

# "You're the Guy with Parkinson's"

POEMS, PROSE AND PONDERINGS  
ON 'THE CAMINO'



**WITH WILL BOAG**

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## Prologue

When I was a young boy my two favorite books were: “The Magic Wishing Chair” and “The Faraway Tree”. Enid Blyton took me to places I could only dream about. I mean, sitting in a chair and having it take you wherever you wish, or climbing a tree full of little people and hopping on to clouds that offered me a variety of wonderful things, what more could I want for. This, of course, was simply fantasy, but to me, it was the ‘possibilities’ that were important, and when I was young, I couldn’t see those potentials, so I imagined them.

I didn’t know then, that all of this was simply part of life’s journey, and I needed to make sense of it all. I didn’t know that I could make choices, that most of these were up to me to make. And I didn’t know then, that the choices other people make can affect your life in many ways, and that I had the means, but not the ability, to deal with them. I was unaware of what I was capable.

I unconsciously allowed my life’s circumstances to prevent me from realising that wishes can come true, and that these needed to be tied to life’s realities. It took me until my forties before I could work out my belief system, which then allowed me to sit in that chair, and make wishes that could come true, while knowing there are others that may never reach the light of day. It was at this time, that I needed to look at the possibilities, and make my choices in life accordingly.

Life’s journey has taken me in a range of directions and to a variety of places with some wonderful people. I have formed deep relationships, while some have given me different challenges. At times I have been able to meet them, at others I have been found wanting, and wishing I had made better decisions. Now I have been given one of my biggest challenges yet, with Parkinson’s Disease. I can still climb the faraway tree and my clouds have changed their depth and shape, however, I can now see the possibilities with more clarity. I have once again sat in my wishing chair, but this time there is a difference, my fantasies are becoming my realities.

Rehabilitation has helped me to further enrich possibilities already realized, and to uncover those of which I was unaware. The disease, while closing down some neural pathways in my brain, has managed to open up some creative pathways in another part of the same organ. It is these creative pathways I have taken with me on a physical pathway. This has resulted in me bringing these two together, and taking a ‘poetic walk’ along the eight hundred kilometre pathway of the Camino (Way) Frances in Spain on behalf (informally) of those who suffer from the disease. This is ‘my’ Parkinson’s way, which begins in St Jean Pied de Port in the French Pyrenees with my wife Corrie.

## Day 1 - St Jean Pied de Port to Refuge Orisson

Walking down the steep meandering ancient street of the medieval town of Saint Jean Pied de Port (at the foot of the pass), I was imagining what tales the cobblestones could tell, of the hidden secrets and adventures untold, by shadows behind the myriad of doors peering out on pilgrims with their different thoughts and feelings, also meandering their way towards the mighty Pyrenees.

Weaving our way through the adventurers we saw young and old from diverse cultures with bags too heavy, nothing too light, but all with their different stories of what brought them on this long and challenging journey. We said 'buen camino' (good walking) as we walked past, their response indicating whether they wanted to continue talking or not. My 'Walking for Parkinson's' jacket was also an open invitation for the more brave and curious.

The walk up 'Napoleons Way', Bonaparte's route when he invaded Spain, was testing on the first day. Steep winding tracks and roads were made easier because the adventure had begun and the distance was short - we chose to climb only eight kilometres instead of the only other option for crossing the Pyrenees of thirty kilometres. Mysterious whisperings tell that walking this extra distance on the first day has ruined many a good walk and deflated many a pilgrim's ego.

The dense fog prevented us from seeing the magnificent hills and valleys (which we had glimpsed on a previous journey), and from seeing a sign post, thus adding another kilometre, but the fog also kept us cool as we continued on from that mystical hidden world of Saint Jean. After a nearly continuous three hour climb, out of the fog the 'refugio' of Orisson appeared, as if someone had simply lowered it in front of us.

The lack of mouth watering views meant that many of us had already made contact, giving us a ready made entree into dinner where that contact soon mushroomed into friendships, further warmed by the log fire for the fifty of us. It was here we met the teasing Swiss girls, Ursula and Barbara, the friendly Kiwi couple and Aussie girls, the Portuguese couple, Vanda and Emidio, the outspoken but generous French Basque men, the supportive French woman, the affable American girls, Deana and Andrew from England, the helpful Taiwanese girl, the quiet Dutchwoman, and the ebullient Tatiana from Sweden amongst others. A truly wonderful and inspiring day.

So there we were in a 'refugio' (French) or 'albergue' (Spanish) in eight degrees at 10 pm, unprepared with one blanket and no sleeping bag, and with no heating. So we showered, dressed for tomorrow's walk, doubled our blankets, and said good night to our English and Portuguese room mates. We were ready for tomorrow's adventure!

## The Camino Begins

I was shocked at what my Parkinson's diagnosis might mean for Corrie and me, and uncertain of how tough the climb ahead might be, with the unknown especially clouding my consciousness.



*They gather young, they gather old,  
They're fit, they're not, they're cold, they're hot,  
They come from everywhere I'm told  
Adventurers, pilgrims, a diverse lot.  
Some drink, some pray, some blog, some think,  
But most of all they love to walk,  
The Camino Frances, the common link  
At the 'foot of the Pass' they follow the chalk.  
The climb is steep up the Pyrenees,  
Some go around, it removes the fear,  
But the beauty to behold in its hills and its valleys  
Is magic to savor beyond mountains that are sheer.  
Then when you reach Orisson you can be sure  
The hardest is done but there's so much more.*

## Day 2 - Refuge Orisson to Burguete

The bright stars indicated there would be plenty to see today as we slowly drifted in to our Basque spartan breakfast of bread and coffee. Our focus however was on the day ahead. Hands were shaken, one and two kisses were given, hugs were had, with 'hasta luego' spoken in a variety of languages.

The path reached out ahead of us snaking its way ever upward around bare green hillsides, across narrow plateaus and circling narrow cliff roads, with rolling hills and sharp snow capped peaks in the distance. It was an interactive morning; familiar faces and friends swapped more intimate stories as we stayed awhile, talked about Parkinson's and 'their' tales, and then moved on.

Reaching the peak was welcome. Tawny layers of leaves underfoot from beech trees that held the hillside together, cushioned us as we passed, while remnants of snow left untouched by the disappearing sun, hugged the narrow cliff pathway. We rested, took in the expansive views, strolled around, and moved off again. It was then downhill meandering again, sometimes rocky, mostly not, past massive hillside bracken burn-offs to a pretty valley on the Spanish side, where our French 'bonjours' now became Spanish 'holas'.

We were in Roncesvalles, a small, charming and medieval-looking monastic town on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees - the site of the legendary battle marked by France's first great epic, heroic, medieval poem: 'La Chanson de Roland'. Some of the best French Gothic architecture in Spain can be seen in St Mary's Collegiate Church, which along with the town's 12th century hospital (that looks after pilgrims who have suffered on their walk over the Pyrenees), is tucked away into the heavily vegetated base of this vast mountain range.

This ancient town is the starting point of the 'Camino Frances' for the majority of pilgrims, and there could be many reasons for starting here rather than in Saint Jean. The main one being that the weather in the Pyrenees is unpredictable: if there is deep fog you could fall down the mountainside; if there is snow you could lose the track altogether; or a blizzard would prevent you from starting at all. The last point is often vital, because many pilgrims are on a very tight schedule.

We continued on through another leafless beech forest to spend the night in the seemingly deserted town of Burguete. Created as a borough of the hospice of Roncesvalles, this village is famous in this part of Spain for the regular visits of Ernest Hemingway, who called the area 'the most wickedly wild and savage territory of the Pyrenees'. It was here that we said "hasta la vista" to our faster walking special new Portuguese friends, as the sun also bid its daily farewell.

## The Sun

It was vital that a light was shone on my disease so I could then see it clearly and face squarely any issues that may arise. I needed to see the full picture in my mind before I could start to create my own.



*As nature yawns the sun arises  
And with its one enormous brush,  
Ready to deliver more surprises  
Providing art with stealth and hush.  
This one great artist in the sky  
Alters the landscape day by day,  
At times it even fools the eye  
There's no better art along 'the way'.  
The snow it melts to its design  
Creating streams of water below,  
It changes the trees, leaves fall over time  
Creating a cushion that deepens, so slow,  
The paints it uses are nature's own,  
The art of 'the way' , the sun has shown.*



### Day 3 - Burguete to Zubiri

I promised my speech therapist to send a photo of myself practicing voice training from the top of the Pyrenees. The photo did not convey that at such an early stage I sounded like I was in pain - alarmed walkers prepared to rush to my aid. Many with Parkinson's lose much of their voice quality and volume, so exercises are designed to open up the part that has lost its flexibility. In one session, I found my voice strengthened, but only serious voice training will indicate the long term nature of any changes.

After a huge day, Corrie and I put our voices to sleep, awaking before dawn to fortify ourselves with cakes, croissants and coffee left out by our host.

Leaving this quiet town of Burguete we walked out through a small farm, then soon up into the hills once more. Other 'pilgrims' (I'll use this term for all who are walking towards Santiago, be it for adventure, spiritual or other) ventured out before sunrise and greeted us in many languages. We walked the flat part and enjoyed the company of a retired Brazilian judge, until he sped up into the hills beyond for the seventh time in seven years. Steep rocky paths marked this journey, while the sun dappled through pine trees, and thoughtful bushes shaded us as they hugged the narrow pathways. All the while, we greeted past acquaintances and formed new ones.

Further along the path we came upon a procession of at least one hundred caterpillars (a Spanish girl told us they are called 'Oruja's' or 'pine processionary caterpillars') - all joined together (unsure why). Apparently pine tree dwellers that give a nasty sting. These preordained butterflies are a very hairy moth, not to be touched because their hairs release a nasty allergic pine processionary skin reaction, and can cause temporary blindness for children who rub their eyes after contact. Living in nests in the pine trees, these caterpillars form head-to-tail trails as they move across land. I reflected on the similarities between pilgrims and people with Parkinson's ... we too join together with our own broad goals.

Arriving at Zubiri, we crossed over the Arga river which was pirouetting and tumbling as though celebrating its wonderful Gothic bridge above, carrying not just people, but many myths and legends that have spread across the world. One of these myths led to it being called 'Rabies Bridge': after a certain ritual by the cows around the bridge's main pillar, it was said they would be cured from rabies. Still today, the bridge, for this reason, is highly venerated in France and India. For me, the ancient bridge symbolises a crossing point, while I see the cured cow as wellness, the water as purity, and the silent stillness of the huge procession as producing a rich meditative opportunity in line with Indian practices.

A wonderful symbol on the camino that is not a myth, is the daily procession of yellow arrows that help guide us toward our common goal.

## The Yellow Arrow

I had a great need for direction, and I needed a map to see where we were now in our lives, where we intended to go, how we intended to get there, and those 'arrows in my mind' are always there when I feel lost.



*The yellow arrow never tells a lie  
No teenage fibs across its point,  
This painted line you can't walk by  
It's straight and true you could anoint.  
This precious line on rocks and trees  
May adorn a house, a gutter, a pole,  
Some road, a sign, wherever they please,  
You can rely on them to finish your stroll.  
We're told to follow the sacred shell  
But it's confusing 'cause it points both ways,  
Some use these arrows in order to sell  
So be careful and watchful it always pays.  
We're lucky to have these arrows of yellow  
Painted by the pastor of O'Cebreiro.*

## Day 4 - Zubiri to Pamplona

We dined with our Swiss friend Barbara enjoying a cultural exchange, while missing her friend Ursula who was ill and needing to catch a bus the next day (one thing most pilgrims hate to do). Usually walkers have limited time, so illness can be very disruptive and difficult choices have to be made. We'll remember her fondly especially during the 'sauce affair', and her reaction at Orisson when I asked where the sauce was for our evening meal. "Sauce Villiam, you want sauce?" I was the joke of the table until a French woman agreed with me, she knew what I meant. I could have solved my issue by recalling Don Quixote, when he and Sancho used "hunger as their sauce" to sharpen the taste of some dry, lifeless food!

An early set off, we searched with a young American for the sign of the camino, that yellow arrow, clear, but not luminous. The full moon strained to show us the narrow rocky path that wound its way across the mythical Zubiri bridge, past a small but crashing waterfall, continuing its winding ways across healthy fields, where sheep and horses were familiar with humans 'walking and talking' in the paddock next door. Along the way we were joined by many Irish folk and Spaniards, all welcoming but with determined looks, as Santiago de Compostela, their ultimate goal, lay many more kilometres ahead.

Soon it was another steep climb, then down just as steeply to cosy up to the river Arga again which was engaging with us loudly, washing the many boulders in its path, following us under bridges and through towns, leaving us only when it couldn't climb the hills.

I swapped Parkinson stories with Lisa, a Canadian cyclist who had lost her partner to a similar but worse neurological condition; chatted with an Irish teacher who joined us for some time; swapped stories with a Canadian girl sitting by the showy river; shared walnuts with a Spanish senorita as we sampled a ham & cheese filled tortilla, at yet another ancient bridge by the river.

Up and down another hill, and we were on our last leg to Pamplona, a city closely linked with pilgrims since the 1st century. We felt the continuing link, as a simple enquiry for directions led a member of the 'guardia civil' to escort us a kilometre to the front door of our hotel. It has been our experience that the Spanish are great with directions, repeating them over and over until certain we understood them, and even then, often walking with us to our destination anyway. This happens especially when the camino ties are strong, as they are in Pamplona.

Ties are also very strong with camino friends, and when we met up again with Lisa at Finisterre (at the end of the earth) we knew it was meant to be, and this is what happened:

## Lisa

We needed to let our emotions come freely, to feel the sadness, the inevitable changes, the losses and the associated pain and grief.



*She was sitting at the table with a pensive look  
I had no recollection of this woman at all,  
Eyes calm and steady seemed to read me as a book,  
We met briefly on the road as the rain began to fall.  
“You said you had Parkinson’s it took me right back  
To the death of my partner who died just last year,  
Then you were gone I was alone on the track  
I cried all day long to my very last tear”.  
She cried once more as she recalled precious days  
Struggling together with the strength of their love,  
Up mountains, across oceans, there were no delays,  
Not daring to wait for those calls from above.  
We hugged, no tears left, a bit lighter in grief,  
She turned, walked away, our time was too brief.*

## Day 5 - Pamplona to Uterga

Once again, the moon guided us out over yet another glorious medieval bridge, and through some winding lane ways that unusually had no pattern to them, past buildings tall and elegant shadowing their narrow streets, entertained by the sound of a large choir of small birds, and the crowing of red roosters. On our way out on a stony unshaded track through fields of canola dotting the green landscape like yellow quilts laid out to dry, with the distant hills beckoning us on, we passed, and were passed by, dozens of pilgrims walking and on bikes. Mostly on their own, some couples, rarely groups, barely talking, just walking.

Amongst the many, we exchanged greetings with old acquaintances, met a Swede going backwards but only to Pamplona, a German going forwards advising me on Spanish crops, an American resting in the shade who was great company, and an Irishman who stopped me in my tracks in a little village called Zariquiegui. "Hello there" he said, in a broad Irish accent, "I'm John, would you mind if I sit with you?" I looked up to see the author of my precious guide book that I was reading, John Brierley. His book, 'Camino de Santiago', is comprehensive with maps and accommodation, and in addition, fills in more of the religious and historical details. We left John in this enchanting little hilltop village to climb a long rocky track to the mountain top, glancing back at colorful fields that rested in the laps of gentle hills.

At the top there was a van supplying fresh water, and while we had our own, it seemed a good thing to accept a genuine offering - reviving us just enough to break into a tango dance. My wife and I learnt to tango prior to leaving for this trip. It can be good for people with Parkinson's, and for the following reasons: it aims to improve balance, thereby limiting falls; it has movements that can be difficult for people with Parkinson's, such as turning, and moving backwards (in Tango there is lots of stopping and turning and the 'follower' in Tango moves backwards). I'm not a dancer, but amazingly I was at the same standard or better than lots of others, many who were much younger. We had a lot of fun.

Whereas the Tango moves back and forwards, the great wind turbines (that can be seen in vast numbers throughout this and other parts of the camino) move one way only. While unlike the Tango they look unattractive to many, their purpose and function are to deliver environmentally effective energy for Spain's future needs. This Navarra region, once reliant totally on imports, is today energy independent, and the renewable energy heart of Spain. It was now time to look at my own energy needs by attempting to deal with some past issues, possibly contributing to my ongoing symptoms of Parkinson's. I tried to do this as I carefully and thoughtfully walked down the unforgiving, 'hill of forgiveness'.

## Forgiveness

I needed to look at my life, and forgive those I had issue with including myself, and forgive any possible catalyst that may have contributed to the disease's manifestation. How wonderful to have this long and challenging descent allowing me the time to reflect on this.



