

LA CONCHA

american pilgrims on the camino magazine

WINTER 2024

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- ➔ TRIBUTE TO AN HOSPITALERO PIONEER
- ➔ BOOK REVIEWS & POETRY
- ➔ PILGRIM REFLECTIONS & ART
- ➔ 2024 LA CONCHA THEMES

the ARTIST'S WAY

PROCESSING PILGRIMAGE THROUGH VISUAL ARTS, SONG, POETRY & PROSE



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COVER Photo of an art piece commissioned by the 2023 Omaha Arts Festival, depicting a surreal landscape and sky inspired by the artist's Camino pilgrimage. Original artwork and photo by Joe Diril.

TOP of page: Another fantastic sunrise on the Camino Francés in Atapuerca, Spain, on October 2, 2023. Photo by Adriana Rovers.

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

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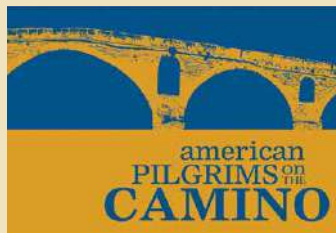
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LA CONCHA

Fellow Pilgrims,

When my husband and I walked the Camino Portugués in 2018, we seemed to cover the stage from Pontevedra with a particularly light step and steady pace, arriving in Caldas de Reis by late morning. After settling into our albergue, we grabbed lunch at a nearby café bar, and then my husband turned in for a postprandial nap. Not inclined to a siesta myself (if only I'd read "The Fine Art of Napping" on page 13), I decided to explore the lush, verdant town known for its hot springs. As I meandered the streets and alleyways, many of which the Camino route would not take us by the next morning, I noted several buildings whose exterior walls had been painted with murals, even backtracking to view some from another angle.

That peaceful afternoon spent strolling Caldas de Reis uncovered in me an underused appreciation for outdoor art installations. Since then, whenever I visit a town or city, I try to make some time to explore it on foot. I am especially delighted if I stumble upon an interesting mural or sculpture that gives me a glimpse into the creative culture of a place.

I experienced similar delight last summer when I saw on the American Pilgrims Facebook group a post made by pilgrim and mural artist Joe Diril sharing a photo of a commissioned piece he had just completed. As soon as I saw this photo of his pilgrimage-inspired painting drying in his studio with paint cans and other artist tools strewn about in the foreground, I knew it would make the perfect cover art for this issue, and I'm so glad Joe shared it with us.

In this issue of *La Concha*, we've curated a collection of work that explores the way of the artist-pilgrim and the relationship between art and creativity on the Camino. We have book reviews, poetry, and reflections from those whose pilgrim journeys (and, in one case, a Camino cat) inspired prose, verse, or visual art. We consider essays and artwork from those whose pilgrim experiences got the creative juices flowing or helped unearth buried artistic talents. And we hear how songs from the quintessential ("Ultreia!") to the unexpected ("Leah" by Bruce Springsteen and "Castles in the Sand" by Seals & Crofts) hold a special place on some Camino soundtracks. Enjoy this colorful and creative stroll along "The Artist's Way."

May your journey be sacred,

Amy

Amy Horton
Editor-in-Chief



One of several murals spotted on an afternoon stroll of Caldas de Reis, a town along the Camino Portugués, September 2018. Photo by Amy Horton.

American Pilgrims on the Camino

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



Joe Curro
Board Chair

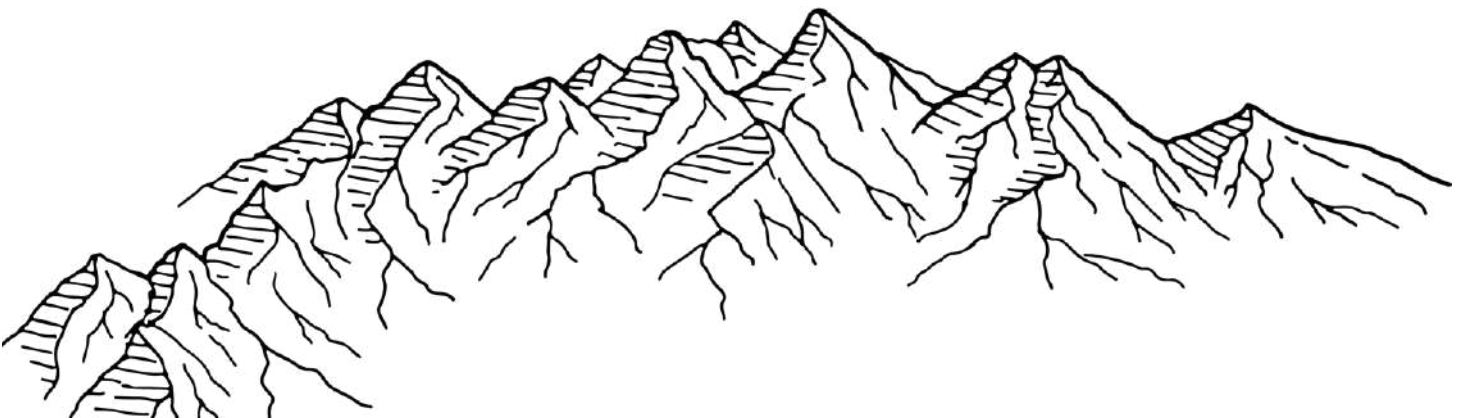
Dear Fellow Pilgrims!

Greetings for the new year and best wishes from your board. It is my great honor to serve as chair of such a committed and talented board of directors and to have the opportunity to work with so many of you in new and exciting ways.

As a board, we bid a fond farewell to four individuals who have gone above and beyond in service to the Camino and American Pilgrims:

- **Dave Donselar:** As a three-term chair, Dave steered our organization through the height of the COVID years, even as the Camino shut down and so much of our activity was paused or went virtual. He has chaired several Annual Gatherings and plans to continue in this capacity as co-chair of the 2024 Gathering and our planned 2025 international Gathering in Vancouver, BC. Dave also led the nominations committee that identified our newest board members.
- **Sara Steig Gradwohl:** Sara chaired the infamous 2020 Gathering at Lake Tahoe, which coincided with the start of the pandemic and a major blizzard. She has served as vice chair of American Pilgrims, co-chaired our technology and communications committees, and continues as webmaster. We look forward to seeing Sara at future gatherings, with her tiara, banjo ukulele, and infamous shell bra!
- **Steve Lytch:** Steve served the past two years as chair and before that as treasurer and nominations committee chair of the organization. He represented us several times in Spain at gatherings of Camino associations from around the world, and he readily rolled up his sleeves and served pilgrims on the ground as a Ribadiso Welcome Service volunteer. Steve has been a strong advocate for membership diversity and for setting measurable organizational goals that help us to serve you better.
- **Jackie Saxon:** For many American Pilgrims, Jackie is the face of the organization. As a member of the chapters committee, she managed the application and interview process for countless chapter coordinators. Jackie was also the chair of the 2023 Gathering at Lake Tahoe, where she was easily recognizable by her bright, colorful propeller beanie. Jackie's organizational skills and brilliant sense of humor will be dearly missed by her fellow board members.

(continued)



LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

We also welcome four newly appointed board members who bring a wide array of talents to the table in support of our mission:

- **Eryn-Ashlei Bailey:** Eryn is a Boston-area pilgrim who has participated in chapter events and offers valuable experience as a leader with nonprofit and membership organizations.
- **Rachel Ganzon:** Rachel has served as a coordinator for the Portlandia Chapter, as a leader of our chapter coaches assisting chapter coordinators across the country, and as co-chair of the 2024 Coordinators Workshop.
- **Luis Gussoni:** Luis has actively participated with the Texas Gulf Coast Chapter, and has walked many Caminos. A native of Argentina, Luis brings Spanish and Portuguese language skills that will surely be assets to our work.
- **Martin Peña:** Martin's Camino experience includes service as an hospitalero. He has helped organize Northern California Chapter events and participated in last year's Navarra cultural exchange. Annual Gathering attendees will be familiar with his graphic and video design talents.

As you view the photo profiles of your incoming and continuing board members (on page 6), please consider ways you might volunteer to serve the greater pilgrim community. As an all-volunteer operation, we are nothing without the energy, ideas, and encouragement of our members.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the Annual Gathering of Pilgrims this March in Texas and to hearing from you in the year ahead as we continue to promote the Camino spirit.

¡Buen Camino!

Joe

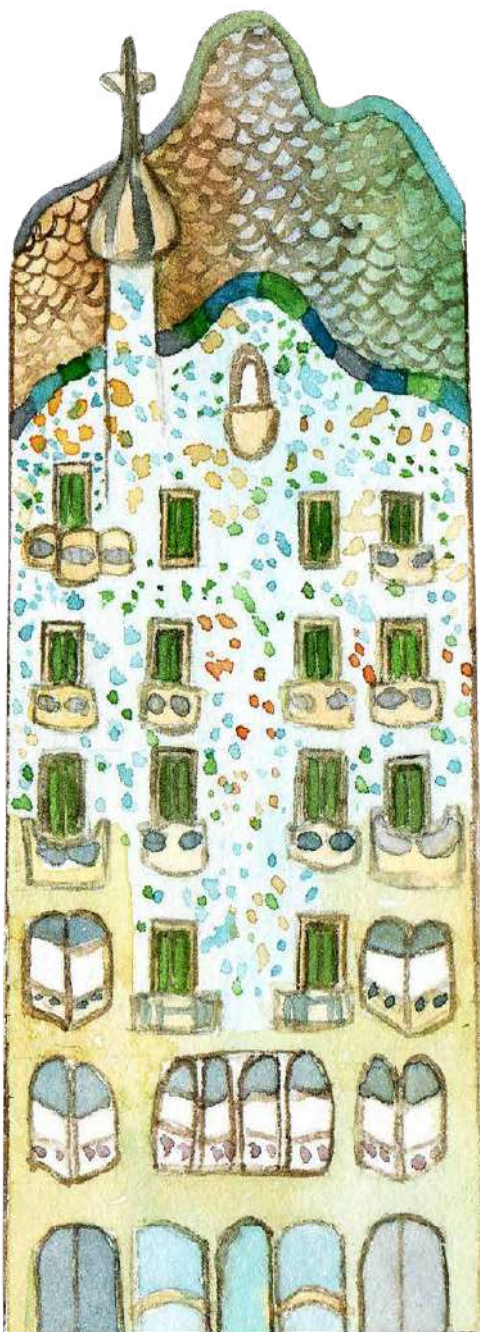
Joe Curro

Board Chair, American Pilgrims on the Camino



American Pilgrims board members at the Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery in St. Paul, MN, on October 21, 2023. From left: Sara Steig Gradwohl, Allison Venuto, Jackie Saxon, Dave Donselar, Paula Jager, Joe Curro, Tom Labuzienski, Tom Coleman, and Bill Artz. Photo by a Sister of St. Paul's Monastery.

MEET YOUR BOARD MEMBERS



Joseph Curro



Ruben Mendoza



Bill Ortiz



Allison Venuto



Paula Jager



Tom Labuzienski



Tom Coleman

Welcome to our
new
board members.



Eryn-Ashlei Bailey



Rachel Ganzon



Luis Gussoni



Martin Peña

MEET YOUR BOARD MEMBERS

CHAPTERS

Rachel Ganzon*
Bill Artz
Paula Jager
Eryn-Ashlei Bailey

COMMUNICATIONS

Eryn-Ashlei Bailey*
Martin Peña*

EXECUTIVE

Joseph Curro*
Ruben Mendoza
Bill Artz
Allison Venuto

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Ruben Mendoza*
Joseph Curro
Tom Labuziensi

FINANCE

Bill Artz*
Tom Coleman
Joseph Curro
Luis Gussoni

GATHERING

Tom Coleman*
Rachel Ganzon
Martin Peña

GOVERNANCE

Ruben Mendoza*
Joseph Curro

GRANTS

Ruben Mendoza*
Luis Gussoni

HOSPITALERO/RIBADISO

Paula Jager*

MEMBERSHIP

Allison Venuto*
Bill Artz
Tom Labuziensi
Eryn-Ashlei Bailey

NOMINATIONS

Tom Coleman*

TECH

Luis Gussoni*
Rachel Ganzon
Martin Peña

** denotes committee
chair/co-chair*

Special thanks to our
outgoing board members
Stephens Lytch, David Donselar,
Sara Steig Gradwohl, and
Jackie Saxon.



