

"You're the Guy with Parkinson's"

POEMS, PROSE AND PONDERINGS
ON THE PORTUGUESE CAMINO



WITH WILL & CORRIE BOAG

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Day 1 - Lisbon to Moscavides

We met Vanda at the starting point of the Portuguese Camino. She is the female part of our Portuguese friends and had decided to come with us on our first leg. It was wonderful as she led us out of 'Fado land'. The male part, Emidio, had painted some dripping yellow signs in strategic subtle places where they were obvious (but only to the walkers because they were actually looking for them, while locals could not easily see them for they were looking for other things). These are the yellow arrows which keep you pointed in the direction of your final destination, Santiago de Compostela, and are used on all the Spanish 'caminos'.

Luckily it was a short journey today as I was struggling on many fronts. After a few kilometres I was struggling to get my legs moving, while later I struggled to find my breath, then felt a little faint. This was a continuation of last year's walk where the problem first began. It is obviously neurological so I'll be sure to mention it to my neurologist who can set me on the right path. I walked up front because it gave me more incentive to keep ahead. The girls were a bit oblivious to this as they were having a lovely time discussing all things Portugal, which led to discussing the Portuguese involvement in the European Union.

While I was against Britain leaving the European Union, it was enlightening to hear our friend's perspective. With Germany controlling and making most of the decisions, it is obvious that Germany gets a relatively good deal. I mean why wouldn't Portugal want two of their submarines, with all of the wars they have? Each country has a role to play, and decisions have to be made regarding the economic benefit as a whole to the union. And why do they have to grow certain products for the union, lesser roles than the big countries? Our friend said it is partly for these reasons that smaller countries want to leave.

I had to sit down or I might have to leave the union as well, and my involvement has just begun. My body needed a break and as soon as a 'type of traffic island with chairs and an archaic men's loo' appeared, I took one. The others arrived on my traffic island and Corrie crossed the road to get coffees. Here she met a local man with whom she chatted for a while about his life in Wollongong. I could tell by the temperature of my drink that she had spent time listening to his story of a cancelled visa but could not explain why this was so. I could though. I'm sure it was because he made cold coffee!

We arrived at our destination but there was no accommodation, a situation we have never found ourselves in before on our many 'Caminos'. We rang ahead to see if there was a bed...but none. I suggested we catch a train to the first place that did, with Corrie placing her faith in my decision. I don't think she realised I was not functioning too well, and in my blurry state we ended up catching a train to a town much too far away. So tomorrow we will backtrack by train to where we were supposed to be and see how I go on the second day.

Keep ahead of your disease, so it is the one that has to catch up



Good Friends

We met them long ago their room we shared
Up in the Pyrenees with ice and snow,
The first we met, two Portuguese who cared
This special couple we have come to know.
We walked and talked our time was very brief
Their faster pace meant we would say goodbye,
Until in Lisbon if we met no grief
Would meet again then leave with tears to cry.
We met again in Lisbon in this spring
Our memories so warm came rushing back,
Our friendship strong we wanted just to sing
And laugh and cry, of joy there was no lack.
A little sadness came and went on parting
Saudade cries, a new connection starting.

Day 2 - Alverca to Vilafranca-de-Xira

It was back to where we would have been after the second day, to continue our walk. A bit embarrassing but it's done now and quite relaxing having a train ride before our day's walk. We were welcomed at the station by a lot of grey sky and a little rain but not enough to dampen our start. The cafe owner pointed us in the broad direction but language differences smothered the finer details. So, a very slow start as these finer details are crucial, and it is so easy to miss a sometimes innocuous sign. A bit of guessing is important at times, combined with some logical imagining looking around in detail until you get a good vibe.

It doesn't really matter, for if you check direction pointers at every intersection or laneway you'll be okay 99% of the time, but not if you're deep in conversation, for that is where the 'get lost fairies' take over. So back we went, but as we checked the intersections for signs, we were coming from the wrong direction so missed it again. A French couple, (they talk a lot), missed it also, so we combined forces. They went one way, we went another, keeping an ear out for a 'discovery shout'. We had a vague idea that the track was near a sporting complex so heading broadly that way we found a track behind a house with an arrow.

It was an innocuous walk through long industrial areas and on a busy highway, until the final few kilometres where a smart track kept a close eye on the Tagus river. It's huge, and like all Portuguese rivers that have residency here, its birthplace was in the Spanish mountains, although its whole life would be spent flowing between Fuente de Garcia in Spain and Lisbon. A popular 'Fado' song notes that while people get older, the Tagus remains forever young. The famous poet Pessoa wrote a poem about its beauty, while classical poetry refers to its gold-bearing sands.

It was water all around. After a small cloud burst at the station, it rained on and off throughout the day. We could see the storm clouds coming so had plenty of time to change into our rain gear. It at least got us used to walking in the rain again which is not generally a big deal, unless it really rains and we get caught with our pants down (rain pants that is), for it is a tight squeeze over our shoes (only a time issue if there's no shelter).

Another short day as I try to diagnose my walking symptoms. Is it Pd that slows my left leg, probably, it's happened before, or is it that, plus my leg trying to remember if it has walked like this before early on, and with maybe a touch of bursitis? It's just a shopping walk for Corrie without the purchases, so hope I can sort it soon so she can stretch out a bit.

Our home is gorgeous, high up in a pretty hostel looking out at the most attractive market facade I have ever seen. We can admire it from above as our room has four sets of windows, which gives us the same amount of moving paintings that provide great entertainment as we rest.

If you don't achieve your goal the first time, try again



Life

A life is such a very precious thing
Deserving of respect throughout its reign,
It's not just here to have a lazy fling
There's work to do, of nothing it should feign.
Our thoughts can lead us to corrupt our being
And feelings can destroy our precious friends,
Much deeper is our soul to stop from fleeing
Our body wounds can bring us to sad ends.
So when the body starts to fall apart
Just listen close to what it has to say,
And be empathic, that's a special art
Then make some changes, take it day by day.
This medicine is what it likes the best
Remember this is just another test.

Day 3 - Vilafranca-de-Xira

We are having a stopover in Vilafranca-de-Xira. Early for us, but our situation has made it so. This town is so pretty and our accommodation so delightful, it was not such a difficult decision and more lessons were learnt as we interacted with the Portuguese staff.

At breakfast, Corrie asked for a 'cafe con leche'. The response was quick and harsh: "Why do you ask for it in Spanish?". Corrie taken aback replied: "I speak Spanish and I'd like a coffee with milk". The man came out with the coffee, and asked me what I wanted and I said (very clearly): "Hot chocolate please", thinking myself very lucky that I couldn't speak Spanish! After a short meeting we decided not to react to his earlier aggressive behaviour and of course, spoke in our best non-offensive English.

He went a bit weak at the knees at our lack of response and apologised for his comments, saying that people often think that the Portuguese don't have their own language, and thought they spoke Spanish. He said that some Portuguese don't like the Spanish because of how the Spanish treated them in earlier times including a few invasions in the eighteenth century. He went on to say that some were also jealous of the Spanish because they had more money and were more self assured. He went on to be the best host you could imagine.

The tourist office was our next venture. We knew these places mostly spoke English, and don't sell coffee, so the language was settled early. I mentioned our earlier experience with this man, whom we now have a good relationship with (keeping confidentiality of course). She said: "we had our chances in earlier times but failed to take advantage of them. Our economy is in bad shape and even my own daughter has gone to Germany to work. She then went on to say: "people think we are not good workers, but given the right opportunities we can be amongst the best, it is the government that lowers morale".

We did eventually ask for advice on what to see in town and followed this up with a visit to a very modern and well designed interesting neo-realism museum. Then it was off to a huge glass library situated alongside the Tagus river, a possible large distraction for those who loved this view as much as I did. The talk on Portuguese poetry would have been a bonus but it was not on today, and the talk on the culture of bullfighting might have given me more of an understanding on why they do it, but it was cancelled due to the rain. So we kept in training by walking along every street in this gentle town.

We're off tomorrow on another short walk, and this time it seems there will be serious rain so we'll leave fully prepared, hoping my left leg is being as thorough as we are in its preparation. I look forward to a less eventful breakfast and a new topic of discussion, and where Corrie will order 'coffee with milk' and not, a 'cafe con leche'!

Sensitivity is the infection left as a result of deep wounds



The Self

The past is full of many contradictions
That influence our present circumstances,
While some are good, others cause constrictions
And lead us on some very merry dances.
We need therefore to get to know ourselves
To sort out things that off' get in the way,
And would be best if just left on the shelves
Then dust them off when done - avoid the spray.
Not all of us can put the past to rest
And thus it's up to us how we react,
To see if we at least can pass the test
And separate the fiction from the fact.
There's something there in everybody's past
When understood, the tension will not last.

Day 4 - Vilafranca-de-Xira to Azambuja

Another short day as my legs are finding different things to entertain themselves with. Firstly a small ache in the left before it jerks a little and then tentatively reaches out. The right one tries to role model what a good leg should do, but the left seems unable to be taught. The first seven kilometres are okay but after that both legs slow down, so I try to do sharp bursts and yes, that is all they are. At around ten, they both start to quit and at thirteen, well, that marks the end of the road. Maybe more can be squeezed in but it makes the walk more of an endurance test, and that's not our goal.

What is an endurance test however is the one of 'living with Parkinsons'. It is phrased this way to not only highlight those with Pd (Parkinsons disease), but also those close relatives and friends who may suffer in their own way as they live with, care for, and worry about, the person who has the disease. They all have to endure in their own way. It is vital I believe, that the person with Pd understands what their friends, and relatives (especially), are going through. This calls upon self awareness, and the understanding of how they respond to their illness, is vital to lower the endurance needed for all parties.

So, if this enduring couple hasn't reached a home, we catch a train to the nearest 'sleep town' and then work out the next strategy. It's helpful that we have a train line, however, it seems to have had enough of the camino and will soon make a sharp change in direction. A bit disappointing but that's life, and we'll watch closely for any changes. More industrial sites today and a busy main road wasn't the best place for photos, but our new photo deposit scheme doesn't want to post more than one anyway. It's beyond us and my graphic designer, on how to do better than this. A bit disappointing, but at least my 'I phone' is 'I clouding' them for me.

We were passed by an older German couple, had a short chat with two older Swiss walkers and a young American boy, then a short walk with a jovial Frenchman. A bit of trivia about these meetings had me thinking of previous encounters with these nationalities. Quite often the greetings are shortened to 'morgen', 'morning', 'dias', but not the French, who have made it nearly impossible to shorten their greeting by making it one word, and still call it a greeting, and even so, can you imagine saying 'jour' or 'bon'? And the Swiss, well, simply shortening would stray from perfection.