*What is forgiveness and what does it mean,  
Does it make life better or is it just a process,  
Does it change any thing or wipe the slate clean,  
Or is it just a word, and things stay a mess?  
Is it another I need to forgive,  
And is it too late, the wound too deep,  
Or is it myself I have a problem with,  
Is it difficult to live with, is it hard to sleep?  
These questions arose down forgiveness hill  
The more they came up the steeper the slide,  
I needed some answers I had no time to kill  
I had no place to go and no place to hide,  
It certainly now won't be left on the shelf  
I'll forgive, and remember, to look after self.*

## Day 6 - Uterga to Lorca

Dinner with three very funny people - Wendy from Australia, Alan a British man, and our Swedish friend Tatiana - was very entertaining. We solved the political, religious and ethical problems of the world, and shared why we were making this journey. While Alan and Tatiana were walking for spiritual reasons (Alan was also raising money for war orphans), Wendy was doing it for adventure. It was especially wonderful, to see those two women with opposing spiritual beliefs, enjoying one of those very special camino relationships that I imagine will last well beyond this journey.

Our adventure continued when we left Uterga, again in the moonlight, but missed a turnoff, taking us an extra three kilometres. Such unnecessary walking can add avoidable stress, because those extra metres can cause a psychological drain as well as a physical strain. However, a positive outlook soon turned this into another adventure, where we really took in the scenery that we alone of the walkers would see, and twice, while also providing us with a story to share with others over the evening meal. Once again flat narrow paths led up to very steep hills, while the cloudless sky was tempered by virtually no humidity, which helped to lessen the pain.

We passed the one hundred kilometre mark today. So far the journey has been one of climbing and descending steep hills, catalysts for a 'personal Parkinson's discovery'. While hills are difficult, they have been easier for me than any other gradation. The uphill walk gives me good balance as I propel myself up with my nordic walking poles, (I propel the poles forward together), whilst downhill I do a shuffling jog, consciously planting my feet on solid ground; either way, balance is not a problem. However, walking on the flat gives me less control as I tend to wander around a little, and that's where the nordic pole walking provides me with that balance and posture.

When we're not walking, hot drink and croissant stops in these peaceful ancient villages have become an integral part of our trip, providing us with reflection time, friends-dropping-by time, and local interactions. I'm looking forward to the poppies and storks becoming a common sight after my first sighting of both today - the ciguena (stork) high up on an old smoke stack now warming up the eggs for hatching time in May. And, may all their eggs be storks!

Passing through Puente La Reina (Queen's Bridge) took us over its namesake, the imposing five arched medieval bridge, where we sensed the protection that the 12th century Romanesque Church of the Knights Templar had afforded to pilgrims. The Knights Templar will be especially familiar to those who have read Don Quixote, a character, you might say, who slightly overdid it. I contemplated the idea that for some of us, this type of protection may also be experienced as support and loyalty from others.

## The Knights Templar

My wife is my Knights Templar and I am hers, and, when we are unable to look out for each other, then we are fortunate to have a system that caters for this situation. On the camino we had a school friend and his wife who filled that role, being there for us no matter what.



*We all need protection at some time in our life  
As a child we need parents to look over us,  
As a youth some need others to keep them from strife  
We would like to know it was one we could trust.  
When you go into battle there is one by your side  
If you're homeless a buddy is there while you sleep,  
Protection is needed if there's no place to hide,  
It's safer to have someone when depression is deep.  
In days of old when they struggled on 'the way'  
There was such a one who watched where they went,  
A Knights Templars he was, and there night and day  
It was safe to walk, and sleep when spent.  
Those living with Parkinson's they need their knight too  
To be there when it's dark to shine some light through.*



## Day 7 - Lorca to Irache

What a delightful night in Lorca (yet another 12th century quaint hilltop village), at an 'albergue' owned by a Spaniard and his Korean partner, where we dined with an American man, a German man, a Swiss man and a lovely younger American couple from New York, Jeremy and Viola. We mostly solved home brewing issues in the world and reviewed our journeys so far. Jeremy was especially interested in my blog as his stepdad has Parkinson's. While many albergues are large and can be a little impersonal, some places have a small communal place where you might go to chat, or, they just have a good 'feel' about them, this was one.

The next day we walked on what were now becoming familiar white gravel lanes through enchanting medieval villages (often one about every five kilometres), some having been revived due to the camino's popularization in recent decades. These villages we passed today were drawn together by luscious wheat fields, with the odd poppy clinging on to field edges, purple irises beautifying pathways, and the 12th century Gothic churches peering down from their lofty heights - the latter a very special attraction for the more religious pilgrims and lovers of great architectural prowess.

We climbed again to yet another hilltop village where I had my photo taken with some local children, who then followed us, singing, to the next village. I took the opportunity to practice my voice exercises, secreted behind their ethereal voices, thanks kids! They also took some photos to help spread the word and promote awareness. Irache, our home tonight, has the unusual distinction of having not just a water fountain, but a wine fountain; no chance of a water shortage in this village! We passed a man in his late seventies bent in two by a massive pack, and later saw him comfortably settled in his tent just outside town, fast asleep; maybe it was from drinking too much water.

We passed through the culturally rich town of Estella (star) in reference to the 'milky way', which lights up the path for, and follows, the pilgrims' progress along the camino. It's a pity we couldn't wait awhile and learn a little more about what its culture has to offer, but decisions like this have to be made - our bags were waiting for us elsewhere.

Lorca, by the way, is named after arguably Spain's greatest poet, who coincidentally studied in New York in 1929 before returning to a re-established Spanish Republic. Initially concentrating his poetry on the native gypsies and Flamenco which he helped revive, he later spread his pen to America to increase his poetic breadth. It was special to be reminded of him after previously visiting his home in Granada, reading his poetry and one of his plays, 'Blood Wedding'. There had been a lot of love and nature on this walk so I'll give you one of his beautiful love poems, 'Sonnet of the Sweet Complaint':

## Lorca the Poet

Lorca, the great Spanish poet, has been an inspiration to finding a way through this disease and has helped me find direction with poetry. The luscious fields of wheat, the colorful irises and my favourite, the poppy, all touched that creative part of me as we walked with the children.



*Never, let me lose the marvel  
Of your statue-like eyes, or the accent  
The solitary rose of your breath  
Places on my cheek at night.  
I am afraid of being on this shore  
A branchless trunk, and what I most regret  
Is having no flower pulp or clay  
For the worms of my despair.  
If you are my hidden treasure,  
If you are my cross, my dampened pain,  
If I am a dog and you alone my master,  
Never let me lose what I have gained,  
And adorn the branches of your river  
With leaves of my estranged Autumn.*

## Day 8 - Irache to Los Arcos

Heavy rain woke us, but rain drops guided us out into the shadows of a high rocky hill, clothed in wisps of soft cloud that filtered through into a cloud-filled cover for our twenty kilometre walk to Los Arcos. Wisteria type bushes, yellow bracken and a handful of poppies intermittently waved us on, as we followed a narrow curling path through lush wheat fields bordered by high distant hills. The track was dotted with moving, colorful packs and rain jackets, as we quietly nordic-walked past this mostly silent moving column, until greeted by Jeremy and Viola whose company we enjoyed so much in Lorca. We talked and laughed a bit, and then walked on, this couple were really taking in their surroundings.

Nearly all pilgrims I have seen use 'poles' to reach out in front with arms bent (a way you would not normally swing your arms if the poles weren't there), more to keep themselves steady (especially when walking downhill) and with some level of propulsion. With nordic walking, however, you swing your arms naturally, planting the pole behind near your back foot as you drag it, not lift it. You then push into your pole using your shoulder to strongly propel yourself forward. These Finnish bred poles are made for hard work, and that is what many Parkinson's people have to do.

I find nordic walking helps my Parkinson's by keeping my body upright (we tend to bend forward); it strengthens my shoulders and keeps my arms moving naturally (we tend to use our muscles less because the muscle movement deteriorates); the firm push gives me balance and control (we tend to lose this over time). Further, the poles help me with my back problems by relieving the pressure on both my lumbar and sacrum. Specially designed boot-shaped rubbers accompany the poles for use on roadways and other hard surfaces.

On reaching our albergue in Los Arcos we were greeted with an Easter street parade. We entered the local Romanesque church with its Gothic, Baroque and Classical elements and witnessed an architectural and visual delight. I have never really understood the church's methods, and never accepted the behavior of many of its representatives, but seeing the intricate detailed work that I witnessed here spoke to me of the love and passion that was once there - and which I imagine remains in many pockets of the church world of today. Later, outside a bar, classical singers broke into song while drinking and eating amongst the 'tapas eaters'.

Passion to create a visual delight in my poetry is more important than the health of my physical body (though not unimportant), and each day I want to discover more of the intricacies of this art. Knowing that I have this love makes the disease much less daunting, because the disease was certainly my passion's catalyst.

## Parkinson's

Talking about my nordic poles on this section of the walk had me reflecting on what Parkinson's means to me, and maybe to others. While not dwelling on this fact, I know for sure, I need to keep walking.



*I have Parkinson's and I'd like to share  
What it means to live with this disease,  
Reflecting now to make us all aware  
Of symptoms: we might shake or simply freeze.  
Its silence means we may not know we're caught,  
Its slowness gives hope that there's much space,  
Its persistence shows that time is gold but short,  
Its weakness felt but fails to leave a trace.  
They say a cure may come in few short years,  
But knowing others care and understand  
Can make life rich and wipe away the tears,  
And motivate our minds to lend a hand.  
Then it's up to us to search and find a way  
To make good use of every single day.*

## Day 9 - Los Arcos to Viana

Last night we attended a concert, an orchestra made up of children from a nearby village who entertained us with 'Phantom of the Opera'. The next morning venturing out of Los Arcos into wide spacious fields (after our albergue breakfast of coffee, toast, eggs, cake, fruit and juice), we were reminded that we were still traveling in the right direction when our backs became very warm. The sun had already risen but was behind a hill and we had begun a steep incline, so instead of a gradual warming we got a sudden blast of heat from nature's artist.

Just prior to this risen sun, I took a picture of two pilgrims framed against the eerie light as they wandered between lush green fields of wheat, juxtaposed with ordered grape vines showing off their late spring leaves, with promises of summer grapes to come. I say this because it reminds me of a change Parkinson's has bestowed on me, and that is, being ready for, and then taking, an opportunity when it arises. And opportunities abound on this ancient path.

Light hearted banter with three young singing Spanish women took us into Viana, a small storybook village with its very narrow streets, pilgrims tiredly meandering between locals oozing out of the full bars, where a Spanish fiesta was very much alive. My imagination had me thinking that this vibrant village is similar to how it was back in medieval times, its villagers protected by well preserved defensive walls.

Over a 'pilgrim's meal' at lunchtime we came across Jenny from Taiwan who had translated for me back in the French Pyrenees in a challenging situation. Meetings like this are memorable especially because I had not thanked her, so even though I had missed an opportunity earlier I wasn't going to miss this one.

Lunch or dinner is a 'pilgrim's meal' consisting roughly of a choice between soup, salad or paella for entree; chicken, fish, pork or pasta for main; then cake, ice cream or fruit salad; all with wine, water, and always bread. If not this meal, a good option is a large 'plato combinado' of salad, chicken/fish/meat, chips and fried eggs. In between we have coffee, hot chocolate, croissants and fruit (all for as little as ten to fifteen dollars), trying to keep fat on our fading bodies.

As we approached our hostel we passed some donkeys going the other way (first I've seen unenclosed) who probably forgot to stamp their passports, vital if you want to receive your certificate of completion in Saint James' Santiago de Compostela. We were to hear later in Madrid of the ever growing concerned organizations advocating on behalf of the donkey where it is still used to carry loads it was never meant to. Following is a sonnet on behalf of this long suffering animal.

## The Donkey

The similarity I (with Parkinson's), and the donkey have, is that we have little choice in the matter of hard work. But while the effects of the disease make a lot of movements more difficult, unlike the donkey, I do have some say in how hard it has to be, through my own will.



*They came towards me with a wry smile:  
“We don’t have to be locked up or tied,  
We can be free though we walk in file,  
In our earlier life we just sat there and cried”.  
The donkey has served us in so many ways  
Lugged weights too heavy for far too long,  
Worked so hard that hours seemed like days  
Everyone knows this is simply wrong.  
Let’s see them roam like they used to do  
Farmers don’t need them to pull the plow,  
No need to carry pilgrims to Santiago,  
Or used in carnivals as they are now.  
Let’s just see them loose in the street,  
It’s the donkeys’ turn to put up their feet.*

## Day 10 - Viana to Navarrette

The long narrow streets lit with eerie lamps showed us out of this medieval village, as narrow balconies seemed to gaze down on us alone; no other folk could be seen. Once the street lights faded away, the half moon shined its light ahead of us, and if we had any concerns about the direction we should take, the 'north star' shone loyally to our right. We walked with other pilgrims through the poppy-lined lanes separating the wheat fields from the rich black grape vines, over creeks through slightly undulating scenic land, a vista of open space.

We passed through Logrono which rose to importance due to the route's popularity from the 11th century on. It was during this time that the four arched Puente de Piedra (stone bridge) was built across the river Ebro. The 16th century church of Santiago is further evidence of the importance of this town for pilgrims. A representation of 'the way of the cross' by Michelangelo is prominent in the Cathedral of Santa Maria, while Logrono's skyline is dominated by the oldest church in La Rioja, Santa Maria de Palacio with its magnificent cloisters.

As with previous days we came upon pilgrims we knew, in one instance swapping blister stories with a Dutchwoman, from my 'easy-to-walk-with-ones', to her 'laid-up-for-two days-ones'. Our interactions which were initially quite rich have plummeted to survival stories, despite promising ourselves we would stay with the rich stuff. Maybe because of our common goal, people rarely asked what we did for a living, often one of the first questions asked away from the camino.

To address these blister issues and other ailments that pilgrims suffered along the way, 'hospitales de peregrinos' were built in towns such as Viana (there were four here), where we stayed last night. These hospitals existed in many towns along the camino from medieval times, and today serve other roles such as providing accommodation for pilgrims in the shape of an albergue, or the more expensive accommodation in the form of the 'parador'. The regular hospital of today plugs the gap by fulfilling the role of caring for pilgrims free of charge.

At the entrance to Navarrette, our new village high up on a hill (as with many), was a small curious house with a large curious woman, who has followed her illustrious mother since 1982 in stamping curious pilgrim's credentials in order to follow tradition. She stands at her doorway all day beckoning in passing pilgrims. This camino passport is something all pilgrims must take with them and have stamped at their lodgings as proof they have travelled the distance, while some have them stamped in churches, bars and other places they visit (if on offer), as an enriching memory of their journey. This is one of those very special stamps.

## The Pilgrim's Passport

Tradition, I think is great, especially when it is fulfilling and serving a purpose, however at times it can hamper 'good' progress. While I will keep my tradition of determination, I am changing others, such as sticking to a well worn path that no longer works, thus becoming more open to fresh ideas.



*She stops them in their tracks and gesticulates,  
Brings the right fist down on to an open left hand,  
To stamp your passport is the reason she waits  
Handed down by her mother in this Spanish land.  
She takes you in to her small stone house  
As her family has done for thirty years,  
And stamps very carefully as quiet as a mouse  
It feels very sacred but it wells up some tears.  
Her name is Felisa her stamp said 'love-water'  
This is her life devoted to the track,  
She'll do this forever like mother like daughter  
Devotion and persistence this woman doesn't lack.  
So when you're on the track to Logrono  
Make sure you have your passport on you.*



## Day 11 - Navarette to Azofra

We started out early again an hour before sunrise; a myriad of small birds were singing in the nearby hedges and trees, dancing on them simultaneously. What a lovely way to be farewelled into the moonless night. Over undulating landforms through now mainly 'grapeless' vines, we made our way along windless lane ways, the moon and stars lingering behind no longer in pursuit.

We arrived in the village of Azofra on a mild cloudy day and sat on the main street for lunch, the footpath too narrow to accommodate us. Although once again siesta and abandoned houses meant the streets were deserted, it became quite crowded when a car drove along, pedestrians appeared, and we were eating lunch ... all on the road. This quiet town would be a lot quieter than it is, if it wasn't for pilgrims who keep the little village on the map, one of maybe other reasons they are glad to see us plodding up their main street and interrupting siesta time.

The word 'siesta' comes from the Latin 'hora sexta' meaning the sixth hour, or midday, when it is said the Spanish take a nap. However, our Spanish friends informed us that it is 'rest time': you either take a nap, catch up on things left undone, or do things you love to do, mainly at home. Well, we survived lunch on the road and found our 'matrimonial' room for the night. Usually, with all amenities, we have paid around twenty euros per person, but here a municipal albergue offered a tiny cell-like room for seven euros each. Lodgings at this price show that you don't need to be wealthy to go for a walk in Spain.

