

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

POEMS, PROSE AND PONDERINGS  
ON 'IBERIAN PENINSULAR'



[willtowalk.com.au](http://willtowalk.com.au)

**WITH WILL & CORRIE BOAG**

## POST 1

We return to Spain a little wiser, a little creakier, a grown up Person Living With Parkinsons (PLWP) – still alive, still walking, but Parkinson is bringing more friends to walk with us. Some tip-toe around me so I chant ‘heel first’, and like a Collie dog it obeys. Some stop me all together so I change direction and sing: “these boots are made for walking”.....and they agree. I’m starting to lean to the right so an old friend is back, and it’s my back that suffers, so exercises and meds are all I have and they get me moving. And, Corrie, is up and away.... a sore hip has gone but niggles, and a sore back after a flu shot is ready to walk. All of us decided to warm up with a walk round Oviedo.

Oviedo is a beautiful city, where you can walk against the red if the cars see green as long as they are not too close, but the car can’t go if it is green. This is a walking friendly city where these rules allow a free flow and the cars automatically slow down because it just seems right. The irony of it all is that if the rules were more strict there would probably be more mishaps.

We warmed up for our first day tomorrow with ‘heel first’ taking the lead, stepping out with high, long strides. We find it is important to check our route out of a city the day prior to leaving because sometimes we have missed a vital clue because the city is large. That was nearly a day’s walk in itself! There were, however, complications so it was fortunate we went. But now there are further complications with how to pay for luggage transfer. Hence back into making this a learning exercise and we are looking for an alternative way - that was to trust each other and it worked - we did it! The things you experience if you break a few minor rules and the rewards are greater than anything ‘dopamine’ could provide.

For now, one more beautiful sleep (the best week I’ve had in a long time) and I am trying to find something that works ..... back to basics. Another good day’s walk tomorrow, that is, if you like rain. I love rain and the results of it: on a broad scale keeping the planet alive; Storms, that often go beyond their scope, soon recover as raindrops - evidence of destruction and witness to a fascinating piece of theatre, a presentation matched by no other.



It sweeps across the land - a mighty force  
Or sits in clouds just waiting to disperse,  
In varying amounts it falls, 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.

## POST 2

We set off on a wet day, with a forecast for a week of rain, but no concern, and the forest birds seemed happy with the rain. We were on our way. It was a busy route because it is a challenge and this was obvious on the numbers. Soon on leaving the bitumen the track was one where we needed to focus our attention: slippery rocks; narrow in places; walkers crowding. A danger time for me where I took all precautions. Because of my A/F I had to, and soon after we began, I started to sway. My legs became weaker, and I wonder if my usual positive placebo approach was getting wise to me. I gave Corrie my poles and with both hands leant on one thigh at a time to get going. I reflected on how these changes were more dramatic than before, so fear now joined our group.

I then started walking backwards..... very carefully... giving my glutes a workout while giving my forward-walking muscles a rest. It was important to be careful with this method of walking, perhaps best done by walking uphill where your 'festination' (if you have this symptom) has nowhere to run away. Secondly, if you fall, there is less distance to the ground and you are protected by your bum and backpack. Taking advantage of these safety messages to stride out, it was less likely I would fall. Under no circumstances walk downhill backwards!

There are further "don't"s. Rain makes my walking more thoughtful. so I look out for Corrie when I sense danger, slipperiness, water holes; and keep good vision with glasses. Fortunately I soon reached the final plateau and with help from Corrie made it to our six euro home in one of the four-bunk Albergue dormitories. Jacko from Prague was the only other resident.

It was now time for a meeting which concluded with a popular 'no' vote. Both voters agreed that I could cause harm to myself and to our adventure, and that was unnecessary. After all, it was April, 'Parkinson's awareness month', where I read a poem about awareness with our Blue Mountains support group. It would be silly to not listen to this message. We slowly explored Grado for the next couple of days, keeping to the flat. Grado was the first time we had seen snow on this walk. A barrage of hailstones out of nowhere, and I lost my i Phone, victim of an open zipper pocket. Thus a bit of a pause in an already chequered posting attempt where our iPad has now given up the ghost. After the memorial, we sang a few healing chants for Corrie's phone in the faint hope that it will recover from its poor memory.



