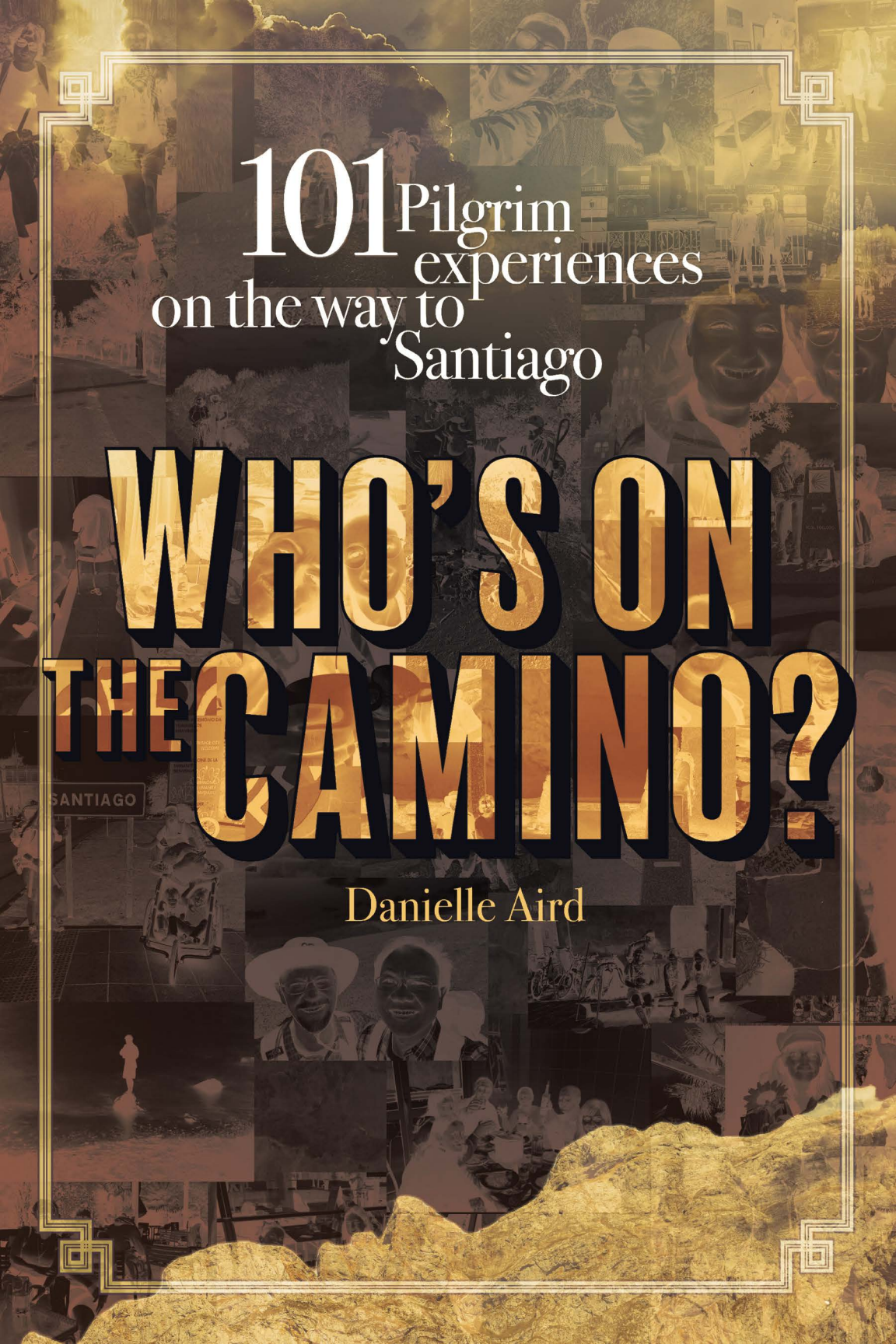




101 Pilgrim
experiences
on the way to
Santiago

WHO'S ON THE CAMINO?

Danielle Aird

Also by Danielle Aird

**THE FISHERMEN OF PROGRESO
SHORT STORIES FOR THE LONG FLIGHT
THE CAMINO IS NOT JUST FOR WALKING**

101 Pilgrim
experiences
on the way to
Santiago

WHO'S ON THE CAMINO?

Danielle Aird

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OUTSIDE BACK COVER ART SABINE IRWIN
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WWW.DANIELLEAIRD.COM

ISBN: 979-8-8541-0856-0
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
SECOND EDITION

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Introduction

If you are holding this book in your hands, it is likely that you have been to Santiago de Compostela or are hoping to go. Or maybe you are walking the Camino vicariously because it is not possible for you due to time constraint, budget, health or some other personal reason.

While walking several parts of the Camino Francés starting in 2018, I had gathered some of the stories fallen like pebbles over centuries along the path to Santiago. I related some of them in my previous book *The Camino is not just for Walking – Pilgrims, hosts and ghosts along the Way*. As I was planning my next Camino, I thought it would be interesting to collect more of those stories, but in the pilgrims' own words. I was also fully aware that it would be a Herculean task to keep a record of them while trying to get from one village to another.

One thing I was certain of: almost everyone along the way is keen to talk about his or her experience. After sharing a table with other pilgrims or perhaps just falling into step with some along the way, I would talk about my project and note names and contact information. Only one or two did not express enthusiasm. Later, from home, I reached out to them for a story and photo. Sadly a few did not respond: either my email disappeared into space or they got cold feet... I have met most of the pilgrims whose anecdotes you are about to read, broken bread with them, shared a dorm space or walked a length of the Camino with them. A few participants were friends of my original contacts. Some, like Rikou le Baroudeur were pilgrims who touched me by their postings on Facebook. Most are not writers, and there are a few, like Elad of Tel Aviv, who had to be coaxed, and just made it by the deadline (many times extended). I am glad I insisted: their stories are sincere and touching.

Occasionally you will come upon a passage in French or Spanish or Russian. The translation follows.

Please DO NOT read this book like a mystery novel. Although the stories are compelling and you might not want to put it down, RESIST! After a few anecdotes, put it aside for the next day. Savour each one like a good chocolate and its surprise inside. Sit with the narrator of the story. Invite them into your life for a moment. You will be in excellent company ranging from a couple of giggly young French students, professors emeriti, artists, musicians, prize-winning authors, executives, a recipient of the Order of Canada, vagabonds, a six-month pregnant filmmaker, fathers-and-sons, young people looking for love (and finding

love), others *not* looking for love, and finding love, grandmothers innocently and reluctantly propelled onto the Camino by their children (and becoming Camino addicts), people dealing with scary medical diagnoses, others walking to Santiago in a bid to recover from PTSD... Every single pilgrim on the Camino has a story to tell. Every story is different and inspiring in one way or another. In my pilgrimages along the Camino, I met a man with only one leg, another was missing one arm, a pilgrim was pulling a cart with his belongings, a couple walked with a baby, another with two small children... And I came across all colours of the rainbow.

The nationalities in this book straddle the planet. Some pilgrims were not fluent in English. With the exception of Denis Dumais whose writing was translated by his friend, when the authors wrote in a different language, I translated their essay (from French, Spanish, Italian, or Russian) sometimes using a translator app. (I only know three words of Russian!). Often I printed the original before my translation. For those who wrote in English, but whose main language is not English, I usually left their writing in their own words, as you would hear them if you met them along the Camino.

If there is one *leitmotiv* to the book, it is the desire to return time and again. Very few pilgrims are satisfied with one pilgrimage. And most will already be planning to return before they have even reached Santiago. Some will walk the same path over and over while others will choose another starting point, be it from Lisbon, or all the way from Le Puy en Velay in the centre of France, or from Andalucía... or they will walk the Camino del Norte, or any one of the many paths leading to Santiago. Some will tackle a pilgrimage to Rome... As this book goes to print, many, including Connie, Rikou le Baroudeur, Suzanne, Jan, Ralston, Paul and Monika are back on the Camino.

Some stories will make you laugh, Others will warm your heart, and even bring you close to tears. Many of the contributors wished to thank me within their testimony for giving them the opportunity to feature in this book. Since the stories are not about me, it was a dilemma, but I have decided to leave their comments in their essays. I am very touched and much indebted to them for kindly agreeing to participate, sometimes exposing their inner thoughts and feelings to readers all over the world. I thank each and every one of them sincerely for succumbing to my request, (sometimes after being probed insistently... "Of course you can write. If you can talk, you can write...")

I had originally asked each pilgrim to contribute a photo and a passage of about 750 words. Many adhered to my request. Others found it difficult to write their testimony in so few words. Eventually, I gave in and accepted longer stories. For example, after my repeated requests to Cathy to shorten hers, I realized that it was a story of sheer doggedness in the face of adversity, and just could not be told in one-and-a-half pages.

A note about spelling etc: Since some words are spelled differently in different English-speaking countries, I have honoured the writer's original choice. I have also left distances as quoted by the writer, be they in miles or kilometres. Some names of towns or villages such as Finisterre (Fisterra in Gallego) have multiple spellings; I have kept the spelling used by the writer. Some Spanish words

(albergue, hostel, hospitalero, hospitalera, camino, etc) have become part of the pilgrim's language. For that reason, I have chosen not to italicize them.

I wish to thank sincerely all participants, also my long-suffering husband Neil for putting up with my requests to review, print, touch-up photos, and comment. I am very much indebted to my son Anthony for his excellent artwork, patience and ability to turn these stories into a beautiful object. A special thank you goes to Sabine Irwin whom I met in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port and who never ceases to amaze me with her wonderful artwork; her Camino-inspired rug hooking figures on the back cover.

And as always, I wish to thank you, my readers. Without readers, there can be no writers.

Buen Camino de la Vida.