Read brief Camino biographies on each of the board members at
AMERICAN PILGRIMS.ORG/BOARD-OF-DIRECTORS

October Board Meeting Report

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

The Board of American Pilgrims on the Camino met the weekend of October 20, 2023, in St. Paul, MN. The meeting began with a review of the eight Pilgrim Principles—humility, simplicity, flexibility, responsibility, collaboration, candor, hospitality, and gratitude—by which the board operates and a teambuilding activity.

To support the external relations committee, the group voted to approve work on another cultural exchange with a group in La Rioja for 2024 and discussed the proposed Madrid albergue project. American Pilgrims, along with other pilgrim associations around the world, anticipates contributing funds to this construction project. The board also spoke with representatives of the Australian Friends of the Camino to learn more about their organization and goals.

The board heard updates about four hospitalero training sessions planned for 2024. The first session is full and has a waiting list. The Ribadiso Welcome Service team was approved for volunteer staffing in 2024 and will be issuing an invitation to members to apply as Ribadiso volunteers. With incredible gratitude, the board thanks Annette (Annie) Argall for her long-time service and leadership as she steps down as Ribadiso team leader and as an hospitalero trainer.

The communications, gathering, chapters, and membership committees provided updates related to their ongoing work supporting pilgrims. The board remains grateful for the volunteers who help these teams carry out their work. One notable update is a plan to bulk-purchase shells for chapter shell ceremonies.

Looking to the future, the board turned its attention to the legacy project, finances, and technology. The legacy project seeks to create a video and archive of organization history. Thanks to the generous support of pilgrims, American Pilgrims is in sound financial condition and projected to finish the year above anticipated funding levels. The board continues to look at ways to use technology to effectively manage organization goals.

The board discussed effective ways to onboard four new board members in 2024 and how to transition tasks from the offboarding board members. The board adjourned for the evening to enjoy a lovely dinner together hosted by a former board chair.

The following morning's discussion focused on 2024 goal setting. After meaningful discussion and an activity, the group resolved to center goals around: (1) international outreach, (2) preserving our past, (3) leaving a legacy, (4) expansion of appeal, and (5) organizational sustainability. The board will create action items for these categories at the January 2024 board meeting in Hunt, TX.

Lastly, the board thanked the four departing board members whose terms ended in 2023. We are grateful for the service of Dave Donselar (6 years), Sara Gradwohl (5 years), Steve Lytch (6 years), and Jackie Saxon (3 years). They have provided immense expertise, passion, and dedication to the organization and will be missed on the board.



REMEMBERING SANDY LENTHALL

Sandy Lenthall, in whose living room the groundwork for the establishment of American Pilgrims on the Camino was laid, died on November 30, 2023. She was one of the organizers of the very first Gathering of Pilgrims held in Williamsburg, VA, in 1998, and for many years she remained active as a coordinator with the Southeast Virginia Chapter.

In this special section, pilgrims who also have been integral in contributing to the foundational values and impact of the organization remember and pay tribute to Sandy's legacy to the pilgrim community.

You can also read Sandy's obituary in the [VIRGINIA GAZETTE](#).

I first met Sandy in 2007 at the Gathering in Williamsburg. She was the epitome of graciousness and warmth; she made me feel as if I'd been a member of her family all my life. Sandy's sparkling eyes, huge smile, and warm hugs will live with me forever.

– Daniel De Kay

In 2015, Ellen Eddowes and I began the process to start an American Pilgrims chapter in Southeast Virginia. We were advised to contact Sandy. She became a mentor, advisor, and "opener of doors." From Sandy we learned the history of American Pilgrims and we were so honored when she agreed to serve as a co-coordinator for our new chapter.

– Donna Looney

In 1998, Sandy invited me to the first Gathering of Pilgrims. She intuitively knew that returning pilgrims needed to connect with one another. I regret not attending that first gathering, but got to know Sandy. She was one of the kindest, warmest people I have ever met.

– Lynn Talbot

Sandy truly embodied the Camino spirit. I met her in 2009 at the first Gathering I attended, and we stayed connected. Sandy received the Lifetime Service Award at the 2016 Gathering. As then-board chair, I presented the award, and in my remarks, I described Sandy as the "Mother of the Gathering of American Pilgrims." She initiated the Gatherings, knowing that shell-shocked returning pilgrims needed other pilgrims, that it was important to find someone to share the life-changing experience of pilgrimage.

– Cheryl Grasmoen



Sandy and I co-hosted three early Gatherings in Williamsburg. Her contagious joy and compassion made every pilgrim feel welcome. She was the ideal hospitalera—smart about rest and refreshments, a patient listener, and had an intuitive skill for connecting people. The early Gatherings were literal family affairs, with Sandy's and others' family members drafted as kitchen staff, gofers, chauffeurs, and clean-up crew. Her husband, Ron, even suggested the word "gathering," like a flock of birds taking wing in unison.

– George Greenia



Black & White photo:
Sandy Lenthall on Camino in 1995.
Photo provided by Cheryl Grasmoen.

Color photo:
Still image captured from a video interview in which Sandy Lenthall recounts the early days of American Pilgrims on the Camino. The video was recorded at the 2019 Annual Gathering of Pilgrims held in Black Mountain, NC. [VIEW THE VIDEO](#)

We owe a great debt to Sandy Lenthall and our other founders, in whose footsteps we walk today, and we offer our deepest condolences to all whose lives Sandy touched.

– Steve Lytch

|| A GLOBAL GATHERING OF PILGRIMS ||



Steve Lytch, then-board chair of American Pilgrims on the Camino, tells a global gathering of pilgrims about the American Pilgrims mission in Monte do Gozo, Spain, on October 21, 2023. Photo by Emilio Escudero.

The Encuentro Mundial closes with a Galician quemada in Monte do Gozo, Spain, on October 22, 2023. Photo by Steve Lytch.



From left, Emilio Escudero, George Greenia, and Steve Lytch represent American Pilgrims on the Camino at the Encuentro Mundial in Monte do Gozo, Spain, on October 19, 2023. Photo by a generous pilgrim.

A Global Gathering of Pilgrims

by Steve Lytch
Lancaster, PA

On October 19-22, 2023, more than 300 people representing 135 pilgrim associations from 35 countries gathered outside Santiago de Compostela for the II Encuentro Mundial de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago, hosted by Turismo de Galicia and Federación Española de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago. I, then-chair of American Pilgrims on the Camino, along with former board members Emilio Escudero and George Greenia, represented the organization at this global gathering of pilgrims.

In his research, George has identified six stakeholders in every pilgrimage. The Encuentro was an opportunity for those parties to learn from one another and build trust in order to preserve the essential characteristics of the Camino de Santiago in light of its growing popularity. One key stakeholder is the community of pilgrims. Many of us delivered presentations reporting on ways our organizations support the Camino. Shrine custodians are another stakeholder group. Don Francisco José Prieto Fernández, Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela since 2023, attended the gathering, as did others responsible for maintaining the Catedral Basilica de Santiago de Compostela and other religious sites. Spanish government officials described ways that security has been reinforced along the Camino, investments in its infrastructure, and the challenges of balancing commercial development with traditional values. Tour managers and service providers, two legitimate stakeholders, were also represented. The Encuentro took place at the Monte do Gozo Hostel which is operated by the Carrís group of hotels. The company's owner has walked several Caminos and has since renovated a dilapidated and abandoned facility into a clean, comfortable accommodation for pilgrims and groups—an example of how the various categories of stakeholders are permeable. The last group of stakeholders at the Encuentro were journalists and scholars who talked about Camino history and culture.

In 2023, Americans made up the second largest group on the Camino after Spaniards. American Pilgrims on the Camino was held up as an example of what a Camino association can be. Our grants make a significant impact on the infrastructure. Our chapters are admired for the ways they keep pilgrims connected. Hospitaleros are our goodwill ambassadors. As George has written, “American Pilgrims holds to simple yet deep values, and we should insist on them in the face of the boom that inspires rather too much economic lust.” These values—community, service, gratitude, and simplicity—are reflected in all we do as an organization. The Encuentro was an opportunity for us to learn from our partners and to affirm our place in the global community of pilgrims.

MEMBERS SAY

“I walked the Camino Francés last year, and what I loved most were the albergues and the camaraderie with my fellow pilgrims. I especially loved the church-run albergues with communal dinners, which really encouraged and nurtured the relationships among pilgrims. I happily renewed my American Pilgrims membership knowing the support this organization provides to donativo albergues. I will walk the Camino Primitivo in June, and then volunteer for two weeks in July at Ribadiso thanks to the American Pilgrims partnership with that historic albergue.

– Laura, Renewing Member



José Ignacio, a Memory

by Daniel De Kay
Sebastopol, CA

He was a Boston Celtics fan. He was a huge teddy bear of a man. He was a friend to pilgrims. He was Father José Ignacio Díaz Pérez.

José Ignacio was a driving force in the founding of the modern hospitalero movement. He was the creator and original coordinator of Hospitaleros Voluntarios. He created courses for volunteers; he published *Peregrino*, the first pilgrim magazine. From his energy and love of pilgrims spread the idea, beginning in 1990, of opening donativo albergues to provide for all pilgrims, regardless of means.

I got to know José Ignacio when I was volunteering at Albergue San Juan Bautista in Grañón in 2004. He greeted me with a huge smile and a warm handshake. We had met earlier that year when he brought the first hospitalero training course to our Annual Gathering of Pilgrims in Santa Barbara, CA.

I learned from him what it meant to welcome pilgrims: a cool glass of water, a smile, a genuine “welcome, you are at home here.”

José Ignacio opened the doors of Albergue San Juan Bautista to all who traveled the Camino. His example and encouragement are what launched the current tradition of volunteer hospitaleros.

“We never close the doors to the albergue, except at night to keep the dogs out,” he told me. There was a small sign on the donation box in the albergue that said, “Leave what you can, take what you need. We don’t have a stamp here at Grañón; our welcome puts a stamp on the pilgrims’ hearts instead.”

Father José Ignacio’s open-hearted greeting extended to one and all. “They might arrive as a tourist, but leave as a pilgrim,” he’d say. When the albergue’s sleeping space was full, we’d open the choir loft, and then the sacristy, to accommodate pilgrims.

The evening spiritual sessions he offered in the choir loft of Grañón’s 15th-century church were open to all pilgrims. From the registry book, Father José Ignacio would read aloud the names of pilgrims who had passed through the albergue several weeks earlier and would now presumably be nearing Santiago. All who took part knew they, too, would later be prayed for, by name, as they arrived at the Tomb of the Apostle. After my first prayer session at Grañón, Father José Ignacio said to me, a non-Catholic, “from now on you will lead these.” I was terrified, but accepted. It was a tremendous honor to take his place during those evening sessions, and it is one of my fondest memories as an hospitalero.

Father José Ignacio eventually moved from Grañón to Logroño, where he opened another parish albergue, often staffed by American Pilgrims volunteers. His care for pilgrims and those in his pastoral care is exemplified by this quote: “a good shepherd knows his sheep by name.” He truly treated everyone as if they were his children. I am indebted to and thankful for his example, and for having known him. His spirit and example live on in the welcome that all volunteer hospitaleros provide for pilgrims along their Way.