Silent Shade (author unknown)  
A shadow falls, unseen, unheard  
A whisper soft, a silent word.  
A disease takes hold, a subtle thing.  
Awareness blooms, and hope can sing.

The body weeps, a silent plea  
As darkness creeps, relentlessly.  
And in the light, we start to see.  
The struggle deep for you and me.

The silent shade, a hidden pain,  
A battle fought again, again  
But knowledge shines, a guiding star,  
To reach right out, and heal afar.

Let empathy be our guiding light.  
To bridge the gap, and making it right.  
For in awareness, strength we find,  
To heal the body, and the mind.

## POST 3

By the way, our trip has been productive in other ways. This has allowed me time to do the ten core and osteoporosis exercises, followed by speech therapy. Then there is the reason I am mostly here for, and that is to help bring awareness of Parkinson's by walking 10-15 kilometres a day. As I get older my steps become fewer but my determination gets stronger.

The path has changed as we revert to previous methods of walking (in this article's case we won't be walking the Camino Primitivo as suggested but walking in certain sections of it).

We arrived in Cudillero. While walking down the web of narrow 'supposed' two way streets to our accommodation, we wondered how the cars and pedestrians can be accommodated. Later, we found out!!! One of those cars came up backwards too far onto the footpath, and finally I had met my match. The car was off, and I was left with the father of two little kids who helped me up. Two of my middle fingers were facing the wrong way, and I knew something needed attention. I was advised to go to the Community Health Centre, the word got around quickly, and two nurses splintered my fingers and sent me off to the local hospital 30 kms away.

Within half an hour they had X-rayed my fingers, un-dislocated them, to the concern of very attentive hospital staff, who had scrambled to various vantage points to witness my terror and the enormous pain as they un-dislocated them. Sorry about the pain, said one of the nurses. I said 'no problem, it was the best birthday present I had enjoyed in a long time.'

On reflection, the hero might disappear from Cudillero while the pain remains in Spain as its ongoing development isn't halted, the result of decisions being minimised due to centuries of independent decision making by powerful regions. These regions pretty well make up the whole of Spain and mostly get their requests/demands met. While these fascinating curved streets are a tourist offering, future accidents from inadequate warnings are required as well as much tougher speed restrictions. But no time for mindless chatter, I have voice exercises to complete (Corrie has joined me), and other things to do.



Associate that age is part of wisdom  
As you mature your mind exceeds the rest,  
So praise your age as would Christendom  
Resulting in the fact that you're the best.

So use your strengths that languish in the mind  
Where "I can't do it" is less probable,  
Older now, so to the brain be kind  
Then tougher things become more doable.

When you lose some of your acceleration  
Then make your steps a beauty to behold,  
When you walk backwards with your festination  
It's time you need to come in from the cold.

Remember you improve as you get older,  
So keep in shape for life you must keep hold a'

## POST 4

Well, it took an Englishman, his beautiful Collie and Healer, and some luck to get me back on track with the posting. The five of us stood on the cliff-face of Ribadesella talking about anything other than technical issues. He had been living with his wife and dogs, with Los Picos de Europa on one side, and the cliffs of Ribadesella on the other. In his words, it was the best of all worlds. We had started out that morning on the Camino del Norte on a gorgeous country road. For some reason we branched off to the amazing coastal walk. After sharing for a while, he informed us he had not completed the track due to a lovable, but boisterous dog, who might have dragged him over the cliff. We said we would finish it for him. I knelt next to 'booster', with his jaw on my knee, and his ears aware of every move we made.

We soon parted company and I started writing. Excited to be back on track, I was little prepared when we heard the news there was an electricity failure in all of Spain and Portugal, and some parts of France. And Corrie's phone had 1% charge left, on a phone I couldn't use, next to an iPad that wouldn't work.