A short fifty metre walk from the station to our lovely room, where a gregarious woman greeted us at her hostel and, as she talked, she did what many locals do. As they talk, they'll reach out and touch your arm, or stroke your face even, creating a close and friendly environment which is very relaxing amidst a possible cultural or linguistic clash. Not sure whether it would have worked with our 'breakfast man', but it would have helped him phrase his objection more tenderly. Off to our room now to plan tomorrow's walking tactics.

Endurance will get you through the worst of it



Endure

A person can endure some things by choice
Like running marathons or climbing hills,
Or opera, with scales to keep your voice
It's just hard work no place for having thrills.
But then there are those things that foist upon
Pd is one, that came to me by chance,
There is a choice where light can still be shone
A powerful word enduring endurance.
When things go wrong don't stay the beaten path
Try something new that has a feeling true,
The older way may cause unwanted wrath
Remember we're unique - and that means you.
The vital bit's resiling to endure,
A mind achieving substitute for cure.

Day 5 - Azambuja to Santarem

There wasn't a distance I could confidently complete – ie. ending up in a village with lodgings or a train station, so we decided on a 'two village walk'. On the way we looked in on a 16th century church with its tiled walls of the same era in this ancient settlement dating back to Roman times. The station of Azambuja continued the blue tile theme, as did many of the shops and residences. The same white and black patterned tiles continued to lead us around another village to a park of tiny hills. It was overcast so no-one about, setting an eerie feeling as I delighted in this unusual 'tiny hill' park.

I looked skyward as birds cast speckled shadows on the grass high above a tall unused chimney stack, well, not exactly unused. There was now a squatter proudly displaying her tenant rights untouchable by human hands. Storks, that we saw so many of in Spain, were now displaying their same dominance here in Portugal where over eight thousand pairs are presently building their nests high up in the sky. They are so exposed to the elements it makes me wonder how this bird, the only one I know that doesn't seek protection from the weather, survives the persistent Portuguese pours from the grey masses above.

The silent shadows turned into other storks, flying back and forth from their nests on the top of trees chosen often for their height. Here, they are also on a rooftop chimney where they are perceived to bring good fortune, and on another chimney stack close by. I watched them at work for close to an hour as it was the end of our long village walk. While they are safe from predators up there, the 'storklets and storklings' are vulnerable to the rain and cold weather, so nest building has an urgency about it. Later I saw some younger ones buried in their mothers huge feathers so at least they're not that exposed.

We trained-in on the poppy-lined tracks to another beautiful tiled station and set off to our new home in the hilly town of Santarem, close to the famous town of Fatima. After lunch we fast walked up higher and higher to the old part, past the familiar tiled market place and over the narrow cobbled streets. Another thirty minute fast walk back down (a sort of alternate walk), made me feel better about the walking part of my day.

When we slowed down, I noticed a picture with the name Ana Moura written on a window. There was something about her that made me pursue an enquiry about this woman. She was a 'fadista', a singer of fado songs and was born here in Santarem. Fado is an ancient tradition which sings of hope and sadness and is related to, more by the older generations. Ana was young and was able to add some modernity to this often melancholic music and thus make it relevant to the young as well. She echoes the distant past with deep emotions (recalled from her own more recent history), which are deeply embedded in this city of invasions where you can faintly hear the cries of wounded souls.

Conference of the birds



Fado

The fado lays its ancient routes so deep
From there it gets its melancholic tones,
Awakening the sadness from its sleep
It rattles long lost grief from its dead bones.
The wailing shows there's life to manifest
In happiness that calms this wounded soul,
That takes it to a place, may be a crest
To see again if it can be made whole.
In Santarem there is this one 'menina'
Who brings a curious interpretation,
So all can come, glad to have now seen her
No longer just the old, but for a nation.
The Portuguese old soul remains intact
Refreshed, so now there is no turning back.

Day 6 - Santarem to Fatima

Today we decided to take a bus to the holy town of Fatima. It was not on the track we were taking, but was so close. No walking the camino today so we decided on a substitute. A steep hill provided our morning fast walk as we walked from our hotel to the bus station way up in the village of Santarem. I was quick to allow my imagination some rare freedom when Corrie called to me to come and look at the faint rainbow hanging from the slowly sliding sun-uncovering clouds. It was curious knowing the place we were travelling to was partly about visions of the sun dancing, or moving suddenly, at least.

I'm not a great believer in what people report they see, but here I am fantasising about seeing a connection between the rainbow and the visions at Fatima. For no reason other than to clear something up for myself, I pondered on Fatima being a catholic pilgrimage site, and also the name of Mohammed's eldest daughter. This tenuous connection, like the rainbow on the cloud, had me reflecting on my own spirit. My spiritual belief is one that sees a spiritual connection, however fragile, between everyone, whether they have a belief or not, so the rainbow reflected this overarching inclusion.

So, what a huge fuss three young Portuguese kids caused after their reported sighting of the Virgin Mary. Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, three young shepherds, stated that they had this encounter, which led to much debate over the actual truth of what they claimed as their religious experience. For me this is not the important point of discussion because nothing probably will ever be proved. To me what is really fascinating, is the fact that a huge industry has been created around three kids reporting on this vision. In the meantime many do believe, and that is their truth and part of their spiritual journey.

There didn't need to be proof for millions of staunch catholics, curious tourists and Corrie and me (we were in the neighbourhood anyway), to make the journey to this now quite overwhelming sacred site. I acknowledge the sincere belief most of these people have but like a lot of places that become popular, a lot of the good vibes associated with them become smothered in footsteps. What was not diminished was the warmth and welcome of the local Portuguese business owners, and a deep calm, as it is not a place that attracts those who would disturb the sanctity of others.

After a short visit to special sites, we ended the day with another quick walk around the outskirts of town then back to our home with a huge balcony (twice the size of our room, which is big). As we look out in the night sky the cathedral is lit up and we can see just the top of it shining in front of dark rain-filled clouds. I will let my imagination run free once more in the face of a glowing sunset, as I think of what those three kids created all those years ago. The rainbow has gone, but the belief of millions remain in its aftermath.

No matter your belief, we are all headed in the same direction



God

There is no solid proof there is a God
But many people do believe it's true,
For those that don't, it must seem rather odd
Believers are so sure - it's a virtue.
So many saints, with God they've been in touch
Their proof they say lies deep within their soul,
From these reports believers gain so much
That leads them to their omnipresent goal.
But what is it that places so much trust
In few that say they saw an apparition,
While others see, but simply seen as just
A fantasy where they must show contrition.
To God it's just the road that they are travelling
Where tales of journeys past are still unravelling.

Day 7 - Santarem to Golega

So, a bus back to Santarem and it was off walking again as we headed back to familiar camino territory. Through copious vineyards with older grapes making way for 'just planted vines', planted so methodically, and appearing to be divided by gatherings of wild yellow daisies. Then every one hundred metres or so, we would see a small brick hut in the middle of these vines that we imagined to be either a workers rest place or a place of storage for grape things.

Little irrigation is carried out here and the many puddles were evidence of weeks of rain common in this area, but fortunately there was always a dry track to take. It was my first time out in the open far from sensitive ears (except for Corrie's), so she ramped up speed to get away from me, knowing that I was about to introduce a sound that could scare the friendliest of fauna, which was not so hard to do in my present state. So it was time for my unattractive voice exercises, my first chance since I left home.

Out of the vines and on to a small road. My legs once again were making anything over six kilometres a struggle, so a couple of long breaks got me going again. We're now in a seemingly affluent area where large mansions were the main sign of this largesse, along with more and more vigorous barking dogs. A lunch break just outside Vale de Figueira was welcome but had us miss our train by two minutes. It was a bit unnerving for we weren't sure of the regularity of these trains, and probably a little traumatised by our recent French experience, where the only regularity with trains was regular strikes.

So an hour's wait seemed like a good time for Pd exercises. No-one on the station, so an appropriate time for some 'sit and stands', a few 'curtsy flicks', and some 'tah dahs', with more to come as we become more isolated. I always feel better after these exercises so will attempt to incorporate them into my every day. My blog also is an exercise and gives me a chance to think about the day to help keep my brain active and in the best state possible, and just doing it provides me with an instant 'placebo hit'.

We were met at our Golega guest house by our new hosts. Paulo and Philippe entertained us for over an hour, treating us like family, as we chatted about their new renovations (our home), passions, and this town of the famous lusitano horses. These horses used in war and in bullrings are known for their calmness as well as their high spirits so are ideal in combative arenas. They say that the old are wise, and they don't come much older than these horses that have been on the Iberian peninsula since 1700BC. We chatted about this at a local bar, where our hosts shouted us drinks and nibbles with some locals.

While all this was happening, Paulo was arranging for us to be picked up tomorrow by Fernando, the manager of a natural reserve park where it is time to mark some birds to be tracked for research.

Be calm in your action but spirited in your belief



The Wine Shed

A vineyard has a life one hundred years
Like us, it then produces very little,
Twenty to forty fully in careers
The wine is good, but bodies getting brittle.
The older wines not always the best taste
But maybe richer in some situations,
The younger aromatic, drink with haste
Inventive in their flair and new creations.
But in the vineyard lies a little shed
With bits and pieces we can use to alter,
Our destiny before we are all dead
A taste that's wise and so we do not falter.
We need to access sheds among the vines
So we can be the very best - of wines.

Day 8 - Golega

Today our host arranged a visit to Golega's Natural Reserve with Fernando who is in charge of this huge area. This man seemed highly dedicated as he banded birds while he spoke to us, vigilant of the fact that the birds they had netted had a maximum time to remain in their shuffling 'bird bag', which hung silently and just above his feathered desk. The area is about five kilometres square and we spent the morning walking through mostly 'untouched by human hands country'. While our trail walking is often filled with bird sounds, there is little that is so highly concentrated on nature, as this 'reserve'.

Walking initially between two small creeks, through long wet grass (where my non-waterproof shoes don't work so well because of the grass's constant soaking effect), we could hear the soft and musical sounds of tiny birds. These were the same birds we saw Fernando and Katerina 'ringing' today, and tagging them so they could carry out research on what is happening in their tiny busy world.

As we walked, a cegonha branca (a white stork I posted about some days ago) flew out from one of the creeks a metre away. I was hoping to see their younger ones tagged but this was nearly good enough. Two lakes with large nesting grounds of reeds were full of storks, white and black, and a myriad of other birds obviously content with their permanent resident status. Others with such permanency, a field of cork trees that had been stripped of their commercially important cork), leaving them with a somewhat mysterious naked presence. Through the branches a train line came into view, with a train which could barely be seen nor heard due to a purpose-planted thick band of bamboo, enhanced by colourful poppies in the foreground. Soon we were back at reserve headquarters where photos were taken and our friend waited, ready to take us home.