Editor’s note: Daniel De Kay shared this reflection after Father José Ignacio Díaz Pérez was posthumously recognized for his lifetime achievement by the Pentafinium Jacobeo, an awards program that honors five individuals or organizations that have contributed to disseminating and enriching Jacobean culture. The awards were presented at II Encuentro Mundial de Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago, a global gathering of pilgrims held outside of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in October 2023. Steve Lytch, who represented American Pilgrims at the event, shared that Father José Ignacio’s award was met with a standing ovation and a rousing round of “Ultreia!” Upon hearing the news of the award, Daniel De Kay said of José Ignacio: “He was a lion on the Camino; his legacy is what guides our hospitalero program.”

Read more: [PENTAFINIUM JACOBEO AWARDS 2023](#).



Father José Ignacio Díaz Pérez, right, with Pope Francis. Photo provided by Daniel De Kay.

The Fine Art of Napping

by Francine Mastini
Tacoma, WA

As an hospitalera as on Camino, pacing yourself is part of the journey. In an albergue, you might have no pack to set down nor a shady spot to rest under, but you can find those stolen moments that your body and mind need. Trail or albergue, find a quiet place to cover your eyes and sink into a blissful 20-60 minutes of rest.

I hear you say, “I can’t nap.” My answer: “Did you always know how to [knit, grow a tomato, make a crazy awesome chili, etc.] or did you start rough and learn?” Napping doesn’t come naturally to everyone. Napping takes practice. Seriously.

A typical day serving at the donativo albergue in Logroño meant getting up; eating breakfast after the pilgrims had left; cleaning the kitchen, floors, beds, and bathrooms; and then washing my laundry and hanging it out to dry on the rooftop patio, all before lunch. (Did I mention the albergue has four flights of stairs and one very unreliable elevator?)

After lunch, there was grocery shopping, garbage hauling, showering, greeting and registering pilgrims, cooking with pilgrims, singing at dinner with pilgrims, praying with pilgrims, and then setting up a pilgrim breakfast for the next morning.

If this sounds exhausting, it is. Take a nap. Even if that means just lying down and listening to soft music through your earbuds for 30 minutes. A half hour a day is all you need to develop the fine art of napping.

After welcoming the typical daily rush of pilgrims, we hospitaleros would take turns staffing the office to greet late-arriving pilgrims. When it was my turn, I found the office chair was a perfect spot to rest. Feet up, bandana over my eyes, I took many nice little naps in that chair. Another space for quiet was my bed. With window shades drawn, eyes closed, and the muffled din of pilgrim activity beyond my door, I’d take 30 minutes of quiet time after my shower and before we began preparing the evening pilgrim meal.

Naps are a cultivated art form. That’s why there is a *siesta*. Here are steps to help you get started:

- **Step 1:** Plan. Arrange a time with your fellow hospitaleros for each of you to have a break and some alone time.
- **Step 2:** Location. Find a cozy spot where nobody can disturb you, preferably behind a closed door.
- **Step 3:** Dark. Block out the sun, either with a shaded window or covered eyes. I highly recommend the bandana approach.
- **Step 4:** Expectation. Set your alarm. Not a timer, which can make a nap feel like a task. This rest time is for you, and, in turn, your sanity and no-grump attitude benefits others.

What can happen if you don’t take a nap? You could get sick when rundown. Not only would you feel unwell, you’d probably feel horrible for your hospitalero mates, and you’d miss out on the rewarding experience of being an hospitalero.

Do everyone a favor. Take a nap!



The author in the napping chair at the Albergue Parroquial Santiago El Real, September 2023. Photo by Becky Rush-Peet.

**"I found I could say things
with color and shapes that I
couldn't say any other way—
things I had no words for."**

— Georgia O'Keeffe



Arts & Culture

Restaurants preparing for evening drinks and tapas on the Camino Portugués,
September 2023. Photo by Francine Mastini.

Hello Raincoat, My Old Friend

by Susan Thomas
Billings, MT

After Simon & Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence"

Hello raincoat, my old friend
It's time to don you once again
Because the mist is softly creeping
And the rain is slowing seeping And I can't see
Amid the sound of raindrops
I am walking now in dripping misery

"Fool," said I, "why am I here?
This rain will never end I fear.
My Brierley is soaked and wet.
I cannot see a café yet."
But my fears like silent teardrops fell
And echoed in the sound of raindrops

On pilgrim trails we plodded on
To walk this day's half-marathon
'Neath a eucalyptus overhang
I turned my jacket to the cold and rain
When my heart was warmed
by the sight of a yellow sign
A guide divine
That touched the sound of raindrops



A rain spattered Camino arrow points the way.
Porto, Portugal, September 2023. Photo by Francine Mastini.



The rain in the capitol of La Rioja.
Logroño, Spain, September 2023.
Photo by Francine Mastini.

And in the arrow's light I saw
Ten million pilgrims maybe more
Whose ancient footsteps passed this way before
Whose courage spoke forevermore
"The Camino calls and we must walk the way!"
Despite the sound of raindrops

To Santiago we will go
St. James is waiting, this I know
We follow where the arrows lead
Through sun and rain we will proceed
And the vision that was planted in my soul
Remains my goal
Despite the sound of raindrops

The Beginning

by Lawrence Jones
Bristol, VT

(when the Camino ends the Camino begins)



Lawrence Jones (left) and Steve Lytch in the Plaza del Obradoiro in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, on July 23, 2017. Photo by Carol Lytch.

I stood by myself on the Mount of Joy—
far be it for me to be cute or coy—
for friends and others were with me there,
glimpsing the spires o'er Cathedral Square.
But tears unbidden came to my eyes
as I gazed upon the distant prize.
Five hundred miles lay behind;
I struggled to grasp this with my mind.

Silence came over me there and then,
a silence beyond my will or ken.
No words came to me, no thoughts were clear;
I only knew then to revere.

Some good long moments, then down the hill
and into the city's crowd, noise, and thrill,
until along a cobbled street,
with tired body and aching feet
the Cathedral spires loomed ahead.
There were still some streets we had to tread,
but then we rounded into the square,
and my pilgrimage *began* right there!



An unknown pilgrim kneels upon glimpsing Santiago from Monte do Gozo on July 23, 2017. Photo by Lawrence Jones.

Pilgrim Paths to Assisi

Book Review

Pilgrim Paths to Assisi: 300 Miles on the Way of Saint Francis

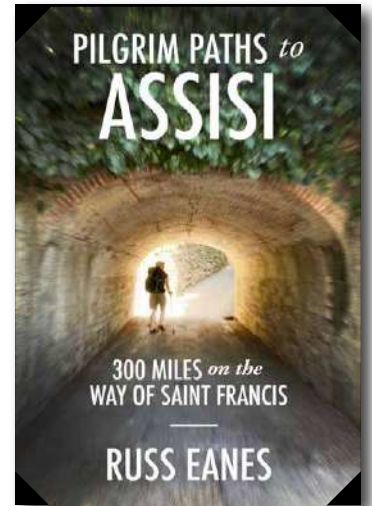
by Russ Eanes

The Walker Press, 2023

233 pages

Reviewed by Roni Jackson-Kerr

Tulsa, OK



Russ Eanes's debut Camino book, *The Walk of a Lifetime*, was so thoroughly enjoyable I jumped at the chance to review his follow-up book. *Pilgrim Paths to Assisi* discusses his experience walking the Via di Francesco, or Way of St. Francis, from Florence to Rome, broken up into three distinct stages of a pilgrimage undertaken between 2019 and 2022: Florence to Assisi in April 2022, Rome to Rieti in September 2022, and Rieti to Assisi in September 2019. The organization of the book is linear rather than chronological. Each section chronicles Russ's three treks with St. Francis, the first and second of which took place three years apart as the world grappled with a global pandemic that sent scores of yearning pilgrims into a different kind of meditative journey.

The Via di Francesco ventures through the Apennine Mountains, meandering through some of Italy's most historic and beautiful villages and countryside, and connecting places of significance to Francis of Assisi, one of Catholicism's most beloved saints.

While much has been written about St. Francis the man, books about the pilgrimage dedicated to the saint are a good deal harder to come by. This makes Russ's newest work all the more welcome and valuable to pilgrim literature, as it provides wonderful insight into this somewhat lesser-known European pilgrim path.

Russ does a lovely job weaving together real-time observations from the trail, the personal significance he derives from the experience, and his philosophical musings on the meaning of pilgrimage in general. As a writer and pilgrim, Russ is deeply reflective as he explores these sacred places of significance to the saint that has left such a palpable impression on his life and worldview. His deep admiration of Francis is contagious, even for readers who might be slightly more bereft of religious or Catholic affiliation, and the values of simple living that St. Francis embodies will immediately appeal to anyone with a deep affinity for pilgrimage and the sacredness of the natural world.

The greatest appeal of Russ's writing is a sense of ever-present kinship with a fellow pilgrim who meditates deeply on what it means to be a pilgrim and who fully offers himself to the experience of pilgrimage. He trusts that both the blessings and the challenges of the trail will serve to enrich him and lend meaning to the journey. May we all experience pilgrimage with such a level of trusting surrender.

The Cat Who Walked the Camino

Book Review

The Cat Who Walked the Camino

by Kate Spencer

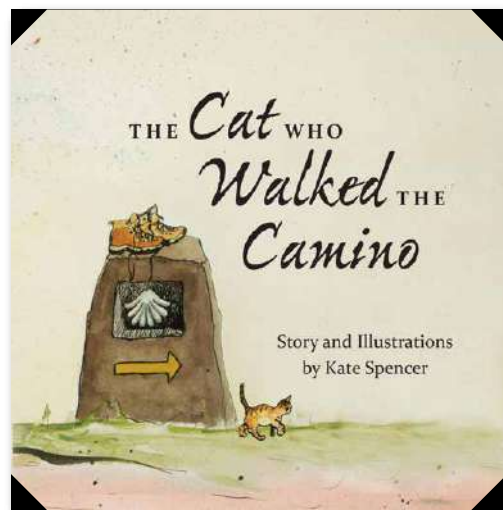
Self-published, 2023

45 pages

Reviewed by Amy Horton

Warrenton, MO

Cats were a common feature in the villages and towns I passed through on my three Caminos. As a pet parent, I was easily enamored with the feline friends I encountered along the way. Judging by other pilgrims' photos, I'm not alone. However, Kate Spencer takes her adoration for cats to a higher level in her beautifully illustrated book about a kitten her family met on the Camino.



Don Pedro Pepito's tale is told in the form of the hero's journey. The kitten reluctantly begins his adventure when he and his litter are taken to a farmers market to find new homes. One by one, the other kittens are adopted. Pepito is the last kitten remaining when a pilgrim named Lucia picks him up, serving as the archetypal mentor to help him begin his quest.

When Pepito gets separated from Lucia, he encounters other helpers. Some generously come to his aid, such as the pilgrims and locals who offer him a bowl of milk, a bite of sandwich, a chunk of cheese, or a nibble of anchovy. Others inhospitably shape his journey, such as the innkeeper who refuses him lodging and the snarling dog he meets in O Cebreiro. Each character he encounters serves a vital role in helping him advance along his path. The kitten reunites with Lucia in time to walk into Santiago de Compostela together.

This is an illustrated chapter book geared toward readers ages 5-7. Some pages contain dense text, and the retelling of some Camino lore was too complicated for the younger lap readers with whom Auntie Amy tried to share the story. This book would be ideal for pilgrim youngsters or for early-grade readers in your life who are curious about a pilgrimage you've made. It would also make a perfect gift for pilgrims of any age who delight in Camino cats.

MEMBERS SAY

"This group contributes to the Camino experience in so many ways—educationally, financially and spiritually. I am happy to help with a small fee each year to keep the spirit of the Camino healthy."