In the summer of 2023, Pilgrims lost a precious member. Without John Brierley's dedication to the Camino and his excellent guidebooks, many of us would never have ventured onto the famous path.

RIP Mr. Brierley





Sabine Irwin,
NOVA SCOTIA

*I had no idea what I
was getting into*

Just thinking about the Camino puts a huge smile on my face.

Our Camino was my highlight of 2022. After a few dark years, first losing my Mom to cancer and then being locked down with COVID.... planning our route through the north of Spain gave us some light at the end of the tunnel.

I can only say, it was the most amazing and incredible journey I have ever been on and the best part of it all, I got to share it with my brother Stefan who lives in Germany, (and whom I don't often see since I moved to Canada) and a handful of most interesting and loving people met on the way. What a time we had... Now I can understand why people do it more than once.

The daily walking, through little villages, gravel roads, flat and hilly, forever long....a Food truck showing up in the middle of nowhere just when you need it....a burning sun, flying dust, fog as white as a wall... sometimes getting caught in a rain storm....having your first *café con leche* and a croissant before you start your day.....a pilgrim's meal and a delicious glass of red at the end of our day....putting on super thin paper sheets on your bunk, the list goes on and on....

I was not prepared and had no idea what I was getting into, but at the end of our 42-day journey, I was the happiest and most fulfilledWhat I've learned from our pilgrimage? Nothing scares me anymore, I feel like I can tackle anything.... and my next Camino is in the plans....

Had it not been for my brother Stefan, I would have never experienced this amazing and life-changing walk/hike... forever grateful...



Who's on the Camino?



Who's on the Camino?





Beth Anderson, 25,
ENGLAND

I discovered the beauty of everyday things

I decided to do the Camino because of a quarter-life crisis. Okay, it wasn't actually as dramatic as that. I'd been working for three years in a job I enjoyed, but had found over lockdown that my world had become very small. I'd get up, work, watch TV, sleep, and repeat. I knew work was taking up too much of my head-space, but I had no idea what else I would do if I left. With the help of a brilliant career coach, I decided to take a leap of faith and leave my job, but I thought I would benefit from some thinking space and rest before deciding what to do longer-term. I've always liked walking and adventure and I'd vaguely heard of the Camino. I thought it sounded like a 'safe' ready-made adventure and a great opportunity to expand my horizons and clear my head.

I didn't know what to expect, yet at the same time my expectations were high. One of my friends had walked the Camino five times. He told me of the revelations he'd had and the friends he'd made. It felt like a lot of pressure for a trip which was supposed to be about recovery and discovery. And it was true; it was too much pressure. One week in, I had to have a word with myself and adjust my expectations. I had really enjoyed that first week, but had found that rather than pondering the big questions of life or making peace with the past, most of my head-space was taken up with quite mundane thoughts: What shall I have for lunch? How far away is the next town? Is that tree a good place for a wild wee?

Gradually, I changed my definition of success, realising that a good Camino was one where I had a good time. It did not necessarily involve having life-changing revelations. I discovered the beauty of everyday things: sharing a picnic with new friends, seeing the sun rise, or enjoying a cup of hot coffee in the morning.

Each day all I had to do was walk, eat, wash and find somewhere to sleep, and that was wonderfully liberating. What's more, these small daily steps added up to a not insignificant 800km journey.

I had fun. I was silly. And I was comfortable being silly with people I'd met just a few weeks ago, which is a big thing for me as somebody who normally takes herself a bit too seriously. I walked most of the Camino with the same group – two Australians, two Americans, one Austrian and one German – and so many games and inside jokes emerged.

I got much more comfortable going with the flow. There is a saying among pilgrims that “the Camino provides”. I found myself trusting in that. I enjoyed setting off for the day, not knowing where I would spend the night, and I got better at listening to my feelings. I'll be honest – there was a jolt back to reality when I returned to London and didn't have a bed for the night – but it's all learning!

In writing this now, I realise that there is a lot of learning from my Camino even if there were no huge moments of enlightenment and revelation. I came to understand that a good Camino was simply one where I had a good time, and I'm coming to believe that a good life has a lot to do with having a good time too. Ingredients for a good time, for me, I discovered, include appreciating the small things, having fun, and trusting that things will work themselves out. Add in a good mix of friends and a sprinkling of craziness and I'm happy.

I feel very lucky to have been able to do the Camino. Six months on, I'm still in the midst of the quarter-life crisis, now focusing on working out how I can use my life to make a positive impact on our unfair and complicated world. Again, changing the world might sound dramatic, but I'm hopeful that with little steps and the help of friends, I can get there. And I can have fun on the way.

If you're considering the Camino but aren't yet sure, I'd highly recommend it. The Camino will provide.



Teresa Pearson,
MINNEAPOLIS

Meeting my Dad on The Way

My Camino began in my mind ten years ago, and my walk began on April 30, 2022 after a friend asked if I would join her. I had no expectations other than to disconnect from social media and e-mail to ensure I would be fully present in the experience. I wanted my Camino to be a spiritual and reflective journey with some adventure along the way.

Even though I traveled with a friend, I quickly learned I preferred walking alone, yearning for solitude and wanting to fully embrace it. I thought a lot, sometimes asking myself what I should be thinking about, then eventually just letting my thoughts come freely, often surprised by where my mind went. Sometimes my thoughts were very concrete like – how my feet were feeling – sometimes it was more like – what am I supposed to learn from this? Sometimes I had no thoughts at all. One step at a time, I felt myself letting go of things I fret about at home. While I did have a playlist, I preferred the sounds of nature: babbling brooks, birds chirping, the sound of my feet on the gravel, gentle breezes. One day I wrote in my journal – *‘So how am I feeling? Physically – tired, sore feet, stiff legs. Emotionally – terrific! I’m not sure if I’ll have an epiphany at the end of this but only time will tell. And more footsteps. One thing is clear – when I get up in the morning there is only one thing to do and that is to walk to the next village and enjoy the path.’*

Then on May 17 I set out with a keen awareness that it was the anniversary of my dad’s death. Ironically, May 17 is also Norwegian Independence Day. Significant because he was full-blooded Norwegian. I’ve always viewed it as the day he was

released from the pain from his cancer. With all that in mind as we headed out, I was stopped dead in my tracks when a John Deere tractor drove right in front of me! You see, my dad was born and raised on a farm and drove John Deere tractors. I was born on that same farm and feel a close attachment to it as well. For me, on this day on this journey I was brought to tears sensing that tractor was my dad's way of letting me know he was watching over me.

A week later, on the way up to O'Cebreiro, I had another experience. In spite of the climb, and the heat, it was one of my best days. The views were spectacular – I could not get enough. After lunch, I kicked in my playlist and got lost in my thoughts, the music, and the view. Then I had an experience I cannot fully explain, other than to say it was extremely profound. I was listening to my music and in my own little world and as I approached the centuries-old wall along the path into the village the song *Dance in the Graveyard* by Delta Rae began playing. Below is the chorus – but please listen to it – the music adds so much more. I have no doubt this prompted what I was about to experience.

When I die, I don't want to rest in peace, I want to dance in joy, I want to dance in the graveyards. And while I'm alive, I don't want to be alone mourning the ones who came before. I want to dance with them some more.

Listening to the music and the words, I felt compelled to touch that wall. It was as if everyone who had walked by that wall, as well as my own ancestors, including my dad were all reaching out to me. I was overwhelmed. Tears streamed down my face as a feeling of love washed over me. As I felt my dad's hands touch me and the hands of all those others reach out to me, I felt a oneness and a connection with them, and any negativity in my body left only to be replaced by love, warmth, and tenderness. I promised I would do my best to honor them by carrying forward the love and kindness they were giving me. Was this my epiphany? I don't know. But I do know how it impacted me and still moves me to this day.

p.s. *In 2023, Teresa met with five Camino friends for their first annual reunion.*



Elisabeth Hermansson,
SWEDEN

The Camino was calling me

My walk was fantastic! I will never forget it. It is in my veins even though I was sick twice along the way and eventually had to quit in Burgos due to being ill with Covid-19. I started alone in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port at the end of April 2022 and stopped walking at the end of May in Burgos. My intention had been to walk to Santiago or even to Fisterra.

Before my retirement in 2017 as an environmental worker and later travel agent, had you asked me if I should do the Camino, I would have said: "Never ever would I do something like that". I have never done much exercise, and before my retirement also very little walking. Then suddenly, at 68, The Camino showed itself to me in a lot of different ways. People I knew recommended it for me, and I began reading books, watching movies and videos and following Facebook groups about it. I slowly started to realize that I could do this, I wanted to do this, and finally I had to do this. After almost two years of preparations like walking with and without backpack, buying equipment and reading everything that I could about the Camino, I started my journey. There wasn't any choice really. **The Camino was calling me!**

Almost every pilgrim along the way instantly felt like a friend. Since I also speak German and a bit of Spanish as well as English, it was easy to connect with most pilgrims. We greeted each other with *Buen Camino*, *Ultreia*, *Suseia*, and talked to each other while walking, about very personal matters. If anyone looked tired we supported each other. I met so many people on the way who had experienced personal losses, and it was amazing how easy it was for us all to open up and talk about everything with total strangers. I met people from around the world (Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, Russia, Canada, USA, South America...). We are all so very alike! And we all got along well. We had very few belongings, just for basic needs and it was enough. We shared with others something they had lost or forgotten to bring. It is a different and better world on the Camino.