On the way, Fernando suddenly applied the brakes. He had seen a rare bird, unseen for decades. We scrambled out of the car to peer at a black vulture, one of few seen in Portugal in this region for thirty years. It flew too high to get a clear look at its three metre wing span but the boss will lend me his telescopic photo. It is so large that at times they hurtle toward the ground, and if undamaged, need two people to help it take flight again. We learnt quickly that these vultures are great for the environment by cleaning up tonnes of diseased carcasses. This has now nearly fully made up for not seeing the young cegonha branca.

Excited, as though we had just made a momentous discovery ourselves, we chatted continuously about the siting on our land rover drive through this peaceful reserve. We had a final coffee with our new friend who told us more stories about his beloved Portugal, and the tireless work that these people were putting in to retain its fauna. Soon we were back in the home of the famous lusitano horses which was our (temporary) home also, to be spoilt and entertained by Paulo's gregarious wife, Louisa.

The wonder of seeing something that's not supposed to be seen



The Black Vulture

I glimpsed this bird along the track today
Gliding in the thermals way up high,
Its wingspan measures three long bales of hay
It has no voice, but you may hear a cry.
For twenty years they haven't been around
Poisoned accidentally through its prey,
Or killed by 'lines of power' close to the ground
And loss of breeding sites - they have no say.
The black vulture does mourn its ancient shed
The holm oak and the cork were dwindling fast,
But recognising they were nearly dead
Ensured the vultures future was not past.
This mighty bird, the one without a voice
Once more it cries, locals have made a choice.

Day 9 - Golega to Vila Nova Da Barquina

We've just left the best bathroom in the world. A huge shower room with a huge shower head that tries to drown you, a loo with the same space, you could dance in the 'cleaning teeth room' and then no door at all into the 'getting ready for bed room'. We leave this one hundred horse town, where they breed, train and sell the self-assured and famous lusitano horse.

They are a beautiful, strong chested horse used in bull fighting events where they ensure the well being of both the bull, and the bull fighter, because the bull in Portugal is never killed. I'm not a fan of either but if you don't know about this, then you will miss a large part of Portugal (please correct me Vanda when you read this). Thousands of people come from afar to buy this horse, but they are not sold until a real understanding has been reached between horse and buyer.

Out through wheat and potato fields, with poppies, yellow flower bushes and cactus plants on the country road edges, our first non-wet day walking on the camino was refreshing. Temperatures are still cool; Portuguese drivers are still not leaving us much walking room; walkers are few; and no rest houses for nearly ten kilometres. I'm getting used to pushing myself a bit, adapting to walking being a little harder, so maybe after fourteen kilometres today we may be able to walk a little longer. I am mindful of my jumping heart, and clotting blood, so whatever I do, I am rigid with my medications and stockings.

Large power lines built like candelabras spread out across paddocks of sheep, horses and crops. The storks were also there, with six of these lines fully booked by several storks. As we passed through a small village there were more on rooftops, chimneys and water towers, many still building their nests.

This small, quite busy village of Sao Caetano with new wealth, blended into an abandoned one of 'once was old wealth', 'Quinta Cardiga'. Originally a castle defending against the Spanish and Arab invasions, then a royal palace, followed by a hospital, this peaceful, abandoned town, served as a delightful resting place for us on the banks of the Tejo river. Ominous private property signs had us wondering 'what next' for this ancient village with its old stone bridge and majestic tree lined street.

Soon it was home with another old and new mixture. The hotel's modern cafe was in contrast to our abandoned room, especially the world's worst bathroom. Only one of us could fit in it at a time, except when needing to help each other over the tiny but high defensive bath wall, and onto a floor like a huge drain. If you wanted to use the small independent shower head on yourself, instead of having it wash the wall, which, by the way, needed washing anyway, we had to rest it at such an angle in its holder that it became a dangerous object, and if you weren't careful with the flimsy plastic shower door it would fall off its railing. Yes, I know, these are first world issues alone.

A bridge can connect everything



Deserted

'Deserted' paints a picture all too bleak
No life exists here save an inquisitive mind,
Under a bridge there is a lonely creek
Among the vines its life you still can find.
With no-one home and so for many years
The paths arrive at rotting vacant places,
Still wet from long and lasting grieving tears
The sadness locked in lines across their faces.
Today deserted kids do paint a picture
Reflecting bad decisions by the old,
Becoming everyday a common fixture
'Cause we are not so able to be bold.
But 'water under bridge' it will not be
'Til kids revolt to save us from the sea.

Day 10 - Vila Nova Barquina to Tomar

We are catching up with our English/Australian friends so our journey today will start with a four kilometre walk to the station to catch a train to Tomar, a medieval town, so crucial in the Portuguese story which I will tell you more about after tomorrow's exploration with our friends.

In the meantime, we walked through parts of this ancient city, chatting about old times, and potential new times for us, families and the globe. With the ancient castle staring aloft with sad and weary bloodshot windows, a distant image of its old self unable to do the job it was built for, and no longer needed to do so in any case, we walked and talked through its ancient streets.

As we walked through the large square I noticed a yellow arrow, and pointed it out to our friends, who then followed it with me as we discussed its role in getting us to our goal. We passed limping pilgrims, one with a bandaged knee and another with a swollen ankle, reminding me that it is not an endurance test at all costs, but a journey full of challenges, where wise decisions are needed to be made in the name of personal and spiritual growth.

It is for everyone who wants a challenge and where even the faint hearted may surprise themselves, as long as walking is not an over-riding burden for them, and where a change of heart is a desirable thing. We talked about life's different meanings as we strolled through some beautiful parkland, in awe especially of the strong heart of what appeared to be a dead tree, as it sprouted new saplings from its seemingly lifeless, but determined will to survive.

If this tree was a person we would probably refer to it as severely disabled, which would mean that there would be little chance of it ever leading a productive life. But we now know differently because we have seen people who have defied this image, thousands of times. This tree not only survived after being fully uprooted and left to die, it defied human belief, but not nature's, by not only living, but giving life to many others. All of them had no sign of a disability themselves and were in a similar condition to other trees around them.

Many of these people go on to not just an ordinary life like others, which would be fine, but to enjoy extraordinary lives that may never have happened if they were without that disability. We all have a disability but there are some that the community sometimes has a derogatory view about. So how do some people overcome this perceived limitation while others suffer?

There could be many reasons and I have one of them. From what I have observed, people who have a positive outlook on life, something that they love to do and a determination to foster this daily, are those that have a successful life. They have a reason to live and live fully each day and continue regardless of obstacles and excuses. Their disability then becomes an ability, showing them strengths they never knew existed.

New growth is possible no matter your ailment



Ability

Disabled is a hard word to define
It conjures up a feeling of despair,
There's been a public drawing of a line
In sand that's quick and sinking - that's not fair.
The old interpretation boxed us in
A burden, it was life no longer living,
Like shredded paper filling up a bin
That takes up space, it's taking but not giving.
Today there's change with opportunities
To find your passion - move beyond your fears,
And rise above these disabilities
To live life well for many, many years.
It's tough, I know, it's easy just to say
But simply start, then take it day by day.

Day 11 - Tomar

We explored a bit of Tomar and started to get an idea of why it is most revered. First it must be noted that Portugal has a very large catholic population dedicated to the church and its loyal protectors. These protectors are professional soldiers, known as the Knights Templars and were made up of an elite fighting force (around 10% of the catholic service providers) with their support staff, administration team and others making up the other 90%.

The Knights Templars were most prominent in Spain and Portugal and the history of their genuine exploits were widely known throughout the world. One of their more prominent roles was to look after the safety and wellbeing of pilgrims on their long, arduous and often dangerous pilgrimages. Some 'pretend knights templars' brandished their swords as we walked through the Convento de Cristo where they were holding an annual orange festival. I'm unsure of its tradition, except to say this is a festival town, so they may not need a reason.

It was time to join the modern era once more, so it was into our friends' car where we travelled to an 'ancient castle on an island'. However we could only look from afar for sadly, it was closed. Another on the way back appeared to be open for some young Portuguese scouts and not really open to us, so we went through an open gate and imagined ourselves back in those old days of face to face battles and with the simplest of weapons that were used in those times.

We also imagined the invasions by the huge French garrisons as they confidently advanced. Thousands of foot soldiers led by the more experienced fighters on horseback, imposing cannons, carts of tents and food, moving with their historic arrogance against the lesser forces of the Portuguese and the British. They seemed more confident on this, their third and last invasion, intent on winning by the power of numbers instead of the strategy of tactics.

But the locals had other ideas. They knew that it would take a lot of food to feed such a big force so they systematically destroyed any sign of it. They poisoned their crops; all food storage places were burnt; householders buried the years provisions; and stock were killed. The next strategy was their great wall. A huge wall had been built to protect Lisbon, so those who had survived had continued in vain, because this wall was insurmountable, and the well-fed Portuguese and their English friends watched, as this great vanquished army returned home.

Back at our home we started out on the 'raining camino track', giving our friends a small taste with a four kilometre round trip. As you can see, we are doing this walk a lot differently because of my issues, taking the journey as it comes to us. With no strict timetable we are using this time to be fully with our friends, who will take us tomorrow through rough terrain with its lodgings too far apart, and drop us at a point where lodging distances are more accessible. It has been a relaxing and special time with them and we will cherish it.

We all need a Knights Templar at some stage of our life



Size Doesn't Matter

It's not so much the size of the team in the battle
For numbers don't define a win or loss,
It's the battle in the team that makes them rattle
Eventually showing who really is the boss.
So when the odds are in the others' favour
Then draw upon your wits to gain an edge,
So you can earn a victory you can savour
Which doesn't leave you hanging from a ledge.
When diagnosed with Parkinsons disease
The loss of cells with dopamine is vast,
But with intent the last few you can please
Rewarding them with treasures that can last.
It's best to get the most out of the few
Than mourn the loss of those you never knew.

Day 12 - Tomar to Coimbra

Another misty morning greeted us as we opened the curtains on Tomar's last performance. We had balcony seats so we also felt the touch of the cool air as we strained to see the castle we never saw. The others had already made a start, so it was off to breakfast to join them and talk about the day ahead. The food that was waiting for us at the interval of our stay, was superb. It catered for all tastes and all the different diets, meat and non-meat eaters. What a grand show this was and it whetted our appetite for the second half.

We had a meeting and agreed that distances between lodgings are too far (over thirty kilometres on average) at present, and the rail line is taking a different direction, so we are left to continue under our own steam, for our emergency transport would not be happening any further along the camino. Our friends offered to take us further north to a place where the town we were walking to was reachable, so we settled on Coimbra.