We met up with Wendy, and our roommates at the Orisson Pyrenean albergue on the first day, Deana and Andrew, and had an engaging time with three special people. For anyone choosing between walking around, or over the Pyrenees on the first day, I strongly advise climbing over the top if you are reasonably fit and the weather is okay. Not just because it is stunning, but you meet so many people in the Orisson albergue. Fifty pilgrims gather for coffee, dinner and breakfast in front of a log fire; a memorable sojourn affording a good chance to meet most of them, or at least later recognise their faces. It was a lasting legacy for us to be able to renew contact with those whom we had connected at the start. The initial climb is only eight kilometres and although steep, it's a good gentle start to the camino.

Our biggest day walking offers me an opportunity to give you another sonnet. For those who don't know, and without becoming too technical, sonnets do vary, but basically the first eight lines provide a single theme, while the last six provide a contrasting, or alternative view. I have chosen the sonnet form because I believe it lends itself especially to the camino, owing to the continuity of contrasts we experienced in the north of Spain.

## Walking

Walking has been my best antidote to the physical declines with Parkinson's, the added bonus being all the people we have met and befriended along 'the way'. I can't think of a better way to meet so many people from different generations, of varied nationalities, and with a multitude of interests.



*No wish to pass them any more imagining they're not there,  
Failing to stop 'cause there's no time to pause a moment or two,  
No matter where on the road you are, signs you must beware  
Or on the tracks or in the sky your goal is set for you.  
No wish to do the many things that keep you on a strip  
To hit a ball, to throw a spear, to row, to sail, to jump,  
Or engage in meaningless, static tasks, it helps to breathe a bit  
Just keeping on the 'true and tried' someone you'll want to thump.  
Then wish to walk you'll see it all and smell the roses too,  
No straight lines, no lights to stop, no need to seek advice,  
You can stop, go back, in circles wind, can dance or throw a shoe,  
Can smell the air or swim the lake, watch birds and walk on ice,  
Sing out loud and greet another, this journey tells no lie,  
Walk till you fall you'll see much more.... with joy you can then die.*

## Day 12 - Azofra to Redecilla del Camino

The drenched streets welcomed us onto their clean, shiny cobblestones; no competition for space on the roadway due to the wet. Following the 'easy to find' camino yellow arrows, we spread our arms out wide and took up the whole road, accompanied by our friend Wendy with whom we had linked up again. She had bought me a yellow arrow on a miniature 'Aussie thong' for my birthday. What a lovely thought, and I didn't know then how significant this present would be, and that it would prove so highly apt in the closing stages of our journey.

Scenically, we were enveloped by the expansive wheat and canola fields, with grape vines dwindling in number and the massive bales of hay accidentally sprouting, while mist-hazed mountains still, as always, forming an imposing dress circle for the wonderful scenery below. Soon we were on our own with no-one in sight, a good time for singing 'rain songs' and doing my speech exercises, which rapidly put flight to the flock of black birds. These exercises are meant to strengthen my voice box - not impress an audience - and therefore, unlike the birds, are not pretty.

As mentioned earlier, this voice work has been developed to help with the limiting symptoms of Parkinson's disease: dysarthria (difficulty with speaking) and dysphagia (difficulty with swallowing). Speech-language pathologists can help people with Parkinson's maintain as many communication skills as possible. They also teach methods which conserve energy, including a range of non-verbal communication techniques.

Our Swedish friend Tatiana joined us. When I cheekily enquired about my birthday present she responded with: "my presence is your present"... cute. Her enthusiastic and breezy personality seemed to be the catalyst for a sudden gust of wind and driving rain. When she said: "now you know you're on the camino", I thought we had been joined by the goddess of wind and rain. The goddess and I swapped stories as we powered off leaving the two Aussies (Corrie being one) strolling along talking academia. On what was our biggest day yet, their company shrank the distance to the one street, one bar town of Redecilla del Camino. Here we enjoyed a hearty three course meal (pilgrim's menu), and story telling time with our friends, with Corrie exuberantly celebrating my birthday with a carafe of red wine - all over her.

As we thought about going to Belorado tomorrow, a room to ourselves, a shower longer than ten seconds, and more importantly, catching up with a classmate from many years past, coincidentally staying close to the camino, the warning sound of a car's horn sent a wild deer across my camera lens. What a beautiful sight, like watching a ballerina flying through the air, and landing so effortlessly - things seem to happen when nature shows its indifference to human comfort.

## The Deer

Deers have a very wide focus (310 degree) and I am learning to widen my vision to encompass a vast range of mental possibilities which will allow me to survive on this less used Parkinson's road.



*The ominous sound of a blasting horn  
Had me look to the road for the other car,  
But only the blaster I saw above the corn  
There must be more not seen from afar.  
I had my camera in my hand  
There's something that I did not see,  
What did just happen on this Spanish land  
I would have seen, there was barely a tree.  
And then I saw it, a sight to behold,  
It flew through the air in graceful flight,  
There's many out here or so we were told  
So elegant, so spirited, a wonderful sight.  
A frightened deer survived another day  
And made our moment as we went our way.*

## Day 13 - Redecilla del Camino to Belorado

A late morning start had us on the road in daylight for once, a very strange feeling, as though we were late! I really struggle with being behind time, so maybe this journey will help me with this issue. We had organised only a short walk for today so no need to start early to beat the heat of the day. Calling into the next village after we left Redecillo del Camino we met up with a Dutchman who was just enjoying walking in retirement. We loved this day of slowing right down and simply strolling through some curious villages, taking more time to explore, and welcoming in the day with Spanish greetings to the usual, but different, handful of locals.

Caves in the limestone cliffs have been home to hermits around Belorado for centuries. Perhaps they were ascetics, or simply those who chose a solitary way of life, not completely anti-social but preferring to be alone in their thoughts, their meditative life. I'm not sure why they chose that life, but for me, when I was at school, I found it difficult to mix and talk with my fellow students, reacting, in hindsight, to boarding at a primary school, where I was subjected to abusive discipline. Today I am much more of a social being, with more tolerance, scope and freedom. Importantly, the discipline I now enjoy gained through meditative practice, has helped me enormously with my therapy around my unchosen companion, Mr Parkinson.

I was well aware of my past 'limestone-cave' days when we met up with someone I went to school with many years ago. We were in kindergarten together for two months, a primary school in suburban Sydney for two years, and a Sydney city secondary school for five years. Today, we properly met for the first time in fifty years. But it was worth the wait, a sensitive warm intelligent man with a gorgeous clever wife, both heavily involved in making life better for the underdog. What great company for eight hours over wine, mosto, pinchos, fish, paella and creme broulee.

We came to resolutions about corrupt politics, the environment, and world cultures while pondering over mixed school days, the meaning of our existence, and life in Spanish villages and limestone caves. A very special day where, from that day on, they became our Knights Templars for the rest of our journey, offering any assistance we may have required. Knowing we had not been well, they rang us; "anything" they said, "just call and we'll be there". That's a Knights Templar..... with a mobile. We planned to solve more of the world's problems when they are in Sydney in October.

Reflecting on a relationship that never happened for either of us at school, and contrasting (as in a sonnet) that sad outcome with such fulfilling and unforgettable relationships both of us have with our spouses today, had me thinking deeply about my relationship with my wife Corrie. This poem is the inspiration.

## The Partner

Meeting up with my school friend and his wife reminded me of how special the relationship with your partner can be. My wife has greatly enriched my life, and my disease has brought us even closer, as we see more qualities arising in each other because of it.



*I've got the disease but she feels it as well  
It's simply not something that keeps to itself,  
Past trauma can't hide and reactions swell  
Work needs to be done not left on the shelf.  
She holds on to me when I seem unsteady,  
She's patient with me when I get a bit slow,  
She likes to 'sleep in' but she's quick to get ready,  
When she knows all I want is to get up and go.  
She helps with the book when I can't get it right,  
When I press the wrong key and can't get it back,  
She puts up with me coming to bed late at night  
Knowing I've got things I need to keep on track.  
She's my wife who lives with Parkinson's too,  
I'm so lucky, and know I'm not one of a few.*

## Day 14 - Belorado to San Juan de Ortega

It was wet and windy as we left Belorado, with no 'lights in the sky', but as luck would have it we had a pilgrim in front of us with a light on his forehead. Not that he had reached nirvana, it was just a torch, so we followed him closely, our early morning star. At this hour of the morning it was deliciously cool walking through the ubiquitous fields of wheat. The third village two hours out fed us with enough tortilla to get us up and over the first hill and forest of oak trees, their new buds cringing before the wind and the rain. The croissants got us up the second hill with its secluded pine forest, while the coffee poured us through the sticky thick brown mud. On passing a 12th century hermitage cave we met an Aussie whose brother-in-law has had Parkinson's for twenty five years; I'm hoping he found his way onto my blog. Six hours later we were guests in a hotel in San Juan.

This was only our second 'hotel', we had mostly stayed in hostels and private albergues offering private rooms with ensuites. There are municipal albergues with dormitory accommodation for as little as five euros each, however sending luggage to these lodgings is not always possible. Normally pilgrims who stay there carry their own packs, stopping when they have walked enough. For us, ringing each day for our luggage pick up was part of our afternoon routine, after booking our accommodation for the next night. So far it had run smoothly. As for daytime, Corrie carried a small pack with some first aid, nibbles, gloves, hats and rain pants, and I carried just a litre of water in the front pockets of my jacket.

Like 'states' in Australia, we passed through 'regions' in Spain. Beginning in the French Basque Pyrenees, we crossed soon after into the Spanish Basque Pyrenees. While some of the older generations wanted independence, nowadays most want to stay with Spain. This earlier earnest yearning for independence could have been partly because of their uniqueness - they are the oldest ethnic group in Europe. We then crossed into Navarra, famous for entertaining the writer Ernest Hemingway when he was on holidays writing a novel or two there, and infamous for the 'running of the bulls'. The most recent region was La Rioja, sometimes known as the 'zone of the seven valleys', formed by rapids of its seven rivers that all meet in the sparkling waters of the river Ebro.

La Rioja is also world famous for its celebrated red wines. The earliest written evidence of the existence of the grape in La Rioja dates back to 873 AD in the days of the Phoenicians. As was the case in many Mediterranean lands in medieval times, monks were the main practitioners of winemaking and great advocates of its virtues. Spain's earliest known and foremost poet of the Castilian language, Gonzalo de Berceo, mentions the wine in some of his works in the 13th century.

## The Wine

As we walked behind a man with a torch on his forehead, I thought of Indian yogis who meditate on a 'Divine being' through a 'third eye'; Christian saints who symbolise Christ's blood with wine; and Turkish sufis, who get drunk on the 'wine of the Divine'. Wine's symbolism can help to nourish a soul.



*You can't walk the camino not tasting the wine  
It's free, it's pleasant, it's just part of your day,  
There waiting for you whenever you dine  
It will nourish your soul along the way.  
There's also wine that flows from a fountain  
Even children line up to get their taste,  
For pilgrims it's reward for climbing a mountain  
A local gets there each day with haste.  
As you walk white paths and cross old bridges  
Down rocky hills and across little streams,  
You'll see the vines on the flats and the ridges  
And know to the camino what that wine means.  
This wine it comes from the fruit of the soil,  
To this nectar the pilgrim remains ever loyal.*



## Day 15 - San Juan de Ortega to Burgos

An intimate time was held in the small and only bar in town run by a father and his two sons. A Spanish bar sells mostly wine, beer and soft drinks, with some tapas, coffee, cakes and croissants, and has a dining area where meals as described earlier are served. In the company of twenty five walkers, including Germans, French, Spanish, and Americans, we spent some hours swapping stories and talking 'walking'. There was loud patriotic singing, so I took this rare opportunity to further strengthen my voice with some not yet discovered notes.

From tiny San Juan we headed off to the historic capital of Castile, Burgos. Emerging from the budding oak forest, we came across a magical cafe, whose entry required us to duck, and carefully step down to just three coffee tables. Groceries lined the small wall; to the left a counter for coffee; left again and up two stairs to a bar with even less head space; left again a doorway hugged us as we walked into a two table eating space, then down two steps now back alongside the entrance. We loved this little place, set beneath low timber beams and owned by a middle aged music lover.

We left reluctantly to climb a steep hill with large uneven rocks challenging our eyes and feet at every moment. On the way down the other side we met a Canadian who showed an interest in Parkinson's, while the relative (who has Parkinson's) of the 'Aussie' I met yesterday was now showing an interest in my blog.

Between seven and ten million people worldwide are living with Parkinson's disease. The incidence of the disease increases with age, however around four percent of people are diagnosed before the age of fifty. Men are one and a half times more likely to have Parkinson's than women, and severity of symptoms can vary greatly.

As well as our Canadian companion, we spent the last laps home with an engaging Swiss girl into the large city of Burgos which lies in the province (provinces are parts of regions) of its own name. It is known for its archaeological digs where one million years old human remains have been found. Along with these discoveries has been an unearthed 10th century Spanish language.

We planned our first 'walk-free day', staying in the architectural wonderland of Burgos for two nights. As per our usual experience, when we asked a Spaniard for directions to our old worldly five-star-looking, two-star-paying hotel, he walked us one kilometre to its majestic entrance. Our hungry and talkative stomachs sensed out the crowded medieval 'street of bars' for the last day of 'the week of tapas', where we bumped (the Spanish don't mind being bumped) our way through the 'floor of stale serviettes' to a 'bench of fresh delights'.

## Tapas

These are usually eaten in one or two mouthfuls over periods of time. Parkinson's has given me many things to do, and to achieve them I have found it best to do those things in 'small bites'.



*Tapas is often synonymous with Spain  
A piece of bread with some type of meat,  
It was meant to cover (so flies would refrain)  
Your drink, so it would remain a treat.  
The Romans brought olives to add more flavor,  
Almonds, fruits and spices came from the Moors,  
Then came tomatoes and things you could savor,  
Potatoes and peppers brought more indoors.  
On the camino if you keep your eyes clear  
And you want food simple yet small and tasty,  
Ask for tapas so you can cover your beer  
Have another and rest, and don't be too hasty.  
And just like your journey along the way  
Can be a different experience every day.*

## Day 16 - Burgos

Sunlight crept into our room to wake us for the first time on our journey. Looking out on to quaint wrought iron balconies like ours and a lantern-lit Spanish street, did not have us looking for our walking poles. Instead, a quiet interlude with our German and Dutch companions and a stroll around town was enough of a walk, and a chance to prevent too many leg and foot complaints in the weeks ahead.

Used to striding out (as we are taught in rehabilitation), it requires some concentration to just 'stroll'. So on a 'stroll' I can still stride out, but to enable me to stay back with others, I tend to do it in slow motion with a long arm swing, which stops me losing my balance and provides a workout at the same time.

Reflecting on the people from many nationalities we have met, I consider how lucky we are to be raised in an English speaking country. If we spoke most any other language only, there would be great limitations on how many people we could converse with. But thanks to English being a universal language, so many cultures at least have a smattering of it. So my appreciation goes out to those who take the time to speak my language.

Our day off was a further opportunity to raise awareness in a big city where people enquired about my condition, and Parkinson's in general, so, they now have my website. A special chat occurred with a local woman who has the disease and is doing 'yoga' to stretch her muscles, 'meditation' to relax her mind, 'pilates' to work the micro muscles and 'cycling' to resist the muscle weakness.

She was able to involve herself in all these activities, despite having no access to them and no internet in her own village. Just to talk was a relief for her, and another special experience for us on our walk. We took a 'memory' photo for us all and plan to stay in contact.

Our stroll took us to the centrepiece of Spain's Gothic capital: its 13th century cathedral. Medieval streets provide a canvas to this grand sculpture, to me the equal of cathedrals in Spain's city of Leon, and Chartres in France. It was sculpted by French and Italian artisans into a magnificence that shows architecture at its grandest. The Gothic replaced the Romanesque, and later enhanced by the beauty of Renaissance steps and the splendor of Baroque domes. No matter what you think of the money spent, or the sometimes frustrating contradictions of the Church, it is hard to deny the creative genius of those who built these impressive works of art.

The cathedrals feed us with architectural and Christian delights to nourish the hungry mind and the yearning soul, but the weary body also needs nourishing. So I will leave the cathedral sonnet to Leon and serve you now with a sonnet on 'the bar'.

## The Bar

We sat at the bar relaxing and talking to the staff. We don't frequent the pub or bar equivalent in Sydney, so don't get to see what else the bar has to offer: a place to relax and connect with others, even when the masses arrive.