– **Chuck**, Renewing Member

We Are Pilgrims

*by Dick Carter
Seattle, WA*

Welcome, welcome Pilgrim friend!
We're glad to see you here,
But this is not your journey's end.

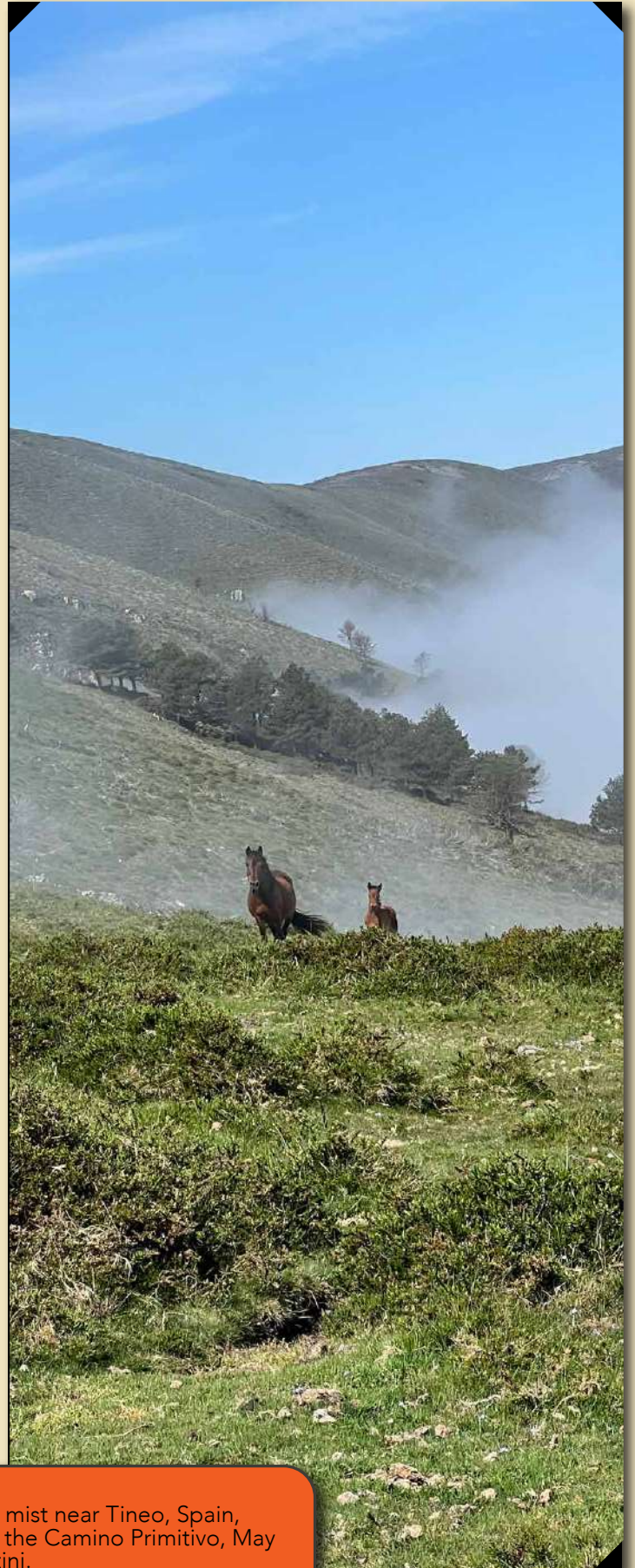
Ahead are prairies without song,
And rain-soaked fields of wild flowers
Each blossom marking someone gone.

There's the mountain of grief
And melancholy prairie,
And rivers of no relief.

We flow like rivers in their courses.
Memories flood our aching souls
Rapid and strong like wild horses.

We climb our own private hills
And cross our internal rivers
Leaving our work and daily drills.

We relish each refuge then journey on
Clinging to one another
And trudge ahead in another dawn.



Wild horses emerge from the mist near Tineo, Spain,
along the Hospitales route of the Camino Primitivo, May
2022. Photo by Francine Mastini.

Walking West on the Camino

Book Series Review

Walking West on the Camino—Encore Une Fois

by Johnna Studebaker

Two Pelerines Press, 2017-2018

219 pages

Walking West on the Camino—on the Vézelay Route

by Johnna Studebaker

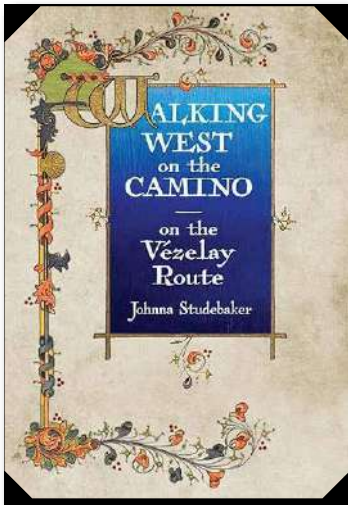
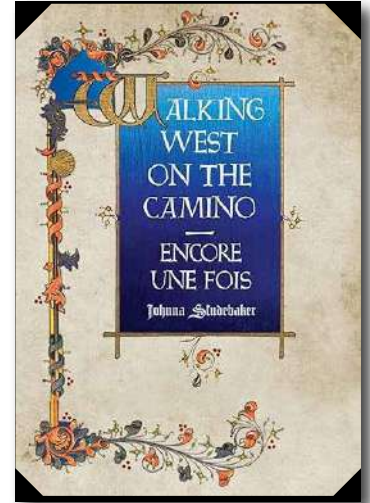
Two Pelerines Press, 2023

125 pages

Reviewed by Allison Venuto

Dallas, TX

After an injury alters her first Camino experience, author Johnna Studebaker convinces her somewhat reluctant twin, Marcia, to walk from Le Puy-en-Velay to Santiago in two-week stretches over the course of six years. The result of their experiences is the delightful *Walking West on the Camino—Encore Une Fois*. Studebaker follows up this book with a second, *Walking West on the Camino—on the Vézelay Route*, in which the sisters walk together from Vézelay, but when illness waylays Marcia, the author walks the last stretch from Nevers to St. Jean Pied de Port by herself.



Both books follow a typical Camino memoir format, with one chapter of narrative covering a day of walking. The author's joy and positivity leap off the pages as she experiences Camino highs and lows. The author's lovely original paintings featured throughout both books give a sense of the special journeys held within the pages.

Studebaker offers the reader supply lists and historical information to help place the Camino within a modern context. She also provides details on culture that bring the walks to life without overwhelming the reader. She writes to an audience who loves the Camino as she does, or soon will after reading her stories.

While, in the first book, the two sisters plan for Santiago to mark the end of their Camino, as with many pilgrims, the spirit of the Camino calls and the two begin planning their next walk. Unfortunately, as they return to pilgrimage in the second book, we learn that illness interrupts Marcia's plans, and the author continues alone. Walking after the pandemic, Studebaker notes changes on the Camino as a result. This second path focuses more on Mary Magdalene, so the historical and cultural information the author provides may be less known to the average pilgrim. With an openness to see the varied ways the Camino provides, Studebaker's obvious delight in the lessons of the Camino will be a strong reminder for seasoned pilgrims and a beginning lesson to those planning their first walk.

These Camino love letters palpably bring the Camino spirit to life, and I hope the author writes a third installment for added sustenance.

The Heart of the Camino

*by Kate Enderlin
Salem, MA*

Walking, walking, walking
And as I walk along
Silently thoughts enter
Almost missed at first
But persistence helps

Thoughts without words
Finally an emotion
In my chest
There is a feeling
Still no words

It is a warm feeling
Emanating from my heart
Each beat pulses
An Inner Peace
Throughout my body

Author's note: Being in nature for days at a time on the Camino's sacred ground, you become one with it. There really are no appropriate words for the sense of wonderment. This poem is a feeble explanation of my experience.



From left: Sara Goldberg, Kristina Jacobsen, and Morgan Peterson walk a labyrinth outside of Astorga, Spain, October 2023. Photo by Becky Rush-Peet.



"Ultreia." Watercolor and graphite by Eileen Logsdon Bugee. This homage to the artist's Camino brightly echoes the vibrant cobalt blue and warm yellow of Camino markers. Softly colored flowers morph into scallop shells, and flowing upward, names of villages through which the Camino Francés passes.

Finisterre

*by Mark Peterson
Santa Rosa, CA*

The end of the world on the coast of Spain. The lighthouse stands tall amongst the ocean waves crashing against the rocks. The light beckons all to come and rest. It's an ending point and a starting point. An inspiration.

Pilgrims finish their five hundred mile journey here. They've walked weeks to arrive. A daily struggle to reach this place. It's beautiful here at the end of the world. Air is fresh. Wind is strong. You taste the salt. Hear the roar of the waves. Bask in the sun.

Many pilgrims have burned their weathered shoes on these rocks. Others throw them into the ocean. Decisions are made here. Visions are seen. Promises are given.

Some say this is where the Camino ends. Here at the end of the world. They're mistaken. It doesn't end here. The pilgrim continues to walk their Camino back in their own town, at their job, in their school, with their family and friends. In many ways their Camino begins here.

Finisterre.

The end of the world.

The end of your Camino.

The beginning of your Camino.

The beginning of the rest of your life.

The beginning of your changed life.

Finisterre.

The end and the beginning.



Silence Speaks

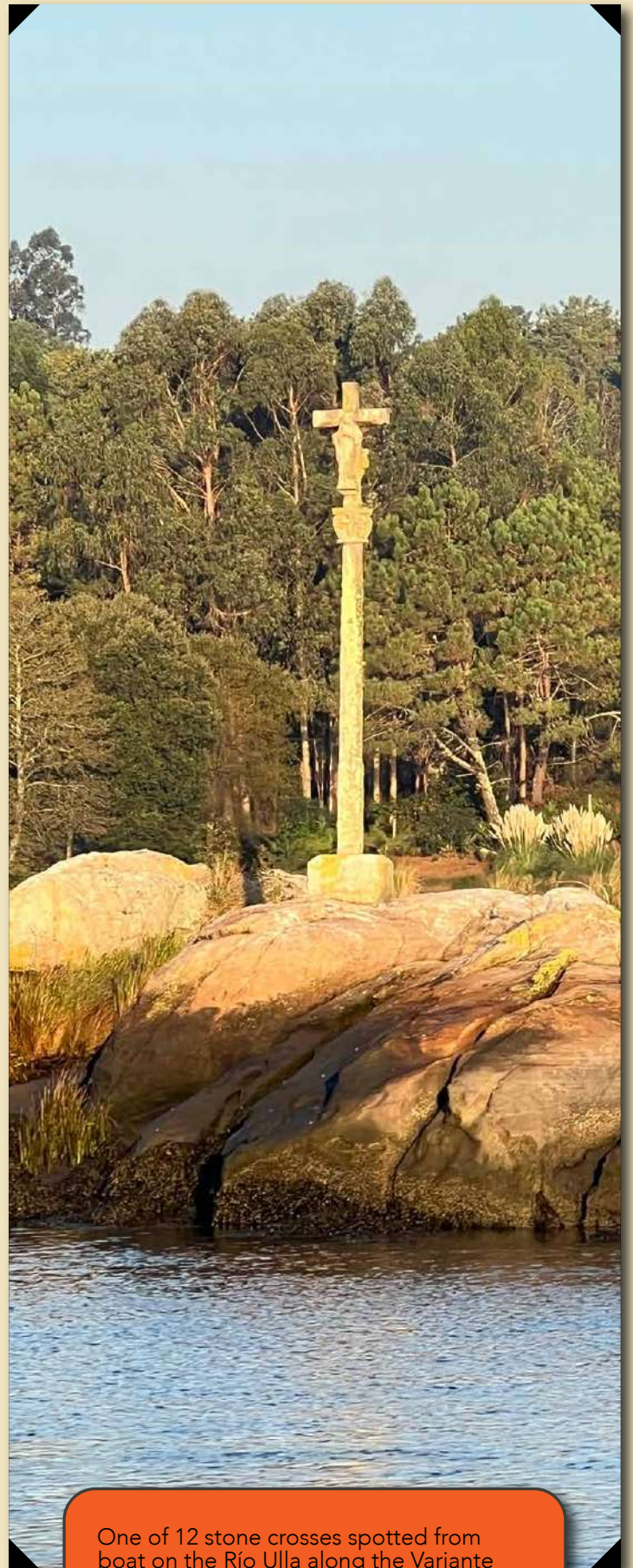
*by Skye Wagoner
San Clemente, CA*

To talk without speaking
Every facial expression takes on new meaning
Each flick of my fingers
And shrug of my shoulders
Does not leave me any colder
Without talking to others
My voice promised to the ether
I've found the lonely person's cure
Nothing births more intimate communication
Than holding an audience without words

This form of connection is a newfound vacation
From the prison hold of able conversation
There is no pressure to respond
And it inevitably invokes an intimate bond
With the other, with you, and language itself
The dictionary on the shelf
And charades out to engage
Beings around the world
With nothing
but
space

Words often leave us tongue-tied
Unable to understand and listless when we listen
Silence is the boundless space of blank paper
Beautiful when not marred by scribbles from a pen

Author's note: This poem was inspired by the vow of silence I took while walking the Camino Francés in the summer of 2023.