Our 'gps', and a masterful driver, got us going, and we continued our camino in a different way. It felt a bit strange but also like it was meant to be because without our friends it may have been another story. We followed the camino as best we could until the yellow arrows turned our roads into tracks, where we then took other roads to where the walking track re-met ours. While it was comforting to have a car, whenever we saw pilgrims slogging it out in the rain, there was a desire to join them, like that was our sworn duty and we were abandoning them when the going got tough, but that was fleeting.

Many villages we passed through had been truly abandoned by its citizens but unlike those pilgrims, their neglect was real. There was no sense that they would survive with trees and bushes hurrying on their demise. Through their sad, narrow and windy streets there was a sense of saudade, a sadness of once was, but will never be again.

Arriving in the steep old part of Coimbra we had mixed feelings, as we sat high up above the imposing river below, sharing a drink and a meal with our generous friends. Our lovely waitress was working here part time to help pay for her learnings in the oldest university in Portugal and one of the oldest continuously operating universities in the world. To find her study books she finds herself in the grandest baroque library, (and would you believe) in the world. It's awe inspiring ceilings painted by famous Portuguese artists, provide an atmosphere for creative and wonderful learning opportunities.

We opened this book with our friends only days ago and we are now about to close it, and continue our learning journey beneath nature's ever changing ceiling. There will be no sense of abandonment but rather a sense of 'saudade' as we look back on the wonderful time we spent together, with 'sadness that it's over, but happy that we did it.

Be sad for the memories but glad that they happened



The Library

Unwittingly, we write our book of life
Unknowingly, we store it in our soul,
With lots of good, there's also lots of strife
With what you gave and also what you stole.
The largest of the worlds great libraries
Has billions of these stories over time,
Protected by the spirits and the fairies
This library - stupendous and sublime.
The earthly one with matching character
Joanina, Coimbra's beautiful baroque,
Has not the real story but has the actor
And timeless books but governed by a clock.
This library deserves a heavenly place
Of earthly traits it's hard to find a trace.

Day 13 - Coimbra to Porto

There was no accommodation inside twenty five kilometres, and at this stage we decided that it would be too risky to walk with a leg well below full capacity. We scanned the maps eager to see other possibilities, but the patchiness of distances, many over twenty kilometres, was too vast. From Porto onwards there appears to be closer distances between sleeps and a much larger support system to give both of us peace of mind. I think one of the secrets of our ability to endure our long walks has been to successfully measure my limited physical prowess in line with distances and topography.

As we entered Porto by train, there was a slight lean on our carriage as passengers sighted the river Douro. While it is not a river out of the ordinary, at one stage in town it has found a way through the sheer hillsides, creating a 'river in a gorge effect', stunning enough to get a train to lean. It is a spectacular sight not only for its appearance, but because this ravine is in a big city, unlike anything I can remember seeing.

In the meantime, we will spend a little time here in Porto because it is a beautiful city with lots to see. We especially needed to see the yellow arrow, and we know in any town with a cathedral that is where the arrows start. It's like a game, searching for the first one then followed by much excitement when you find it, like reaching the starting line for a marathon. Once again the arrows are very clear, but you have to focus to get out of a large city because of the many twists and turns, and other things that can entice your concentration. So we followed a few arrows just to get a good sense of where it winds out of town tomorrow.

Our camino reconnoitre led us firstly down a myriad of steps, where dark residences with little doors and windows in varied colours, contrasted vividly with the shops on the other side lit through large windows and normal doors. Narrow cobbled pathways led us back and up from the valley floor, yellow arrows giving 'passers by' something to think and talk about. We are often stunned by the fact that many locals in the lands of the camino are unaware of a brush painted sign that provides a refreshingly new direction for people who yearn for another type of walking adventure.

As we passed a sign, unfocussed as we were, we saw a young couple with large and dirty back packs, a fair sign they were pilgrims who had started some time ago. We sat and chatted with this newly-met couple, about lots of things. The young Italian showed me his app., called: 'mapyCZ', while the young Canadian woman suggested another called: '# Wisely + The Camino Portuguese'. Saudade was with us once again as we left these two young pilgrims in this old Porto street. Back home, looking out on graceful buildings from the fourth floor of our five-bed suite (which my 'genius booking.com' wife got for a song), we contemplate the next verse in this chequered camino story.

The multilayered art of walking



The Yellow Arrow

We all have yellow arrows but not clear
To see, for they are often hidden far,
Below the conscious mind - it's hard to hear
Directions that will lead us to our star.
Our arrows do not have a single way
But change if we decide a different track,
It's ours and ours alone and we can stray
And give another one a solid crack.
At times there is an unexpected turn
It takes you by surprise when you're not ready,
New things about yourself you need to learn
Now that you are shaking and unsteady.
This painted yellow arrow on the track
Is now part of our path - no turning back.

Day 14 - Porto

The streets of Porto were washed for us once again as we searched for a special cafe. We walked in and out of our first one, but soon returned after failing to find a decent croissant in another. The barista in the 'rejected cafe' seemed to be waiting for us, as he gave us a 'what took you so long look' on our return. Corrie was also getting her share of rejections. After getting into trouble asking for coffee in Spanish last week, she learnt it in Portuguese, and asked him for a 'cafe com leite'. "Sorry, we don't have omelettes", he said in perfect English.

I've seen the sit or stand cafes, but this was something else. Firstly there was 'the no stopping at all - on the run coffee'; next was 'the standing at the bar - no time to sit coffee'; then 'sitting at the bar - can't stand but no time coffee hit'; 'sitting at a table alongside the first three - wanting a relaxed coffee', and finally tables and chairs down the back - 'settling in with luggage, snacks and ipad coffee'. We chose the fourth because we wanted to relax - and seeing they had no omelettes, Corrie will just have a coffee.

There was time left in the day to do other things besides drinking 'karma sutra coffees' however, and it was time to pursue more cultural pursuits. As we tried to keep on the right side of the street, dodging people lightly washing their umbrellas from the intermittent showers, we had our camino passports stamped at the cathedral, a necessity if you want pilgrim privileges along the way, eg lodging discounts and thoughtful kindness. This done, we had a short walk through the cathedral, with the highlight being some delightful paintings especially on the ceiling of the notary chamber.

From here we continued our cobblestone slide to the home of Guerra Junqueiro, one of Europe's greatest poets. His poetry was highly satiric and he used this medium, backed by his journalistic background and his time as a member of the lower house, to criticise conservatism, the catholic church and the Portuguese monarchy, while contributing greatly to the Portuguese Revolution of 1910 which created the Portuguese First Republic.

Back on the narrow winding streets that were getting older, we stepped carefully down past Porto's oldest house built in the 13th century and eventually reaching the shores of the wonderful river Douro. The rivers of rainfall today join the waters from the Spanish mountains, to form this superb waterway that creates a natural border between Spain and Portugal for over one hundred kilometres, eventually becoming the spectacle that is the Douro valley.

We retraced our steps back up the steep hillside of Porto finding now even more cobbled streets with their ancient walls framing their now more contemporary interiors. There is no time left to visit my Porto bookshop which I am sure would have had a lot more to add to my short story, but there will be time to pursue this in another town somewhere on the Iberian peninsular.

Revolution is sometimes the only way to defeat stubborn incompetence



The Duoro

The stunning Douro river has it all
Its origin in Spain it shares a culture,
Meandering - its purpose to enthrall
It glides as if a shadow of a vulture.
It paints a moving picture on its way
Its watercolours shine amongst the vines,
Their terraces a beautiful display
It sculpts the land - exquisitely divine.
It enters Port-oh then your jaw drops wide
Saluted by a gorge within a city,
Beneath its bridges, there it meets the tide
That welcomes it, this river oh so pretty.
From Spain to Portugal the river Duoro
Creates an art that goes beyond the morrow.

Day 15 - Porto to Moreira da Maia

No more washing today, the streets are clean but wet, and the big dryer is about to emerge from its slow shifting cover. We're on the move again venturing out into a perfect day. As we opened our guide book to check directions I thought of the delightful young Canadian woman and her new camino friend, a young Italian man. We met them in Porto resting on their first day off since Lisbon and fell into a Camino debriefing. When they saw my guide book she said with intrigue: "no-one uses those anymore".

As I was reflecting on her 'dinosaur' quip, a young man on a motorbike pointed behind him suggesting that was the way. Further along I pulled the book out again and an older man crossed the road, put his hand on my shoulder and waved his hand vigorously in the camino direction. Later, an older woman, seeing us scanning the book yet again, insisted on walking with us when the book had a sudden memory loss. I can't remember if any of the three used words, but who needs them when you've got two legs and a finger.

So this got me thinking about what our young friends were saying to us when they inferred that these days everyone uses an (app). So we tried the two they suggested, both insisting theirs was the best. We downloaded them but we're not sure exactly what to do with them. In Portugal however there is another way. Buy a book, remove all the pages (less weight), and when you need it, open it, then pretend to look at it for a few minutes at most, and wait for your Portuguese navigators to walk-cycle-drive past, or simply wave from their home.

Mostly our walk was through busy traffic areas which was okay, as we got a sense of outer Porto and the people who live in places away from the more popular areas. Walking north we were aware of the neatness of the streets and houses, the odd home with walls tiled with different designs and colours. We stopped twice for a snack to spoil my leg and slowly acclimatise it to the extra walking. I had the usual stiffness after five kilometres, then again after a further eight and eleven roughly, with the last few kilometres home being leg-happy, giving me some encouragement for the rest of the journey.

Corrie on the other hand is still having a walk in the park doing it so easily and fluently. In the past I have shot ahead too much at times, but now I've slowed a little, we are walking and talking more together. This led to discussions eg, about why no-one (except when we got really close), knew where our lodgings were. Our book stated clearly where it was, but this optometrist had her shingle there. Google agreed with our book, but what really unnerved us was that the usually reliable Portuguese navigators did not know, so maybe it's time to work more on our 'app', surely it knows. Finally we found where our bed was and why we could not find it. The problem was, it had changed its name very recently, and the optometrist was working out of the same building..... you see?

Sometimes we look, yet do not see



Empty Spaces

They tiled the walls for fear of empty spaces
With blue and white intriguing azulejo,
From 13th century Moors there are some traces
Rococo then the narrative 'grandao'.
In alter cloths they're unique Portuguese
Facades of homes are smartly decorated,
Then panels also mirrored French 'trompe l'oeil'
Contemporary was then duly feted.
Maybe an empty space has qualities
That we don't see because it's not there long,
Aristotle says that nature oft decrees
That silence often has a need for song.
So when that space does duly make you fearful
The beauty of these tiles will make you tearful.