Local people along the way always tried to help. When I was sick for six days in Pamplona, I had to switch hotels a few times because of previous reservations by other pilgrims. Every day when I walked between hotels, I found myself along the Camino. Almost every time, someone tried to point out the right direction towards Santiago. With my heavy backpack and walking sticks, I was so obviously a lost pilgrim. A kind man even invited me to go for coffee and recharge my phone battery, but sadly, I dared not go. And one couple, seeing that I was on my own, offered to take my photo with my camera in front of the Burgos cathedral. In the end, I could not go further than Burgos, but from St-Jean, I walked every inch of the way, even when I was ill. And I was fortunate to be able to attend a Pilgrim's mass and a concert in the cathedral.

I never had trouble with bedbugs and met very few and only mild snorers along the way. None of the things I had prepared for in advance did happen, but things I had not thought about did. My belief is that it is impossible to really prepare for the Camino. It is good to be in reasonable good condition both physically and mentally, but unexpected things will happen along the way. Speaking English and a little Spanish was very useful and much appreciated among us pilgrims and also by the locals.

I also learned a lot about myself, such as I have problems with trusting other

people. I have to check for myself. I also have problems with asking others for help. I am a loner probably because of those issues. At the same time I easily socialise with people and want to help them if I can.

This was my first long hike ever and my first time on the Camino. Despite suffering from diabetes, lymphoma, asthma, osteoporosis and food allergies, it was still doable. One of my biggest challenges was getting the right kind of food due to my diabetes. Often the food I needed only came in large packages which was costly, and I had to leave part of it behind.

Being able to send my heaviest things between the hostels was helpful and worth the price, but due to my illness, the cost of private rooms, Covid tests and medicines, I had to greatly increase my planned budget of €50 a day. And unfortunately, my normal travel insurance was not the right one for going on a pilgrimage.

My only regret is not having taken names and e-mail addresses of some of the people I met. I miss very much two wonderful ladies from Minneapolis whom I had met my first night in Borda and with whom I walked for a couple of days. I had assumed we would meet again somewhere along the way, but it did not happen. I really hope to be able to carry on from Burgos sometime in the future. My Camino isn't over yet. I can feel it calling for me once again.



Anne-Sophie Meheust

***Strangely, I was not anxious.
I knew that I would find
a solution***

I began my Camino in Le Puy-en-Velay in France Monday, March 21 2022, and attended the blessing of pilgrims at 7:30 in the cathedral. This was the start of my wonderful adventure ... I won't describe all the villages I crossed, all the beautiful landscapes I saw or all the people I met. No, I just want to write about what happened to me once while I was near Rocamadour, a well-known pilgrimage site in France.

At the beginning of April, we had snow. It was cold, and at that period of the year there were very few people walking on the French Camino. One Sunday it snowed all day long. I was alone. It was 22 km between Figeac and Lacapelle Marival. In the only village I crossed, I met nobody. It was like I was alone in the world. Fortunately, I had my bed booked for the night. My host was Chantal. When I arrived in the middle of the afternoon, totally frozen, I found easily Chantal's house. I rang at her door: nothing. I called on her phone: nothing. She was not at home and I was unable to reach her! So I decided to walk in the village to find I don't know really what (help, bed, somebody?) I did that one hour long and I met not a single person. Strangely, I was not anxious. I knew that I would find a solution.

Suddenly, a man arrived. He had just his 4 km walk done and he was about to go back home. When he saw me, he came and told me not to stay outside, because of the cold. He invited me into his house. He offered me a hot chocolate. That was so nice ! I tried several times to call Chantal without success. So Gérard (the name of my savior) offered me to stay in his home for the night. He had never been a pilgrim host before, but he was a wonderful one. We had a nice meal, we spoke a lot.

I forgot to tell you that late in the evening, Chantal finally called me back. She was terribly sorry. She had a phone call in the morning to cancel a reservation and she thought it was me. In reality, it was another woman for another day! She was so contrite that she insisted to invite me for breakfast the next morning. So after my first breakfast with Gérard, I had another one with Chantal. One more time, the Camino provided me much more than I could expect!

I could write more and more about the beautiful people I met. I really want to thank especially Pierre and Marie from Condom (very special hosts too), and David from Santa Catalina de Somoza (in his donativo you can deeply feel the Camino spirit).

And all the so dear new friends I met till Santiago and Fisterra after this more than 1600 km walk : Serge, Jean-Paul, Lyn, Laurent, Franck, Patrick, Dominique, Teresa, Nancy, Luis, Sophia, Francesco, Barney, Alex, Jean, Andrea, Claude, Philippe, Elisabeth, Camille, Monique, Romain, Geneviève, Hervé, Millie, John ... Thank you to all of you.



.....

Carol Brown,
CANADA

Auntie Irene, Mom and I on the Camino

For five years, after Dad had died in a car accident on his way to play chess with his buddies a few years after retirement, Mom and I read everything we could about the Camino. We planned on walking it together, but always, something got

in the way. Mom's sister Irene, who lived near us became very ill and had only us for family. She had never married and had no partner, so Mom took care of her for two years during the last stages of her illness and until her dying day.

In her younger days, Auntie Irene had been a world traveller, but a debilitating illness had eventually condemned her to a sedentary life. It seemed to me that when I was a child, every time we visited her, she was planning for her next trip. She always travelled solo. She said she liked to just decide at the drop of a hat what to do and where to go. And for some reason, she never wanted to share a room with a companion. She would scour the ads for last-minute flights and off she would go with her small backpack, ready for another wonderful adventure. And once she became too handicapped for travel, she kept her spirits up by reading voraciously and watching shows about other travellers' adventures.

In February of 2018, after almost a month of intensive care in the hospital, Auntie Irene passed away. In April, while Mom took care of her estate, we started equipping ourselves for the Camino. We decided we would take some of Auntie Irene's ashes with us to spread along the path. We planned to walk in September-October and kept busy shopping for the right clothes, the perfect backpacks, the boots... It was all really exciting... Auntie Barb had left Mom her small house and a fair sum of money, and we thought about her with sadness and thanked her each time we treated ourselves to the necessary gear for our long hike. We both knew she would have approved, and Mom had decided that it was what we would use part of her inheritance for. "Auntie Barb would be happy for us," Mom repeated each time she pulled out her credit card to pay for some of our Camino gear.

Meanwhile, we perused every website we could find about the Camino. My children are grown. The oldest is working and my two youngest are in university. They would not be home after their exams, both having found summer work in their university towns. Mom and I spent more time together than we had ever done. I would come to her house after work and order a take-out meal or cook something quickly, or just plan our camino over a salad and a glass of wine. They say the planning is the best part of the trip. Reminiscing is second-best and third is doing it.

Getting in shape and ready was so much fun. On week-ends we had long hikes together. I had no idea before, that Mom was such a good hiker. By the middle of August, I was spending a lot more time at her house than I normally did. And there were times when neither of us could sleep at night, we were so excited. We had never travelled together since I was a child. And during our times preparing, we would reminisce about Dad, and talk about my brother who lives in Australia. Sometimes she pulled out old photos and talked about some of the people I had never met like her grandparents or some great-aunt who had also been an adventurer. There were so many stories that I had never heard before. I think if we had not planned on doing the Camino together, I would never have spent so many hours with Mom and learnt all I did in those months before our planned departure date.

With everything purchased, and our plane tickets printed, we reserved a room near the airport for the night before our flight. In the morning, I went to Mom's house, and rang her doorbell. There was no answer. I rang a few times and

still no answer. I had a key which she had given me soon after Dad had passed away. I went in and found Mom slouched in her lazy-boy chair, a half-full glass of sherry on a small table beside her, her Camino guidebook on the floor by her chair. Her backpack was waiting near the front door.

God had decided on a different Camino for Mom.

I know she would not have wanted me to cancel my (our) plans. In September, I deposited some of Mom's and of Auntie Irene's ashes under an olive tree along the Camino.

Buen Camino, Mom and Auntie Irene. I miss you, but I walked with you in my heart all the way to Santiago.



Päivi Kallio,
FINLAND

***It was great to see “old”
friends and make new ones***

This was my first time on the Camino. I'd had it at the back of my mind since 2016 after I heard someone talking about their amazing experience on the Camino de Santiago including some mystical events. My main reason for going was to quiet

my thoughts by living the simple life of walking for a month. I wanted to hear my inmost being better and learn to trust life instead of thinking and planning all the time.

I am a rather experienced traveller, but I hadn't done such long hikes before. I felt that many of my family members and friends were impressed by my decision to walk the Camino and especially to go on it alone. I had some doubts too, because I was sick with different viruses before travelling. I managed to get healthy by the time of my flight to Spain, but I wasn't able to physically prepare myself for the journey.

Back home I usually walk, swim, cycle and do yoga. All this is rather gentle for the joints, so the start of the Camino, climbing up and down the Pyrenees, was very hard on my knees. By the afternoon of my second day I wasn't able to put any weight on my left knee. I went to see a doctor and luckily anti-inflammatory drugs and one day's rest did miracles for me. For a few days I sent my bag ahead to take some weight off my knees which thankfully got stronger by the day, and about half-way I was able to walk long distances with my backpack. I also had some issues with shin splints later, and once, one leg was so sore that I dragged it almost ten kilometres because it hurt too much to take an actual step with it. I then decided to take a train from Sahagún to León and rest there again for one day. I'm still in awe of how my body was always able to heal so quickly. I definitely got stronger during the walk and also lost a couple of kilos. An important tip for anyone planning their first Camino: take along kinetic tape! I used it from the third day on.