One of 12 stone crosses spotted from boat on the Río Ulla along the Variante Espiritual of the Camino Portugués, October 2023. Photo by Becky Rush-Peet.

"Where the spirit does not work with the hand,
there is no art."

– Leonardo da Vinci



Sign in Mos, Portugal, celebrating the tradition of regional
tattooing, September 2023. Photo by Francine Mastini.

Medieval Wanders and Wonders

Book Review

Medieval Wanders and Wonders: Understanding Northern Spain and the Camino de Santiago

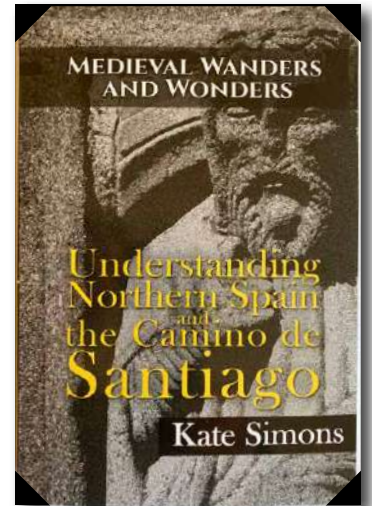
by Kate Simons

Austin Macauley Publishers Ltd., 2017

296 pages

Reviewed by Jerald Stroebele

Anchorage, AK



I was reading *Sinning Across Spain* by Ailsa Piper when I found another book written by a hardy Australian woman pilgrim. Kate Simons walked the Camino Francés in 2010 and returned to Spain two years later with her husband. This time they followed the Camino using public transportation so she could spend more time visiting the castles, cathedrals, churches, and cemeteries along the way. Simons is a research fellow and teacher at Federation University Australia. Her research skills are obvious as you read this book. She was raised in the Anglican Church. She writes a little about medieval life and a lot about Christian life in Europe and Catholic life in Spain in medieval times, explaining the intense draw of pilgrimage.

This is not a typical Camino memoir with tales of blisters on feet, bed bugs in albergues, and marathon kilometer days. It is a serious discussion that weaves a tale of history relating the medieval past to present places on the Camino Francés. If you are like me and look up and around in cathedrals and churches when in Spain, this book will explain a lot. The chapter on cathedrals reveals that medieval artists followed rigid structure taught by their masters. This sometimes gory and frightful art showing suffering in Hell was well understood and expected by religious medievals. Here are excellent descriptions of cathedral origins, designs, construction, and very ordered use. Similar attention is given to monasteries and cemeteries, and death and dying in medieval times. Simons explains “the ardent medieval desire to access the divine and immortality.”

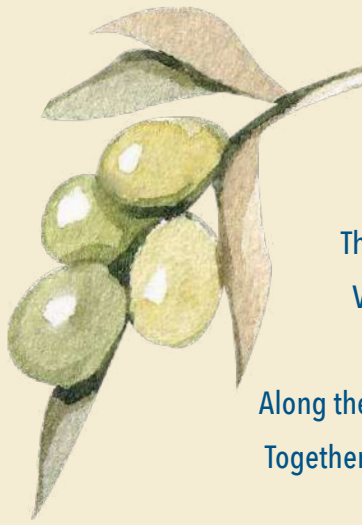
The last chapter addresses the medieval obsession with the virginity of Mary, mother of Jesus, and has detailed discussions of sexuality in medieval Spain. The final discussion is about *Semana Santa*, Holy Week in Spain.

If you really want to know what the Camino de Santiago was like in medieval times, read this book. This is a great reference work, well told and compelling reading. If you bought this book only for its bibliography and cited works, you would be getting a bargain.

MEMBERS SAY

“We were lucky enough to participate in the inaugural Camino cultural program in Estella in May 2023, where we met so many wonderful and amazing people in Spain. After that experience, I decided to renew as a lifetime member. Several other American Pilgrims who participated in the cultural experience were lifetime members and they spoke about how our membership dues help support the communities along the Camino. Even if I never get back to Spain, though I really hope to, I am happy knowing I am contributing something to support the Camino.”

– Paula, Lifetime Member



On the Via de la Plata

*by Meg Hunter
Pacifica, CA*

This Spanish map shows the Camino trails in red lines,
Veins of blood moving toward the heart of Santiago.

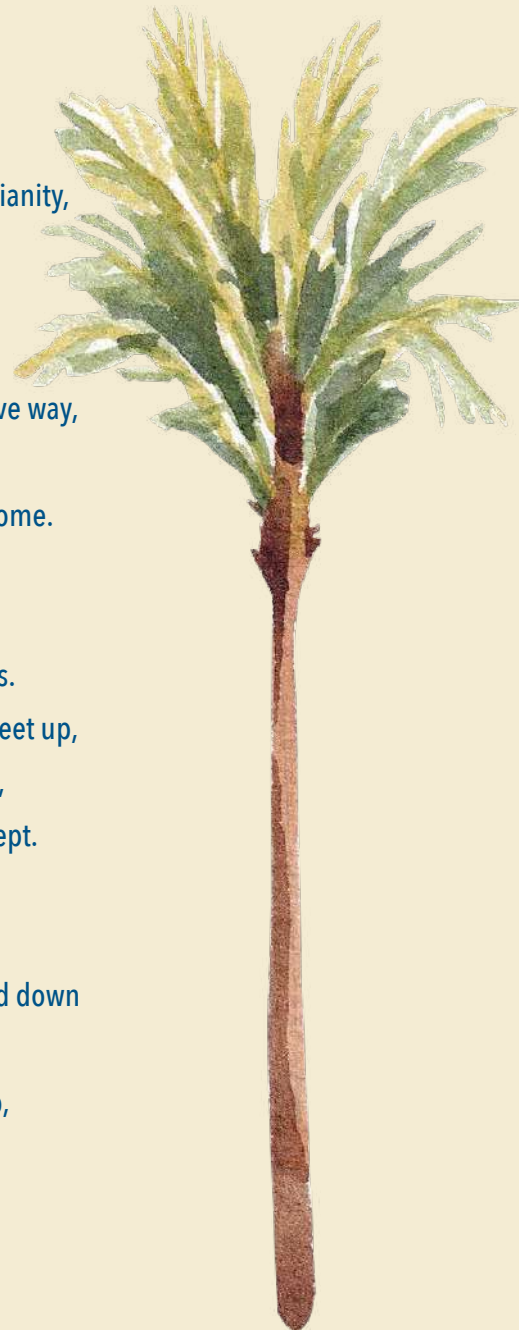
Does blood flow like we did?
Along the roads and paths, up the slick slate and down the riverbed?
Together by chance or maybe design, that pulsing vein encircles us.

Or were we a Celtic spiral of spider web surging toward the middle,
Along the clear lines, through empty villages and ancient cities
To where old lives die and new ones begin?
We are forever bound by those silver threads.

We followed the Roman road, from the edge of Christianity,
From the start of wars, to the soul of Spain.
We walked a way of stones laid long ago,
Now rutted by wooden carts.
How many must have traveled here for the stone to give way,
Rather than the wood?
Today we make new paths that lead from home to home.

Is suffering the point? Or is it joy?
One step after another, more than a million times.
We suffered the joy of a common meal, the random meet up,
Our breath mingling in the air of a shared room,
Our dreams intertwining and overlapping as we slept.
I still meet you there, in my quiet nights.

In every church we entered, the blood of Christ dripped down
Until, at Saint Mary of the Sea in Barcelona,
The bare gold cross rose triumphantly up and up,
Past the altar, past the scorch marks,
On its way to heaven.



Another Occasion

by Irene Calvo
Seattle, WA

*Here's another occasion, she said, for you to yield.
Her palm unfurled, gestured toward me.*

Too injured to walk,
I had already yielded that day to a low stone wall,
passing hours near the ochre church of San Juan Bautista
past which other pilgrims trod, crossed the medieval bridge,
traversed the town, and vanished into heat waves.
The scant shops opened, closed, opened again
as I watched the light lengthen
from my place on the wall.

Then, seating myself for dinner
in golden light overlooking the expanse of the bridge,
I watched her become two voices, two bodies
at the next table.
Would you like to join us? she asked, pouring me some wine.
Day was on the verge of evening.
Yes, I replied, taking my seat with the two strangers
who were not.

To the massive stones I yielded,
to the bruises on my feet.
To the roundness of the air I yielded,
to the cool warmth of the late sun.
To my bodily fear I yielded,
to the conversing at hand.
To that and more I simply yielded,
Willingly and not, once again.

I felt her smile and retreat,
Glow as she gentled herself inward,
Take my place on the same stone wall
To pass through the cusp of night.



"Art should be something that liberates your soul, provokes the imagination, and encourages people to go further."

– Keith Haring



Galician piper outside the town center in Combarro, Spain, September 2023. Photo by Becky Rush-Peet.

Pilgrims Way

"Ultreia!" A Conversation With the Song's Composer Jean-Claude Benazet

by Becky Rush-Peet
Enumclaw, WA

Many pilgrims are familiar with the "Chanson des pèlerins," more commonly known as the "Ultreia!" song. To some, a walk on the Camino isn't complete without singing it somewhere. The song was composed by Frenchman Jean-Claude Benazet, who I had the great fortune of walking and talking with during a songwriters' group in Autumn 2023.

Jean-Claude is a retired high school Spanish teacher living outside of Toulouse, France. He walked the Camino Francés for the first time in 1981, and has made many more Caminos since. He admits he is not a musician, saying he wrote "Ultreia!" over the course of four days in July 1989 while walking the Via Podiensis. In fact, he initially wrote the marching song for himself as a way to pass the time and motivate himself to keep moving.

In early August 1989, shortly after writing the song, Jean-Claude stayed in Grañón at the donativo albergue then overseen by Father José Ignacio Díaz Pérez. Father José Ignacio was excited by the song and decided to teach it to all the pilgrims staying in Grañón; from there, the song spread widely. In 1992, the song was also adopted by prelates in Conques, France. More than a decade later, Father José Ignacio moved to Logroño, where he continued to teach the song to peregrinos after opening the donativo albergue at the Iglesia de Santiago de Real in 2006.

