reta married David, a Christian pastor and evangelist, when she was 30. After 33 years of marriage, he died after an extended illness. As she mourns, the author decides to walk the Camino Francés for her 65th birthday to help her determine her path for the next three decades of life.

Reta shares information for new pilgrims and insights for those who have walked before. The author interlaces her Camino journey with excerpts from her journal, pictures, and reminiscences of her life. Her keen storytelling demonstrates her vulnerability, strength and growth. She includes common Camino vocabulary and pilgrim habits, helpful to any new pilgrim. And, like many pilgrims, Reta continues walking through her physical and emotional aches, overcoming thoughts of stopping her Camino.

Throughout her pilgrimage, Reta draws inspiration to continue walking from re-reading *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, written in 1955 by English author Hannah Hurnard. She cares for herself physically, emotionally, and spiritually without the rush of a timeline sensed in some other Camino memoirs—demonstrating the fulfillment of her hopeful transformation that comes from her persistent journey westward.

Walking alone, the author creates interactions with fellow pilgrims and remains open to her palpable inner journey. As her confidence grows, she learns to fall in love with herself and welcome new experiences. With the distance of a year, the author's Afterward includes reflections on her pilgrimage and integrations of her Camino into her daily life. The memoir leaves the reader bidding a heartfelt *Buen Camino* to a fellow pilgrim who became a friend after just a short walk together.

Content warning: This memoir includes discussion of a past suicidal ideation.



ARTS & CULTURE

The Song of the Camino Dogs

by Teresa Ramsey
Takoma Park, MD

*I still hear your song
The song of fear
Bark, bark, bark, bark, bark,
Who is it that goes here?*

*Why so afraid my friend?
You know I mean you no harm
It is I, a lonely pilgrim who walks
Not a true cause for alarm.*

*Yet the fear travels on to the next
The chorus continues to ring
Why live in fear in this beautiful place
Such a very sad song to sing*

*My heart is singing a far better song
A song of hope and of peace
Far better my friend to sing with me
And let the old song cease.*

*The world needs to hear of hope right now
It needs no more songs of fear
If we store the light within our hearts
And sing it, all people can hear.*



Vilamor, Melide, Galicia. Image by Thom Rynq

FINAL REFLECTION

Real Candles

by Ana Rojas Halland
Corvallis, OR

My two brothers died one month apart in 2016. Flattened by grief, I vowed to walk the Camino Francés in their honor, lighting candles every chance I had, and laying down my heart at the feet of St. James. I fulfilled the promise five years later, when I booked a flight for the fall of 2021, on the hopes that the window for international travel would reopen by then.

By 2021, there were many reasons to light candles. The pandemic took loved ones, cancer called others, and broken hearts still more. The Camino was beginning to feel like one long funeral march. While I anticipated, obsessed, and yearned for pilgrimage, I worried the experience would be a trail of tears.

Surprisingly, there were very few places to light real candles on the Camino Francés. One such place was the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Inmaculada Concepción in Hontanas. I arrived one morning just as the doors opened. Before entering the nave was a large circular sand garden with two red sanctuary candles facing a wall hung with portraits of saints canonized or otherwise, including Malala Yousafzai and Martin Luther King, Jr. Next to the sand was a box of real candles. I began lighting: Alex, John, Pati Ann, Gail, Isabel, Antonia, Buddy...I made a semicircle of flames in that sandbox and knelt. (I hope my donation offset all that light.) It was there that I received the surprise gift of the walk, not of constant weeping as I feared, but a sense of serene joy and gratitude, for lives lived, for the opportunity to move this way, for love in all its forms, and especially as expressed in the inborn hospitality of pilgrimage. All the way to Santiago, I unwrapped that gift, little by little.

I carried the image of those candles burning the rest of the Way. Since returning home, I have lit many candles on the little bookshelf next to my desk where I write, reflect, remember, and pray. The ritual is a way of keeping the embers of pilgrimage burning in my daily life, reminding me I am still a pilgrim and to act accordingly. Listening to someone tell their story, salveing an emotional blister from a fractious exchange, saying "thank you" as often as possible, and seeking simplicity in all aspects of life: Buen Camino, indeed!

Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Inmaculada Concepción.
Photo by Ana Rojas Halland, October 2021.

|| NEXT ISSUE ||

The Spring *La Concha* theme is
Go Your Own Way
Submissions to our Spring issue close on April 1, 2023,
and we would love to receive your reflections!



What makes a pilgrim? The issues will explore the various modalities of pilgrimage.

Please explore this theme for the **Spring 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

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