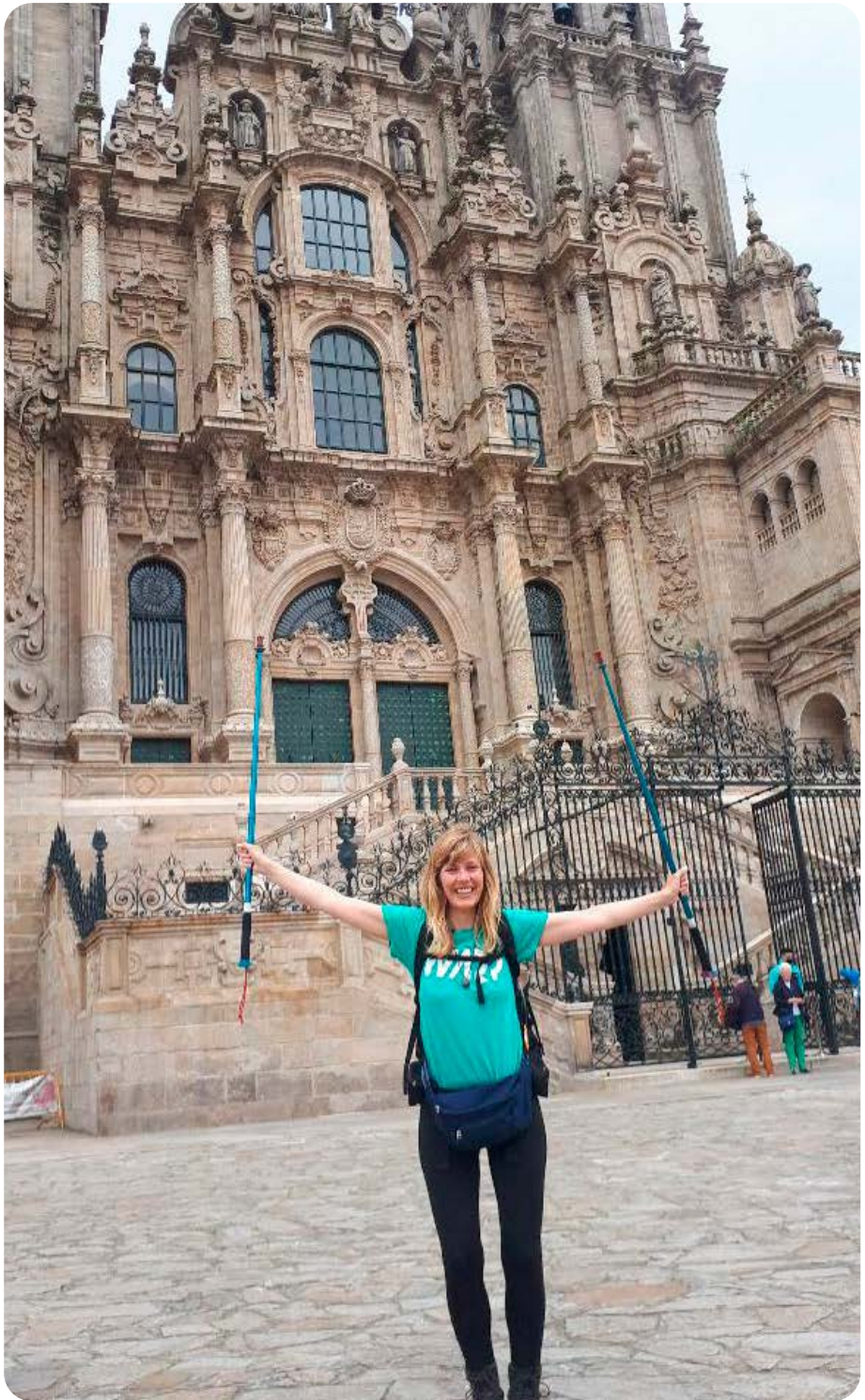
I knew there were going to be many people on the Camino. I was surprised by how many! The number of pilgrims in May 2022 (after Covid-19 restrictions had been lifted) was apparently some kind of record. But I have to say that especially in the beginning it was good to have all the people around me: the company of friends and foreigners made me feel safe. I immediately made many friends whom I would meet again and again for the rest of my Camino.

Since my aim had been walking in silence, by the second week I decided to walk more on my own. But in the evenings company was usually more than welcome and it was great to see "old" friends and make new ones. I got to know people from incredibly many nationalities and backgrounds and I'm still in contact with some of them.

There was word going on that albergues would be full because of the huge number of pilgrims. This is why most of us started booking accommodation for the next day or two, some even for the whole Camino! But before halfway I stopped doing this because I didn't want to worry or plan ahead. After all, I was on a quest learning to trust. And what happened? I always found a place to sleep, and usually a very nice one too!

I mostly stayed in albergues. I liked sharing the space with other pilgrims. For a couple of nights though there was an extremely loud snorer in the same room. Earplugs would do nothing, and after a night like this I would get up and start walking very early, as early as 4:30 or 5 am. Because sleep is important for

Who's on the Camino?



the body to recover from the day's walk, I recommend staying once or twice in a private room or even a hotel. A hot shower and sleeping in silence between fresh cotton sheets does miracles!

After the Camino, it was very hard to get back to my everyday life in Finland. On the Camino, the simplicity of just walking was great and, even with its hardships, made me feel content. For example when you only have two shirts and the other is dirty it's easy to make a choice about what to wear! I'm still struggling with the complexity of merely common life in our society. Could I make it more simple? I don't yet have an answer for that, but I did experience something with trust. When I let go of worrying and too much planning, I felt a trustful attitude towards life. This created a calmer and happier sense of being, and it helped to quiet my head and feel my gut/heart. While my inner camino goes on, I do hope to return to the pilgrim routes soon.



Luis Sánchez Bravo,
V. ALCÁNTARA, SPAIN

***Caminante no hay camino,
se hace el camino al andar.***

EXPERIENCIA DEL CAMINO

Estos sencillos versos, pero a la vez dotados de una belleza y sabiduría, perfectamente encajan en el Camino de Santiago.

No se realiza el camino, el camino te realiza a tí.

Muchas personas, siempre se refieren al Camino de Santiago, como qué han hecho el camino de Santiago, realmente han caminado por una ruta ya establecida, pero no han sentido que el Camino les hacía a ellos. No se han dejado atrapar por la esencia y la energía que envuelve el Camino.

Este transitar por las rutas del Camino de Santiago, en mí caso, es la tercera vez que he sentido la llamada de hacerlo. En un momento muy doloroso de mi vida, por la pérdida de mi compañera del alma, sin saber que rumbo tomar, misteriosamente un día el Camino me llamó, sin previo aviso, sin organizar absolutamente nada, cogí las cosas que pensé me serían más útil, y me dirigí hacia Francia, sin más objetivo, que caminar y sentir lo qué el camino me tenía preparado.

Llegué roto de dolor, pero desde el primer momento, sentí que no estaba solo, élla caminaba conmigo, élla me pondría gente para llenar su vacío, y élla me iría dirigiendo en cada momento. Tengo que decir que las dos veces anteriores que estuve en el camino, élla venía conmigo en persona.

Primera parada, San Juan Pie de Puerto, primera foto con una persona que durante todo el Camino, siempre ha estado presente, curioso verdad.

Última parada, Santiago, la misma persona que estuvo en mi primera foto, entró conmigo de la mano en Santiago. Nunca te olvidaré.

En el periodo del medio, que duró un mes, he ido encontrando gente maravillosa, he ido aprendiendo que siempre existen personas que están sufriendo, tanto o más que tú. Que la hospitalidad es un don innato, no un trabajo, la generosidad, la bondad, la alegría rebosan por todas las partes del Camino, tienes que saber buscarla y por supuesto saber compartirla.

Ahora en la tranquilidad, o tal vez la monotonía de mi casa, siento que el Camino me llama, tal vez no regrese de forma inmediata, pero sí regresaré, seguro que encontraré a gente dispuesta a escucharme y a qué las escuche, y espero reencontrarme con alguna de las personas que he conocido en las diferentes etapas que he transitado por el Camino.

Entré en el Camino, tal vez buscando una aventura, y después de terminarlo por última vez, sé que una parte de mí y de mi compañera del alma, ya forman parte de él. Yo he notado, el dolor, la alegría, los sentimientos, el miedo, de otros que pasaron antes que yo, espero que alguien, en un tiempo, se impregne también de lo qué allí hemos dejado.

Un abrazo para todos. *BUEN CAMINO.*



Antonio Machado, a Spanish poet, wrote: "The Camino is not made, the Camino makes you". His simple verses, endowed with a beauty and wisdom perfectly

describe the Camino de Santiago. The path is not made, the path makes you.

Many refer to the Camino de Santiago as something they have done, but in reality what they did was walk along an already established route without feeling the effect of the Camino. They have not allowed themselves to be trapped by the essence and energy that surrounds the Camino.

This walking along the routes of the Camino de Santiago, in my case, was the third time I felt the call to do so. In a very painful moment of my life, due to the loss of my soul-mate, without knowing what direction to take, mysteriously one day the Camino called to me, without warning. Without organizing absolutely anything, I took the things that I thought would be most useful, and headed towards France with no other objective than to walk and feel what the Camino had to offer me.

I arrived broken with pain, but from the first moment, I felt that I was not alone, she walked with me, she would put people on my path to fill her absence, and she would direct me at every moment. I have to say that the two previous times I was on the Camino, she came with me in person.

First stop, Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, first photo with a person who throughout the Camino, would always be present. Curious truth.

Last stop, Santiago. The same person who was in my first photo, entered Santiago hand and hand with me. I will never forget you.

In the middle period, which lasted a month, I met wonderful people, I learnt that there are always people suffering, as much or more than you. That hospitality is an innate gift, not a job. Generosity, kindness and joy overflow everywhere on the Camino. You have to know how to look for it and of course how to share it.

Now in the quietness, or perhaps the monotony of my house, I feel the call of the Camino again. I may not return immediately, but I will return, I will surely find people willing to listen to me and I will listen to them, and I hope to meet again some of the people I have met in the different stages that I have travelled along the Camino.