The song's chorus, "Ultreia et suseia, Deus adjuva nos," is based on text from the *Codex Calixtinus*, the first illuminated manuscript of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. The phrase, containing a fragment of a dead language, became a famous exclamation repeated by medieval pilgrims. Ultreia means "onward" or "persevere," and is meant as an encouragement. Suseia means "upwards" or "growth," perhaps suggesting moving closer to God. Pilgrims would repeat the phrase for courage in difficult times along the Way. They also used the words for identification—one pilgrim calling out "Ultreia!" as today's pilgrim might say "Buen Camino," and another responding "et Suseia!," to identify themselves as a fellow pilgrim.

Next time you hear "Ultreia!," think of the song's history. Remember Jean-Claude, who composed it, and Father José Ignacio, who taught it to peregrinos from around the world who continue to sing and share it today.



Becky Rush-Peet (left), Jean-Claude Benazet, and Christy Cook in Villafranca del Bierzo, Spain, October 2023. Photo by a generous pilgrim.

A Pilgrim in Disguise

by David Larwa
Brighton, MI

My grandson Wyatt's Grade 2 teacher gave the class this art assignment: "Where would you hide your Thanksgiving turkey to keep it safe from becoming dinner?"

Wyatt thought about it a while. Where would he hide the turkey? Later that evening he exclaimed to his mother, "I've got it!" From the paper, markers, string, and twigs scattered across Wyatt's workplace on the floor, the Camino turkey emerged.

Wyatt knew that *Dziadzia*, Polish for "grandfather," was always safe when walking the Camino. He also reasoned that since Spain did not celebrate Thanksgiving like we do in the United States, the Camino would be the best and safest place for a Thanksgiving turkey to hide.

Wyatt says the turkey looks a lot like me, as it has my hat, trekking poles, hiking boots, and eyeglasses. The young artist was no doubt inspired by the many

pictures he'd seen of me walking the Camino. Wyatt also knew that yellow arrows point the way to Santiago de Compostela.

Wyatt received an "A" grade from his teacher and from me! The Camino turkey, which Wyatt gifted to me, is now proudly displayed at home alongside my Compostela.

In a cycle of life inspiring art inspiring life, I think often of Wyatt and the Thanksgiving turkey in pilgrim disguise as I safely walk the Camino.



A Thanksgiving turkey hides in disguise as a pilgrim on the Camino. Original mixed media artwork by Wyatt Falck. Photo by David Larwa.



"Arriving in Santiago de Compostela," original artwork by Pamela Paine, July 2023.

Art as a Personal Journey

by Pamela Paine
Watkins Glen, NY

In the days leading up to my most recent walk on the Camino de Santiago, I began engaging with the arts as a means of better identifying and processing my feelings related to the experience.

Each evening, I composed haikus to capture and communicate my take-aways from the day. Sometimes, I also created quick sketches in an effort to preserve a particularly special memory.

I didn't share these attempts with others; rather, they served as personal stimuli for attending more closely to my surroundings and internal responses. As an amateur artist (in both skill level and practice), the private nature of these activities removed them from an evaluative context, freeing them to serve their purpose as aids for personal reflection and growth.

When I returned from my walk, I completed a painting of the Cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. Preparing this painting served as a moment of catharsis, synthesizing, and expressing my feelings about arriving in that golden city.

I received such pleasure from these activities that I plan to incorporate art into all of my journeys going forward.

Unpacking My Camino Through Poetry

by Chuck Johnson
Champlin, MN

There is a saying, “You live life forward, but understand it backwards.”

When I returned from walking the Way in October 2021, I returned to a life unfamiliar. I had retired from my career as an attorney one week prior to beginning the Camino. When I came home, I had no routine. The house I’d called home for 18 years felt foreign, or at least less homelike than the Camino trail I’d just spent the past two months walking. Instead of feeling recharged, I felt drained. Emptied. Lost.

I needed to process my Camino. I began to write. Writing, in particular poetry, is my healing salve. The first poem I wrote was “So I Walk,” and writing it broke me, but not in a bad way. I truly needed and was tardy to this cathartic experience. I shared that poem with pilgrim friends and on pilgrim social media sites, and it was well received. I began writing more Camino poetry, not with any motive in mind, but merely to further explore my experience and retain its vividness.

I also started a deep dive into the Camino’s history, figuring a better understanding of the history might lead to a better understanding of my own experience. So I wrote about its history, its legends, its influential figures, and its myths, frequently using poetry to breathe life into what could otherwise be a stale subject.

For two years, I wrote whenever inspiration struck, creating enough material to fill a book. The process was at varying times joyful, educational, playful, nostalgic, celebratory, and emotional. My tear ducts often served as a barometer of my writing; when they filled, I knew I’d hit upon the correct combination of words.

I understand only now that the writing process was necessary to fully unpack my Camino.

Editor’s note: So I Walk: Poems, Songs, Legends and Lore of the Camino de Santiago, a collection of poems, stories, and songs by CW Johnson, was released in December 2023.

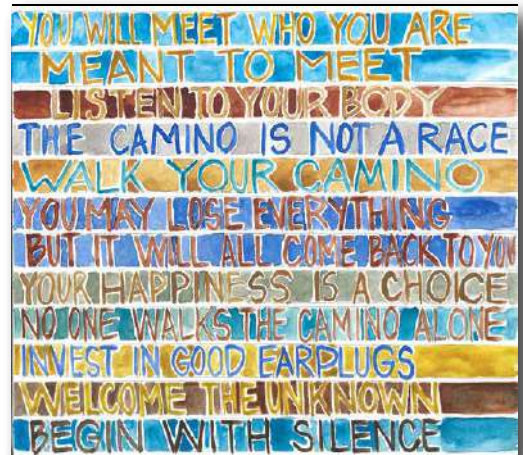
100 Things I Learned on the Camino

Melanie Mowinski
Williamstown, MA

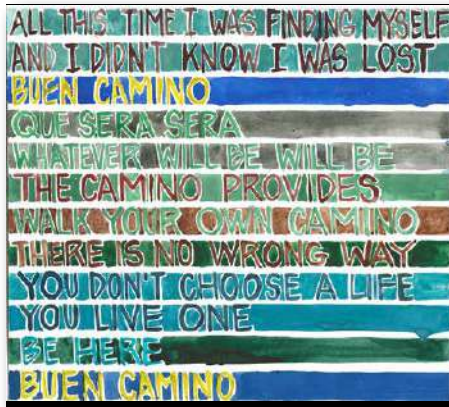
When I began walking the Camino Francés last February, I knew #The100DayProject, an annual global art project where thousands of people around the world commit to 100 days of exploring their creativity and sharing it on social media, was just around the corner. I thought “OK, maybe this year I won’t do it.” My pack was already too heavy, and what would I create anyway?

As the start of the 100 days grew closer, I had an idea. I could artfully capture on paper some sort of pithy statement I heard or read while walking the Camino. I was approaching Burgos, a city where I could get supplies, and I could tolerate the additional weight of paper.

Over 100 days, I hand-lettered with watercolor 100 statements about the Camino, one statement each day. The first handful of statements were things people said to me before I ever started walking, such as something an American Pilgrims member wrote to me in a Facebook post: “You will meet who you are meant to meet.” Using the Notes app on my phone, I also kept track of meaningful phrases my fellow pilgrims shared or words scrawled on signs and bulletin boards. Life on the Camino in the winter was surprisingly full of conversation, connection, and convivencia. One must be disciplined to keep up with writing and art making!
(cont.)



Detail of “Camino 100.” Hand-lettering with watercolor by Melanie Mowinski.



Detail of "Camino 100." Hand-lettering with watercolor by Melanie Mowinski.

The 100 days continued well into my return from the Camino, which helped me transition back to "regular" life. I reached out to the community and others via social media for suggestions. Most of those words found their way into the final lettered work, which measures eight inches wide by 80 inches long, and serves as a wonderful reminder of this special time in my life.

Here are some of the phrases:

- This moment or this place is as perfect as it can be
- Keep your heart open
- Find forgiveness for self, for others, for those you have wronged
- Pilgrimage is also an interior journey
- Make amends (if you can) with those you have wronged
- Live everything in right relationship at home
- Millions of people have come before me and I am not special
- You are in good company and you are special
- You are enough
- Always take the alternative path
- Let yourself be happy
- Everyone has something to teach you.

Creative Juices

by Sara Gradwohl
Mooresville, IN

I've walked four Caminos and the Kumano Kodo, and I have plans to walk two more in 2024. I find that while walking I'm in a heightened state of awareness and creativity. I can't put my finger on why. I might be inspired by the clouds, the flowers, the landscape, or the animals. It might be the unbelievable shades of green too numerous to count. There's nothing like a long walk to get the creative juices flowing! I carry a pen and at least a scrap of paper or a small notebook with me, even when I'm not walking the Camino. I never know when a flash of inspiration will appear, but I want to be ready to record it. Maybe it's a poem or a journal entry. Perhaps an idea for a fantastic trip. It could be the solution to a problem I've been chewing on subconsciously. Maybe it's just a "honey-do list," but I'm always writing something. My husband and friends tell me, "You know a lot of words and you like to use them all!"

I've been keeping a travel journal since 1989 and have countless volumes detailing my travels through more than 110 countries. In them, I've occasionally included my amateur sketches of things that caught my eye.

On my 2017 Camino, my friend and I designed our own sello during one day's walk, talking through the design until we stopped for a cold beer and I sketched it out. I was inspired by the travel sketching and watercolor sessions at the 2018 Gathering of Pilgrims, so when I walked the Camino Inglés in 2019, I carried not only my journal, but also a small box of watercolors and a sketchbook. I had fun (mostly) trying to express what I saw and felt with paint on paper. That's definitely more challenging for me than using words, but my watercolor of the Torre de Hércules in A Coruña is one of my favorites.

I'm self-taught and what I create is only for me. My thoughts and emotions are frozen in that moment. I enjoy reading through old journals and flipping through my sketchbook. They both bring me joy. That's the point of art, isn't it? To allow for self-expression and enjoyment. However you find your creative juices flowing, I hope you can harness them into something that brings you joy.

Pilgrim Spirituality Expressed in Song

*by Tom Friesen
London, Ontario, Canada*

I set off on my first Camino more than 15 years ago, and I could not walk without singing. The joy of the exercise; the beauty of the surrounding countryside; traditions of religious singing as heard in Roncesvalles, Eunate, Burgos, León, and Santiago de Compostela; and the companionship of fellow pilgrims was inspirational as in the song, “How Can I Keep from Singing?” Song was praise for the joy of living.

Singing lifted my spirits and linked me to others in good times and bad. I taught a Spanish peregrina with almost no English to sing, “Sing, Sing a Song,” echoing the words back to me. She told me on a subsequent Camino that my joy in song had transformed her. I truly witnessed her transition from a hardheaded, brusque businesswoman to a peregrina.

I was trained as an hospitalero by Mari Luz Melis in 2005. The training included her guitar playing and singing, as we were given resources that allowed for music and song.

When I acted as an hospitalero in the subsequent year, working on my own in Foncebadón, I directed a vespers service in which I used songs. A young woman sang “Amazing Grace” from memory, a school group sang a Hallelujah rap, and I sang Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah.” I heard the school group continue to sing it in the albergue that night, and the following morning I “sang them down the road” until they disappeared around the bend towards the Cruz de Ferro. Song crossed cultures and generations to unite us.

I have sung “Hallelujah” after dinner or at other appropriate points to inspire pilgrims to contribute songs from their own country. Watching pilgrims commune in song has been wonderful, particularly when the Koreans surprise their fellow pilgrims as the best singers.

I also witnessed pilgrims singing to assuage their sorrow over the loss of a loved one. An opera

singer sang “Ave Maria” at a Mass in memory of his daughter, Marie.

In Grañón on a couple of occasions, we have coordinated to have pilgrims stand outside a bakery and sing songs for townsfolk in exchange for fresh baked goods from the oven.

I also love to sing the pilgrims awake with “Gracias a la Vida,” “Tous les Matins,” or “Morning Has Broken.”

Songs lift our spirits and create joyful Camino communion.