*There's a place in a village where pilgrims meet  
To catch up with those they've met before,  
Meet others they may have passed in the street,  
Or just sit on their own, time for less, not more.  
It's a bar and it has the obvious drink,  
A tapas treat or a three course meal,  
You can eat with others or just sit and think,  
Wherever you are the bar's a great deal.  
The bar and the pilgrim depend on each other,  
Without the pilgrim the bar could fold,  
Without the bar the pilgrim would suffer,  
Both would be damaged or so I'm told.  
But it's here to stay, is the Spanish bar,  
It's never too close, and it's never too far.*

## Day 17 - Burgos to Hornillos del Camino

At 7.00 pm we walked into a deserted 'Panchos', our tapas stop the day before, for a snack of 'raciones'. We're into the Spanish way of a large lunch and small snacks for dinner, the only downside being that most of our camino friends are having their big meal at night. Panchos was in a narrow street, just wide enough for crowds of mostly locals to huddle and chat, over tall, oval tables placed there by tapas bars on each side. When we asked why the long bar was empty, la senora told us: "the Spanish shop till 8.00 pm, then they'll come, but I like it quiet". So an hour alone with Ana and her staff (couldn't do this without Corrie's Spanish) waiting for the inevitable food and wine seekers, was very entertaining, and, with some tapas on the house.

When the 'seekers' did arrive the whole atmosphere changed. A relaxed laid back mild evening became a whirlwind of activity as the first 'shoppers' arrived ready for their 'morsels of delight'. The long hook like bar is where you order and where many stay seated for the evening. Yet it is also where you collect your tapas, so it is fortunate that 'sorry' and 'excuse me' aren't all that necessary in Spain. Conveniently, you don't have to be careful with dropping your napkins on the floor because that is where they are supposed to end up; nor worry about being late because there are no set times, and often the food gets cheaper further into the night. Such a flexible and friendly way of eating, I can't understand why it didn't catch on in Sydney.

Clouds greeted us in the morning, as did our constant farewelling cuckoo, when we turned into the laneway and the long path out of town. A ten kilometre stretch before breakfast, followed by a long gradual climb, took us on to the 'meseta', part of a long stretch of wheat, corn and maize. The wheat itself was quite spectacular like a green carpet with its half metre high stalks silhouetted against distant low mountains. On the higher side of the path the maize and corn looked on with quiet envy at its more illustrious competitor on the lower southern plain. The bald hills behind seemed to have drained themselves of color as their green cover flowed out on to undulating landform and lush plains.

Our lodgings lay in the striking medieval one-street village of Hornillos meaning 'small stove'. I don't know why this meaning, but I can imagine it to be the perfect place to finish writing this little book. I envisaged: rising early in the morning chill, rubbing my hands together in front of the open door of a 'small stove', watching the flames flicker as the kettle boils. This took me back to days on my parents' farm where they would appear at sunrise warming their tea by the side of an open fire, after passing my bedroom with dad's ominous line: "sleep not lest ye come to poverty" - which probably explains why we leave in the dark. In reality, we took a little time to breathe in the village's ancient stories, and think of their inhabitants sitting by their fires.

## A Village

The life of a village is its people (families and friends), and while in this village there seemed only to be memories, each day a new camino family would arrive, and it was special to be part of that ever changing community.



*Down from the hills along a white way  
The flats sing green, the hills cry bare,  
And there in the distance where no kids play  
A village lies quiet, it seems no-one's there.  
The pilgrim treads lightly, doesn't want to violate  
The ghosts of the past who drifted in peace,  
This village is witness to much of their fate,  
It keeps its secrets never to release.  
But if you tread softly and don't make a sound  
And listen so carefully for whispers or sighs,  
Or look for cracks in the walls then you're bound  
To discover the secrets and behind what lies,  
Those silent walls of which villages speak,  
The silence fades, you can now hear a creak.*

## Day 18 - Hornillos del Camino to Castrojeriz

It seemed that the same clouds cooled us, and the same cuckoo birds told us the time, as we took the ancient village's no longer secret creaks with us onto a more defined meseta. The hills faded further into the background as undulations now flattened out into vast plains hugging our forever winding pathway. Along this path we met a keen German walker who showed a lot of interest in Parkinson's as a friend of hers has it. She took a photo of my website and promised to share my blog with her friends back home. We walked and spoke to this engaging woman for a cherished while, and when she outpaced us, we fell back with a delightful Irish woman for a short time, soon into our own silence, once more being disturbed only by the endearing 'buen caminos'.

It became more obvious to me that the stillness and silence we experienced in Bayonne had never left us. The villages were mostly silent, the pilgrims remained silent even though this may be the quiet suffering of aching legs and blistered feet, there is mostly no traffic, and even the Spanish seem more quiet than is their nature. This silence for me meant a time to look inward and experience the bliss of meditation.

Meditation means different things to different people but usually it is a quiet time to reflect. For me it is a time to let my thoughts move away to deliver a space of 'rest' for my busy mind, allowing room for creative energy to flow without hindrance. To have this opportunity on a busy track in Europe, I would imagine, is a rare thing, so I wasn't going to miss it. I find my mind becomes clearer, with more energy to better experience the inevitable noise and chatter of daily life.

We passed through villages nestling in valleys, clinging to the hillsides or urging us up to their hilltop home: sometimes to rest on our own, at other times engaging with other walkers, to have coffee, thankfully rest our legs, fill up from the local fountain where water is warned against or promoted, taking clothing off, putting it on, or simply going for a toilet break. Eventually, a long flat tree-lined walk took us into Castrojeriz, lying at the base of yet another bald hill adorned by castle ruins, a reminder of what once was, and putting a short temporary break to the path hugging wheat and other various green crops.

We enjoyed a delightful interlude with a group of Australian women from the nostalgic Orisson albergue, who were taking a break in the garden of our hostel. We swapped unavoidable foot stories, and had a post lunch chat with a New Zealander, Chris and her Welsh-born husband, Gareth. A walk through this siesta-seeking town took us back to our now familiar beamed-ceiling home, the often shy sun peering into our little window. We wondered whether the cuckoos would be there again tomorrow?

## The Cuckoo

Like the cuckoo bird I have found it is easy to be misunderstood, while also being guilty of misunderstanding others. All it takes sometimes is a little research to save a lifetime of wasted misinformation.



*They say: "cuck-oo" just like their name  
There each morning with their usual greeting,  
They're thought of unkindly which is a real shame  
Very decent to us each morning we're meeting.  
I've heard people say they destroy other's nests,  
That cuckoos have a very unkind side,  
They're seen by many as nothing but pests,  
If they're seen as such, hard to turn the tide.  
But if you do your research you'll see very clearly  
That the cuckoo's eggs in the nest of others,  
Connect in a way that their presence merely  
Increases survival of chicks of their mothers.  
So when you hear the "cuck-oo" today  
Say: "cuck-oo" back, this bird is okay.*



## Day 19 - Castrojeriz to Boadilla del Camino

An 'hola' to old companions and 'top of the morning' to a new Irish woman companion who like us, is having her bag transported to her new digs. But soon on to more serious business, a very long high hill was laying in wait and Corrie, who had an hour's sleep due to a fever, was not excited about it. She made it though, as steep as anything in the Pyrenees. Her resilience is uncompromising with an ability to 'push through' when she attaches importance to the ultimate goal. While a fever would usually have seen most people in bed for a few days, (an idea that was contemplated), it simply amazes me how the body adapts when you do something contrary to what it seems to need.

We continued along the meseta, a high plateau that covers over forty percent of Spain. While the early May weather was glorious, it is freezing and windblown in winter, and blistering hot in summer. These wide open plains had an ethereal quality today, as the gracious stalks of the wheat fields swayed in tune with the gentle breeze, and distant snow peaks to the north provided a screen for a luscious silhouette. The large bare hills I talked of earlier now seemed relatively small, looking more like monks' caps with long flowing robes of green reaching out to the ancient white path that leads to their home far away in Santiago.

I don't know what it would be like to look at a landscape full of one other color, but this great green expanse feels snug, while open; fresh, though dry; hardy, yet fragile. These phrases could readily translate into human emotions, certainly contrasting feelings I had been experiencing along the way. We had climbed so many hills and valleys, that the idea of climbing a meseta, and staying there high above sea level for days (without the rises and falls of the previous contrasting landforms), defies description.

Apart from the accompanying major towns and cities, the meseta is sparsely populated, with its often nearly vacant earth-colored villages mostly identified by their church tower or grain silo. Due to mechanization, many of these villages are abandoned or inhabited by older people, the younger ones having moved to the cities in the 1960s in search of work. Boadilla, our next overnight village, is, however, one of many coming to life again, where buildings are being rejuvenated and needing locals to cater for the increase in pilgrim numbers.

Nature's mirroring of this rejuvenation was in the meseta's spring revival, where green glory wrapped around lavender fields with yellow and mauve flowers bordering the edges. The large drains between these edges and our track were lined with grasses and nettles, decorated with the stunning red of scattered poppies, only limited in number by the agricultural needs of these vast lands.

## Lavender

The scent and beauty of something can bring a sense of calm that can soothe the mind, especially appreciated when the body is aching, the mind is clouded and in an environment that can be harsh.



*Large bushes so white, look covered in snow,  
The witches cry out: "this mountain is ours",  
Competition is strong they have colors to show,  
Who will win the 'dance of the flowers'?  
On the slopes lower down a bush bides its time  
Pure violet it's clear that the color is true,  
The bush with a flower so divine,  
It has a dance of its own , 'The Lavender Hue'.  
Not only its sight can give you a thrill  
But its scent has a soothing and calming way,  
This gentle bush on the side of the hill  
Will cheer you up and make your day.  
They'll slow you down those Lavender plants,  
And delight you with their violet dance.*

## Day 20 - Boadilla del Camino to Villalcazar de Sirga

We continued along the meseta. I remember learning in geography at school about 'mesas' (small plateaus) - a bit late to use this knowledge, but now I at least know its origin. Our path joined the Canal de Castilla until crossing a lock into the village of Fromista, meaning 'cereal' - a reference to its large wheat harvest prominent since Roman times. There were a couple of unusually designed churches, notably one of the purist Romanesque churches in Spain built in the 11th century. Fromista's importance for pilgrims in medieval times was that many pilgrim hospitals were located there.

We walked past a few pilgrims (probably at our fastest) and some walked past us (still probably at our top speed). One we passed at less than our top gear (he had a painful hip due to a too-heavy-bag) giving us time to talk to him a little. He was a young Finnish man called Panu who had just completed (I fought the temptation) acting school, was taking a break before starting a family, and fulfilling an enduring desire to do this walk because of the challenge it presents. He was interested in Parkinson's so we had a chat and he will review my blog. I wonder if he knew that our nordic walking poles were first developed in his country!

This section was mostly on yet another narrow white pathway, but along the edge of a highway which removed some of the usual serenity. After lots of wide open spaces we arrived at the village of Villalcazar de Sirga (town of the canal tow-path) in the province of Palencia (land of fields), an area of dark rich soils and copious irrigation for growing a wide range of cereal crops. Yet again, we were amazed at the extensive and often unseen inventive system for quenching nature's thirst.

Brought to Spain by the Arabs in the 8th century, the system was developed over the next seven to eight hundred years into the extremely sophisticated schemes that still have agriculture thriving throughout the Iberian peninsula. There is also tight government control of inspection and enforcement that ensures its sustainability.

Turning back to Christian anecdotes, we visited the superb Santa Maria Templar church, home to a delightful panel showing the life of Saint James, the saint for whom many are making this pilgrimage. His remains in Santiago have allowed this ancient track to be maintained, and therefore used not only for those who seek enlightenment, but also for those who seek adventure, or, just want to go for a walk.

Our new home was a small hostel with a window overlooking our day's journey, inviting us to recall those reflective moments and intimate times adding to the collective thoughts now embedded forever in this timeless track. Outside there was some sun to hasten the drying of our clothes on a fairly cloudless day with a chill in the air.

## The Shoe

With Parkinson's, muscle movements become slower, and it is important for those with the disease, to keep them as mobile as possible with specific care and exercises. On the camino this lesson was magnified, as the same poor preparation threatened to end my walking journey early.



*To walk a long way you need the right shoes  
Ensuring lots of room to wiggle your toes,  
Else blisters you'll get, and toe nails you'll lose,  
If you squash your feet then your pace slows.  
Orthotics are good if arch height your foot lacks  
And get an implant if you have any spurs,  
Also oil is good to prevent those cracks  
And prick that blister before damage occurs.  
And pack as if you're going for a day  
A change of clothes, thongs, and rain stuff,  
Small first aid kit, and water for the way,  
Your hat, your poles, that should be enough.  
Your pack and shoes they'll get you there,  
If your feet and your back you treat with care.*

## Day 21 - Villacazar de Sirga to Calzadilla de la Cueva

We left our little village at what is now our regular time of 6.30 am. For six kilometres we travelled on the white path, but next to the highway the sound of the few cars unknowingly camouflaged the sound of my voice exercises. Quite soon we reached the village of Carrion, where we moved onto a wide pathway and away from the traffic. Seventeen kilometres walking without any place to rest ... a tough but rewarding day! This longest ever continuous walk in my life had me recalling an injury I sustained while walking close to here last year. I have a chronic back condition that becomes painfully acute when, for instance, I make a sudden movement. Waking up one morning I could hardly move, my back movement so restricted I couldn't put my shoes on - every twist or bend ended in violent protest. I decided to embark on our day's walk anyway, and twenty kilometres later my back said: "thanks".

The wind blew at our backs and with the thrust of the nordic poles as well, we flew past many of the walkers, so a good chance to meet others. Subtle messages are given if people don't want your company, a classic happened today when someone who didn't seem to want to talk said: "you're faster than us, buen camino" so we 'buen camino'd'. Another made a query about Parkinson's, a great clue, so for some time we talked in English and Spanish to Beatrice, Loretta and Ana from Spain.

The girls told us that the mountains flanking us well to the north were the Picos de Carrion, their white sides glistening from afar, while the ones behind were the even more impressive Picos de Europa. We soon passed through the town of Carrion de los Condes (Carrion meaning decaying and dead flesh) which, like many Spanish villages, has been decaying, but not yet dead. The women, who were local to the area, moved on after an enlightening talk, and promised to post after checking my blog out.

We re-met our Irish, Kiwi and Welsh companions, and two French 'madams' who turn up everywhere we do. We would love to chat with these women, but we don't know each others' language, so we communicate on a different level with smiles, nods and some unknown, but roughly understood words. We were met at our new lodgings in Calzadilla de la Cueva by the warmest and friendliest hosts in Spain, so welcome after a long time walking. Many of the pilgrims are in bad shape and at the 'real' end of the day it's hard to tell who has Parkinson's and who hasn't. I'm a standout though because I've got a sign on my back.

Last day on the meseta, and even though emotions may vary with the seasons on these high flat fields (as described in this book as well as other material I have read), for many, these emotions are stimulated. Another opportunity might well be there to discover and process what previously might have been an underlying, unknown feeling.

## The Meseta

Emotions can vary greatly on the long stretches of the meseta. For me, it was important to reflect on this and learn more how to better deal with deeper emotions, and learning to see them not as roadblocks, but to walk with them as close companions on my journey.



*It can bring out anger, make you love a bit more,  
Can make you cry, and even laugh with you,  
It might create heat, so cold you'll implore  
To reduce the kilometres to just a few.  
It's impossible to walk if rain is your fate,  
It's still not easy when there's not a breeze,  
The sun will burn you if you leave too late,  
There is no shade, no bushes or trees.  
But when you get the season right  
And leave before the sun has stirred,  
The burden then might seem more light  
And a change in you may have occurred.  
The meseta may be your best teacher,  
No matter which conditions might feature.*

## Day 22 - Calzadilla de la Cueva to Sahagun

A clear sky greeted us, while the north star was the only light to remind us we are just another speck in a huge, mostly unknown universe. What is known to us is that the track we've been walking on was used by the Romans over 2000 years ago (and in much the same condition), the main highway alongside providing us with a modern contrast; past and present equally functional. We continued on through villages closely associated with the 'Order of the Knights Templars', the mountains looking over us as did the Knights Templars over past pilgrims, appearing to ensure their ongoing safety. The path soon sidled off into the countryside, winding its way up through landforms unchanged since Roman times, while the nature and extent of what colors the landform, has.

The Romans arrived in northern Spain after defeating Carthage in 206 BC and began constructing roads to spread their customs and products in an attempt to quickly and dramatically Romanise this part of Spain. These roads were built alongside new cities, and soon connected them to the old, with paved roads (called 'vias') across the great expanse of the Iberian peninsula. The roads were about a metre and a half wide, with stone monoliths every thousand steps to mark the distances, leading to the authentic freeways of the time. Many side roads split off each route in various directions of the peninsula, joining up the main roads and outlying agricultural fields.

We were quietly walking along one of these roads when I heard the familiar sound of home. A lean and solid Australian army general, walked up to have a chat. After a short talk we found we had a mutual colleague from over forty years ago. This colleague was my company commander in the Vietnam war and I was his radio operator. It was an encounter which brought back mixed emotions: happiness, because we worked well together, and sadness, that chemicals in the war may have been at least part of the cause of my Parkinson's. Today, Michael's camino adventure will be the theme of a book with an artistic component he is hoping to publish in the following months. We talked about our Spanish experiences then said goodbye after agreeing that most Spaniards are very warm and welcoming.