I entered the Camino, perhaps looking for an adventure, and after finishing it for the last time, I know that a part of me and my soul-mate are already part of it. I have noticed the pain, the joy, the feelings, the fear of others who passed me. I hope that someone, someday, will also be impregnated with what we have left there.

A hug for everyone. *BUEN CAMINO*.



**Ian Corroyer and
Stephen Buxton**

Our Camino de Santiago

Steven and I are ex-British Army soldiers in our early sixties. We were helicopter engineers in REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers). Our Camino walk was in memory of our late friend, Captain Christopher Butt who died in service after a long successful career, and we raised funds for ABF the Soldiers' Charity and St. Helena Hospice. Walking the Camino was something we had wanted to do for many years. Retirement gave us that opportunity although planning became more complicated due to the Covid epidemic.

Through a company called *Follow The Camino* we booked accommodation and used the baggage transfer service. Our rooms were always clean and tidy, had good showers and internet, except for Atapuerca. We slept sometimes in truck stops, other times in hotels. Some accommodation was a bit out of the way, but most were close to local amenities.

Being physically fit, our preparation was fairly minimal, but we walked sometimes as far as 15 miles to test our legs and lungs. During these hikes, we carried day sacks containing at least two litres of water, snacks, waterproofs, a warm top, spare socks and medical kit plus flip flops for the end of the day. We would be carrying the same for our Camino.

It is a good idea to do a fitness regime before starting. However, along the Camino, people of all abilities seemed to be coping fine. For shoes, we used a size bigger than our feet to account for swelling during the day. Ours were lightweight walking shoes which seemed perfectly adequate. We saw people wearing trainers and sandals. We did not use hiking sticks, but the majority of pilgrims do. One of our abiding memories of the Camino is the constant clicking of sticks! As for blisters, they definitely are an occupational hazard. As well, we noticed a lot of knee braces after the first few days, probably attributable to heavy backpacks.



We started in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port on May 1, 2022. The day was a bit of a slog, but the weather was good, which always makes a difference! That day, friendships started that would last all the way to Santiago. The feeling of safety along the Camino makes it natural to connect with other pilgrims. We never knew when we started each morning where our conversation would take us and we

never hesitated to engage with other pilgrims. Soon we met Danielle who asked us about our reasons for doing the Camino. She liked our story, told us about her project for this book, and invited us to participate.

Stephen and I had split the walk into 33 stages averaging 15 miles each, and incorporated some rest days. We used Brierley's *A Pilgrim's Guide to the Camino de Santiago* which seems the most popular. All stages are clearly marked, and we only had one hiccup. Coming out of Los Arcos to Logroño, it was barely just getting light. We followed the pilgrims ahead. After about 20 minutes, we collectively noticed we were on the wrong path! Much grumbling but a lesson learnt!

We had planned rest days in Logroño, Burgos, León and Sarria. Since we were usually finished walking by 2:00 pm, we had plenty of time to explore local sights, and in retrospect, felt we did not need all that time. Arriving in Logroño on a Friday, we found it to be a party town. Burgos and León were interesting, but we thought Sarria (where the majority of pilgrims start their Camino) felt a bit soulless. It is a good idea to do a bit of research beforehand about the larger towns along the way as most have something interesting to offer.

From Rabanal del Camino, the path down to Acebo is particularly treacherous. We met pilgrims who had suffered major injuries the day before, and between Villafranca del Bierzo and O'Cebreiro it was quite frankly a bit of a drudge, but we made it, stopping often to offer encouragement to some less able pilgrims and to make sure they were ok, and we were fortunately able to help some ladies suffering from dehydration.

Although our Camino was a physical challenge in memory of our friend, we were fully aware that all pilgrims have a valid reason for being on the path. We tried to be open-minded and friendly, even to the cyclists who occasionally seemed to want to run us down! And nearer to Santiago, where swarms of 100-km pilgrims fill the path, we noticed a change in mood. If you walked from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, there can be a bit of "us" and "them" in that area. We tried to steer away from that attitude.

Entering Santiago de Compostela, we felt more a sense of relief than euphoria, although not quite an anti-climax. We both had mixed feelings which we can still not quite put a finger on, even now months later. It was great to bump into fellow pilgrims met on our journey and to swap stories. We were lucky enough to get into the crypt of St James in the Cathedral early in the morning. We put that down to divine intervention! We also hid a scallop shell in memory of Chris in Santiago. Hopefully this will remain undiscovered.

The Camino de Santiago is certainly an experience that will stay with us forever. Some say it is life changing, others a springboard to more challenges. Many return to do the Camino often. Would we do it again? The answer is a firm "no". We both feel that our time would be better spent doing another pilgrimage or challenge. We were definitely fitter and less stressed at the end of our journey. But the Camino can change your life in so many ways. *Buen Camino!*



Louise Nickolinne Saffi Bruunn,
DENMARK

I had never hiked before

Several years ago I received my monthly magazine from my book club, and on the cover there was a picture of the book *Pilgrimsfærd on the Caminoen - Camini*

Francès. I thought for a split second: I want to go on that pilgrimage. Bought the book and put it in the bookcase because I knew it wasn't right now that it was going to happen. Suddenly at the end of the year 2021 I thought that now it was time, and it had to be in the month of May 2022.

I had never hiked before, but I knew I wanted to walk alone and I wanted to walk the whole route, and especially the feeling of humility was very evident. I was very busy in the spring at work, so I didn't get to read and study that much before I left, and I was actually happy about that on the trip. I took pictures of the routes with the various information about the places, and read them along the way from day to day. That made it very exciting every day. I also got my pilgrim app installed on the phone and then I was ready for the adventure of a lifetime.

It was very exciting to get going and get started. I was also a bit nervous – because of what was waiting out there, and could I now handle it and so on. I was hooked from day one. Absolutely fantastic scenery above the Pyrenees at the beginning, but also on the whole trip across the whole of Northern Spain.

Different heights, landscapes, expanses, cities and not least all the different wonderful people you meet, greet and or talk to every day. You soak up all these new impressions every single day while just putting one foot in front of the other. At no time did I not want to go.

Humility was present throughout the trip. To walk under the milky way, and read, think, see and feel, all the people who have walked that route over many thousands of years... All the churches, cathedrals, castles and houses you see and visit along the way are simply wonderful. There really is so much exciting history on the camino.

I found peace and quiet regardless of whether I visited a small village Church, a large Cathedral or a Templar castle. Then there were also the many wonderful accommodations that I used – always very decent, regardless of whether I slept in the monasteries, large or small hostels, or family places, they all had their own distinctive character and their own interesting history.

My hike was most amazing and inspiring. As I write this, months later, I have not even finished digesting it yet. I met wonderful people with whom I am still in contact, and had experiences that continue to make a lot of impressions, and which I regularly evoke with a big smile and a warm heart.



.....
Phil,
U.S.

Pitching our tent in Santiago

My wife and I had been married for 37 years when we first went to the Camino. It was September, and our fourth child had just left for college. We were pretty broke at the time and the kids' studies had used up just about all of our savings.

We were never the kind of people who use credit cards and then have to pay exorbitant interest. We figured we would take a small tent with us and if we were short of funds, we could sleep in a field somewhere. Looking back now, I can't believe we were *that* naive!

We carried that tent on our back (on MY back!) from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port all the way to Santiago. Now, I am not a big fellow. Upon seeing me sweat like a fool, other pilgrims kept advising us to ship the darn tent and sleeping bags. "It's only \$5 a day," they kept repeating, but we were determined not to blow our meagre budget.

Just before Burgos, I developed a very sore hip. My wife and I (she won't let me use her name or our last name!) could not find a cheap hostel where we could stay more than one night. I was very disappointed because I had heard that if you were ill, they would let you stay until you were fit for the road again. We ended up in an expensive room not too far from the cathedral. To compensate for the high cost, we lived on bread, cheese, and cold meats, but after three days of that diet, we both gave up and went around looking for pilgrims' meals which seemed a rare thing in that larger city. It was only when we crossed to the other side of the river that we discovered the cheap eateries where we could eat generous portions in ethnic restaurants.

Eventually we got back on the path and at one point we had to take a bus because we would not have enough time to walk all the way to Santiago and we really wanted to make it there and see the cathedral and the *botafumeiro* ceremony. We made it all the way (and quite a bit over budget). We never used the tent! We pitched it in Santiago. And I mean pitched it! I hope someone smarter than us inherited it and was able to use it.

If you meet someone on a low budget with a tent on the Camino, please tell them to pitch it before it destroys their hip!

My wife won't let me put a photo of us! However, I can happily report that we are still together. I don't think we will be back unless our kids get well-paying jobs and send us back in style on our 50th anniversary!

p.s. Phil would like to write a "semi-fictional" book about the Camino someday.



Lagan Michela Battello,
ITALY

*We speak the language of
the heart and this language
is universal*

Sono Lagan Michela Battello, ho 48 anni, sono italiana, abito in Friuli Venezia Giulia nel nord est dell'Italia, il mio paese è in collina e si chiama San Daniele del Friuli è conosciuto per la produzione di prosciutto crudo.

Ho lavorato come impiegata per molti anni, dieci anni fa' ho deciso di dare spazio alla mia passione ed ora sono una dog sitter.

Il cammino di Santiago non era tra i miei desideri, ma a gennaio 2022 ho sentito la necessità di fare il mio primo viaggio/vacanza da sola che poi si è trasformato in voglia di fare un cammino.

All'inizio dovevano essere 5 giorni di cammino in Italia ma durante le ricerche per informazioni ho sentito il richiamo verso Santiago, mi ero organizzata per una settimana che in seguito sono diventate due in compagnia di un'amica volevamo fare il primitivo...ma il richiamo era diventato più forte, un'esigenza vitale sentivo di dover andare assolutamente a fare il cammino francese partendo dalla Francia.