We made our web again, but being practised web makers, we put the electronics aside and went to enjoy delicious Spanish wine and Pinchos at Los 4 Gatos. We were introduced to the owner, a cat called Gato, who was then deposited under the table to consume his biscuits and water while we sampled the pinchos.. Another cat (who, the manager had left outside a wealthy cat owner's mansion, hoping for a cosy adoption) appeared unhappy with his potential adoption.

After eating, we started collecting our candle and other lighting needs at around 8pm, and prepared for nothing!!!! The lights suddenly returned after many hours and we were were back on track again. This is what we came up with ..... the earlier pilgrim walk was in such a beautiful setting, with lush country and happy sheep, with thanks to the Englishman who showed us a narrow breezy coastal track. It was mostly flat and winding, the ocean 100 metres below us. After a couple of kilometres the track had more undulations. We passed a line of very large and beautiful gum trees, which soon ended with a large beach. In between times, we have been walking along pilgrim tracks and taking the opportunity to chat with pilgrims along the way. We were getting used to the public transport system, where we interchange little trains with big buses, and an occasional albergue with pensions and hotels.



A 'blackout-nationale' was the prediction  
And shops were shining lights in many ways,  
They needed cash to guard them from eviction  
So gathering torches became a sudden craze.

We over bought cause that is what we do alas  
No one is sane, the mobile sits alone,  
Now one late rush the shops run out of gas  
A roar erupts... could hardly hear the phone.

'Twas not yet night the potential blackout fails  
A cheer erupts, the business folk take heed,  
Not keen to meet the victims of record sales  
The owners disappear in record speed.

So when the lights go out and you can't see,  
Recall that trusty headlight, I'll take with me.

## POST 5

From here on, the steep jagged peaks of the Picos de Europa have separated themselves from the great mountains of the Cantabrians that lie in a few regions of Northern Spain. The region where we mostly bore witness to them, was the Asturias. These ranges are particularly prone to weather changes because of their proximity to the sea and although we witnessed these daily, they were not as extreme as they would have been thirty years before. Twenty kilometres in length provided plenty of opportunities to see its huge grey and ghostly limestone exterior. We walked through some of it, drove through other parts, and some were rarely out of our sight as though we were living in it daily and I suppose we were to some extent.

The talk and discussions we had, and heard, were more about how you get there, many tourist officers did not seem to know even this. Some buses were running, others were not; out of some towns there were only two a day and rooms were scarce. Well we soon found out: be your own info officer; ask anyone you see; and most of you will find a bus and a way eventually; and check out all times.

And remember this is your opportunity to meet the local Spaniards. (siesta is roughly 1500 to 2000. We spoke to a Guardia Civil person, a homeless individual, a pilgrim having a break from a long and difficult walk etc. Later we will have tapas (wine and nibbles), have dinner, and let the night pass into another day.

The Picos were like a giant snow covered cardboard cutout sitting silently, confidently, intently and without fear. They appeared to have a range of dark clouds hanging above them for long periods of time and when they wept, the tears fell close by, diminishing quickly as their thoughts floated gently away, the sunshine rarely seen in the months leading up to summer. Meanwhile we followed the pilgrim tracks around the villages capturing the cloudy sunshine as it drifted away from the tears of yesterday and onto the soft coastal sands where we enjoy the stillness of the beach in the rocky coves of Llanes.

We reminisce in the smallest cove as the tide returns to rescue its two stranded crabs; we think of the goat high above standing on a rocky ledge thinner than its hooves. We listen to what seems to be a crying cat but is really a cursing crow or a lonely seagull calling for her mate to finish their half built family home on the roof of our neighbours' Spanish home.



Its peaks are sharp and steep I felt alone  
A surface grey and stark and mostly bare,  
This was a magic testament to stone  
Mysterious and mostly lush downstairs.

The glaciers are wet and picturesque  
Exquisite in a grandeur all their own,  
Majestic even, this is no burlesque  
Save for the wind that recently has blown.

These mountains are a cousin of the sea  
Together make it difficult to walk,  
Few others there so you can feel so free  
So now enjoy the restfulness of talk.