Our path crossed the modern highway on the approach to yet another travelers' inn at Sahagun, known for its Mudejar architecture and built by the Moors in the 12th century. It was here that we crossed paths with our three special Spanish women friends. They were resting on an old bench near a 12th century bridge, that introduces the hermitage of 'Our Lady of the Bridge'. We enjoyed each other's company for a while, a time that I treasure and hold very dearly, the meeting place near this bridge holding a very special memory that inspired this sonnet.

## A Gothic Bridge

I was reminded of how valuable past connections are, when I met up with a fellow traveller (on that 12th century old bridge) who formed a nexus to a colleague from some forty years past. This journey has taken us across many a bridge connecting us with many dynamic and wonderful people.



*It's time that I treasured and held very dear  
A place where I would stop and ponder,  
My thoughts and feelings surfaced clear  
I would look inside or search out yonder.  
It's a bridge from a medieval year  
That beckons you to come and look,  
And sense the depth of sweat and tears  
That flowed below, sprinkling the brook.  
Then walking over our Gothic bridge  
Time stands still as I ponder connections,  
Coming down from that medieval ridge  
To contemplate and think of directions.  
The bridge above, and the river below  
Can remind us how to connect, and flow.*



## Day 23 - Sahagun to Calzada de los Hermanillos

As promised, we heard from our enthusiastic young Spanish women friends who are now following, and posting on my blog on a regular basis. They were all enjoying our perspective and were very supportive. The meetings with people like these have turned a really good journey into an even more memorable one, the girls enriching our journey by their good nature and local knowledge.

We've now left the 'land of fields' for the province of Leon, which in 1188 may have been the first parliament in Europe after the parliament of Iceland. That said, our own parliament of two (after passing through an honor guard of statuesque poplars), had to make a decision, for our faithful yellow arrows were now pointing two ways. This was not a mistake, but alternative pathways to the same destination.

We took the Roman road, and the one so less used, that we were enjoying our own company all day for the very first time, except once, in the small village of Calzada de Coto, where we spent ten minutes with the village ciguena (stork). The chicks were hatching, and the soaring population which excites the locals, should move to even greater heights in 2014. The earlier poplars and the intermittent low shrubs were now shading us for the first time in four days as we walked in the silence of our own thoughts along the Roman road.

We arrived in Calzada de los Hermanillos, a village we could see from a great distance as we walked through open plains. It seemed to be the place from nowhere, so far from anywhere. We walked around the village back streets looking for a shop we were informed was there. After disturbing half the village and getting directions from small groups of older women sitting in the shade of their house walls, then from the curious ones bending their necks through creaking doors, we found it. Behind one of these doors, we squeezed down a narrow hallway and into the small front room. We weren't expecting much, but we enjoyed the best and freshest cakes on the camino, and what a delightful man who served us, in a small house, in a quiet village, on a Roman road.

Most villages had two to five hundred inhabitants, one of them had just one hundred, so there is not a great need for shops and supermarkets. When there are, they usually consist of a bar or two (on day 16, I described the bar), a small fruit and grocery shop, maybe a larger one in the bigger villages, two to three albergues and hostels that might sell snacks and breakfast only, to larger meals in the hotels which often have a bar as well. For the journeying pilgrim this is usually adequate, as most are aware of what is available, therefore carrying adequate washing, clothing and medical supplies with them on this fascinating, often arduous, journey.

## A Roman Road

We took a less used road, and uncovered some unusual and unexpected delights similar to those we are experiencing with the less used Parkinson's road. Not only are we surviving, but uncovering other uses.



*The Roman roads still last today  
Foundations strong, five layers of rubble,  
Across this land they snaked their way  
Tying up their gains and preventing trouble.  
Their role today is something new  
They remind me of times off' forgotten,  
They are open to all but seen by a few  
Who admire the good and regret the rotten.  
Pilgrims have used this time worn track  
To visit Saint James across in Santiago,  
Adventurers too will show their back  
As they tread this path from so long ago.  
The Roman road its way still snakes,  
To enable that journey, as long as it takes.*

## Day 24 - Calzada de los Hermanillos to Mansilla de la Mulas

We met up with Chris and Gareth, our New Zealand friends and had a chat with Peter and Kristin from Canada over some 'tapas' in the 'village in isolation'. We seemed to be in the middle of nowhere - reminiscent of towns in the flat outback of Australia - and more so at night, the stars in the stunningly clear night skies seemingly our only neighbours. The village's gregarious cafe owner informed us that when eating a small piece of bread with savory, people used to put it on top of their drinks to keep the flies out - top means 'tapa', thus the word.

On the way back from 'tapas' we ran into an athletic Sydney executive, Barry, who was walking at a frenetic pace (up to forty five kilometres a day) with his exhausted daughter. A self-confessed workaholic he was firmly told by his employees to just 'go', possibly they had an ulterior motive. Hearing him talk of the importance of water and salt gave me a new understanding of my muscle spasms, so I'll work on acquiring a greater taste for water, and to understand, that, at the right time, salt can be a good thing. We also solved the psychological problems of the world in fifteen minutes, and he's going to follow my blog, probably while walking.

When you leave in the dark, it's vital the night before to check where the yellow arrows are so you don't get lost, and how well lit the area is and for how far, so you can leave accordingly. The street lights were our moon as we followed them and the arrows out of town on to the longest extant Roman road in Spain. Twenty five kilometres without a coffee shop or a bench, and for the second day in a row, without people. It was a great time to reflect on present and future decisions, and, of course, to practice the all important voice exercises.

Across vast open plains with the odd little oasis of trees, not one house or person, just large irrigation ditches, healthy looking crops, and us. We crossed a railway line, lunched in a tiny deserted railway station, then continued ever westwards until our first 'field of poppies' in four hundred kilometres. Their blood red color so vibrant, seemed to bring to life the small old brown shed in its tree thicket home. I love poppies and storks, so this has been the road just waiting for me, and people like me.

We arrived in Mansilla de las Mulas (hand on the saddle of the mule) just hoping that the saddles were light, the girth was correctly tightened, they were not overloaded, and they were treated well. A book I am reading by Ildefonso Falcones talks of how the Arabs would sing to their camels and brush them lightly with a stick to direct them. I hope it was the same for the donkey in the saddle. The town still has its 12th century medieval wall and is the place where the Real Camino Frances joins with the Calzada Romana, the old with the new, becoming one road.

## A Field of Poppies

This 'field of poppies' moved me greatly as I stopped to watch their silent beauty, thinking not only of those who sacrificed their lives at war, but also the sacrifices of those with Parkinson's, their friends and families, and the beauty that can come from that.



*At first I saw you standing by the road  
Just one, to let the world know: 'I am here'.  
The glance, it stole my heart and really showed  
The power of that beauty when it's so near.  
Soon others then appeared in similar flush,  
I loved you all, I knew not how to choose,  
You spread to fields afar in one red blush,  
Not one of you could I, afford to lose.  
Yet was not love that needed to possess,  
To share it with the world was my intent,  
That greater love would make it more, not less,  
A flower that lets the others know they're meant  
To show their beauty too, in peace they'll die,  
The poppies burning love still makes me cry.*

## Day 25 - Mansilla de las Mulas to Leon

The regular clumps and rows of poplars have sung to us the last two mornings as they softened and decorated the streets, their eclectic mix of birds and rustling leaves creating one of nature's stunning improvised orchestras. The tumbling of the water under the ancient bridge added yet another melodious sound to this fabulous show under the stars, the cuckoo in the background keeping a two beat timing as the 'unrisen' sun lights up the orchestra pit, while the reflection of the village's ancient Roman wall added a theatrical touch.

The pilgrims also move as one. Each day there is a moving performance when the first exodus happens well before sunrise, the few gently sounding solo instruments emerging stealthily one by one, followed by the early breakfast eaters who leave soon after sunrise, adding fuller sounds. Then the orchestra becomes as one when large numbers, determined by how the conducting sun directs them, mimic nature's orchestra above. As the performance proceeds, some cease playing while they have a coffee/meal break or tend to wounds, then join in again, and finally, one by one, they build to an exciting climax as the curtain falls on their journey.

We walked on along the dark path with its dawning light seeming to illuminate more each minute, and stretch ahead further and further alongside an ever busier main road as we neared the medieval city of Leon. We returned after twelve months to this mystical Venetian-style medieval city, where streets, not canals, guided us in spurious directions. By keeping a keen gaze on the fleeting glimpses of the towering cathedral, we knew we would soon be guided back to our cosy inn.

The local police establishment, the 'guardia civil', met us at the edge of town to provide us with a map and to answer any queries. A great way, I thought, of connecting with perennial pilgrims, setting a good tone for the stay, and sending a clear message: the police are there to help.

Speaking of connection, my toe nails were losing theirs while I also had unknowingly encouraged a large blister, as I obediently followed advice to neither remove my nails nor burst the blisters. So I was bemused when I connected with a local podiatrist, who painstakingly removed my nails and burst my blister making me feel a whole lot better for doing what I was told not to. I wonder who it was that told me!

We met up with our Dutch and Austrian acquaintances dancing tango in a bar (even though they didn't have Parkinson's), and later, were stopped by a young Spanish girl who was interested in my blog, having lost a relative to the side effects of Parkinson's. We relished continued connection with my classmate of so long ago and his wife, new and old friends, and a myriad of good people.

## The Poplar

In Roman times the people used to meet under the poplar (people), a tree that was then a symbol for the masses, so it was time to reflect not just on those living with Parkinson's, but on all human suffering.



*They appear on the walk when least expected  
Usually small forests bordering the road,  
Or in orderly columns as though they've been erected  
They're meant for fame as soon as they're sowed.  
Environmentally sound they're used for lots of things  
Their leaves can be eaten by stock in tough times,  
Their wood for a guitar and the pleasure it brings  
Though if cut down would seem such a crime.  
But left there they give us immeasurable pleasure  
Their musical leaves with slight wind make a sound,  
That leaves no doubt we have something to treasure  
A camino speciality so glad we found.  
This glorious sight, the tree of the people  
Gives us the delight, that the stork gives the steeple.*

## Day 26 - Leon

On a 'camino free day', we explored the maze-like streets of the famous city of Leon, where we encountered a church open day and night, never to be shut, proclaimed by Royal decree. A fascinating city which had, by some texts' interpretations, the first democracy in Europe, a pretty good start in the life of a fledgling city. It was a wonderful privilege simply walking around a city with such an egalitarian history, a feeling so special, visiting ordinary shops often giving us an extraordinary feeling. Sharing this with Corrie added yet another delightful dimension.

This ancient city had me reflecting on 'real democracy' and the only true freedom that we can be certain of, and that we can have control over - the freedom to choose what we think, what we feel, and what we do with our lives (mostly).

Having Parkinson's has altered what I think, but has not reduced my ability to think it. I used to think I had lots of time before I had to make decisions about the last period of my life. I used to wonder what I would do with the rest of my precious time on earth, resulting in decisions not being made and simply going down a path I hadn't prepared for. I had a democratic right to think, but I wasn't using it.

Tied in with my thoughts above I have felt complacent and worried about valuable time I might be wasting, and what if I wasn't given the time I wanted. I was anxious about some family relationships and became caught up in trying to, in some improbable way, imagine good outcomes. I had a perfect democracy, as most of us have, but it wasn't working for me as I expected. My democratic right to feel what I want is mine alone. Then I got my diagnosis.

I now know my muscle movements are becoming slowly less active and I have a shorter time span in which to use them. I felt some shock, some sadness and concern as to what this might mean for me and my wife, and our future together.

Because I have been pro-active in looking at what I can do to manage this deterioration, I stumbled upon something I love to do, studying and reading poetry and writing my own, and combining that with other loves in my life: reading, writing and walking. I have pulled back as well from wishing for some better relationship outcomes and feel relaxed with what I have. So my democracy is working.

My disease has now forced me into action, and that action has led me into making different decisions that give me the freedom I have never allowed myself to have.

I'll leave you with a sonnet that, in my eyes, speaks to two vital parts of Leon's culture: Gothic architecture and freedom.

## The Cathedral

This journey has allowed me to pursue my passions, opening up a world of color, light and beauty, also reflected in the passionate support of others.



*The Leon Cathedral it stands tall and proud  
It may be the worlds' best, if it's measured by looks,  
The pale yellow stone has its praises rung loud  
Its spires are lauded in all the right books.  
The stained glass windows hold the people in awe  
Their light alters perception during the day,  
This great "House of Light" that the people adore  
It gives one a feeling: 'believe now, don't delay'.  
But just down the alleyways the ciguena looks out  
On San Isodoro a more modest affair,  
No spirals, small windows the stone appears cold,  
Less people visit, the metaphors aren't there,  
No payment for entry, just a man with a bowl.  
Open twenty four hours by royal decree,  
For anyone, anytime, what a church could be.*



## Day 27 - Leon to Villar de Mazarife

We left Leon for a second time and left my gortex shoes for the last time. We loved Leon, and I tried to love my shoes, but they didn't love me, so I left them in a cupboard where some shoes are meant to be. I am now having an intimate love affair with my blue "New Balance" shoes, and heaven knows I need all the help I can get with balance; and if he/she is in the sky, the celestial blue color should be of great assistance. Now what do I do with the 'shaking parts'?

Well lit streets ushered us out of this ancient city into the less attractive streets that are home to those things that help old cities stay alive; that give people an income; that allow communities to thrive and provide a strong basis for future prosperity. This is the industrial part of Leon where the ciguenas don't differentiate, a bell tower is always a bell tower; where poppies still grow; and where the 'cafe con leche' is much the same as it is in the old part of town.

We wished the other pilgrims well on their personal journeys as they did with us, some limping, some with their shoes off trying to prevent or repair a limp, while others, like my wife, in lovable shoes, just wondering what all the fuss was about.

After two hours of walking the industrial sites we stopped for a coffee and had a chat with an Irish couple who were doing the walk in three stages. Soon after, the 'fifty kilometre a day Sydney salt and water man' and his devoted daughter, sauntered past as though it was a Sunday stroll (but they had just taken a day off so another fifty should be a walk in the park), and we swapped cheeky remarks: "what's the hurry", and, "can't handle the pace", but without stopping, of course. Sitting outside, even if it is a bit cooler, allows for these little opportunities.

Moving on past shops slowly coming to life, we shared our road with others taking different journeys along a major thoroughfare, past truck driver pit stops and finally off on a sort of country road. Once again, sharing, but now with less people, over modern bridges, through villages cut in two by quiet roads, and into the busy and thriving village of Villar de Mazarife. Here the three stork bell tower was once again fully booked. The village not only has a church dedicated to Saint James but a store called 'Frutas de Camino de Santiago', together signaling we were still on the right track, and in friendly Spanish hands.

After booking into our albergue, doing the mandatory washing, searching for pegs and line space, we went to lunch. While eating, we met up with two Dutch women we had talked to in other villages. One has a blog and is raising funds for Downs Syndrome children, so, as you do, we swapped our blog addresses.

## The Ciguena

The return of the migratory stork in springtime symbolises rebirth and renewal, and I am using this disease to renew my thinking and channeling my flights of fancy into real and creative pursuits.



*They stand upright above all the rest,  
The steeple praises them just down below,  
Closer to the Divine is their twiggy nest,  
In town it's by far the greatest show.  
It's not only steeples where they make their bed,  
Poles, chimneys, minarets where 'imams' cry,  
Out of harms' way not where humans tread,  
As close as they can get to the clear blue sky.  
They're a statue, an angel, a monument too  
Their life in the balance high up in the air,  
While they're not as famous as 'The Shrew',  
They're not there for glory, they just don't care.  
They have the locals' respect and the visitors' awe,  
Storks earn their place on this high bed of straw.*

## Day 28 - Villar de Mazarife to Hospital de Orbigo

We returned to our lunch retreat for 'the pilgrim's menu' with our Canadian, Kiwi/Welsh and three Dutch friends and met a lovely English couple from East London. A tasty dinner with interesting people in an exquisite environment - a large closed-in paved courtyard with a fountain and delightful hosts, meant a late night, 10.00 pm.

Late, because our albergue doors are locked at that time, so we quickly sprinted back, which seemed such a ludicrous way to end a twenty eight kilometre walk. To access our private room we had to gingerly weave our way through a darkened thirty-bed dormitory (about ten were occupied), so out of respect for these weary souls it is a good thing that we follow the albergue rules.

We slept with the window open, looking out onto a cloudless sky with the 'north star and friends' bidding us "buenas noches" knowing they, themselves, will never sleep. Breakfast was offered at 6.00 am, a ready-made excuse to get Corrie going early, so we left with the same rules of not disturbing others, but this time, a real test - two heavy cases, a flight of stairs, and no guiding light as we moved with mindful stealth. It takes a lot to disturb a sleeping pilgrim.