Incredibilmente per una serie di coincidenze e con un po' di timore il 30 aprile sono partita da sola per la mia prima avventura:

primo viaggio, primo cammino, il cammino francese da SJPDP a Santiago e poi da Santiago a Muxia e Finisterre.

Prima della partenza non mi sono allenata o preparata in modo particolare, sono stata scrupolosa nel pesare tutto il materiale per rimanere dentro i kili previsti, nel mio caso erano 6kg poco più del 10% del mio peso corporeo.

Mi sono informata sui costi base e su come gestire i piccoli imprevisti come dolori articolari o vesciche, ho acquistato una guida che poi ho volutamente lasciato a casa per godermi l'avventura.

Mi piace fare escursioni in montagna quindi come attrezzatura e vestiario ho utilizzato lo stesso materiale, scarpe da trekking, bastoncini, vestiti in tessuto tecnico per un'asciugatura veloce e il mitico balsamo di tigre bianco, per massaggiare i piedi mattina e sera, una pomata naturale all'Arnica e artiglio del diavolo, una pomata naturale al timo per massaggiare gambe e polpacci, ancora oggi mi sorprende di non aver avuto vesciche o dolori articolari.

Indumento indispensabile il mitico poncho che ha salvato più volte me e il mio zaino dall'essere completamente zuppi.

Non avevo un obiettivo specifico per il mio cammino se non quello di prendere del tempo da dedicare completamente a me stessa, mettermi in gioco, capire chi sono e permettermi di lasciar il "peso" invisibile che mi portavo sulle spalle, delusioni, ferite, difficoltà a cui sono grata perché è anche grazie a loro che il mio cammino è stato magico e mi ha permesso di togliere il grigiore che mi avevano lasciato addosso.

Non avevo prefissato un budget, la spesa media è stata di €25 al giorno, per i miei pernottamenti ho prenotato solo la notte a sjpdp prima di iniziare il cammino, poi mi sono goduta il viaggio, seguendo l'istinto senza tappe prefissate.

Ho fatto tutto il cammino con il mio fedele amico sulle spalle, varianti comprese, dopo i primi giorni lo zaino diventa un prologamento del tuo corpo, senza non ti senti completo.

La giornata tipo era sveglia alle 06/0630 e partenza alle 07, barretta ai cereali e via...poi al primo paesino pausa per caffè e brioche, poi un passo dietro l'altro con pause per foto, contemplazione della natura, meditare, a volte cantare in compagnia o da sola, parlare con i pellegrini che incontri lungo il tragitto, osservare gli animali, ogni giorno riserva uno o più regali e questo ti fa' sentire così grato nei confronti della vita.

Solitamente verso le 14/1430 arrivavo in hostello, sbrigato le pratiche, c'era la preparazione del letto, doccia, lavaggio biancheria e uscita per cenare o per far spesa e cucinare insieme ad altri Pellegrini.

Gli ostelli che porto nel cuore per l'accoglienza e le belle ore trascorse insieme ad altri accompagni sono:

Il rifugio P.P. Reparadores a Puente la Reina ha un bellissimo giardino in cui rilassarsi a fine tappa è una bella sala con cucina per cucinare e mangiare tutti insieme.

Il rifugio parrocchiale di San Juan a Granon gestito da volontari, una tappa obbligatoria, in questo rifugio si può capire il vero significato del cammino, l'accoglienza è fantastica il posto semplice ma magico, si canta, gioca, cucina, tutti insieme un'esperienza da non perdere. Rifugio Ermita de San Nicolas a Puente Fitero i pellegrini vengono accolti, con l'antico rito della lavanda dei piedi e viene offerta la cena a lume di candela. Rifugio parrocchiale Karl Leisner a Hospital de Orbigo con giardino e cucina semplicemente magnifico.

Personalmente non ho avuto difficoltà a trovare alloggio, le camere pulite, non ho avuto problemi con le cimici o altro.

Ho incontrato tantissime persone di tutte le nazionalità, la magia del cammino sta' nel fatto che tutte le barriere cadono, non ci sono difficoltà linguistiche o comunque ti comprendi.

Io non parlo nessuna lingua straniera oltre all'italiano eppure ho conosciuto spagnoli, francesi, coreani, giapponesi, inglesi in cammino si parla la lingua del cuore e questa lingua è universale.

Tra tanti amici conosciuti, alcuni sono speciali e sono tutt'ora in contatto con loro, Giulia l'ho incontrata il giorno della partenza al gate dell' aeroporto, abbiamo iniziato e finito insieme rispettando i nostri tempi e spazi, lei è uno dei tanti regali che il cammino mi ha fatto, una bellissima amicizia, ci sentiamo spesso, festeggiamo i successi e ci sosteniamo nelle difficoltà,

il cammino ti cambia, cambia il modo in cui osservi e affronti la vita il rientro non è facile e quello che vorresti e' poter ripartire subito.

Avrei mille avventure da raccontare ma forse quello che il cammino mi ha insegnato è vivere il momento presente totalmente senza passato e senza futuro, momento per momento avendo fiducia e rimanendo aperti a quello che l' esistenza a in serbo per te.

Grazie Danielle per questa bella possibilità.



My name is Lagan Michela Battello, I am 48-years-old. I am from Friuli Venezia Giulia (north-east Italy), my small hill-town San Daniele del Friuli is renowned for the production of raw ham. I worked as a clerk for many years then, ten years ago I decided to indulge my passion: I became a dog sitter. The Camino de Santiago was not among my wishes, but in January 2022, at the age of 48, I felt the need to go on my first holiday alone which then turned into the desire to go hiking.

Initially, it was supposed to be five days of walking in Italy, but during my search for information, I felt the call to Santiago. I planned for a week, but it soon became two weeks in the company of a friend who wanted to do the Camino Primitivo ... but the call became stronger, and I felt I absolutely had to go and walk the Camino Francés starting from France. Incredibly, through a series of coincidences and with some apprehension, on April 30 I left on my own for my first adventure: first trip, first camino, the Camino Francés from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port to Santiago and then from Santiago to Muxia and Finisterre.

I did not train or prepare in any particular way, but I was meticulous in weighing all my gear in order to stay within the recommended six kilos (10% of my body weight). I inquired about basic costs and how to manage small unexpected events such as joint pain or blisters, and bought a guide that I then deliberately left at home to enjoy the adventure.

I like hiking in the mountains, so as equipment and clothing I used the same material, hiking shoes, poles, technical fabric clothes for quick drying and the legendary white tiger balm, to massage my feet morning and evening, a natural Arnica ointment and Devil's Claw, a natural thyme ointment to massage my legs and calves. Even today I am surprised that I had no blisters or joint pain. Indispensable garment, the mythical poncho saved me and my backpack several times, preventing us from being completely soaked.

I did not have a specific goal for my journey except to devote time completely to myself, get involved, understand who I am and allow myself to leave the invisible 'load' that I carried on my shoulders: disappointments, wounds, difficulties for which I am grateful because thanks to them my camino was magical and restorative.

I booked my first night in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. After that, I planned nothing ahead, and had no set budget, but managed with an average of €25 per day. I was fortunate to walk the whole way with my faithful friend on my shoulders. After the first few days my backpack became an extension of my body. Without it, I felt incomplete.

On a typical day I woke near 6:00 am and left an hour later with my cereal bar, had coffee and croissants at the first village, then one step after another with breaks for photos, contemplation of nature, meditating, sometimes singing in company or alone, talking with other pilgrims, observing the animals... Every day reserves one or more gifts and this made me feel so grateful for life.

Usually mid-afternoon at the hostel, I got through the daily rituals: the preparation of my bed, shower, laundry and finding a restaurant for dinner or shopping and cooking together with other pilgrims.

I carry in my heart memories of some hostels for their welcome and the beautiful hours spent there with other companions, amongst them, the P.P. Reparadores refuge in Puente la Reina with its beautiful relaxing garden. There I enjoyed cooking and eating with other pilgrims. There was also the San Juan parish shelter run by volunteers in Grañón. It should be a mandatory stop. In this refuge you can understand the true meaning of the Camino, the welcome is fantastic, the place simple but magical. You sing, play, cook, an experience not to be missed. Also, at Ermita de San Nicolas Refuge in Puente Fitero, pilgrims are welcomed with the ancient rite of washing the feet, and dinner is offered by candlelight. I also loved being at the Karl Leisner parish retreat in Hospital de Órbigo with its welcoming garden and simply magnificent kitchen. I never had difficulty finding accommodation or clean rooms nor had I any problem with bedbugs or anything else.

I met many people of all nationalities. The magic of the journey lies in the fact that all barriers fall, and all pilgrims seem to communicate without language difficulties. I only speak Italian and yet on the way, I met and communicated with Spanish, French, Korean, Japanese, English. We speak the language of the heart, and this language is universal. I made many new friends, some of whom are now special, and I am still in contact with them. On my day of departure from Italy, at the airport gate, I met Giulia, and we started and finished together respecting our times and spaces. Giulia is one of the many gifts that the journey has given me. We have a beautiful friendship. We talk often, and we celebrate successes and support each other in difficulties.

The Camino changes you, it changes the way you observe and face life. The return is not easy, and you would like to be able to go back immediately. I would have a thousand adventures to tell but perhaps what the journey has taught me is to live the present moment totally without past and without future, moment by moment having confidence and remaining open to what existence has in store for me.

Thank you, Danielle, for this nice opportunity.