“Camino Day 4, Erro, Navarra,” 34-inch by 34-inch oil on linen by Susan Abbott, from her “An Artist’s Pilgrimage” series.

Unexpected Gifts on an Artist’s Pilgrimage

*by Susan Abbott
Marshfield, VT*

I first heard of the Camino de Santiago while teaching a sketching workshop in Spain. My students and I strolled for a few easy miles each day until it was time to board our van to the next hotel. One evening while sipping a vino tinto, a group of dusty backpackers trudged past. I asked them where they were going, and they replied they were on a (cont.)



A page from the artist's Camino sketchbook, drawn in pen and watercolor while sitting in the Plaza Mayor in Burgos. Her sketchbook was her constant companion on her walk across Spain. Sketch by Susan Abbott.

pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. On the spot, I decided I would come back someday to be a pilgrim. A few years later, I returned with my small backpack filled with watercolors, sketchbooks, pens, and journals to begin my solo hike from St. Jean Pied de Port to Santiago.

Walking the Camino by myself offered the unexpected reward of deep feeling. Alone in nature day after day, I transformed from being a person who rarely cried to one who had a hard time holding back tears. I felt both deep sadness and great joy, and came to see these heightened emotions as a gift of the Camino. Pilgrimage provided a constant lesson in vulnerability and risk that has since served me well in my creative work.

Solitude also allowed time to draw and paint. My sketchbook was a constant companion, and I drew fellow pilgrims during coffee breaks, locals having dinner in restaurants, and views from the path. I learned that sometimes I needed to sit with my palette and brushes on the edge of a road or a bench in a village, and really look.

Writing became another important means of expression as I noted impressions of people and places along the Way. I experienced the surprise and pleasure of having poems pop into my head and had to pause on the trail to scribble them down.

While I walked, the idea came to me of a series of 25 large oil paintings that captured the beauty and variety of the landscape I was moving through. On my return to my studio in Vermont, I began creating these "Artist's Pilgrimage" paintings. Working on them over the next year allowed me to relive my hike across Spain. Over the last few years, I've shared the transformative experience of the Camino in museum exhibits of the "Artist's Pilgrimage" series, slide talks, and with an 80-page catalog that includes my visual art, journals, and poems from the Camino.



"Camino Day 50, Silleda, Galicia," 34-inch by 34-inch oil on linen by Susan Abbott, from her "An Artist's Pilgrimage" series.

Pilgrimage & Poetry: Fine Companions

by Cathy Hollister
Hermitage, TN

As many pilgrims do, I journaled along each of my pilgrimages. Noting the mileage, locations, events, food, and conversations, these journal entries serve to remind me where I walked and what occurred each day. But my journal entries did not capture my emotions and could not fully express the range of feelings evolving through each hour and mile. I was only able to capture the depth and breath (yes breath) of Camino through poetry.

When I started writing early on my Camino Francés in 2017, my poems were shallow, often about sights, smells, and other physical sensations. As I accumulated miles and blisters, I moved into a more observational stage, and my poems spoke of surprise and discovery. As I enjoyed more pilgrims' stories of their lives and reasons for pilgrimage, my poetry also began to show my own internal explorations. Toward the end, my poetry contained an element of sadness that the walk was nearing an end, but also a sense of fulfillment.

Many seasoned pilgrims say the first third of the Camino Francés is physical. The middle, which includes the long Meseta, is emotional. The final third is spiritual. Though not intentional, there was a definite poetic shift from physical at the beginning to spiritual at the end. My journal entries reminded me of what I did; my poetry reminded me of how I felt at each stage.

My second walk on the Camino Portugués in 2018 was shorter and more compact, and so was my poetry. A solo walker for the majority of this route, my poems revealed a new aspect, that of the challenges and rewards of a solitary pilgrimage. Unlike my first Camino, where I wrote poems throughout the journey, this time I only composed poems after reflecting on the totality of the walk. Different pilgrimage, different writings. Only fitting.

Similarly, I only wrote a final poem at the completion of my third pilgrimage, on the Via Francesca, in

2022. It encompassed the overwhelming sense of gratitude for the kindnesses of people, seen and unseen, that I received along the way.

I am pleased that many pilgrims share their experiences through poetry. As I read their poems, I relive my own thoughts and remember the profound changes that occurred in me because of pilgrimage.

Editor's note: A review of Cathy's poetry collection Seasoned Women (Poets' Choice, 2022) appears in the Autumn 2023 issue of La Concha. Her poem "Step Out," which is part of that collection, appears in the March 2021 issue of La Concha. Her poems "Stepping Stones in the Stream" and "Busco/I Search", which are not part of that collection, were published in the June 2021 and Summer 2022 issues of La Concha, respectively.

My Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity

by Deborah Weltman
St. Louis, MO

I'd never have walked my Camino, nor written a book about my Camino lessons, had I not first studied and taught the book *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* by Julia Cameron. When I began to read and do The Artist's Way work, I was hoping to jump-start myself back into creating visual art. That once-deep desire had retreated as I taught public school art, and later, opened a picture-framing business. Sadly, somewhere along the way, I lost my original joy in creating visual art.

What came from my *Artist's Way* studies was an understanding that my Creative Self now wanted to write, to tell stories that shifted the reader's perspective and encouraged them to become their Best Selves. I called this type of storytelling "receiving wisdom through the backdoor of the mind." My thought: when reading fiction, biography, and autobiography, we gain empathy for the characters, are open to new perspectives or ways of seeing, and may become willing to change our mindset. All these backdoor, unconscious changes affect us more deeply than being told, "Change your mind!" (cont.)



Mid-path waymarker made of stones. Camino Francés, Spring 2011. Photo by Deborah Weltman.

Over the years, I wrote daily Artist's Way journal pages. I also wrote fiction and personal stories on gaining wisdom. In sharing my own life experiences, I offered my reader a chance to learn by empathizing with me. I wrote monthly e-newsletters, designed personal growth classes, and, surprising to me, one morning as I journaled, ten years of "wanting-to-walk-the-Camino" popped out from my subconscious mind, traveled down my arm, my fingers, my pen, and onto the page in front of me. The Divine spoke to me, directing me to quit my "wanting" to walk the Camino and just DO IT "...or your life will be forfeit."

I walked! I had a perfect-for-me pilgrimage, complete with needed life lessons; great natural beauty; (mostly) welcoming people; some anger, pain, and rescues; and empathy galore! I journaled throughout my Way, and a plethora of soon-to-be-stories (plus memories of cross-cultural kindness and caring) returned home with me. My Camino lessons, my stories from the Way, offered me a perfect creative opportunity to encourage others, to show them how I had moved forward into my soul-adventure, and how they could, too.

I remain open to the muses. I will continue to write as long as the stories keep coming. Perhaps there is another Camino in my future with more stories to share?

Editor's note: A review of Deborah's memoir Camino Lessons: Losing Twenty-First Century Fears on an Ancient Pilgrimage Trail (Terra Art Publishing, 2021) appears in the Summer 2022 issue of La Concha.

Symphony of Snoring

by Hany Farag
San Bruno, CA

A symphony denotes the art of creating and coordinating sounds. Traditionally, symphonies are compositions by renowned composers and performed by skilled musicians. An unconventional symphony unfolded one night in a small albergue along the Camino Francés, initiated by unwitting deep sleepers and enhanced by willing participants. This unique, unrecorded performance became an unforgettable experience.

The hospitality of this small albergue was generous, with five euros covering lodging, dinner, and breakfast. With only a single hospitalero on this particular day, pilgrims shared household duties. Following registration, the hospitalero assigned dinner preparation tasks. Fortunately, I had to cut the potato, not the onion. Work performance was mixed; while onion peeling was delayed and the pair responsible for table setting vanished, the hospitalero did approve of my perfectly symmetrical potato cubes.

After a communal dinner, the hospitalero invited those who excelled in their duties, myself included, to a tavern across the street for *agua de bruja*, or "witch water," a type of gin. The select group and the hospitalero shared Camino stories, creating a joyful atmosphere. As the evening progressed, a second round was ordered. Around 10:30 p.m., the tavern's closing prompted our return to the albergue. Crossing the street, our lively conversation and laughter echoed through the quiet town. (cont.)

We stealthily made our way to the dormitory, guided to our beds by the faint light seeping in from outside. As we crept through the shadows, a deep, decisive voice pierced, “Quiet, please!” Our whispers ceased, and in the ensuing silence, we became aware of a distinct, robust noise emanating from a deep sleeper.

The sound resembled an intermittent suction of air, gaining strength in crescendo, followed by a gradual release of lung exhaust. It posed a genuine threat to our collective ability to sleep. A member of our group mimicked the earlier piercing voice, repeating the plea, “Quiet, please!”

When the deep sleeper remained unfazed, our stifled laughter erupted. From the other side of the room, a distinctive soft wheezing could not be ignored. Suddenly, a new sound, a controlled tune, joined the sounds emanating from the roncadors, or snorers. A few others summoned the courage to join in the tunes, and periodically echoed the refrain, “Quiet please!”

I couldn’t resist the allure of the first movement of this symphony of snoring. Nevertheless, and despite not having earplugs, I succumbed to deep sleep and awoke the next morning brimming with energy.

Song of My Soul

*by Sherri Caplan
New Canaan, CT*

I finished my first Camino last summer—six weeks on the Caminos del Norte and Primitivo, and then on to Finisterre and Muxía. In my third week, I left the Camino del Norte, turning toward Oviedo.

My hotel for the night was 45 minutes off-Camino, which didn’t seem too bad until I reached a long, steep climb near the end. The added mileage and unanticipated elevation gain made me more irritated with each step. Even as I recognized getting angry wasn’t helping, my frustration grew. Soon I was walking in anger instead of gratitude, and becoming frustrated with myself for being angry. Why is practicing self-compassion so much harder than feeling compassion for others?

At Right: God’s Fingers. A view from the Camino Primitivo near Grado on May 10, 2023. Photo by Sherri Caplan.

The next morning, I resolved to leave yesterday’s grumpiness behind and took a taxi back to the Camino to avoid that steep descent. As he drove, the driver started streaming music. I was instantly captivated by lyrics I’d never heard:

*“I got somethin’ in my heart, I been waitin’ to give
I got a life I wanna start, one I been waitin’ to live...”*

I almost cried. The song was expressing my exact feelings. My heart felt open here at the midpoint of my Camino, on my way to a “life I wanna start” living. The driver, sensing how moved I was by the song, played it again. Before dropping me off, he let me snap a photo of his screen to remember the song, a live version of Bruce Springsteen’s “Leah.”

I’m not a Springsteen fan, but that night I searched the song online and played it over and over. I was in love! Each listen made my heart feel so happy and full. I thought, “This is why I’m here walking!”

I typically prefer to walk in quiet solitude, listening to birds and feeling present to all that’s around me. But the next morning on the Camino, I was tempted to listen to “Leah” again, and I realized the song has a great rhythm for walking. Right then, it became my Camino theme song. I felt like the universe had given me this song—the song of my soul—just when I needed it.

Almost every morning thereafter, I’d listen to “Leah” on repeat, smiling, my heart full, my feet light, sometimes dancing along the route. During rough patches or in the final miles of a long day, I would often listen again to lift my spirits and put a spring in my step. I walked the Camino with a song in my heart.

Since returning home, I’ve listened to my Camino theme song almost every day, especially on walks. It instantly brings me back to the joyous feeling of walking the Camino, keeping that internal vibration of love, gratitude, happiness, and self-compassion alive.





Photo of an oil pastel by Jodi Tippet, based on a photograph of the shoes and paws traveling with the artist. Photo by the artist.