The forgotten peak of Europe standing tall,  
Hidden away awaiting for her call.

## POST 6

Walked pilgrim track from Santillana del Mar towards Orena.

Just to revise, we are going back and forth along parts of the pilgrim track which are the most thrilling to travel on, and because we had trouble early we were late with everything and a little disorganisation goes a long way. The reason we are not walking the full track is because we recently changed to account for my first day which scared me. Travelling to villages, and then walking about 10-15 kms each day, allows us to walk a fair distance all up and that will be about 400-500 kms. We also only use the time that we purposefully walk, by taking off 1km daily for general walking.

Because we catch public transport a lot to get to our hiking places, that mostly exist on the routes we make, we meet walkers and locals so I will tell you a story that happened yesterday. As we were preparing to alight from the small train that travels along the north coast or nearby, I dropped Corrie's phone down between the seat and the carriage wall (remember I was the one who lost my phone earlier on in that hailstorm), it was not looking good for our future relationship.

Seeing the look on her face had me roll under the seat and begin to pull apart what I could. We were a minute away from the station so I jumped up, ran to, and knocked on the driver's door. The conductor is always in there at this time to help newcomers get out. I told him in my broken sign language what had happened and ran towards yet another of my recent disasters. A relieved Corrie, still contemplating our relationship future, gave me a 'third chance smile' when she said – "we've found it!", or rather this man did.

She was pointing to our only carriage mate – a disturbed looking man who then reluctantly told me it was he who found it. He looked like a regular on this train and he was, as he usually fell asleep and missed his station, I imagined. I thanked this mean looking man and he offered me a dead fish hand (my country cousins would tell me never to trust a sloppy handshake man) and they often left me with a rubber ball with which to strengthen my hand – guess why?

We had arrived at the station and I had 30 seconds to write my name and address and blog for him. He then wrote a few words quickly because he was non-verbal and thus could not speak. He had written this – "I am homeless, and I spend time helping people in need of any sort". I gave him the euros I had and wished my new friend, the self employed aid worker, well.



We'd like to offer you a great big favour  
For following my blog near every day,  
Because I have A/F we catch the FEVE  
To our next hike along a Spanish way

It's rarely crowded, always a quiet train  
The station's still, it hasn't yet been found,  
So get there soon before it starts to rain  
Then there will be a very different sound.

In 2014 across Spain we eagerly walked  
We caught the FEVE after we had finished,  
A separate adventure where we most talked  
And on the FEVE we were soon replenished.

So when you get a chance give it a rate,  
Before you miss your train then it's too late.

## POST 7

The walking has been a great experience. I would have thought after 13 years of walking we would be going on a lot of similar landforms but no, nature has a way of exciting us with new eye-bewildering landscape. In the north of Spain there's a lot of rain so it highlights the varying green grasses carpeting the glorious open fields of even more shapes and designs than ever before.

We climbed a mountain today with stunning views and 360 degrees of it. It seems that the farms are protected by nearby hills, they are then watched by nearby mountains, and then framed by the snow covered Picos in this case. I didn't see them at first but as we were leaving, the curtain of clouds lifted to reveal the snow covered stage of the Picos for a minute.

Down below we started up a conversation with a Scottish couple who could have turned into acquaintances but they were going a different route; there was older Juan a real character from Argentina – we walked with him for a while in the dimly lit Plaza Mayor; and then there was the landlord, a lot younger than the others who is donating a sum of money and will keep in touch. We have met a lot more of those on holidays, many of them looking for rainbows from those billowing clouds, while others enjoy the limited sunshine available, or simply just get wet. We take every opportunity to talk of Parkinson's, some promising to donate, while others wishing me well thinking that I'm not, but I am....., but do so with good intention. Of course there are many who do suffer and you can see that in their eyes, but some learn to live with it suffering silently or accepting it as now being a part of who they are.

We went for most of our usual walk this morning from Santillana Del Mar with its stunning surrounds, a new masterpiece round every corner, a brilliant piece of art over every hill, nature at its very best, a visual feast for many of us. There's nothing ordinary out there and we know how lucky we are. It's a type of marathon, except we have breaks.