Eva and Fritz,
GERMANY

Den Rest des Weges gehen wir zusammen

The rest of the Way we walk together

Eva started her Camino 20 years ago in her home village of Manching, in the south of Germany. By then, she didn't spend many thoughts on how far she might eventually get. However, summer after summer, she dedicated some weeks to the Camino, walking in stages through Germany, Switzerland, and France. In the fall of 2016, Fritz joined Eva's life, and in the summer of 2018 he also joined Eva on her next Camino stage, ending at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.

We both had fulfilled lives before we met; even more we feel thankfulness for the privilege of meeting a beloved partner rather late in life. We got married last year, and "*Den Rest des Weges gehen wir zusammen*" has become a mutual promise

for our lives and for the Camino – a *rest* it is, after all, compared with the 1500 km Eva has come along! For our wedding invitation we picked a snapshot from our 2018 hike on the Camino through France.

As retirees we had the privilege of staying on the path for many weeks with no firm deadline for return to our families, so we planned our Camino in a more relaxed way than previously. A daily goal of 20 km, or slightly more if necessary, deemed us sufficient. We tried and succeeded to avoid dormitories. Granted, double rooms compromise the feeling of true pilgrimage, and for sure make the trip more expensive and harder to plan, but we both have experienced enough dormitories for a lifetime and wanted privacy in the evening. On the other hand, we managed without pack transportation and taxi service, though we were open to accept this aid, should the trip turn out to be too exhaustive.

Walking the Camino Français and spending 42 days and nights together as a “just married” couple in such an extraordinary setting was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and strengthens our confidence that the rest of our way through life will not just be a joined one, but also one filled with sunshine, happiness and love, just as our “*Rest des Weges*” on the Camino!





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Lucas Gasco,
COLMENAR VIEJO, (MADRID) SPAIN

The Camino, a Natural Feast

I really don't know what to say. I love the road, I feel it as a necessity, because every day it gives me moments, very special for me, the valleys, the mountains, the tranquillity, the peace, the song of the birds when the day has not yet fully dawned, the music of the streams, the dance of the green fields, lulled by the wind, those puddles of water with the gnawing of their frogs, its villages, some poor and sad little ones, others charming with their houses rustic built with hands without limit of effort or time made of stone, adobe, wood and other elements, without forgetting beautiful Geraniums and other plants full of brightness and color sitting in their windows and balconies, and around the house. Those ruins of monasteries, their churches and cathedrals when you go along the roads you have the pleasure of savoring the fruits of the forest, blackberries, chestnuts, grapes, apples and many other delights of nature. The different foods to share with other *peregrinos*, so many wonderful people that I will never forget. I take memories to remember forever. I enjoyed meeting you too for very small period, I wish it was a longer time, to have time to chat with you in the Camino.

I met Lucas, a kind and gentle man, soon after Roncesvalles. We were five or six (ranging 5 decades in age) having breakfast together. Without giving anyone time to object, Lucas had picked up the tab for all of us. It is the kind of generosity one sometimes encounters along the way.



.....
Hélène Aupied,
BRETAGNE, FRANCE

Leçons de vie

Je vais vous raconter l'histoire du camino. Est-ce que ça vous est déjà arrivé de ressentir la vie? La vraie vie, celle qui vous balance d'un côté, de l'autre, vous fait rebondir, le cœur se serre, c'est précieux, c'est doux, c'est touchant, unique. C'est si fort, que l'on n'imagine pas. On ne voudrait jamais oublier ces moments...

On ne savait vraiment pas à quoi s'attendre. Les petites Bretonnes ont fait vibrer leur cœur et ont vécu des moments inoubliables. Le camino a ce côté magique que nous sommes incapables d'expliquer... Alors je vais vous raconter.

Jour 1, l'histoire de l'autocuiseur : Les deux jeunes femmes sont arrivées à Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, destination Saint-Jacques-de-Compostelle. Le temps est pourri, il pleut beaucoup. Il y a des vieux avec leurs bâtons en bois et leurs sacs avec une coquille bizarre. On se demande pourquoi on est là... Heureusement pour nous, le rire est toujours au rendez-vous. Les pèlerines commencent le voyage....

On cherche un endroit où dormir! Il faut réserver son auberge avec son petit sac. Le premier soir on comprend vite qu'on va bien rigoler, se faire à manger c'est plus compliqué qu'on pensait... Dans notre auberge il y a une machine à vapeur multifonction, un autocuiseur, mais pas n'importe lequel! il cuit le poisson, le steak, le riz, il lave même les chaussettes des randonneurs (ça c'est une blagounette!). Le genre d'outil qui t'énervait parce que tu passes trois heures à chercher à le faire fonctionner. Alors on demande à l'aubergiste un peu d'aide.

“Je ne sais pas comment ça marche. Désolée.” Bienvenue à Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, les Bretonnes.

1ère leçon de vie : Ne sous-estime pas les petits soucis. Je demande alors à un monsieur de m'aider à me servir de la fameuse machine qui commence à m'agacer. Trente minutes plus tard le steak attend toujours de se dorer la pilule. Ce monsieur se moque un peu de moi; il a une sacrée dégaine, cheveux longs (un peu comme Jésus). C'est le début de nos conversations en anglais, pour le moment ça se résume à “I want to use this thing” et pour lui “this thing must work with this thing” (on va aller très très loin).

2ème leçon : on commence à vivre sans notre confort quotidien. On n'a pas de poêle et on n'aime pas du tout l'autocuiseur. (Quelle idée!)

Des Cambodgiens viennent à notre rescousse et réussissent à faire cuire ce fameux bout de viande. On a enfumé toute l'auberge mais à part ça, tout va bien! L'histoire de l'autocuiseur ne s'arrête pas là. Des petits innocents ont essayé de s'en servir après nous. Ils ont fait cuire leurs viande en 2 min..., (oui oui, nous on en avait mis plus de 30). Ces petits malins n'avaient pas pris en compte la fumée dans la pièce à cause de notre fameux steak. L'alarme incendie s'enclenche «bip, bip, bip, bip, bip». Un monsieur arrive pour prendre en main la situation, on va l'appeler 'le réparateur'. Celui qui ressemble à Jésus et qui m'a aidée au début crie “Nicolas Sarkozy!” C'est vrai que le réparateur avait vraiment une ressemblance frappante avec notre ancien président. Nous avons beaucoup rigolé de cette situation cocasse. Un petit feeling sympa s'est installé entre nous et Jésus qui nous a fait beaucoup rire.

Au total, ce petit steak aura dérangé Jésus, ‘Nicolas’, les Cambodgiens et l'auberge entière par la même occasion avec le bruit strident de l'alarme. Et nous qui voulions nous familiariser tranquillement avec le Camino!

3ème leçon de vie : tes petites galères croustillent ta vie, et la rendent vraiment belle. Tout dépend de la manière dont tu vois les choses. On a toujours l'impression que ça n'arrive qu'à nous. Les Cambodgiens on certes réussi en deux minutes à se servir de la machine mais finalement ils ont eu sur le dos l'alarme bien embêtante.

Jour 2, le début de la marche : on ne bouge plus, c'est magique, la nature est là, on est dans le grand bain, on comprend vite que ça ne sera pas une petite randonnée comme les autres. Levées à 6h, les petites marmottes sont chamboulées de leur train-train quotidien. Pendant cette petite journée nous n'avons pas marché seules, nous avons suivi Jésus (le monsieur du steak).

Jour 3, la famille : Très vite nous nous sommes rattachées à lui et à ses nouveaux amis et avons continué le petit périple tous ensemble. Puis nous avons rencontré Danielle, la grande écrivaine, et pleins d'autres sur le chemin. Nous restons fascinées par la rapidité de la création des liens d'amitié et d'attachement. (Certains disent que la marche, l'effort, rapprochent les cœurs et les âmes). Les jours ont passé et on riait beaucoup, vraiment beaucoup.... On prenait soin les uns des autres dans cette épreuve, j'avais l'impression de les connaître depuis toujours.

Jour 4, la rupture : Toutes bonnes choses ont une fin. Le temps est venu pour nos amis de continuer leur chemin et pour nous de rentrer étudier à Rennes. Alors, nous décidons de faire un petit repas d'aurevoir où chacun cuisine une spécialité. Ce moment est merveilleux et est un mélange de fous rires et de discussions bienveillantes. Nous avons fait des crêpes en honneur à la Bretagne, Adèle a fait rire la galerie en les faisant sauter de sa poêle. Ce repas était à la fois joyeux et émouvant car les autres allaient continuer la route sans nous.

Jour 5, la douleur et la peine : Le lendemain, tout le monde part tôt chacun de son côté, et moi j'ai très mal. Depuis le premier jour, je cache une douleur à mon tendon d'Achille, je ne l'écoute pas car je passe des moments incroyables. Ce matin-là, c'est devenu très douloureux, la fatigue était physique et psychologique. Je n'arrivais plus à marcher, le drame...

4ème leçon de vie : chacun son rythme, le plus important c'est toi, ton corps. Le chemin est un réel 'miroir de la vie', il faut savoir prendre du recul et prendre soin de soi. Il y a des moments de joie et des moments où on doit savoir se recentrer sur soi-même, devenir adulte, être responsable de sa santé.

Tout s'effondre pour moi et Adèle. On est obligées de faire du stop et de prendre un bus. On est triste car je ne peux plus marcher et nous avons quitté nos amis. Nous ne l'expliquons toujours pas aujourd'hui mais c'était le déchirement. J'avais écrit à ce moment "on redevient si faibles, je m'effondre dans les toilettes. Adèle craque, je recraque, j'ai une douleur intense, inattendue, à sonorité de rupture, celle qui vous fait vraiment mal, on voudrait continuer l'aventure avec eux mais c'est la fin..." Ma douleur physique et émotionnelle liée au fait de vivre une journée sans nos amis me brisait le cœur. Adèle était tout aussi triste.