The street lights saw us out again because the moon was still away, the north star not bright enough, and the milky way had other jobs to do. We left for the first time with others, so a different experience replaced the bird sounds; the sun, oblivious to all of this as always, just comes up. We walked at a reasonable pace with little weight and renovated (not for Corrie) feet, through plowed and newly harvested fields, the birds seeming to encourage our efforts to arrive at Hospital de Orbigo (a reference to hospitals for pilgrims in medieval times). To get shelter we crossed one of the longest and best preserved 13th century medieval bridges in Spain (Puente de Orbigo), with the water jumping merrily as it bumped the rocks below.

These rivers feed the village fountains of which there are many, and I can't remember a village without one. Nearly everyone can walk a few kilometres without food, but not so without water. And no need to rush to get there in case shops close, because these drinking water 'shops' are open twenty four hours a day and their produce is free. Even outside a village you might find a tap protruding from a rock providing the same service, and not very often, there will be a danger sign warning against drinking from that particular fountain. They come in all shapes and sizes and are often the centre piece of the village in the middle of a plaza, a place where there are seats on which to relax and reflect for a bit.

The pilgrim's progress would be of a much greater challenge if not for the perennial water fountain.

## The Pilgrim

Walking with others from various countries showed me the extent of Parkinson's and other neurological diseases worldwide, and the similarity of the issues and feelings involved.



*In the early shadows of morning light  
Dark figures limp and sway and stop,  
Like soldiers returning from the fight  
All spent, less will, and ready to drop.  
These silent figures can't hurt any more,  
One million steps, many more to go,  
Why wound yourself to the very core,  
What's to prove, and what's to show.  
One figure might say "it's all in the mind",  
Another: "the body can do what it's told",  
Whispers one: "it's spiritual, what can I find"?  
"It'll be my masterpiece before I'm too old".  
When ashes are spread, good to have known,  
You'll reap the fruit of the seeds you've grown.*

## Day 29 - Hospital de Orbigo to Murias de Rechivaldo

They walked toward me, their burly, bearded, steadfast looks appeared at first glance to be threatening. When my “hola” was returned by all three, I knew they weren’t there to defend the longest medieval bridge in Spain. They may not even have known this fact, as ‘bikers’ conventions, I imagine, would not have a detailed medieval history component. This is what we walked into, as we crossed the bridge that a certain knight successfully defended against three hundred other knights (one at a time). His name was Don Suero de Quinones. After being scorned by a beautiful maiden, he defended this imposing bridge, freeing himself from the bonds of love and regaining his honor.

Hospital de Orbigo is not only hospitable to bikers but also very pilgrim friendly. Our hostel hosts proudly led us on a guided tour of our new lodgings, the senora letting us know, in detail, how all the modern appliances worked and other various instructions. This new way of greeting was linked to a host of awards they had received as bed and breakfast managers. What goes with this is high dining prices, so we had dinner elsewhere with our Canadian friends, discussing political structures, forest preservation and foot rejuvenation.

We departed town on our own, a feeling we were learning to cherish, and it remained that way for another five kilometres until our ‘breakfast village’; once again we were the only people on the street. The road leaving the village cut a dairy farm in half, where recently milked cows seemingly moored at us intruders, while farmers continued their daily chores, and we poled up into the hills followed by the climbing sun. At the top, a mountain range came into view to the north, their sheets of snow glimmering in the sun. Soon it was down a rocky road to a valley spotted with clumps of poplars whose leaf-bells jangled in the wind as a small stream hastened in between.

Our self interest was broken as an American passed us on the uphill part, still reflecting on why he is walking this marathon. The mountains of Leon (Montes de Leon) closed in on us as we passed a lean-to cafe against a pile of ruins. It was then downhill into Astorga, home to a Gaudi palace and the meeting of three caminos: Camino Frances, Calzada Romana and Camino Mozarabe from Sevilla. Astorga marks the start of the Maragateria. The Maragato culture goes back to the 7th century, their true origin unknown, and thus they are trying very hard to keep their traditions alive.

It was then mostly flat country until a long and gentle incline took us into Murias de Rechivaldo where our grape covered courtyard beckoned us in for a welcome rest beneath its rough beams, while a stork slept above, and a cat cried.

## The Cats

Since my diagnosis I have become more content with my aloneness as I learn more about myself. It has also helped me in pursuing greater independence as factors outside my control attempt to limit it.



*The 'cats of the camino' are doing it tough  
They've learnt what to do when times are bad,  
Most scamper away 'cause they've had enough  
Maybe don't like our poles, or just feel sad.  
Elsewhere four kittens weren't getting their share  
Some jumped after rats in the wheat and straw,  
While others scavenged for their bits of fare  
Some sat by their window looking unsure.  
One sat on my lap while I tied my shoes  
And when I stood up to my lap she clung,  
This cat had decided she had nothing to lose  
camino bound was she, so there she hung.  
Another followed us, had she heard of "the way"?  
Maybe this is why, they appear sad all day.*

## Day 30 - Murias de Rechivaldo to Rabanal del Camino

Murias de Rechivaldo spread out along two major streets lined with houses constructed of multi-colored, multi-sized stones forming thick walls. Large wooden doorways, once used to house horses and horse drawn vehicles, were the only evidence left of their past presence. We farewelled our adventurous Canadian friends Peter and Kristin after dinner, and prepared for the following day.

This village is on a vast open low scrub flat, with a narrow white gravel pathway stretching far ahead flanked by yellow broom, lavender and white flowered bushes. The flowers stayed with us until we breakfasted at Santa Catalina de Somoza, a one street oasis that seemed to be just another adornment to this forever stretching pathway. It widened and narrowed as we passed a young pine forest, and became drawn into a u-shaped mountain range in the distance as we navigated inclined rocky paths. We were soon overtaken by a group of silent Koreans (of whom there were many on this journey).

We passed through the delightfully quaint village of El Ganso, stopping at a local store run by an equally delightful woman, who was run by eight friendly 'gatos' and a miniature 'perra' called Petunia. As we left town, a ciguena flew low back to his bell-tower home, carrying a large breakfast for his partner and their kids.

The pathway continued to move us from flat to gradually rising rocky roads, on towards our mansion at Rabanal. On entering the steep-streeted town we were joined by a lovely Canadian woman, Maggie, whose brother-in-law is suffering from advanced Parkinson's. We sat on the street at the local bar and talked about a seventy three year old woman on the camino with the disease, yoga, and her spiritual quest. We swapped blogs with 'M. M.' saying she would promote my blog on her website, then we swapped goodbyes as she continued her journey. Corrie and I moved into our mansion further up the hill, right on 'the camino'.

Wandering along the steep-cobbled streets we heard bells ringing and the haunting sounds of a Gregorian chant, and soon found it's enchanting source inside a small church. It was built in the 12th century by the Knights Templars, (those honorable men who protected pilgrims over the harsh mountain terrain), and is now administered by a collection of Austrian monks. As we carefully sat, I looked around in amazement at what could have been an abandoned building. If Leonard Cohen's line of his poem: "there's a crack in every thing, that's where the light gets in", is true, then truly this little glorious structure would burst with light.

On reflection, since the cracks of Parkinson's appeared, I have found even more light in my life, which keeps me from being an abandoned structure.

## A Cracked Church

I have been gathering cracks all my life and have seen where bits of light have snuck in often unobserved, now the largest crack has appeared, shedding huge light in which to observe my life with more clarity.



*It looked as if it might fall down this time  
This old stone building that resembled a church,  
We went inside and were surprised to find  
That it just wasn't ready for its final lurch.  
People were singing with holes above,  
To the side a prop to keep beams in position,  
At the back loose stones just needing a shove  
To cause more damage than 'The Inquisition'.  
There was proof of life where a tree grew thru  
And wind came in where it found a crack,  
From a nest in the corner a bird just flew  
A path had been made, not a human track.  
This is a church and it only goes to prove,  
We don't need to know that, to make us move.*



## Day 31 - Rabanal del Camino to Acebo

Climbing up along the yellow, mauve and white bush path, the once far away mountains seemed to close in on us, while the sun painted ever changing pictures in the fading sheets of snow. As we moved up once again on very rocky paths, the closer hillsides turned to mauve and the path colors varied according to the dominant plant at the time. We were joined by a Korean mum and her daughter who were getting to know each other in different ways, but the camino (way) provided them with different reasons for walking: daughter was doing it for mum, while mum's reason was a secret. As they said "annyonghi-kjeseyo", we said "goodbye" and moved to fifteen hundred metres, the highest point on the camino.

We danced a little fifteen hundred meter tango with a large and friendly German fellow whose path we crossed intermittently down the steepest, rockiest part of the camino - and I think, the most dangerous. In earlier blogs I was talking of doing a downhill shuffle, not so here, this slope was about 'one slow pole-directed step at a time'. Soon our village home Acebo appeared, clinging to the hillside and hanging on to life as its single street wound down the steep hill, becoming one with the continuing camino track. And yes, one could say, it had a pl-acebo (sorry) effect on us, because Corrie's arthritic toe pain and my bruised heel ache went away as soon as we saw it. The sight of many curious and fascinating villages along our path often provided more relief than voltaren.

Catching up with our Danish friends, we agreed that last night's cracked church was definitely the highlight of that cosy village. We caught up as well with Panu, our Finnish actor friend who was struggling earlier on, but had found a new lease of life with some special food and a long massage in a village along the way, funnily enough, called Hospital de Orbigo (where pilgrims of old were treated). It was with sadness that we bid our heartfelt goodbyes, on 'the single street of Acebo'.

We climbed up to our rooftop dwelling, the stairs as steep as the mountain we had just descended, but the price as low as the flat plains of the meseta. Usually I'd get going with my post, but our luggage had been collected by the wrong people (the usual suspect, we were told), so we had lunch and chatted with two very friendly retiring and adventurous couples from North Carolina, who were walking for various reasons: one, because he (like folks back home), liked to tell a good story. We agreed that a little embellishment along the way is vital criteria for the best stories. They are moving into our lodgings in Ponferrada tomorrow night, so it will be a great opportunity to find out more about these interesting Americans. Our luggage was found up the street, so now I had my computer, and was ready to embellish as I see yet another exquisite structure for storing grain.

## The Horreos

They were used to keep grain fresh in northern Spain, but I used them on my journey to remind me to keep life fresh by writing my daily poem, daily contact with the world through my blog, and daily interactions with other walkers.



*They were used to store and ripen grain  
Of wood and stone they stand on high,  
They kept corn fresh and safe from rain  
Kept vermin away and those who fly.  
Ventilated by slits in the wood on the side  
Their natural look blending with the land  
Galicia is their king, Asturia his bride  
Cute at one metre, at twenty they're grand.  
Today they're not used for grain any more  
Instead they're a symbol of something past,  
If you look inside, you'll see a bare floor  
A piece of charm and one that will last.  
The 'Horreo' house is here to stay  
All along the Camino Frances way.*

## Day 32 - Acebo to Ponferrada

We drifted down the street of Campo (which is Spanish for field) between buildings that seemed to be closing in on us, sharing stories lost in human thought, but remembered by the stored historic memory of old stone walls and bent wooden balconies. Trees grew in some houses, seen taking several nervous peeks through a multitude of gaps in roofs and reaching out through ancient broken walls, looking somewhat sinister as their stunted branches searched for light. I'm sure their adventurous branches wished us good walking as the wind gave us a conclusive shove into the cold dawn, where birds sang to us, as we left yet another village on our long walk for Parkinson's.

Fields of lavender with their purple stems and pink hats swept up and over our path, making the most of the land not yet overtaken by the yellow straw of the witches broom. We pushed through some isolated oases of rainforest, jumped narrow streams watched by clumps of varied trees and bushes, and slowly negotiated narrow cliff paths in the constant shade of imposing mountains to our east.

The descent was difficult as we carefully decided which rock was stable enough to take our weight, whilst a lad from Prague danced past us without an 'unstable rock care' singing as he went, the pup he had just saved from a wet death clinging desperately to his chest, possibly fearing another way to the life beyond. We had coffee with an American Vietnam veteran and talked about the meaning of life, life after war, long relationships, and time out on the camino.

After quick goodbyes, as army men do, we slowly moved down into the undulating valley of Ponferrada where we met up with Randy, Mike, Hilary and Barbara, the four Americans we met yesterday and have been close on our heels. If we had not been on the camino we might have been concerned and suspicious. Less suspicious are our accidental rendezvous with our Dutch women friends, whom we may see again in Santiago, I hope so. I've seen nothing like these instant friendships, with many of them offering just a momentary glimpse into someone's intimate soul.

Ponferrada is a small city with its medieval part up on a hill around a castle. Its name means 'iron bridge', the original one that was stabilised with iron in the 11th century. While the locals reinforce themselves with the local Bierzo wines, I wondered what it was that sustained me. Mainly, my sustenance comes from the belief that there is something much larger than me out there, which gives meaning to why some of us have larger battles than others. Once having this understanding, it is then up to me to make the most of what I have. Other reinforcements include my poetry, my writing, my walking, my friends and most important of all, my wife.

## The Tree House

I loved that tree peering through the doors and windows, branching out of its confined space through gaps in the walls, becoming brighter and stronger despite its obvious limitations; I simply loved that.



*There isn't a sound as you enter town  
It's half boarded up, trees growing through,  
When you see someone you see a frown.  
They're also quite old, these less than a few.  
Is it siesta and they've not yet awoken  
Or gone to a city to get their supplies?  
Has the town just died or the people taken  
An earthquake perhaps, but there are no cries?  
They say there isn't any work for them all  
The young have left for the big cities now,  
And all that are left are ready to fall  
Save the barman, the priest, a dog and a cow.  
But life could come, if the pilgrims stay there,  
They're growing in numbers so just say a prayer.*

## Day 33 - Ponferrada

It's a day off today, and instead of putting the blame on Sandy for whom we are waiting (as he flies and drives from London), suffice to say I needed to check a pain in my heel. Hospitals will see 'pelegrinos' (pilgrims) for free for any problem "from the waist down", so I'll get my head seen to at another time. Corrie and I waited eagerly for the 'sister' to fix my aching heel but she sadly informed us that she was only the 'blister sister' and I would need to see a specialist. The doctor arrived soon after, diagnosing me through my interpreter (Corrie), and after a thorough examination, with a spur. It was only a small spur that doesn't like walking, the solution was a rubber pad that better like walking.

The day off (as I look out on a large hill silhouetting the Roman Citadel, where in the 12th century the Knights Templars created a living palace and a place of protection) had me reflecting on Parkinson's and walking. Walking evens the playing field for all and even if you're in a wheel chair (with help) you can gain a similar experience, with probably even more chance of a 'duende' moment (poem below). I know it's not for everyone, but for me, walking, along with poetry, is a way of expressing myself, and it reminds me that I still have the same opportunities as others.

I'll never be able to put my socks on easily, or verbally express myself as clearly as others, or type anywhere nearly as fast as I used to, but I can still walk and write and that's fantastic, and when I can't do that any more, then I'm certain more opportunities will arise to address those challenges when they come.

To help ensure that these challenges remain at bay for as long as possible I, along with many others, do a wide range of exercises. They are done aerobically, that is, at quite a fast speed while extending the body part being exercised as far as possible. Simultaneously, we are instructed at 'Advanced Rehab.', us 'PD Warriors', to use our cognition, by, for example, naming a range of products belonging to one group, and, let's say, naming all fruits beginning with the letter 'p'. We then express those fruits clearly and loudly which also helps to strengthen the vocal chords.

By going to these extremities, we ensure the exercises are done well, because 'our' notion of how far our limbs move has decreased dramatically. These exercises are performed in groups twice weekly, along with other specific exercises aimed at limiting the inevitable loss of movement, with the final goal being to bring about changes to our neural pathways that have been affected by lack of Dopamine. Whether or not this happens, I am confident that 'duende' moments don't differentiate, so I will still be ready to applaud their appearance if I am so lucky. I hope you recognise your 'duende' moments, and when you do, you linger long in their vibrancy.

## Duende

When I have come close to these duende moments the feeling has been sublime. I know I can't look for them, but I can continue with my passions, which I believe can help open pathways to these profound experiences.



*I saw it written upon a chair  
Then deftly carved into a tree,  
Somewhere we go but don't know where  
Sometimes we feel it sometimes we see.  
It may be walking in the moonlight  
And sensing something never sensed before,  
Connecting with someone who's pure delight  
A feeling so strong you must have more.  
But just when it happens it slips away  
It's brief but it's something you'll never forget,  
The word is Spanish, the indefinable 'duende'  
It's special and leaves no room for regret.  
It can come, to any one, at any time,  
So always be ready, to experience the sublime.*

## Day 34 - Ponferrada to Villafranca del Bierzo

Out into the Plaza and along a lantern lit street, down some steps into a long unsettling graffiti-plastered street, through a dark park and out onto suburban streets, we found a good rhythm with Sandy taking magical pictures as we went. We wandered past some storks (chicks now grown up) and our second largest field of poppies. Along quiet highways we walked, but soon ventured into the country again through undulating manicured fields, up long curving hill paths, over streams, through vineyards with workers busy in the fields, as poplars, once again, stand like Knights Templars watching over us, 'the people'.