Castles, Climate & Creative Alchemy

by Martin Peña
Kenwood, CA

On my first Camino, the presence of ancient castles, fortresses, and churches triggered a surge of creativity and provided an avenue for reflection. Like silent sentinels, these ancient castles stood prominently, their stones whispering forgotten tales of knights, kingdoms, religious struggles, lost loves, and forgotten eras. Each castle became a canvas for my imagination, facilitating the creation of narratives that transcended time and experience.

Music accompanied me throughout my pilgrimage, enhancing the experience. As I walked, familiar songs from my past resonated with the landscapes, historical sites, and moments of introspection. One particular song from the 1970s, "Castles In the Sand" by Seals & Crofts, stuck with me. The title phrase brought to mind counterparts in other languages like "Castillos en el aire" in Spanish and "Batir châteaux en Espagne" in French, all expressing the theme of building or dreaming about something that is unlikely to happen, impractical, or even illusory. (*cont.*)



In envisioning "Castles in the Sand," I pictured the Ermita de San Miguel Arcángel in Villatuerta, bravely extending into the ocean just beyond the shoreline, confronting the relentless tide of rising sea levels.

THE ARTIST'S WAY

A major catalyst for my pilgrimage was a destructive wildfire that ravaged our California hometown, a clear result of climate change. The idiom “Castles in the Sand” became a poignant metaphor for the precarious nature of human endeavors in the face of climate change. The lyrics of the song, delving into the fragility of life, transient dreams, and impermanence of possessions, became both a companion and a mantra for me as I walked.

As I returned home to “the real world,” I attempted to draw meaning from my Camino experiences. I found myself immersed in a creative alchemy that combined photos, illustration, music, and poetry to explore forgotten places and untold stories. My Camino became my crucible, where my experiences, thoughts, emotions, and environmental awareness wove together into a tapestry of evocative images.

Through this process, I discovered a harmony between my personal introspection and environmental consciousness. The creative alchemy sparked by these entanglements not only illuminated my individual journey but also revealed the interconnectedness of humanity and the planet—a reminder that we all hold the potential to weave a more sustainable and mindful future.



In the depiction of “Castillos en el Aire,” my image places the 12th-century Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol in Villafranca del Bierzo amid the clouds as a divine gesture of forgiveness and perseverance.



The iconic hórreo, symbolic of the fertile Galician landscape, stands within a harsh and arid environment—a glimpse into a potential future where significant changes in rainfall patterns might reshape the world.

Editor’s note: Explore more of Martin’s Camino-inspired images at [MARTIN-PENA.MYPORTFOLIO.COM](https://martin-pena.myportfolio.com)

Walking With an Artist in Residence

by Joyce Detoni-Hill
St. George, UT

In September 2022, a group of eight clergywomen from across the United States trekked together from Sarria to Santiago as a way of walking out of the pandemic and returning into community.

Margaret felt the most called to pilgrimage as one transitioning to a new home and recovering from cancer. Since she was still recovering from illness, she was concerned she would not have the stamina to fully walk each day's stage.

Knowing Margaret was an artist, I suggested she make her camino an *Artist's Way*, so she brought along her watercolors and paper. On the Camino, Margaret carefully planned her walking miles along with art time. I was delighted to find her each day in cafés painting the images of her day. Margaret brought out the Camino artist in the rest of us, too. Pre-trip, she had created Camino coloring pages, which she brought along with markers to share. When members of our group arrived at our day's destination, Margaret would meet us, offering her room or a picnic table to gather and share our day as we colored together.

Toward the end of our Camino, she invited each of us to send her our favorite photo from our week of pilgrimage. Unbeknownst to us, our *camiga* was painting our photos in the evenings. At Christmas, we each received a large framed watercolor of our favorite memory, along with a group montage and pack of watercolor notecards of our photo favorites. I look at these paintings gratefully each day and think every Camino needs an artist in residence!

Upper right: Margaret Giliken paints at a bar in Ribadiso, Spain, September 2022.

Inset at right: A photograph of one of Margaret Giliken's framed works of art, December 2022.

Lower right: "Pilgrim Shadow." A photograph of a watercolor by Margaret Giliken, December 2022. All photos on this page provided by Joyce DeToni-Hill.



Letters from the Camino: Gifts

by Leah Wilkinson-Brockway
Spokane, WA

Dear Pilgrims,

Greetings from Milepost 4,544 of my Camino, where virtually I am near the coast of France. Except for a side-pilgrimage to Italy in October, I remain in Spokane. Our Northwest winter days are cold, gray, drizzly, and foggy with rare snow. In this season of Christmas, my mostly virtual Camino fills me with gratitude.

When I began my virtual Camino in 2019, every step became a prayer. I also came to realize every breath is a prayer, and every heartbeat, too. I was immersed in this physical praying, increasingly aware that we pray unconsciously merely by living. I begged to be healed, freed from suffering, forgiven, restored. I began to pray for others that they, too, would be healed, freed, forgiven, restored. I prayed to know the Will of God.

Along with regular, intentional walking, I've spent hours in churches praying, drawing, weeping, and singing. I sought wisdom from priests, a counselor, spiritual directors, friends, authors, and the Holy Spirit. Walking became my living. Praying became my life. I discovered so much beauty in it. In my suffering, I began to know more deeply our God who loves us and suffered cruelly for us. He rescues us from our trips and falls. Even if we are so injured that we cannot walk, He never leaves our side. What a great gift!

He comes each Christmas. The angels still sing. They tell us to walk to the manger in Bethlehem to find the newborn Savior, the Gift. Yes, every step is a gift. Every breath, a gift. Every heartbeat, a gift. Even the suffering, the blisters, the tendonitis, the cancer, the tears, the griefs we carry, are gifts. The well of grief is deep; I suspect that is true for each of us. It is all Gift!

Follow the Star. No matter what day it is, we can always go to the manger. It is deep in our hearts. We can kneel there and tell Him anything. I want to thank Him for all of it, for His coming to Earth, for my life, for my dear ones, for my pilgrimage, for my joys and sufferings, for beauty and harsh reality. I love You, Lord Jesus. We still need peace on Earth. May Our Lady and St. James continue to pray for us. Blessings, dear pilgrims!

Love,

Leah

Editor's note: This is Leah G. Wilkinson-Brockway's 18th reflection 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. This Winter 2024 reflection concludes "Letters from the Camino" as a regular series in La Concha.



Leah Wilkinson-Brockway in Monte Cassino, Italy, on October 17, 2023. Photo by a generous pilgrim.



"Transformation." Original artwork inspired by a dream. Leah Wilkinson-Brockway.

The Spirits of My Camino

by Mary Baldree
Waterloo, IL



"The Spirit of Possibility."

I started watercolor painting after retiring from 30 years of nursing. I also started walking and hiking now that I had the time. These activities cleared my head and allowed Camino dreams from years ago to re-emerge.

I joined the St. Louis Chapter of American Pilgrims on the Camino on August 22, 2020, and would arrive in Spain three years to the day later to begin my first Camino.

A few months before I left for Spain, I made my first painting of the Catedral de Santiago de Compostela, titled "The Spirit of Possibility."

In this first painting, I see fear and worry. Am I enough? Am I creative enough? Am I strong enough? Am I brave enough? Do I have enough faith? In myself? In others? In the universe?

Upon my return from Camino, I made a new painting of the Catedral de Santiago de Compostela, titled "The Spirit of Faith."

In this second painting, I see myself. I see peace, calm, and joy. This painting is a response to the worrying questions felt in that first painting. Its response: I am enough. Creative enough. Strong enough.

What I discovered through my Camino experience is that if fear is the obstacle, then faith is the catalyst.



"The Spirit of Faith."

Fear was keeping me from faith. Faith in myself. Faith in others. Faith in the world. But, faith won over fear! Faith allowed me to get to know myself on my Camino. Faith blessed me with fellowship. Faith showed me peace and calm. Faith and my Camino filled my heart with joy.

The watermark image and both paintings in this spread by Mary Baldree.

FINAL REFLECTION

Delight

by Suzanne Doerge
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Now that I have left this life,
my paintbrush at rest beneath my easel—
to help you be awake
as you walk the landscape of northern Spain—
I bequeath to you my sight.

Eyes of a painter, trained and inspired
so that you too will see—
shades of colour
shifting tones
textures and depth
shadows and shapes.

Awake! Don't miss it!

Newborn radiance rediscovers abandoned crevices,
entices the horizon to strum love songs upon
the sky, invites the thinnest of stems to be
at prayer with the universe.

Boundaries dissolve we are one.
Don't worry, my friend of pen
paused in air.

if you can't find the words—that palate
of infinite hues for describing what you see—
simply let the sights seep
deep

and from there, trust—
a syllable will come sweeping
toward you like that bird of the wild
just flown from the brush.

As you walk into these days behold
and hold all that astounds.
I bequeath to you my eyes.

Editor's note: This poem is from Doerge's collection, Footfalls: Poems of the Camino (Shanti Arts Publishing, 2022). Find a review of that collection in the Winter 2023 issue of La Concha. Doerge's poems "Village Square" and "Fields of Wheat," which are also part of that collection, were published in the Summer 2022 and Autumn 2023 issues of La Concha, respectively.

2024 LA CONCHA THEMES

The Annual Gathering of Pilgrims marks the unofficial start to a new pilgrimage year. The theme for the 27th Annual Gathering of Pilgrims planned for March 7-10 in Hunt, TX, is "Rhythms of the Way: Lighten Your Load." We have drawn on the Gathering's overarching theme to form a cohesive set of quarterly themes to guide a year of shared reflections, poetry, and imagery in *La Concha*. We invite you to think ahead to how your personal experiences, scholarship, creative works, and insights intersect with these themes *La Concha* will explore in upcoming seasons:

Spring 2024

Rhythms of the Way: How do you experience the cycles, repetitions, or patterns of pilgrimage? In this issue, we will consider the cadence of Camino. Did your steps fall in sync with a Camino family? Or did you prefer to march to your own beat? What lessons did you discover as you lost your pilgrim footing? What routines or practices helped you find your pilgrim flow? What ancient vibrations did you sense as a modern pilgrim?

Summer 2024

Lightening Your Load: What did you choose to jettison on pilgrimage? In this issue, we will explore the ways we strip away the unessential and lay down our burdens to make way for magic. How did a fellow pilgrim or hospitalero help lighten your load, literally or figuratively? How did a practical decision or disciplined practice open the possibility of pilgrimage for you or allow you to experience the Camino's primal simplicity?

Autumn 2024

Adding to Your Pack: What did you pick up and carry on your journey? In this issue, we consider the tangible and metaphorical souvenirs we collect on Camino. Is there a cherished trinket you acquired along the way or a talisman that helps you sustain your pilgrim spirit. What lessons did you bring home from your journey and how do you apply them in daily life? What Camino experiences indelibly stamped and changed you?

Winter 2025

Keeping Time: Returning home, what rhythm and tempo did you set? In this issue, we explore the ways we bring the rhythms of pilgrim life and daily life into syncopation. How did you cope with the post-Camino blues? How did you recalibrate your back-home routine to keep your pilgrim heart beating? Did you make radical changes or more subtle shifts? How are you keeping your connections to the Camino vibrant back home?

We invite American Pilgrims members to share their pilgrim experiences and insights on these themes over the coming year. Watch for our call for submissions and associated deadlines here in *La Concha* and in email to members. If you would like to submit materials, but are not yet an American Pilgrims member, learn more at [AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG/MEMBERSHIP](https://americanpilgrims.org/membership).

The submissions deadline for the Spring 2024 issue, "Rhythms of the Way," is Saturday, March 30. For complete submission guidelines and to contribute a 400-word reflection, photography, or other original creative work, access the [LA CONCHA SUBMISSION FORM](#).

We include as many submissions as possible in each issue. We may defer some items to future issues. We look forward to hearing from you.

Team *La Concha*
American Pilgrims on the Camino
[AMERICANPILGRIMS.ORG](https://americanpilgrims.org)