5ème leçon de vie : l'amour n'a pas de règles, de barrières, de noms, de couleurs, d'âge, de frontière, ce n'est pas le temps qui forge les liens, mais les expériences qui rapprochent les coeurs et les âmes. Adèle et Hélène se sont fait prendre au piège du camino, leurs coeur est pris. La temporalité sur le camino est vraiment différente, les liens sont différents, c'est magique, c'est un autre monde.

Si ce n'est qu'un mot que j'aurais envie de dire c'est 'merci', à Adèle mon acolyte de 1ère classe, à mes amis du camino, au chemin en lui-même. Je reviendrai c'est promis!

Life Lessons

Let me tell you the story of the camino. Have you ever felt life? Real life, the one that sends you all over the place, makes you bounce, the heart tightens, it's precious, it's soft, it's touching, unique. It's so strong that you can't imagine it. You would never want to forget those moments...

We really didn't know what to expect. Two young women from Brittany made their hearts vibrate and lived unforgettable moments. The camino has this magical side that we are unable to explain... So let me tell you.

Day One, the story of the pressure cooker: The two young women arrive in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, destination Santiago de Compostela. The weather is rotten, it is pouring. There are old people with their wooden sticks and bags with a weird shell. We wonder why we are here... Fortunately for us, laughter is always present. We are starting on our journey....

We are looking for a place to sleep! You have to reserve your hostel with your little bag. The first night we quickly understand that we are going to have a good laugh: making food is more complicated than we thought... In our hostel there is a multifunction steam engine, a pressure cooker, but not just any pressure cooker! It can cook fish, steak, rice... it even washes hikers' socks (just kidding!) The kind of appliance that annoys you because you spend three hours trying to figure it out. So we ask the innkeeper for a little help. "I don't know how it works. Sorry." Welcome to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, young ladies.

1st life lesson: Don't underestimate small problems. I then ask a gentleman to help me use the famous machine which is starting to annoy me. Thirty minutes later the steak is still raw. The gentleman chuckles. He has quite an interesting appearance, long hair (a bit like Jesus). This is the beginning of our conversations in English. For the moment it boils down to "I want to use this thing" and for him "this thing must work with this thing".

2nd life lesson: We are starting to live without our usual comfort. We don't have a stove and we don't like the pressure cooker at all. (What an idea!) A group of Cambodians come to our rescue and manage to cook our famous piece of meat. We fill the whole hostel with smoke. Other than that, everything is fine! But the story of the pressure cooker doesn't end there: two seemingly clueless pilgrims use the machine after us. They cook their meat in 2 min... These clever little pilgrims did not seem bothered by the smoke in the room because of our famous steak.

The fire alarm sounds "beep, beep, beep, beep, beep". A gentleman arrives to take charge of the situation. Let's call him 'the repairman'. The one who looks like Jesus and who helped me at the beginning shouts "Nicolas Sarkozy!" It is true that the repairman really has a striking resemblance to our former president. We laugh a lot about this funny situation. A nice little feeling settles between us and Jesus who made us laugh a lot.

In all, our little steak will have been a hassle for Jesus, 'Nicolas', the Cambodians and the entire hostel at the same time with the shrill sound of the alarm. And we just wanted to get acquainted with the Camino!

3rd life lesson: your little problems make life more fun and beautiful. It's all about how you choose to see things. You think it only happens to you. The Cambodians certainly managed in two minutes to use the machine but they had to put up with the very annoying fire alarm.

Day 2, the beginning of the walk: we stand still, it is magical, nature is there, we are in total immersion. We quickly understand that it will not be a short hike

like we are used to. Up at 6 am, the daily routine of our little *Bretonnes* is turned upside down. During this short day we did not walk alone, we followed Jesus (the gentleman of the steak).

Day 3, the family: very quickly we became attached to him and his new friends and continued the little journey together. Then we met Danielle, the great writer, and many others along the way. We remain fascinated by the speed at which bonds of friendship are formed. (Some say that walking and effort bring hearts and souls together.) The days went by and we laughed a lot, really a lot.... We took care of each other in this adventure. I felt like I had always known my new friends.

Day 4, the breakup: All good things must come to an end. The time has come for our friends to continue their journey and for us to return to school in Rennes. So, we prepare a small farewell meal; each one cooks their specialty. This is a wonderful moment, a mixture of laughter and friendly discussions. We make pancakes in honor of our province. Adèle makes everyone laugh by flipping them in the pan. It is both a joyful and moving moment because the others will continue the Camino without us.

Day 5, pain and sorrow: everyone leaves early on their own, and I am in a lot of pain. Since the first day, I have been hiding the pain in my Achilles tendon, I didn't listen to it because I was living incredible moments. This morning it is very painful, and the fatigue is physical and psychological. I can't walk, the drama...

4th life lesson: everyone has their own rhythm, the most important thing is you, your body. The path is a real 'mirror of life', you have to know how to take a step back and take care of yourself. There are moments of joy and moments when we must know how to re-focus on ourselves, become adults, be responsible for our health.

Everything falls apart for me and Adèle. We are forced to hitchhike and take a bus. We are sad because I can no longer walk and we have left our friends. We still cannot explain it today but we were heartbroken. I wrote at that time "*we become so weak again, I collapse in the washroom. Adèle cracks, I crack, I have an intense, unexpected pain, as if something were broken, it really hurts. We would like to continue the adventure with them but it's the end...*" My physical and emotional pain of living a day without our friends was breaking my heart. Adèle was just as sad.

5th life lesson: Love has no rules, barriers, names, colors, age, borders, it is not time that forges links, but experiences that bring hearts and souls together. Adèle and Helen have been trapped by the camino, their hearts are captured. The temporality on the camino is really different, the links are different, it's magical, it's another world. If it's just one word I would like to say it's 'thank you', to Adèle my 1st class friend, to my friends of the camino, to the path itself. I will be back I promise!



Adèle Chedeville, BRETAGNE, FRANCE

Je vais vous raconter un moment qui m'a particulièrement marquée durant cette semaine de Mai 2022 passée sur le camino en compagnie d'Hélène. Ce moment n'en est qu'un parmi tant d'autres, tellement cette semaine était riche en émotions, en rencontres, en beaucoup de choses...

J'ai connu Hélène en première année d'ergothérapie. Nous sommes dans la même classe. Nous avons eu l'idée de partir en vacances toutes les deux, mais nous ne savions pas trop où aller, nous voulions juste passer des vacances agréables, ressourçantes. Hélène m'a proposé d'aller marcher sur le camino. La première fois, j'étais un peu réticente car je ne suis pas du tout croyante, puis

elle m'a dit qu'une de ses copines avait adoré, alors je me suis laissé tenter... Au final c'était l'une des plus belles semaines de ma vie. Et je compte bien continuer le camino un jour, j'espère avec elle!

Nous avons commencé notre périple à deux, puis rencontré plusieurs pèlerins avec qui nous avons partagé de jolis moments, repas, moments de route, toujours dans la bonne humeur. Un jour nous avons dû quitter la troupe car Hélène s'est blessée, et la journée ne s'est pas déroulée comme prévu. L'endroit où nous devions prendre notre dernier petit-déjeuner avec nos nouveaux amis était fermé, alors certains ont continué le chemin et nous n'avons pas eu l'occasion de leur dire au revoir.

Nous avons donc poursuivi notre chemin ensemble Hélène et moi. Nous étions dans un état un peu inexplicable, comme si nous quittions des personnes avec qui on avait tissé des liens d'amitié mais que nous ne reverrions hélas jamais.

À Pampelune, une grande ville, nous avons vécu un retour à la réalité. On croisait plein de monde, la ville était très active: totalement l'inverse du camino où tous marchent dans la même direction, à leur propre rythme, dans la bienveillance. Tu marches, tu réfléchis, tu te vides la tête, tu peux échanger avec les pèlerins que tu rencontres, que tu recroises le lendemain, et d'autres que tu ne revois jamais... Chaque moment est unique et précieux.

Toutes les deux à Pampelune, nous pensions ne jamais revoir nos amis de route. Pendant qu'on pleurait accoudées à un bar en train de boire un jus d'orange à la sortie d'une pharmacie à 9h du matin, nous avons reçu une photo de nos amis devant la cathédrale de Pampelune! Coïncidence? Je ne pense pas... Laisant vite deux pièces sur le comptoir, nous sommes parties les retrouver aussi vite qu'on pouvait vu le problème d'Hélène avec son pied. Ce moment était fort en émotion! Le destin fait bien les choses!

Une fois nos amis repartis sur le camino, nous pensions passer la fin de notre séjour à Pampelune au repos car Hélène avait très mal au tendon d'Achille. Mais tout ne s'est encore pas passé comme prévu... Nous avons retrouvé Päivi, notre amie finlandaise, qui elle aussi était blessée et devait voir un médecin. Tranquillement posées dans un bar nous revoyions beaucoup de visages connus, tous les pèlerins avec qui nous partagions le même chemin depuis quatre jours. Et d'un coup, surpriiiiise!! Danielle apparut aussi et nous a rejoint autour de la table! Ce moment était super chouette, et à partir de là nous avons décidé de reprendre le chemin le lendemain avec de nouvelles chaussures (et pas des moindres...) pour Hélène et des genouillères pour Päivi! Nouveau départ!!

Nous avons suivi les conseils de Danielle et d'un autre pèlerin et fait le début du trajet en bus jusqu'à Cizur Menor le matin avant de marcher une dizaine de kilomètres pour arriver le midi dans un restaurant au soleil à Uterga! Nous avons donc parcouru le chemin de Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port jusqu'à Puente la Reina, toujours entourées de belles personnes.

Tout est possible, et tout se termine toujours bien lorsque l'on se donne les moyens de réussir, et lorsque l'on est bien entouré. Le positif attire le positif.

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