Day 16 - Moreira da Maia to Vilarinho

It was an out of the way village and only one eatery in town. This was a good thing, because the food was the best tasting and superbly cooked food we have experienced in Portugal. From the most tender (eye) fillet to the tastiest chicken (hard to find) with vegetables (don't often see), a salad (in season), a lovely wine, and a home made version of creme brulee (a beautiful sight) for a stunningly low price from engaging hosts. 'Dinner at Dolores' was superb.

What was not superb was the overly loud voice of an older customer as he stridently put his view forward to two other men. I call it the 'unaware overture'. This man, and it usually is a man, seemingly unaware and probably not interested in others' point of view, finds an opening (overture) in a conversation, then becomes the arbiter of all wisdom on that subject. I tried a diversion tactic by mentioning the soccer on the annoying tv to one of the 'voice receivers'. It didn't stop the 'voice sender', but it gave me some sort of connection in the room and thus a little control, so I could enjoy the best food in Portugal.

Back on track after a small cake breakfast, we spent over ten kilometres on cobbled roads. Cobbles and maybe the huggingly close high stone walls, gave the approaching cars the sound of a train or a plane, which is what we thought they were, because often they were hidden behind winding walls. There was also the under-foot feel of the cobbles as they appeared to massage our feet, and then there is the ancient look of these worn stones that seem to add a little mystery to our walk, as we wondered who had walked there centuries before.

We aren't on the coastal walk and a long way from the ocean but our book told us about a hill where we could climb to see it, an extra bonus on the way. We also re-met a delightful Dutch woman whom we chatted with as she took our photo. Back down from our viewing hill and back on the cobbles we continued our Portuguese village crawl.

We stopped twice to sit and eat in a local cafe. Like it is in other European countries, there is a lot of noise in the cafes. There is always a tv with no-one watching, (mostly showing a game of soccer); sometimes a competitive radio; and nearly always someone who thinks their voice must be heard above the rest, as I've mentioned above. However, mostly there is acceptance of others, and they are used to the television, and who knows what they might miss if it was turned off, but all in all they are there primarily to be together, and enjoy their coffee.

Our first room without a heater (it's cold), means we might be having a late dinner before we snuggle up with the extra blankets given to replace the air conditioner. One of my symptoms of Parkinsons is that I have trouble changing positions in bed. Many of us choose not to medicate ourselves for the night because we can end up with more nasty side effects, but having blankets make it difficult to turn with their heaviness, so I yearn for a doona.

Look for a new use in an old product



Loud Voices

Sometimes I hear a loud disturbing voice
That rises far above accepted norms,
Unsure if accidental or by choice
To buck the system and to not conform.
I hear them mostly in a confined space
Where people like to sit to eat and drink,
And thought for others, there is not a trace
It's difficult to talk or even think.
I wonder if it's me or is it others
That find it very difficult to hear,
The rants of boys so often spoiled by mothers
That's now become a substitute career.
Maybe there is no answer for this clown
So work on it, or otherwise you'll drown.

Day 17 - Vilarinho to Arcos

We left this unusual village where a multitude of roads come together in the grassy town square. Our lodgings were the only reason we needed many exits in case some were blocked. It was freezing cold and we wanted a heater (which is obligatory in the cheapest of accommodation) but our host insisted the cabinet was full of blankets to wrap around ourselves to keep us warm. Maybe a small thing, but we still need a camino to sort out these setbacks.

On our way out we saw what looked like a single turret castle which had previously been a water tower, and is now a type of community centre. This tower has a one hundred metre long pipe at around 'telegraph pole height' carrying water to the town's richest inhabitant from where it irrigates all his rich farmland. It looked fascinatingly simple but sounded complex, so I'm not too sure how it worked. And maybe he kept the unemployment rate low or provided reasonably priced food for the village, and who knows if there was some gratifying altruism thrown in, which might make him richer in other ways, but I'll never know.

I hadn't realised that our village was quite elevated because the walled cobbled streets went 'downhill' to a mediaeval bridge, a gorgeous place to rest a little and take some memory shots. So the rise the day before must have been so slight, we hadn't really noticed we were going up. Then our first really steep cobbled hill which was made less steep by a woman giving out oranges from her orchard to tired and moisture depleted pilgrims. Down to another mediaeval bridge and then home to our quinta. Older than white Australia, our host declared, as it was built in 1755. It has a very crooked tree-beam roof, looking over a grapevine covered courtyard with the sweet sounds of little birds.

Our guide books talk of walking through cooling forests. In Spain, for example, we took this as meaning the tall beeches and fir trees; the musical poplars and chestnuts in Italy; the great spruces of Switzerland; and maple and oak in France; but so far in Portugal it has meant mostly eucalyptus trees, although the ancient cork and oak are still a staple product here. First imported from Australia in the eighteenth century, the eucalyptus tree has been a great source of income in the form of pulp and paper. The downside is their high oil content, which has led to many devastating bushfires throughout the twenty five percent of Portugal that they call home.

This land was formerly the home of olives, grapes and cork trees, but the large companies making fortunes from this industry are stopping a push from many who want their traditional trees back. Huge growth in gum trees has been partly responsible for a large exodus to the cities, but it's also an 'agri-cultural shock' for locals and foreign visitors. For us, as Australians, it is a reminder of our fiery eucalyptus home, but not theirs, and I think the vast majority of Portuguese want their home back.

The quality of a gift often depends on the circumstances in which it was given



Kind Souls

So many on 'the way' that we were seeing
Those people who were there to help us out,
Or just their gifts alone defined their being
Of their goodwill it left us in no doubt.
The single table with two chairs to rest
The villagers who came to quench their thirst,
'No charge', it sometimes came as their bequest
The kindly welcome well before the purse.
And then so many people who were there
To check them out when things were going awry,
To take you in their car when lost you were
Or soothe your aching pains when saw your cry.
Not just another walker did they see
But each one special, not just you and me.

Day 18 - Arcos to Barcelos

Dinner was very expensive at our hotel even though we get a huge discount on our lodgings, so we decided to look around this small village for more reasonably priced fare. We found the only one other eating place in town on the village road, and so close to this road, that it also took up the footpath space and pedestrians had to walk on the other side. Two younger Dutch women gave us an English greeting from their table next to us where that footpath should have been, and what a delightful place, and the obvious hub of the community.

Our food was superb, and we shared it with a bottle of green wine. Green wine, if you weren't aware, is made from the first picked grapes of red or white. In lay terms, this one was dry with a little fizz. It's not a bad drop, but it suits our taste buds and adds very little to the bill. It's called green, not because of its colour but because of its freshness, its newness, its aliveness. It comes in all colours: red, white and rose, a humble wine not needing to express itself by its hue.

I said 'shared it' - this also meant with the pavement below. This bottle had a cooling sleeve around it, usually tight around the bottle. This one wasn't, so when Corrie picked it up it fell straight through, hitting my knee (thankfully no damage) then smashing on the concrete pavement.

Within seconds the owner was out with a full set of wine cleaning equipment. He said it happens a bit thus their preparedness, I imagine. The two Dutch women were as relaxed as the owner saying: "don't worry, you need only be concerned about dying". I will have to process that. Everyone was laughing, so maybe they keep it loose on purpose for entertainment value. We soon received another large bottle (free of charge).

A big day today for me, my first attempt at completing over 15kms. It worked! Was it muscle memory? Some other memory of what has been done in the past? Was my leg just waiting for me to do what I've done in the past: long distances, and brisk, confident walking?" How otherwise did I walk 21kms (with less trouble than days of 10 or 15kms) without my left leg complaining? I don't know.

When we finally arrived at our destination after a fairly uneventful day on the cobbles, we slowed down to a saunter to take in the medieval atmosphere. My left leg started to complain for the first time that day, but only briefly. Was it the long day? Was it that it didn't have a successful muscle memory around this type of walking? I don't know.

Corrie said to me later that she was curious that morning when I said I was feeling confident about the day. Maybe that had something to do with it, or the fact that I love leaving early and this was the first time we had done that, or even the overtaking of slow walkers lifted my confidence, who knows? Anyway, I'm aware it's been a lot about me, but maybe my reflections may clear the window a little for someone else living with Pd.

Make sure you have a good grip on life, lest it slip through your fingers



The Footpath

A footpath is a fascinating place
A dedicated path for everyone,
And every day there is a change of face
In rain, and wind, and snow but mostly sun.
Caminos offer paths of different kinds
A road becomes a path when no path there,
So pick the side where cars don't come behind
And then you have the mountain, field to share.
But when your footpath simply just runs out
Not even place to share with car and truck,
It's time to have a break and sit about
And drink and eat, it's better than be struck.
It's time to go and find another way
Another footpath, for another day.

Day 19 - Barcelos to Sao Bento

We left town on Easter Monday where the celebration of Christ was in full swing. There were older people dancing in the square where the main street's decorations culminated. The fireworks that sounded like large gun fire continued from the day before, as did the music. Also on that day we were greeted by a priest and a dozen locals of all ages offering a huge gold plated Christ for us to kiss, and, lollies.

Beautiful designs made of local flowers were laid outside churches and some led up garden paths like a welcoming mat, while others were simply scattered. By the way, they only celebrate the one Easter day (the resurrection), but on both the Sunday and the Monday. By the looks of our fellow walkers maybe they are representing signs of the crucifixion as many of them are the walking wounded. After all, the camino purist pilgrims welcome the wounds they receive as being part of the necessary penance to reach a higher state.

Many of those walking today are probably not amongst those purists as they don't appear to be welcoming their wounds in any spiritual sense. There was a young German woman limping badly, an American man walking very slowly whom we chatted with for a while, and a Korean man with a bad knee, so I'm feeling pretty good alongside this lot. So we led these struggling walkers through fields of wheat, up a long, long hill and then we sort of jog-walked down the other side through olive farms.

We arrived home to a large quinta. This refers to an historic, often walled off Portugal manor as this one was, the owner being especially proud of a block of stone in the dining room wall with an old carving on it. The name 'Quinta' generally refers to large agricultural estates: typically vineyards, wineries or olive groves owned by very well off bourgeoisie.

This one had a huge garden of olive trees but with a difference. The main difference was that the thirty or so olive trees were growing on small mounds to allow the roots more oxygen. The owner was not into growing the best and most olives but giving the trees a good life. He sees them like older people deserving of a good life in retirement, and treats them as such.

He has one tree that is 600 years old, his special love, and his only desire for this one, especially, but the others as well, is for them to have a healthy long life. He was told by a tree expert that one tree was definitely dead, but was so happy to later present this prophesier of doom, with the largest chestnut he had ever seen. Of course, farmers need to make a living, but this Mozambique family were in a position now where they could look at the world differently. We are now looking forward to breakfast with our older Belgium couple, a little younger German man and our two Dutch friends, who made so light of our broken bottle of green wine at our last home.