We overtook a singing pilgrim and heard that familiar American phrase "good for you", in response to my back saying "Walking for Parkinson's". We started talking, beginning with her seventy five year old aunty with Parkinson's, who may write to me to chat about life. My singing friend with her many physical challenges is walking the camino with five mending broken toes in her shoes, and, because she can - she is also writing a blog about 'architecture along the way'. Although an American citizen, she lives in a ruin in Portugal carefully restoring it while carefully protecting its history. She was moving with haste, so I said goodbye and stopped to wait for Corrie to quench her thirst (remember, I had the water).

We strolled into the medieval town of Fuente (fountain) Cacebelos and nearly lost our footing due to an over eager path waterer who was hosing outside a church, not looking. As we helped this little woman with her very long twisted hose, there was no sign from her that indicated whether we were being of assistance or not, a bit like the look you might get from an older person you have helped across the road but who had no intention of crossing it in the first place. We slipped past the stone and wooden houses, their twisted wooden balconies covering the footpath not far above the average person's head (similar to sidewalks in those cattle towns seen in those old American wild west movies). In one of those houses there is a museum displaying artifacts from nearby Roman sites.

We wound down a long and quiet bitumen road to the river hollow of Villafranca del Bierzo, a 'pintoresco' village settled by the French in the 11th century. A walk around town took us through trimmed, maze-like parks, narrow lanterned streets, along a wide, sometimes intimate rocky rumbling river, crossed by high and low medieval bridges. This river was reminiscent of the Ganges at Rishikesh in India, or the river Schwarz in the German Black Forest. We climbed stairs from one level to reach the next in this multi-terraced village, in a valley on the camino. A charming town to introduce this sonnet to you, its valley and layered hillsides, the rumbling creek under the Gothic bridge and the maze where some of our answers may lie.

## Life's Journey

What a day to reflect on a Parkinson's journey. A large field of poppies and rows of poplars symbolised for me the untold 'sacrifices' that 'people' make for others, in that magnificent world outside their own.



*The mountain looms large it seems a huge task  
The mist drifts through as it becomes dense fog,  
The challenges mount as folk begin to ask  
Expectations are high as it's all in your blog.  
A fall going down can hurt once you've peaked  
Be aware of your step and ensure solid ground,  
The calm washes over as you cross the creek  
And listen and look for nature's all around.  
So much to enjoy but what to do when it ends  
The environment dries, it's lonely, enough!  
It's hard to go on, just your self, no friends  
The rain, the mud, it's hard going, it's tough.  
The light appears, you've made it, you're there  
It's life's intricate journey, it's there if we dare.*



## Day 35 - Villafranca del Bierzo to Las Herrerias

I woke my dreaming wife at half past five, raring to go, but she must have dreamt that our poles were missing. I remembered that I had given them a well deserved rest in an outside cafe, but they were exhausted and fell asleep. We found them at around 7.30 am where they had been taken in by an empathic cafe boss, so a late start had us slowing right down. Over a great coffee, we chatted with a young New Yorker who was suffering from a sprained ankle and had lost her bag. There was a French connection in the lost bag saga and we had Sandy with us, who, while still calling Australia home, presently lives in France; he somehow got it sorted.

The moon still lingered as we departed, but the sun had become the most dominant light in the sky. We left by way of the river bridge and walked up a highway, the bitumen seeming to soften with the continual rumblings of the pretty river Valcarce as it criss-crossed the highway underground in small streams, wide expanses, and rocky waterfalls, shaded by a configuration of full-leafed trees. This pretty dancing river may have also been celebrating one of its many sources, a steep mountain that we readied ourselves to climb. The later arduous slog was tempered by the gorgeous views below, while contrasts (as in a sonnet) continued to stimulate and excite the mind with their richness.

The three of us travelled alone moving from walker to walker as speed and time permitted. A man from Los Angeles donated money to 'Shake it up' and will check my blog out. A French couple found something we had dropped so we spent time with them, and I talked with a young couple who taught us how to say "buen camino" in Korean, 'joh-eun sanchaeg-eul'. This could be an important phrase to remember as there is an ever increasing number of Koreans on the camino. Anecdotal evidence I have heard on the track points to the promotion of the camino through the medium of cartoons in their country, which are becoming increasingly popular for all generations. All these conversations afforded new experiences to those of our more reclusive moonlight excursions, and.....we loved the continuing contrasts.

We stopped to talk to some locals who informed us that the shapely dark leafed trees covering their steep slopes were chestnuts - their two-finger rubbing indicating how lucrative these trees are. Back down the other side of the mountain, the same river welcomed us into its beautiful valley. Meandering now gently through rolling meadows at the foot of the mountain, it ushered us to our home in another quaint village nestled at the foot of tomorrow's mountain. This climb would be of some magnitude - eight kilometres - so we needed to fill our bottles from the 'Fuente de Quinones', whose namesake is the valiant knight who defended the Puente de Orbigo. We would need more than a few drops of valour!

## A River

I watched the gently meandering river under the busy highway, and thought of the importance of being able to keep focus on things below the surface, without being distracted by external disturbances.



*There are beautiful rivers wherever you go  
Deep lagoons and magnificent falls,  
Tumbling down from the melted snow  
A display that only nature can call.  
But dramatic is not the ultimate test  
When you're on a walk of quiet reflection,  
A river that flows in solitude and rest  
Might help you best in finding direction.  
There was such a one that circled the road  
To and fro underneath you had to be aware,  
Over rocks, a small dip, a ripple, it showed  
The beauty of little, that moment to share.  
We left it at play, to hide, jump a rock  
To meet it at our inn beside a paddock.*

## Day 36 - Las Herrerias to Triacastela

After an early breakfast with an older German couple and a Japanese mother and daughter (supplies had been left for us on a small table in a lounge area), we left town under the moon and street lights, that little creek flowing with us down past the horse paddocks. We crossed over it and began the long ascent up a rocky but continually shaded pathway, looking out at smaller green hillsides, stepping up to larger ones, and then distant mountains and spectacular views. I was amazed to see hoof marks, and on further investigation found that the horses were being used to transport tourists up and down this treacherous path. I couldn't help but draw a parallel with the donkeys, and wished that both could run wild once more.

After a brief rest, and feeling very fortunate to be human, we continued down gravelly paths and up possibly the longest and steepest climb of the whole journey, to O'Cebreiro, (home of Don Sampedro, the man who with his can of yellow liquid, painted the yellow arrows and kept the camino alive). It is likewise home to the oldest church on the Camino, the 9th century Iglesia de Santa Maria Real.

Our home was down and down through bushy paths into the pictorial, busy village of Triacastela, or 'three castles', that are no longer there, posing a question for me: 'why would you want three'? Medieval pilgrims carried the limestone from the quarry here to Santiago de Compostela in order to build the cathedral ... why am I thinking that those Spanish donkeys would be greatly involved in this?

The day continued its mild and sunny attitude which we much appreciated knowing that we were now in Galicia, the Spanish region most associated with rain. We caught up with a Dutchwoman from our first day, a New Zealander, and an Australian who was walking for the eighth year. He had heard about 'this guy' walking for Parkinson's, it seems a tour guide was looking at my blog and talking about it, so the awareness was slowly moving into conversations - fantastic! This 'eight year camino man' confirmed Galicia's wetness, so we answered the cries from our long forgotten rain pants, desperate for a stroll.

Whilst the last stage of the camino in Galicia is renowned for being wet, we heard whispers that in Santiago de Compostela it would be sopping. Is this indicative of a final cleansing after the tears generated by the meseta? With eyes turned skyward we started our final steps. This part of the walk brings us close to Portugal where the Portuguese would indicate that our journey was not yet over because there is always "saudade", mentioned in the following sonnet. Like the Spanish word 'duende', the Portuguese word 'saudade' is mysterious to outsiders. But roughly, it is a feeling of aloneness, lost in sad but fond memories, but being happy in this state.

## The Regions

Pain and discomfort can disturb the mind which unsettles the emotions, leading to dysfunctional interactions and unease, and to attain some sort of balance, I need to move through and observe the different regions of my body so I can learn to understand their idiosyncrasies more.



*The mountains of Navarra open the way  
With generous folk they believe in trust,  
But if your promises tend to sway  
Loyalty no more, weapons they'll thrust.  
Friendly souls flourish just below  
La Rioja is the region where they live,  
From their vines those great wines flow  
Promoting the way is what they give.  
Castles define this enormous region  
The meseta beyond, a vast expanse  
Of wheat that fed the huge legions  
Of Rome that made their long advance.  
The Galician rains, they're never tardy  
The walk is ending and soon, 'saudade'.*

## Day 37 - Triacastela to Barbadelo

We saw Sandy off home to the enchanting Alsace and although we met many people on the camino and became friends with some, it had been great to have an old friend along. He was fit, funny and full of adventure. We had breakfast with two lovely American women, Joy and Deborah, who were seasoned hikers but walking too for spiritual reasons. We swapped photo shots along the way when one of them told me of her five friends with Parkinson's whom we chatted a little about. She would pass on my blog address and they may be in touch.

To leave in full light from this very busy and therefore more highly populated village was hard to get used to, and in addition to have clouds, was a new experience. We climbed up under the crowded rainforest branches, which curved over us and tantalised the little stream that would jump up to greet its shiny bright green leaves. The uneven path greeted us with yet another walking challenge, and the long path down the other side was just as rough, but a gentler slope, its branched archway covering us in case the sun broke the clouds and pierced the fog.

We advanced through the large town of Sarria, located one hundred kilometres from Santiago de Compostela - this is the minimum distance a pilgrim must walk, in order to gain a certificate of completion. From this point on it became more crowded, and probably the best time for those walking for a long while to reflect on their reactions. There seemed to be a shift in mood and an 'ownership' mentality: "this is our track, we've done the hard yards". Admittedly, I had the same initial reactions, then realised I was more a foreigner than most, so relaxed very quickly. Besides, there would be more people to read my jacket.

Passing animals in sets of two had us thinking of 'the Ark', but looking at the sky we knew this was not possible today, so we put it down to sheer coincidence. We crossed what probably was never an ancient bridge (a few slats of wood), to enter an ancient forest. The trees appeared to be human like from generations past, petrified, their gnarled faces slowing us right down as we gazed into their ancient eyes. On emerging from this state of wonder, an American, Chuck from Seattle, joined us, and remarked that he was a Neanderthal with technology, how apt that we had met him in this ancient oak and chestnut forest.

We chatted about our passions, his was stone carving, the most difficult skill being, not to cut off too much stone. This made me think how easy it is with technology, if you cut too much off you can just paste it back on. We settled in to our farmhouse in Barbadelo (home to a 9th century monastery) as the rain poured down, the weather of unpredictable Galicia enchanting even more, this ancient forest.

## The Ancient Forest

As I stopped and listened, it took me back to my own forest I very rarely saw, because of the numerous and disparate trees in it that distracted me. I am now able to see more of the forest, because I now 'get' its trees.



*I felt that I'd gone back in time  
And looked around incredulously,  
I'd entered an old land having just left mine  
It had gotten very dark so suddenly.  
The stillness, the silence, different somehow  
There was no explanation to satisfy this,  
This was a place that had not seen a plow  
Or any thing that could harm its pure bliss.  
This forest of trees was telling a story  
The way to hear it was to be very still,  
And listen a little as it speaks of its glory  
How it remained intact and always will.  
'Be mindful and let experiences of the past  
Have meaning to grow into something to last'.*

## Day 38 - Barbadelo to Portomarin

Unusually, we had an early breakfast before leaving, so no need to hope for a bar along the way. We said goodbye to our host, thankful for his kindness. I had the flu so he did not charge me for my half-eaten dinner, brought me medication, and gave me a special tea mix for sleeping which worked like a dream! If being sick allows me to see a person in their true light, then it can help me make more sense of illness. Earlier on, his hostel had been freezing, and our host kept descending to the cellar to struggle with igniting the heating for unseasonal demands. I suspected he was trying to save money with what I thought were his excuses. I was wrong ... it would have cost him more to pay for my dinner!

Leaving our first farm stay, we continued on through bountiful tree covered walkways, filtering in a glorious cloud-streaked sunrise and coloring in a patchwork of farmland that sloped down from village dairies. A handful of sheep and cattle and a couple of Alsation farm dogs greeted us. The sunrise had us in raptures so we stayed and watched as the scenes changed moment by moment, excited in the knowledge that on the sun's stage tomorrow the actors will be the same, but the acts and scenes will be very different.

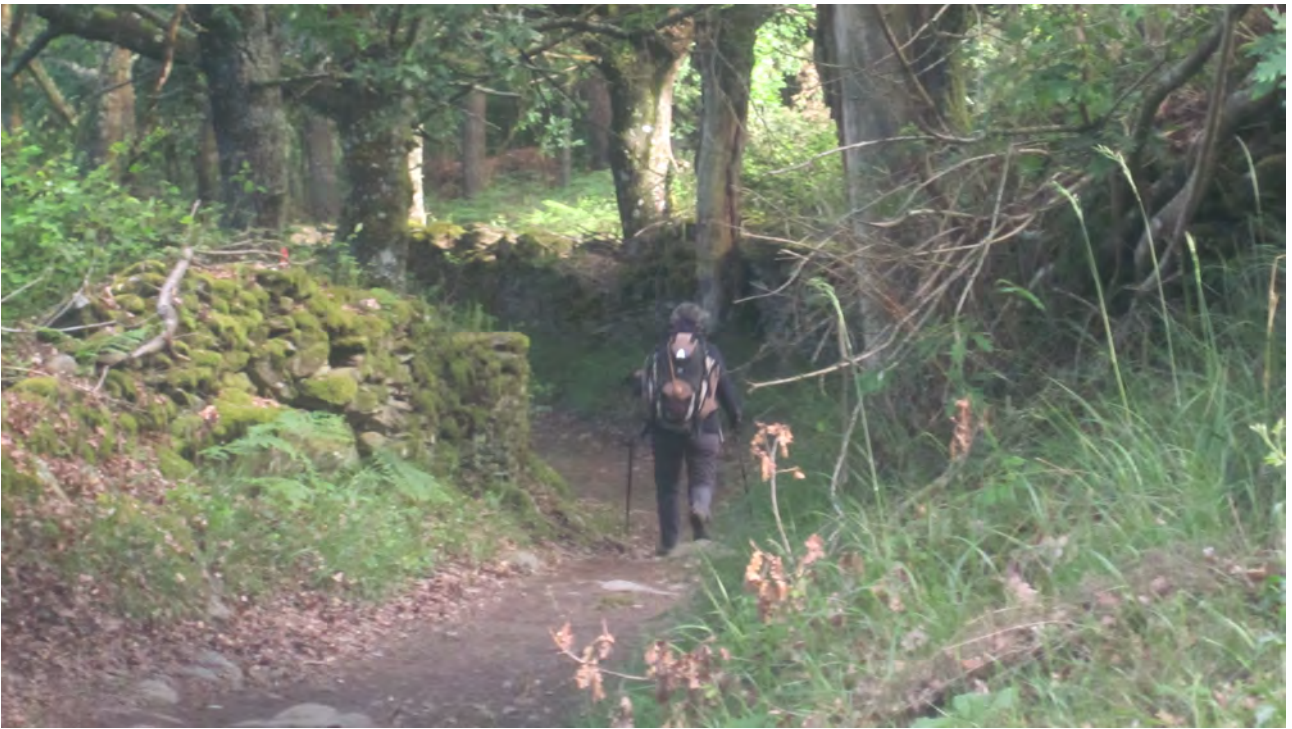
The Seattle man sauntered out of his lodgings, and we talked about a book called 'The Sixth Extinction', which sounded interesting. It had me wondering what we would do if we weren't here anymore!! We walked on again through 'hobbit-like' old forests until we came to a statue where people had been placing pictures and notes, when I felt a hand rubbing my back which had my Parkinson's sign on it. In broken English, this teary French woman, said: (as she kept rubbing my back and crying) "*It is difficult, and for you too Madam...*" as she looked at Corrie, "*..my 'usband 'ad it*". The three of us hugged and cried as others placed more adornments or just kept going on their journey. Then we talked a little before exchanging 'good wishes' knowing we would meet again soon.

As we moved on to rolling hills of farmland on our famous camino white gravel path, an Australian, having heard of this Parkinson's fellow, started talking with me and also 'rubbing my back'. After saying some lovely words, she informed me that she was a physiotherapist working with Parkinson's people in Sydney, my home city. A couple of Australians joined us along with Chuck and our new French friend, Francois; more tears, then photos and until we meet again, 'jusqu'a la prochaine fois'.