I talked of rain earlier and would like to highlight a crucial observation on many rain affected walks we have experienced during 15 walks. While rain is often predicted on many days, it is often light, short and temperate. We only travel in the second half of Spring and the first half of Autumn. This knowledge and subsequent preparation added greatly to our walking experiences.



Nature has a quality so pure  
The dead, the dying, the fit and all the rest,  
There is no point in looking for a cure  
You will know when you have met the crest.

With humans they will go to small apartments  
The poor may find a bed amongst the stench,  
The dead will go to underground departments  
Or look like they are dead on any bench.

They say it's progress to think and feel and do  
To live a life based on the others' strength,  
Dependency is who we are, it's true  
To maintain it we will go to any length.

If stupid kings would just get off their thrones,  
Then stupid folk might stop just throwing stones.

## POST 8

I'd seen her face but could not make a connection. Once she passed me, another time I passed her, then one day she was there in front of me asking if I had Parkinson's. "Yes" I said and I remembered her stare from earlier – serious, focussed, and beyond. She stared at me because I was wearing my 'Walking with Parkinson's' blurb on my back. Sometimes I wish it would get off my back but at other times it's like a friend – keeps me focussed on living. It's nearly always honest with me, and it brings me an opportunity to gain special people as friends. We talk of life and death because my friends die too early. Life becomes more urgent and precious. Parkinson's and I walk too fast, but if I slow down I am worried I might die without completing my walk.

My new friend (I get used to meeting others and making friends because I may lose that person before their time). So we talked, looked at questions, then attempted answers. She was hurting, and mostly in her legs and toes and thought that she may have to slow down or stop. Her toes became twisted and hurt when she walked, and that was her worst fear. I suggested she may try more walking if she saw no danger. Being consistent, more than mileage, is crucial, have someone adjust her gait. Walk faster but less, walk better but often, find out how precisely you should do your exercises and be consistent, work out what each exercise does and then feel the muscles you are changing. Fall in love with them, then you can meaningfully work with them and with everything you do. Her daughter came down to join us. We discussed PD things and they were able to talk, differ and make strong assertions because they could and they cared, and they had a chance to talk and be listened to.

Sorry we didn't do any of this!!!!!! We had other things to talk about and when she's ready to read this post, she may make her own plan. They're the best ones because you know yourself better than others do, and ensure you seek advice from your relevant practitioners.

As we wind down, and coming up for our last week in Spain, we have our own plans to make so we'll have an early dinner and then look for another sunset. By the way, the sun is setting at around 21.35 so we got home after a day's walk of 24km at about 22.00 for a light quick pinchos and wine. I don't know why our daily/nightly walks are increasing, but it is great that I am still moving well.



She looked familiar, where had I seen this woman  
Twas recent, very recent, I could smell,  
I'm not inferring she was very common  
"I've noticed you today", it's what I'll tell.

I asked her if she'd like to have a coffee  
It seemed to be the best that I could offer,  
I knew she wanted something precious from me  
Her voice was soft but mine was even softer.

She enquired why I would walk 500 miles  
To talk to those with PD on their mind,  
There must be better things amongst my files  
If I look a little, maybe I shall find.

I suggested she could read my blog one day,  
And maybe it may help to find a way.

## POST 9

For some reason we are increasing our mileage, as each day feels lighter than the last while I feel no stronger in the cerebral region and lighter on the physical. I'm thinking here that maybe, just maybe, I was wanting to do more and thought I'd set too low a target. So the brain said you need to do a bit more and I know you can so gave me the strength to do it. Then there's the placebo effect. Not unlike the brain there is also this and used here as a metaphor. Like many towns, Leon has a few pathways out of town so we had plenty of choices in mileages.