Our wounds are only as big as we allow them to be



The Olive Tree

What is it when you spot an olive tree
That makes you pause and dally for a while,
Its gnarly look, its scented fruit, so free
Its twisted branch, its tender look, its smile.
It gives us hope - a long and fruitful life
So needed now when there is so much grief,
Its wisdom, power and purity so rife
Remains because it doesn't lose a leaf.
For want of peace it holds its olive branch
To those who wish to free a self from pain,
And save us all from one huge avalanche
To keep the status quo there is no gain.
This ageless tree so certain on its mound
Transgresses not, upon its sacred ground.

Day 20 - Sao Bento to Ponte de Lima

A friend of mine in Sydney suggested I try the bacalhau, or cod fish as most outside of Portugal would know it by, and it's a must to have with a white wine. I firstly tried the whole fish in a restaurant in Porto, which I found delightful. But last night it was in its flaky form mixed into rice with oil and herbs. I did not find this so tasty maybe because I like to have the whole fish and choose what to mix it with myself. There is something special about seeing the real fish, and knowing for sure what you are eating. Our host at the quinta had built up my expectations saying it was a traditional dish, and of course, I then had to try it.

There are over 1,000 ways to serve bacalhau and its history goes back to the 14th century, where it was staple food for the sailors on their great sea explorations, where the dry salted cod could be kept for years. It is also a fish low in oil allowing the salt to be absorbed into it. Strangely, it is the only fish eaten in this fish-loving country that is not native to Portugal and supplies had to be fished from the dangerous waters off Newfoundland. Once it arrives at the markets, customers are free to touch, smell, and personally inspect the fish, very different to how fresh seafood is often sold.

After our stay at this quinta where we ate with a German walker, the two Dutch women and an older couple from Belgium, we dressed for the wet. Our host told us it would rain on and off all day and that's what it did, after filling up all the potholes overnight. We are always wary of overnight rain because of the resultant blister-forming waterholes.

Nearly the whole walk was on cobble stones, which is okay for a while, but then requires more and more concentration, and where our poles find it difficult to get a regular push off. It was one of our prettiest walks so far, as we poled uphill for some time past small olive groves and grape vines growing on upside down I-shaped structures.

Most of these farms were small, and the villages quite well off as there were many larger pristine houses with immaculate lawns and gardens. We passed many of these villages on our uphill walk and similarly on a more gentle slope for a long way down. A Swiss man overtook us but held back to chat about walking adventures, especially our Swiss one, while a Polish family chatted a little in a cafe that saved us from a sudden drenching with heavy hail, which was, however, lovely to watch from a dry Portuguese cafe.

On our way down, a Portuguese man with his dog loped by, but not before telling us it was difficult to accommodate the dog, so he carried a tent just in case. A mixture of the original square shaped cobbles and odd shaped rocks carried us into our new home in Portugal's oldest town, Ponte de Lima. They had also carried our newish and not too old Dutch friends to our home tonight close to the large river Lima.

Pd can also be served up in a thousand ways



Bacalao

In Portugal they have a loyal friend
It's there each day, the tasty 'bacalao',
Atlantic sea, its home, the northern end
The Portuguese they say - 'fiel amigo'.
Five hundred years is when they met this fish
Much local fare it had some competition,
But it remains the locals' favourite dish
So when they need a comrade they go 'fishin'.
It's hard to find a friend that you can stomach
That satisfies your hunger for a mate,
And once you have a taste no turning back
Will never leave your mind - perennial mate.
The ocean depths found wanting without cod
But with it, they are almost one with God.

Day 21 - Ponte de Lima to Sao Roque

We left this old Roman town across its delightful Roman bridge with its largest concentration of Baroque manors in Portugal, and its famous red vinho verde wines. Today is the first time the rain isn't having a break so we won't be having one either, which also means the locals are inside leaving us with a people-free village. It's a day where we became creative with our path-taking choices, edging round puddles, making new dry tracks, following ones that have been newly designed, or just dancing on protruding rocks.

Lots of younger people today mostly from Germany, Holland and Belgium, with a few locals and our American friend who is struggling, but determined. Through lush valleys, forests of pines and immaculate villages again, we walked like a team of racing cyclists, with the leader ever changing as the faster overtook the slower, then some would stop for photos or take a drink and then be overtaken. We had a few short steep rocky climbs where strong climbers overtook the flat runners, then the downhillers would overtake them.

Then we began our long mountain climb up the Labruja valley with some day trippers joining in. Our first waterfalls, enhanced by the rain, entertained us, and provided us with resting time as they filled the valley with new sounds. We stopped by a small roadside waterfall and sat on seats to rest regardless of their wetness, and protected by our rain pants. Soon a young Belgium couple asked us if they could sit (only room for two), because she had a blister. There's no respect for age on these walks, just respect for physical health.

Further on, climbing became difficult because the path was not really defined, and an array of boulders made it more like an obstacle course. We came across four German girls, who were taking two weeks off from work, with one struggling through the boulders probably wishing she was still at work.

We are used to the rain coming and going in patches, and at times interrupted by fleeting sunlight glimpses, but today the rain was either light or heavy, no let up, so never an urge to ditch our rain gear. It also meant there were a few extra challenges besides the difficult steep ascent up to the high pass through the mountain ridge. On the long downhill stretch into the Coura valley via the Alto de Portela Grande the same obstacles were there, but the tall canopy of trees protected us from the rain.

I thought before we left, what a way to spend my birthday, but for some reason I do better on the climbs and downhills and I've always loved rain. I had one of my dizzy spells last night and was a bit concerned, but today I was feeling good as I was back to powering up the slopes and dancing down from rock to rock on the other side. It was not a usual birthday celebration but a great, confidence boosting one. Corrie did not do as much dancing on the rocks, but today it was a special day for me, so my turn.

Like this reflection, I am trying to turn my Pd upside down



Rain

It sweeps across the land - a mighty force
Or sits in clouds just waiting to disperse,
It falls in varying amounts, of course
At times it's small, or else chapter and verse.
It fills the lakes and makes for all the puddles
It joins the rivers and can make them wild,
It hastens growth so there can be more cuddles
It's rain, its nature's most beloved child.
You see it as it dangles from a leaf
You feel it as it falls upon your hair,
You hear it on your roof, it calms your grief
You smell it as the oils combine with air.
Unique it is to walk under the rain
'Cause folks stay in, and only you remain.

Day 22 - Sao Roque to Valenca

We awoke to a misty window with small piles of ice made up of tiny rice-sized balls, which we were later to feel as light hail. Breakfast with a busload of German tourists and four pilgrims, two Dutch women and a young Belgian couple (she had the blister), started our day. Fully rain-gear-ed up except for my New Balance shoes that never seem to get soaking wet anyway, we headed out on our familiar cobbled streets that seem to be never ending.

Through gorgeous woodlands, initially on the original Roman road, dark clouds followed us on both sides, as they became the main actor on today's stage. We got used to the pattern, a heavy ten minute downpour or hailstorm mixed with thunderous applause followed by five minutes of lighter rain and two minutes of sunshine. Different scenes had the above roles changing their order but the actors were still the same.

The sick and the lame members of the audience have either been overcome by the performance of the last two days and moved on in different ways, or altered their program to wait for warmer scenarios. Maybe it wasn't the performance at all, they simply found remedies for their injuries. One of these was the young Belgian blister girl who excitedly told me that she rubbed it with a special potion last night. Now they overtake us.

Once again we re-met our Dutch women friends, walking a while with them in between heavy downpours, and had a rare photo opportunity with them and the two friendliest dogs on the camino, smiling as though they knew they were on camera and laughing because they were having a welcome break from their boring daily life in their gated back yard. The large hedges and trees otherwise gave us some drying-out time when they were available. We also re-met the Polish family while having a hail-free coffee break and soon after had a chat with an older Canadian walking the other way.

We walked past raging rivers and exploding waterfalls, over Roman bridges where the river spray washed its tunnel-shaped walls, stepping gingerly around blister-making puddles and slippery cobbles, to eventually arrive close to the Spanish border on the river Minho. This last section had been a more intimate walk as we turned the last corner to our new home.

As we walked up the street we saw signs proclaiming today, April 25, as a national holiday. In our country it is a holiday in honour of those killed in war. In Portugal it is in honour of those who resisted a more personal war. On this day in 1974, Estado Novo, their dictator of forty eight years, was overthrown during a bloodless revolution. It came to be known as the Carnation Revolution when Celeste Caeiro offered the soldiers carnations. These flowers were meant for customers but the coup had closed her restaurant. The soldiers then simply placed the flowers in the muzzles of their guns, as the revolution succeeded with hardly a shot fired.

The stage is set and we need to choose our roles



Carnation Revolution

The soldiers, they began the revolution
To rid themselves of Portugal's dictator,
Without the blood there was a resolution
It promised peace, a symbol so much greater.
Carnations came from Celeste 'cross the 'rua'
Which symbolise the love and great affection,
Of those who kept morals above the sewer
In favour of a free and fair election.
These flowers were the blood that did not flow
That April day in nineteen seventy four,
Its vase, the barrel of a gun would show
There is no need for bullets any more.
Estado Novo had finally lost his power
The guiding force, the red carnation flower.

Day 23 - Valenca to Porrino

We dressed for rain because, after all, it is northern Portugal where it rains a lot. Well, this morning it is Portugal, but after about 1000 it will be Spain, but it will be 1100 because of the time difference which means we'll arrive late, but no, there will be an extra hour of daylight...I think. Phew! But we still might need our rain gear in Spain, because it is, after all, Galicia, and it always rains in this very wet part of the world, no matter the time.

It was only 'dodging puddles day' today as the heavily laden rain clouds loitered to our left gathering darkly over the great Atlantic ocean. It was special leaving early, walking the empty streets of Valenca. It is a fortress town where most of the old town is inside the fortress. We often miss a look around places but the camino went straight through this lived-in walled city. It is a piece of gothic and baroque architecture which has seen many restorations following its multiple destructions by the Barbarians, Moors, Asturians and recently, the French.

Then it was across the very wide river Minho and into another old town, overtaking many of the 'last 100 kilometre walkers', as we looked for our first breakfast in Spain. This substantial river is the longest in Galicia, and one of the big four rivers of the Iberian peninsula after the Douro, Ebro and Tagus and for 340 kilometres shares its border with Portugal. On our way we walked alongside a narrow fast flowing stream, on narrow slabs of stone and across three small Roman bridges, in a small rainforest creating a sensual setting which took the effort away, a characteristic of certain parts of the walk.