Around a twisted bend we saw our first Spanish lake, floating below the steep hill town of Portomarin where we encountered Francois again, took a photo and talked with her one last time, before she moved on, and we checked into our room with a view of the lake for the night.

## Francois

There's never as much time as I imagine, but when Parkinson's came to the door it quickened my step, leading me quickly along some personal passionate pathways.



*"It is difficult" she sensitively said  
And stroked me as a little child,  
Her face was soft, her voice held dread  
Tears welled up even though she smiled.  
"It will also be very difficult for you  
Madam", the tears flowed freely now,  
They hugged, a hug so warm and true  
Had words to speak but didn't know how.  
She looked at me the smile didn't go  
Her hand was once more on my back,  
"My 'usband suffered too you know"  
Things happen on this time warn track.  
She kissed us on our cheeks then went  
Such precious time ne'er better spent.*



## Day 39 - Portomarin to Palas de Rei

We glided alongside the beautiful misty lake, a few clouds hovering before the rising sun, then moved upwards along an umbrella tree pathway collecting the isolated raindrops on their spoon like leaves. Other walkers were sheltering and pulling on rain clothes. This time we had thankfully dressed for the rain, for it is quite a hassle to interrupt an easy walking rhythm that often takes some time to develop.

Owing to the possibility of rain I did not wear my Parkinson's jacket and felt completely different. There were no *"good for you"* like statements; no *"Parkinson's, what a great cause"* comments; no personal disclosures; no murmurings once they thought I was out of earshot; no more *"is she the wife?"*. The Parkinson's sign was an invitation regularly taken up, usually by the many people who have been touched by the disease in one way or another.

No village for ten kilometres, so breakfast tasted better than usual. Even though our walk had been predominantly along a bitumen road, the scenery still delighted us. The last fifteen kilometres were filled with various farming and grazing based villages which, like most, are closing down; however accommodation and food for pilgrims ensures the 'open for business signs' never fade. The countryside was always pleasant to look at, pockets of fir trees intermingled with poplars as they marshaled the flatland, pine forests lined the hillsides, while oaks and birch, like us, some young, some old, followed the footpath.

Oak and birch trees are often seen together and in some ways enjoy a symbiotic relationship. The birch can improve soil quality, drawing nutrients up into its leaves and branches, and recycling the falling leaves into the forest. It also protects the young oak, which becomes strong like the birch, and provides nourishment for over three hundred species of insects, moths and birds. The oak provides nourishment for deer and other wildlife, especially during hard times, and insects and moths feed on the oak's leaves, while various birds follow nature's instincts by feeding on the now well-fed insects.

Light rain teased us as we walked the last kilometre to our new home and very large bedroom in Palas de Rei. An after dinner chat with a couple from Brisbane, Beverley and Kevin, ended our day and left us with a warm and fuzzy feeling, as we watched this besotted couple in their sixties, in an eight month old relationship, holding hands and talking about their love for each other. Whilst it was definitely all sunshine for them, I was thinking that the Galician rain gods would remove any sunshine we may have tomorrow. One thing that would not suffer with the rain is the 'camino scallop shell' that is very much at home in water.

## The Shell

There are many paths to Santiago as there are many lines on the 'camino scallop shell'. When I look at life today I know I have choices, and to make the best decision possible, I need my yellow arrow, or the shell simply remains: a number of choices.



*The myths are many around these shells  
They're to do with St. James and his remains,  
On the Iberian coast the story tells  
Covered in scallops the myths explain.  
The grooves in the shell arrive at one door  
As do all the tracks to Santiago,  
As the ocean's waves wash shells to shore  
So the pilgrim is guided above to below.  
It's proof that you have done the walk  
Or a sign that you're on your pilgrimage,  
They show you the way no need for chalk  
They're on paths and walls in every village.  
But when you need specific direction  
Which way it points needs astute detection.*

## Day 40 - Palas de Rei to Ribadiso

The Galician rain gods did eventually arrive, so we waited until they were less angry and left in a sprinkle, but before long they once again lost their temper on two occasions. All the lights were out in the sky hidden behind thick, heavy and ominous looking clouds. We walked strongly, hoping to avoid too much of a downfall, since the prediction was for showers. To save what was left of my toe nails I had ditched my weatherproof shoes, so I hoped more fervently that the dodging and weaving sun would find its way through the persistent clouds.

We passed the town of Melide which is the end point for the 'Camino Primitivo', starting its three hundred and twenty kilometre journey in Oviedo. I have counted at least seventeen 'caminos' across France and Spain, all of them eventually ending in Santiago de Compostela. It is said that the 'Camino Frances' is the most popular, a huge reason being that it is not only well resourced with a multitude of eating and sleeping places, but also guided by clear and regular directions.

My direction was not so clear as I started leaning strongly to my right (I'll resist the urge to talk politics), a little frightened as though some mysterious force was pulling me over. Fortunately I had my nordic walking poles which kept me on track and prevented a potential fall. The downhill sections (where the worst injuries occur) were a savior since the jog restored my balance as I concentrated on the safe spots, while short rests seemed to restore whatever was depleting me at that time.

Similar beautiful countryside drew us down its gullied lanes, where tree covered pathways showed off its many medieval villages, night-watched by the ubiquitous village guard dog (my terminology). These dogs appeared in certain villages only and sounded very ominous, though not really a threat, as they were usually tied up or behind fencing. The only threat to me came outside a village in the form of a terrier-type dog, and it was with great relief that the waving of my pole dissuaded this poorly trained canine. In a previous life (career) as an overseer on a large sheep and cattle station I trained working dogs, and am very aware that nearly all dogs are not naturally aggressive, they're mostly trained that way.

Not such a social day today but that soon changed. Firstly, when Corrie attempted a pied piper act without the pipe but with the local sheep and cattle rounded up by farm dogs. Just four kilometers out from our next albergue we came across our Canadian friends, Peter and Kristin, who walked us to the front door of our 'room in a field', and in this busy village of Ribadiso our new neighbors were the Australian couple whom we met last night. Bev was barely able to walk, so I imagined they might be having an extended honeymoon in this little village, on the camino.

## The Dogs

Dogs like us no matter whether we are good people or not, they don't see our frailties. A large purpose of my life is to attempt to resolve these frailties, so I can leave the dog to guard the village.



*Appearing like sentries, the towns' lookout  
Their bark a call that a pilgrim is near,  
Behind high fences no need to shout  
Quite safe they are with nothing to fear.  
At times a small one with some attitude  
Might come so close with teeth at the ready,  
Just talk very gently, a time to be shrewd  
Waving your pole and keeping it steady.  
Some pilgrims have dogs, one we saw had two  
Delighting each day in the freedom they had,  
Another, a pup by his chest had rescued  
As he ran and he sang they both seemed glad.  
With the sheep and the cattle, a paw they lend  
To the farmer, they're known, as their best friend.*

## Day 41 - Ribadiso to O Pedrouzo

Rain greeted us as my non-gortex shoes soulfully apologised to me (I find shoes apologise more easily than humans). I like walking in the rain, however usually at my choosing and certainly not for most of the day. Everything seems so clean and fresh, flowers look newer, leaves look greener, while previous unidentified scents are seemingly more acute. The rain did not stop, but most of the morning we moved between varied umbrella-type rainforest vegetation, gum and pine forests, all thick with anti-rain foliage.

Those 'last one hundred kilometre walkers', mentioned earlier, are now further swollen by large touring bus groups. This didn't really affect our walking (neither does my right leaning) but those strong feelings were now more palpable. Many pilgrims expressed that there was now a different feel to the walk, and a lot saw it as an intrusion into their mostly long and difficult journey. Additionally, lodgings for the night became less predictable, many having to walk to the next village or some distance off the camino. For me, it meant more who read my jacket, thus more people I could discuss Parkinson's with, and that was a good thing. Whether rain or not, I determined it had to be on for our last day and last twenty kilometres, when the media would be out in droves to greet me - a joke, but there would be a lot of clicking of cameras!

Nearing the town of O Pedrouzo we saw Joy and Deborah, our American friends. It was great to catch up and have a trauma debrief, as we swapped our 'falling over stories'. We had both fallen once going downhill while looking at some gorgeous view, the mirror's view not as kind to us, and our first aid kits happy with their newfound attention. They were staying, and we were going, so back on the track wandering through dark forests, before again seeing Peter and Kristin, who have been traveling at about our pace the whole journey, which is why we see each other so much. Earlier I told Peter he could have a copy of the rare deer photo I took, but he said: "*thanks but I'll get my own*"; well, he got it.

It'll be all over tomorrow, our long walk for Parkinson's, and whilst it will be a relaxed walk, it is one I don't ever want to finish. The camino had come at a good time ... a time when Murphy was loudly espousing his law. My hip joint had ground to a halt, my back was lumbering along with acute pain, a bursa protested with painful cries threatening to resign from its real job, while the sole of my foot simply wanted to have a sit-down strike. I had listened, did what I could, confronted the worst that could happen, then I went on this journey. The worst didn't happen, so I'll continue with this plan in all spheres of my life and am ready to confront the worst.

Walking the camino as most do is seen as the common way, but there are others as seen in the sonnet below.

## People's Paths

Our immediate direction was the camino, but even then we had other choices to make. How do we travel, what do we take, how far will we walk. Though we had challenges we were able to adapt our path even when we got lost.

“Sometimes, what happens instead, is the good stuff”.



*The most common way to walk 'the camino' has been  
To walk the track with a pack on your back and a staff,  
Today is the same, but poles are more commonly seen  
And some truck their pack ahead to make it less rough.  
Others bike the way, they love that form of transport,  
One pushed a trolley cause that's what he wanted to do,  
A few took a donkey but some say they get too distraught,  
One went shoeless, it's hard to believe but it's true.  
That's all well and good but then some people complain  
When injured take buses they quickly jump up and down,  
While others take cabs they haven't the time it's a strain,  
And when only the last few kilometres are done they frown.  
But the journey is theirs, they do what suits them best,  
The camino is yours, with no need to follow the rest.*

## Day 42 - O Pedrouzo to Santiago de Compostela

The lights came out from their cosy shelter. First we saw the familiar twinkle of the stars, then a slither of moon and soon after, the fire in the sky, as we walked mostly through long, misty, rainforest pathways, forming a glorious umbrella that we did not need. This meant I was advertising again and two Spanish girls took the cue: *“Why are you walking with Parkinson’s on your back?”*. *“To raise some funds and get more people talking about it”* I said, *“Like I’m doing with you”* she said; we chatted some more and one of them took a photo. Then we left the girl from Madrid as she walked on with a contagious smile and continued to sing.

I looked at his gnarled feet, *“I’ve heard about you, you’re the guy walking with thongs”*. He glanced at my back, *“And you’re the guy with Parkinson’s”*, he said, as though thongs and Parkinson’s had a natural affinity. *“Someone in the family got it?”* *“Yes, me”*, I said. *“Did you know the medication will lose its effectiveness?”* *“More that the brain changes it’s desire”*, I said. *“Parkinson’s sometimes....”* he said, as we continued to share. We chatted, Darren (with the thongs) took a photo and then left us still no wiser about what to do with the rest of his life. Whatever he does, I will always remember his straight talk and his knowledge of Parkinson’s, imagining that his natural curiosity will soon have him find ‘his’ way with or without shoes.

We did our final lap through the familiar tall thin streets of Santiago’s old city to the cathedral, where controversially, lie the bones of Saint James. For most, this is neither here nor there, but for the devout, the symbolism is very clear and rich. On the way to this famous landmark I was asked by a group of pilgrims if they could take a photo of me, but after giving them my best Parkinson’s gaze, they took a photo of my back.

Coming in to the old city, camped out waiting for us were Chris and Gareth, great that they would do that, so we went for a coffee, swapped stories and talked about where to from here before they flew out. We then caught up with two more Aussies, the mum and daughter from Japan, and a young New Yorker whom we had walked with some days ago.

If it wasn’t for Saint James, no matter where his bones are, we wouldn’t have made this journey. This well planned and well resourced path entices people of ‘all creeds and none’ into one thread of its greater web. While I am not a religious person, I believe I am more often than not, a respectful one, so we visited the Santiago cathedral to pay our respects to the man this track was made for.

We celebrated by letting the sun rise before ‘we’ rose, walking around Santiago, and repairing my feet (about the only physical problem I didn’t have before our walk began), while Corrie was still wondering what all the fuss was about.

## Journey Ends

*“Has someone in the family got Parkinson’s?” he said, “yes, me” I said. This simple question reminded me that even though I had walked the camino, another journey was still in progress.*



*We started out with a solid decree  
To walk across Spain on behalf of a few,  
I'll be sorrowful to finish but I also see  
Another journey starts with something new.  
It's been an adventure, things changed each day  
The sights, the sounds, the scents, the tastes,  
The sun and the moon, the light and the grey  
And with my best friend, no time to waste.  
Yet there's time to slow down and let it sink in  
We did what we promised and now we'll relax,  
For more than one night we'll stay at the inn  
And look for more light, there's lots of cracks.  
I've lots more to do, I have a passion  
I hope you have yours, in your own fashion.*



## Epilogue - Finisterre - The End of the Earth

Walking to breakfast we were warmly greeted by our exuberant friend from Sweden, Tatiana, who burst on to the street with great emotion. We had begun our journey with her, and now we finished with this larger than life person. She was with someone Corrie and I had shared intimate unfinished moments with and we now had a chance to share deeper feelings. A mutual Australian friend, Wendy, also turned up to share her wonderful sense of humor with us, in this celebratory, crowded, coffee shop. We told stories, laughed and cried, a special end to a special journey. Darren also turned up, more stories, more laughter.

Back at the front door of our hotel and another piece of the puzzle slotted in to place when Jeremy and Viola walked past on their way home. We had shared intimate ties with them earlier on the walk, but now they were hurrying to catch a plane so only time for hugs and goodbyes. A final walk up the hotel steps and we re-met an American couple who donated money to 'Shake-it-up' earlier on in the walk.

We received an email from Kristin and Peter wanting to catch up but sadly we had left for Portugal. We ran into our Canadian friend Maggie in Lisboa and had an hilarious lunch. After contacting our special Portuguese friends Emidio and Valda earlier by email, we met up with them again, also in Lisboa, for a wonderful dinner in a palace. Francois saw my blog about our emotional meeting on the camino and wrote a wonderful letter to me. Our Spanish senora who has Parkinson's rang us, simply excited to know that we will be sending her a photo we took of the three of us together.

Others we crossed paths with like Deana and Andrew from Manchester; the Taiwanese woman; the Japanese and Korean mother and daughter teams; the German woman with Parkinson friends; Alan from England raising funds for war orphans; the two Austrian women raising funds for Downs Syndrome children; a lovely young Danish couple whom we met briefly, Panu the young Finnish actor, Chuck the sculptor from Seattle; two budding authors of 'Ruins on the Camino' and 'Painting the Camino'; Sandy from the Alsace; my friend from school Sean, and his wife; and our good friends in Australia and England who are also our camino friends, because they were there sharing our long journey with us.

A woman from Slovakia, whose husband has Parkinson's is reading my blog as she hopes he will be able to walk the camino, a wish he has had for a long while. My wish, is to keep making sense of my disease knowing the consequence of having it has enriched my life, and even though I wish for a cure, for the moment it has given me a passion, so I won't be sitting down waiting for the disease's demise. Instead, I look forward to relaxing in my wishing chair once more, and searching for my next faraway tree.

## Camino Friends

The camino has been a wonderful journey for the two of us, made so much richer by the support of friends old and new.



*It's a bond never broken when the camino you've done  
Knowing them or not, the ties are still strong,  
You've walked the same path, underneath the same sun,  
They all understand when things go wrong.  
You're on different journeys but same bridges you cross  
Stay in the same villages, eat the same meals,  
Take the wrong path, for a while you are lost  
Up mountains, down valleys, they know how it feels.  
But there are others where the bonds are even stronger  
You build that connection the more time you spend,  
With their personal stories and knowing them longer  
Having met at the start or shared deeply at the end,  
You hug when you leave and hug when you meet  
It's special, and makes, the journey complete.*



I may not be able to do things the way 'they' do them any more, but I can still swim in the same pond, and do so with clearer insight



**Will Boag's diagnosis of Parkinson's disease has led him to discover more about himself than in any other period of his life. He has used his new found love of poetry along with his former flirt with writing and his long time romance with walking to enrich his life and to make sense of his diagnosis.**

**Recently he has walked across Spain with his wife Corrie to increase awareness of Parkinson's while also raising money for 'Shake it up', an organization which is dedicated to finding a cure. He is now using his above passions in a practical way in writing this book based on this walk, to inspire others to use 'their' passions to help them make more sense of their disease also.**