The pathways were four, one 'in' and one 'out', but if you walk backwards at another time the front becomes the... enough. We were slowed down, (our choice) by chatting with pilgrims. Some had had enough, and were leaving on the next bus out; others had chosen certain dates and were committed to distance. So here you can see the head making decisions for the body which is probably mostly a good thing, except when your thinking goes a bit haywire. Just ask my mobile or that car!!! The catalyst for choosing the camino paths were so we can see what changes are occurring. There are more on this path than others. Last year it was one and a half million, so it becomes more regimented and less spontaneous with more booking a long way ahead, whereas twelve years ago when we did ours we mostly simply turned up. These paths offered me different things at different times, and in retrospect I got more learnings from paths I thought were initially unproductive.

It was bed time when we arrived and I was hoping that my wish had been granted. I'd had some restless nights but the worst I had was (two hours awake) even though I was tangled in sheets. It gets sadder than this. I bought what I call my emergency sleep doona and sneak it in to accommodation places. So try that, you poor sleepers, and let history be more than that. My dad slept well but he had this saying which I have looked at recently, a proverb nonetheless. "Sleep not lest ye come to poverty". It was following my failure in an important exam. This was the best that he could do but he was right. I was depressed for the first and last time in my life. I set to work and study and the only time I missed a day's work (a little embellished) was when I slept in.



Fields of Poppies fill my eyes blood red  
My cornea, a shock of colour floods,  
A weed no less whose vision needs its bread  
Whose nutrients are carried by its bloods.

This shock of red does tell another story  
A stunning rouge, it's everybody's field,  
And here they are in all their fame and glory  
Singing peace, ensuring they don't yield.

While peace does hold on European land  
And freely you can wander fields of France,  
The Poppy thrives, it takes a solid stand  
And with the wind they sway as in a dance.

The closed buds a beauty in themselves,  
They jump about like gorgeous little elves.

## POST 10

I never thought I would like flying but when we get our two seats in the back corner I am in heaven. I am very lucky otherwise it can be a miserable way to end an adventure. Now it gives me time to debrief with my live-in psychologist; to enjoy the ten meal breaks we have and to write poems for you, to give a sort of summary of the type of adventure we had.

So, coincidentally, it was the time also to fly for our beloved storks, or Ciguenas as they are known here. At this time of the year it consists not of ocean marathons from Sub-Saharan Africa but much shorter ones like these in Madrid. They were living with six other species in a park next door. It was time for babies and we found a private viewing spot (just us) where we had a 'bird's eye view' of the storks' family home from our nearby hotel. We usually see these famous storks and know their behaviour a little. This family had just grown to four, so not long ago the female held the home building spot while the male transported the building material. and soon they have a home and two babies. I have seen the males go for food, away for 4 - 12 minutes, the female would lift her head up waiting for the delivery man. They are well camouflaged and so it is us the obsessed ones that find the holes in their clever disguise.

Tonight, in a beautiful park they will sleep. I can go home content with a beautiful sunset that appeared to be crying out to me, "over here", as it seemed to coax me away from my other obsession –the Ciguenas. And then the father came. I shuttered away (is that a word?). Dad was home for the day and the moon could rest easily as there were no clouds to shadow its light, allowing Mrs Ciguena to rest easily for another night.

So our adventure is complete though we had our accidents. Corrie has one injury on her leg and will check it out next week for a final check up, and while my dislocated fingers can once again point the right way, my left hand still looks weird, so I'll join her. The spot of blood from my injuries was highlighted in the beauty of a huge field of neck-to-neck poppies covering acres of land. They looked as though they were a crop ready for harvest. They were 'something else.

It's been a fascinating walk, with lots of interactions and diversions and you've been great company on the blog and by email. Thank you for joining us for our eclectic walk in Spain.



Sleep not lest ye come to poverty  
It's dawn already, people are at work,  
My dad is crook, he owns our pretty property  
But gives a spray, too many people shirk.

I lay in bed and let his words take hold  
I'm not too good at listening to others,  
His timely words however made me bold  
I treated it as though it was my mother's.

So far I've had a modicum of money  
Fulfilling many of my long term wishes,  
Many from the land of milk and honey  
No longer do I have to wash the dishes.

But how about my poverty of thought,  
My looking for it often comes to nought.