Our young friends from Belgium were having breakfast on a concrete block on the side of the track as we emerged from our watery forest. Olivia's blister had deteriorated and was back to its worst which was devastating for her initially, but she's now starting to live with it. A constant rubbing pain such as this one can really destroy your camino, because there is no let up.

After about six kilometres my body did not want to move but I needed it to. We soon reached a cafe to rest. Even after that break I had to will it to move. I decided to set myself a goal of overtaking some walkers, who were causing us some danger by walking on the wrong side of the road. It worked, then a small hill and valley gave me much needed momentum.

Later they overtook us for I had slowed just a little, and the woman who was part of this 'wrong side of the road crew' said to me: "good walking" because she had read the 'walking for Parkinsons' sign on my back. As we talked briefly she told me she had cancer, and when she was diagnosed she started walking.

The day had warmed slightly, as we walked along crooked paths undulating through pine and beech forests, alongside another river, and home. We did the usual 'home and prepare for next day things', replaced our sim card because no-one was talking to us, then took a short stroll around this pretty town.

I've heard it said, 'you need to keep your enemy close to you'



Automaticity

I'm feeling fresh, and have a wish to walk
My left leg though has gone a little tense,
Not certain but I think it wants to talk
We took a break and lent against the fence.
"I know" it said "you want the best for me
But as you know you have this sad disease,
I hear your wish but automaticity
Has made it hard so help a little please".
I listened as I tried another way
Increased my pace and took a smaller stride,
"This helps a lot", I heard my left leg say
"I thought I'd gone and then at last I cried".
Back home again, we walked along as one
Excited that - another challenge won.

Day 24 - Porrino to Cesantes

It's a little darker when we leave now because of the time change in Spain. I like this because for me it is such a special time of day. That feeling of aloneness, the curious explorer, seeing things before others disturb them like a quietly grazing wild deer, and personally, when I'm feeling 'off', it works better when I'm in my own company or Corrie's. Then there's the rare possibility of seeing the sun slowly rolling round, or the slowly dying twinkles of the few remaining stars in this very cloudy part of the world.

We walked for a couple of kilometres on a short rise and then steeper. I need concentration for my breathing on hills, and after hearing a couple close behind, I went a little faster but they eventually caught me. It seemed this Dutch couple must have read the sign on my back and were determined to have a chat. So I chatted with her about the challenges that we both had and the positives that can arise from them, that it had pushed me into doing things I loved and other things I never knew I could love.

Corrie, who had raced ahead, dropped back seeing how I was engaged. We broke off into our gender pairs, where John told me about his life as a barge captain travelling along those great rivers: the Rhine, the Danube, the Moselle and a few smaller ones. Their two children went with them, but mostly during preschool years for it would have been too unsettling with their parents always on the move. We soon started climbing very steeply and I needed a break.

We stopped in a standing only bar, very crowded with walkers, but found seats somehow. Refreshed, and into a walker-free street, was an incentive to move quickly ahead of the crowd. Along the way we overtook a young Italian school teacher, who was taking her older school class on an adventure, but she left them to theirs, so she could have her own.

Reaching the top of this pleasantly forested huge hill, it was now so steep going down, we had to jog in a sharp zig zag movement for quite a way before it became just steep. With her strong and worldwide skiing background, Corrie had taught me how to save my knees, shins and muscles from injury. A long flat area followed as we stopped for a rest then continued on bitumen through a 'stretched out town' before another steep hill climb.

As I was struggling up, a Portuguese bike rider slowed right down to my pace to chat. To do this on a steep hill meant he had to perform an uphill version of my downhill zig zag. Because he was really struggling I fully stretched out with my 'two pole drive' which shortened his 'balance defying zig zag'. He wanted to tell me about his two parents with Parkinsons. He told me how it had dramatically changed their lives but they had learnt how to live with it. Soon we're home looking out to sea with a busy road nearby, hoping that it is cold enough to be able to shut the window if we need to keep the cars out.

Letting people know of my disability has enriched my relationships



Life

There is an illness that we all must face
It's terminal and 'life' is how its known,
Its cause is 'birth', can happen any place
It happens after we have lived and grown.
No matter what our fate we all will die
In youth or aged our time is really short,
We'll all be mourned by some, for us they'll cry
As we depart with only what we brought.
But now's the time whatever is our load
To love the ill that's joined us on this track,
And use it to enhance the path we're showed
With no regret or fear of looking back.
This is our only life, our only chance
Embrace it as we go, it's our last dance.

Day 25 - Cesantes to Pontevedra

Dinner with our Dutch friends was so much fun as we told stories, shared 'life parts', and amused ourselves with the local live entertainment. The first part of the festivities was an old and not very mobile family member, who seemed to have a homemade obstacle course leading through our tables to 'her' chair. Each time a dinner guest moved an obstacle (thinking they were helping) she would put it back and push her wheelie through it. Sometimes the guest was also as persistent, simply assuming that their way was better and return the obstacle to their chosen site. This was an ongoing show which never lost its humour.

The performance of the night though was given by twelve Irish women in their sixties, loudly and determinably destroying 'long ago Irish ballads', as well as the much desired quiet time for the other guests. There is a certain art and fervour to Irish singing which my father attained, but lamentably without the necessary accent. As we left, the cafe owner gave us a look that was a mixture of: 'sorry but nothing I could do', and, 'I used to be quite fond of those ballads'.

Another very steep hill to start the day (when I give the climb gradient, very steep is a Swiss hill/mountain, while extreme is fear of falling backwards a step, or forever). We left early to beat the 'noisy and wandering all over the road crowds', especially difficult on narrow steep tracks. Initially they were steep bitumen roads through gorgeous villages with those wonderful grain-drying sheds on stilts and various types of 'lavoires'.

Corrie's back was hurting and my balance is not always great, so we left the short distance walkers, the young and noisy (not all, as many of the young are silent save to say 'hola') and the unfit and tired, in our necessary wake. The pinnacle came, and once again back to the pretend downhill skiing method which caused a young Spanish couple to say 'you are a champion', as they put their arms around me and my Parkinsons sign.

Along a short valley then it was up an ancient stone slab path. Some days ago we travelled on a similar riverside path which seem common, and peculiar to Portugal. This one had its own waterway or creek (leftovers from days of rain) finding its 'trickling waterfall way' over our slab track. At one stage a Columbian man overtook us and gave me one of his homemade wrist bands without a word. He had read my back.

Then it was through a long valley of garden vineyards and vegetable patches. We came across a Dutch friend from day one as we lent on a 'rock and branch rest'. It was a lovely encounter as we looked at our guide book to work out which of the two arrows was preferable. We chose the birds' home, with the longer 'tightly meandering river rainforest track', and momentarily paused to listen to their ever changing repertoires. Another short and delightful sit on a naturally noisy river bend and it was home again in a large town with another perfect Spanish host.

You can't help someone if you don't know what they want



Assumptions

So what if you assumed that I was rotten
And treated me as much, as though a fact,
Your memory such, so this was not forgotten
All other aspects you had left unpacked.
Was self so strong you did not see another
And your agenda was the only one,
Or maybe traits from father and your mother
Was where your view on life had once begun.
Maybe it was her need for independence
A stubborn streak just may have taken hold,
And humour may have simply had some credence
Or maybe she was casually being bold.
But what about the spoiler and their part
A thoughtful gesture? Or just being smart.

Day 26 - Pontevedra to Caldas de Reis

Started early today, and being Monday, the cafe bars open late, but fortunately we found an original one on the outskirts. As Corrie was ordering breakfast happily in Spanish now, I looked out to see a huge hedge surrounding an area the size of a small plaza. It spoke to me, so I went and found a parador. For those who don't know, a parador is usually a former palace or monastery converted into a luxury hotel. I believe there are ninety four in Spain.

Spain not only has ancient hotels, it is also a 'Roman bridge country', where they appear everywhere, and where there's a bridge there's a waterway, and they have been a wonderful highlight of this Spanish section of the Portuguese Camino. A place to rest, take photos, listen to the varied sounds of different waters, a tumble, a gurgle, an urgent rush, a gentle flow, see and hear the birds, and find the best lunch venue you'll find anywhere.

We started early, to avoid the noise from excited groups of new walkers, who were walking the last 100kms. I also wanted to be far enough away from civilisation to do my unattractive voice exercises (a chance I missed with the Irish women, sorry girls). Importantly, we needed to complete our longest walk day to date. We mingled with the other walkers as we passed through an undulating valley. It was then through small vineyards and vegetable gardens before we started our long steepish hill and then steep hill climb through forested areas, then similar slopes down the other side and along the edge of another valley. Similar to yesterday, with both of us not at our very best, steep hills and lots of kilometres, I wondered why the days appeared to go so quickly.

I realised it was mostly about corners, which prevented me from seeing too far ahead. I can get tired and feel a little overwhelmed on a long straight stretch because it looks so far and I am reminded of it all the time. But corners seem to focus my mind elsewhere – what's round there? That then fulfils me until the next corner, and so on. Hills are similar, holding a certain intrigue with lots of bends and twists and mystery. Maybe it's a little about life for me, where I don't want to see too far ahead, I just want to concentrate on the corners.

As we rounded one corner, the Polish family grinned and waved when they saw us walking by, which reminded me of the young Belgians, especially her with the tortured toe. I really hope it doesn't stop their first walk. We left the Dutch couple behind for a rest day, and the Dutch girls are also taking time out.

We walked slowly along this quiet street where market day was closing down. Just around the corner was a small Roman bridge with a stone stair, four steps away from a tiny park, caressed with the cutest creek shaded by a willow. We soon found our hotel but had to pass tradesman renovating the entrance, loud machines and dust everywhere. Finally in our room we opened the balcony doors and peered round the corner – it was the small Roman bridge.

It is crucial to turn as many corners as you can in life



Round the Corner

Around a corner was a spot serene
We gathered in its peaceful atmosphere,
This gorgeous 'piece of heaven' unforeseen
The only thing not there was a wild deer.
We said goodbye, a fleeting moment past
Around another corner was our place,
We took the stairs and saw our door at last
A darkish room with very little taste.
We went about our 'little home routine'
Then opened up the curtains yet again,
Unexpected, our surprise at what we'd seen
Waiting for us, that little 'piece of heaven'.
A bridge, a beach, a willow by the creek
Beyond the corner, of this little street.

Day 27 - Caldas de Reis to Padron

Looking down on two deep river valleys, we could just hear the waters echoing their different sounds as they made their never-pausing way through this, our first major rainforest. A very long gentle slope took us to Cortina's hilltop followed by a large drop into the Valga valley, where we met up with the echoing waters. Similar topography took us through more beautiful and moss gathering trees.

A glimpse of our Polish friends was the only sighting today of familiar faces, as we threaded our way more slowly through the sharp twisting pathways of our third last day before switching to our blog link 'Portugal 2019'. Our plans have changed a little because of my previous uncooperative left leg, so this new blog will also include some adventures into Spain.

Other skills were born in our new home of Padron, through two famous writers. Firstly there was Rosalia de Castro who wrote: 'exceptionally beautiful prose, and poetry marked by saudade, an ineffable combination of nostalgia, longing and melancholy'. This determined and committed woman was also a strong opponent of authoritative abuse, refusing to turn a blind eye to societal bullying and being a formidable defender of human rights.

I went to Rosalia's old house, now a museum. It was fascinating to hear the influence this writer/poet had over Galician culture. Some of her poetry was so indicative of how she saw the true Galicia, that it was put to music and woven into the Galician soul. Through a delightful park and across a colourful river full of soft seaweeds in a multitude of greens, I was gifted a soothing end to my faint brush with Rosalia.

Camilo Jose Cela was the other renowned writer who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1989, 'for an especially rich and intensive prose which, with compassion, forms a challenging vision of man's vulnerability'. He was determined to use his fame as a writer and poet to bring about necessary changes in society. Another hat he wore was as a Spanish Francoist informant, and was associated with the Generation of '36 Literary Movement.

Camilo, along with his artistic Spanish compatriots, suffered harsh criticism and persecution, that followed from the division of neighbours into winners and losers in that struggle, as well as the physical hardships and moral miseries arising from social instability and political chaos. These were also the ingredients that gave strength to their essentially existential philosophy.

In 1942, within the panorama of despair and chaos of postwar Spanish life, he secretly printed his first novel (The Family of Pascual Duarte), in a small garage in Burgos. The novel sold out before the authorities were able to confiscate it. It met with immediate acclaim. The event was so spectacular that today it is accepted as the starting point of Spanish postwar literary history. These two artistic defenders called Padron their home.

Don't be over concerned with the past, just find a new starting point



Rosalia de Castro

When I think that you have parted,
Black shadow that overshades me,
At the foot of my head pillows
You return making fun of me.
When I fancy that you've gone,
From the very sun you taunt me
And you are the star that shines
And you are the wind that moans.
If there's singing it's you who sings,
If there's weeping it's you who weeps,
And you are the river's rumour
And the night—and the dawn.
Everywhere you are in everything,
For and within me you live
Nor will you ever leave me,
Shadow that always shades me.

Day 28 - Padron to Faramello

This was the penultimate day of our walk and it had a different feel about it. We have been so used to a regular routine that requires little thinking or planning, that to then have to use our thought processes to decide 'where to next', seems alien. In a strange way we are now leaving 'the corners' which we love so much, and are starting to think about the road stretching out ahead. Once we get that sorted, I am certain 'the corners' will come again. I am very aware that this is a boringly first world problem. Maybe returning to normal life is a good thing, so we don't just fall asleep prematurely.

So back on track. This time a very winding one, and the first of our trip. Today's walk is mostly gradual, up along a mixture of roads, gravel paths, stone slabs, and damp tracks. It's May Day, which is generally about workers and their rights, although different countries have their own variations. I'm not sure, but the Padron cemetery seemed to have a new bunch of flowers on 'every' grave, and I'm guessing this may be one of their 'May Day variations'. However, I haven't been here before and it's possible, this is what Padronians do on a regular basis.

Because it's a holiday, the many villages we pass through are bare and silent, except for the 'tap of tired poles' as walkers get closer to the end. Faces have changed and for various reasons the human familiarity has gone, which gives us quiet time to slow down and reflect on recent experiences. The feelings are as varied as the nationalities who are completing distances (also varied) of one to six hundred kilometres.

The only exception was meeting up with a man from Germany whose dream is to walk from his front door near Berlin to Santiago in Spain. We were glad to walk a little with him and share 'walking stories' and a coffee. There are so many Germans here we were delighted to talk with at least one, and it would be difficult to tell friends that we didn't. Others appeared to know us, probably because they had seen the Pd sign on my back.

With regard to my Pd: my left leg has not been such a major issue since Porto, but walking speed has lessened; I have more 'off' time than usual; and it's a little harder to turn in bed and extricate myself from it. I still find that up and down hills and lots of corners work much better for me than straight flat stretches, and my voice is in need of exercise (impossible to find a place where I can do them without creating a disturbance). While walking is good for me, I realise that I need to get back to Pd specific exercises to assist me with the above issues.

Another issue I have is a 'poppy one, because I can't recall seeing one since leaving Porto. I'm wondering if they don't like the coast being a more inland flower, or maybe because of the small intense gardens they have been plowed into the soil. I intend to write a small book on 'poppies' one day within their different environments.

We don't know our penultimate day of life so imagine it's today



Another Corner

It's difficult to know what's round the corner
When you have got this Parkinsons disease,
Some people shake and others may get warmer
While arms may flail or legs may simply freeze.
The corners may come quickly as you walk
Surprises good and bad await for you,
And corners may come slowly - time to talk
To work out what is false and what is true.
These corners give us opportunities
To look or not, to stay a while and breathe,
A time to think of possibilities
Before our time is up and we must leave.
It's then we have a path that's straight and clear
And we can walk with ease - and not with fear.

Day 29 - Faramello to Santiago de Compostela

Not a good start to our last day ... but they say the camino is about learning, about our reactions, how we could have behaved differently. In the pilgrim places where the cost is very low, the attention given to the walker is very high. At the high end of the market the cost is very high but regard to the walker, in our experience, has been very low.

Last night we had little choice other than the high end because the lower end was too hard to find, not far out from Santiago. Hotels are mostly okay, but when it is privately owned like this one was, there seems to be a higher level of control imposed on the guests, such as where to sit for meals.

So when we came for breakfast we went to sit at one of the regular tables, but the owner directed us to two high chairs where we stood to eat because the chairs were so very uncomfortable. The owner asked us to sit while ignoring my pleas of a bad back. I asked if we could sit at the empty normal table and he said it was for an old man. While I took the compliment, I said: "But I'm an old man".

With this, he regressed and pouted: "okay sit where you want" and snatched our coffees, spilling them while taking them to the regular table, while all other items were also snatched and banged down. We said nothing, ate our breakfast and left with the 'young' people from the other normal tables, and no old man arrived. We were angry and shocked by his behaviour, but he would not come near us. Yet on the camino, it's about us, right, it's not about what he did.

So we reflected on this encounter as we walked through the moss covered oak forest beside a noisy stream, and listening to, what has been a rare sound, that of small birds. Round a corner, a steep hill appeared before us. A perfect chance to dissipate my anger (besides talking to Corrie), as I double-poled up the hill digging in my sticks a lot harder than usual.

Now a straight level stretch which you know I'm not good at, we talked more (with emotions calmer), about what we could have done differently. We decided our request was fair, maybe with a little indignance, but agreed that his reaction was way out of proportion to the issue, and we were content with our non-conflictual response. By chance, a long downhill stretch gave me an opportunity to perform Corrie's ski dance, reflecting more than usual, my contentment, because I had learnt a little more about me.

However, as you are intelligent people, you will have worked out that all this is just too cute for words, and little of this resolution work was achieved in this way, but this short story has helped to make it clearer. The real test will come though, when 'trip advisor' ask me what we thought of our stay! Tonight's accommodation will be fabulous, because we have the best and funniest receptionist in the world. Finally, thank you all for also being fabulous with your supportive comments and emails, they are such a huge part of our journey.

You are only fooling yourself if your actions don't match your words



An Angry Host

There was no lodge tonight where would we sleep?
But then we found one snug amongst the trees,
Expensive though - for us a major leap
But comfort plus was more than just the leaves.
The host was strict, for pilgrims "not upstairs"
He then said "yes" when guilt he could not hide,
No food for us, it's then we said some prayers
But then food came but with a wounded pride.
Then morning came, and food, but with no table
My protest brought a table resistant,
Response came back as from a scary fable
And then we left, was great to make distant.
Remember, nothings ever really bad,
Without it, you may never know what's glad.

Day 30 - Santiago de Compostela

We walked easily and freely through the long suburban streets that are the outskirts of Santiago. Up we went on a continually gentle winding streetscape passing, or being overtaken, by the odd walker. It is another camino coming to its ultimate end, a destination that is seen through many different eyes. There are the hikers who love to test their endurance capabilities and walk long kilometres daily, and those that cover similar daily distances because of their time limits. If these limits are very tight then they might have completed multiple shorter sections.

There are those at the opposite end who travel very slowly but still do some good kilometres, while others may slow themselves down by stopping more than one night and exploring a little, or waiting for some body part to heal. Then there are the ones who walk a constant speed, wanting to use the walk as an exercise process physically or neurologically as I do. The pilgrims are the ones these 'caminos' were intended for, people of religion who are there for a penance journey to the place where St James was buried, while others have differing personal spiritual quests.

Ours is a variation, where we do good kilometres, in a physical quest and as a challenge to my neurological symptoms. These walks have allowed my wife to discover a physical exercise which she now loves and has led to her becoming a natural long distance walker. I also use it as a way of spreading the Pd word, while attempting to show others we can still lead a very active life. I also raise funds for a cure and I have met a few others who are doing something similar.

Whatever the reason, most complete the journey, while emotions differ as much as the purpose. There is elation and celebration from many who have reached a memorable goal and enjoyed a substantial achievement. There are those who are working out what it all means and trying to make sense of it all, while others have made discoveries of a personal or enlightening nature. Some are exhausted mentally and physically and have no problem coming to its final end, whereas others don't want it to end, as it has become such a regular part of their life, and they don't want to finish, as it can leave a large void in their world.

So here we are at the end of our Portuguese camino in the large square that is the foreground to this huge cathedral where walkers congregate. They might sit and contemplate on the stone plaza, maybe coffee at the nearby cafes, dance and sing a little, wander round in a daze, have a nap, or seek out friends they might have made along the track. If you arrived early and you are so inclined, there is a cathedral welcome and blessing, followed by a collection of your certificate of completion, evidenced by your pilgrim credentials which shows the stamps provided by your lodge host.

Finally it is time to search out your lodging for the night with the knowledge that tomorrow will be a very different day.

While a single goal is completed, the journey itself never ends



Home Again

The Dutch girls were the first we met on track
Cemented friends once we had smashed our wine,
Another Dutch, she rarely saw our back
We wished, with her, that we had spent more time.
The Belgian couple, young and full of life
Dismayed her troubled foot caused endless pain,
And then there was the bargeman and his wife
These Dutch had paused to chat between the rain.
Another pearl, she was our final host
Mila, so much fun beyond belief,
That she was real, not just a friendly ghost
To have her there, was such a great relief.
So many pearls we found amongst the shells,
That's why that great cathedral, rings its bells.