

**LIVE From the Camino:  
Walking the Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage in the Digital Age  
By Nancy L. Frey, PhD  
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**INTRODUCTION**

1 Sitting there you might wonder: What possible relevancy could a pilgrimage in Spain have to do with me? Why am I here other than to fulfill a requirement? What I'm going to talk about relates directly to the lived experience of every single person in this room even if you never set a foot in Spain because what happens on the Camino de Santiago is simply a reflection of what happens in daily life. My presentation explores the impacts that digital media technologies have on the Camino pilgrimage and by extension, on our lives, whether we realize it or not.

2 This piece of Camino graffiti - Life is a Camino, which is the Spanish word for Path, Road, Way – Life is Journey – sums up my academic and professional experience. Maybe it sounds trite but it's true. Life is a journey we are all on. It's a movement from the known to the unknown, both inner and outer movement. It's about taking risks, challenging ourselves and going through real and metaphorical doorways. And, if you're looking down you might not even see that they are there. If you never open them, you won't know what's on the other side. That's what I do. I take people on journeys and today I hope to take you on one with me. Today my life's journey has brought me here with you.

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4 First I want to share a small part of my story when I was your age. This is me. In the middle at UC San Diego. I loved college and learning. One good idea I had before going was to study what I loved, not what I thought would get me 'a job.' Many people are circles trying to stuff themselves into square pegs. I did everything right. I worked very hard and was rewarded for my efforts. Look at all those things I did – Summa Cum Laude, Greek woman of the Year my senior year, studied Russian, sang in a choir, worked part-time a few semesters, was a student health advocate, got my undergrad honors thesis published in a major anthropological journal, had a great social life, kept fit. After college I became a national representative of my Sorority, got accepted in UC Berkeley's Phd program, and even married my high school boyfriend. My life was DO DO DO DO. Non-stop. It was also exhausting. I didn't question the way it was. That was what society told me was the pathway to success and I listened! I did

have such terrible headaches, insomnia and a feeling of incompetence most of the time. From the outside I looked okay but inside I felt like a mess. And I didn't even have social media to complicate it! I don't know how you guys do it! (Actually, they don't do it very well based on the increases in reported depression, anxiety and suicide rates among the tech connected newer generations).

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Habitrail video – This is what I felt like. I was on the “habitrail of life” (hamster wheel). Do you ever feel like that? The girl in the video says: “What she plan to accomplish running so fast?” Life prepared me to do, but not to be. I just kept running towards some faraway unknown goal towards.....what, happiness? Success? Again, society tells you, the more you do, the more successful you are, the more you have the better you are.

In grad school at UC Berkeley I was in Spain looking for my doctoral dissertation project and stumbled across the Camino de Santiago in summer 1992. For my dissertation research in summer 1993, it was essential to walk the Camino. For me it was a dream come true and combined many of my loves: walk 500 miles across Spain for my PhD. And, my plan was to research others (ie, participant-observation) but I wasn't going on pilgrimage myself. Besides my life was perfect, wasn't it? I didn't want to change it (except maybe the headaches, insomnia and sense something wasn't quite right, empty, missing).

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Then I found myself on the Camino. This is what it gave me mentally, what I needed, but didn't know: an enormous mental slow down in nature. Calm, peace, no distractions, no agenda and freedom. To make a long story short, it turned my life upside down.

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With an uncluttered mind I could see my life, be in the moment, how I was lying to myself, what I really wanted. I was shocked. It was devastating but necessary. I had to leave mentally and physically to truly see my life and to open my eyes. Upon return it gave me the strength to make changes that got me off that Habitrail of life. Some of these changes upset people but living dishonestly was no longer possible. It was hard but necessary. 1) I got rid of my watch (kind of like giving up some tech gadget today), 2) I ruptured and ended my relationship with my high school sweetheart, and 3) I also knew I didn't want to have a traditional academic career. I know that if I had had my mobile phone, my Camino would not have been the same and I would not be here today on this stage.

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After the Camino my life evolved in ways I never imagined they would when I was your age. When I returned the next year in 1994 to do my fieldwork, more surprises awaited me on the Camino. New doors opened. One led to love and I crossed that threshold and we forged a life and career together in Spain. If you had told that girl in that photo (in my dorm room at 17) her life would involve meeting a foreigner and living in another country, I never would have believed it! At heart I'm a curious, hardworking, homebody, not a rebel. It's really good for you and healthy to have your ideas challenged, preconceived notions destroyed and to let your carefully constructed ideas about yourself and world given a good shake up from time to time. You might discover certain fictions do not serve you well. And don't get me wrong. It's not an epiphany and nirvana moment with eternal bliss. Life always has its ups, downs, and struggles and that's why it's a journey and how we grow. (By the way, the person in that photo next to me is not physically present here today but he is present in everything that I bring with me here).

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The COLL 300 theme this fall is Human Movement and Migration. Our journey through life, from birth to death, is the most basic form of human movement. Many factors influence this passage - where we are born, our genetic make-up, who we are born to and the cultural, religious, political, racial and economic systems in which we live. One thing anthropologists do is to try and make sense of how different peoples have, over the ages, explained and understood this journey from birth to death. And answered the big questions that have plagued human consciousness since time immemorial— who we are? why we are here? And where are we going?

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Pilgrimage is the type of human movement I studied and can be very broadly defined as a physical and mental journey to a sacred place. Pilgrimage is also often loosely used as a metaphor for life to make sense of that passage from birth to death. In the Christian tradition, life is a line we progress along towards future ever-lasting spiritual rewards.

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The sacred destination that has been the focus of my research and professional work for the last 27 years is the tomb of St James the Apostle located in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. The network of trails that lead to this tomb is collectively called the Caminos de Santiago (or the Ways of St James in English). These trails developed slowly over 1000 years and Christian religious pilgrims journeyed to Compostela within their religious worldviews of sin and its remittance through penance, sacrifice and

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the hope for everlasting salvation, ideally in heaven rather than hell. As European thought evolved in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Cs, pilgrimage to Santiago progressively went out of fashion. The Camino then experienced a spectacular and surprising revival in the mid to late-20<sup>th</sup> C. This is where I came into the picture when I began to research this new revival in the early 1990s.

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People began to walk again in the 20<sup>th</sup> C not out of religious conviction and hope for a better eternal future (though there are many who did and still do), but to take stock and make sense of their lives in the here and now with few expectations, if any, for otherworldly salvation. It represents a major shift in thinking and action. Pilgrims focused more on the physical and inner journey, and what could be learned along the way in this world, than the goal and the afterlife.

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Pilgrimage along the Camino de Santiago in the 20<sup>th</sup> C became largely a rejection of the alienating aspects of our increasingly fast-paced modern life – materialism, speed and generalized feelings of disconnection from self, nature, society and meaningful rituals that bind communities. It became a journey of self-discovery and reconnection by going back to the roots of human experience. The

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formula is simple – take a long walk in nature (with a great infrastructure to do so) follow a culturally meaningful historical route surrounded by a supportive community and separating oneself from the

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known and familiar, feel intensely along the way, confront adversity, reduce your mental and physical weights and you will find peace, diversion, community and perhaps even meaning and purpose. By

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having and needing less, pilgrims found inner rewards that often transcended their material lives.

Clarity, alive, connected, energized, empowered, and fulfilled are often words used by pilgrims to describe what the Camino gives them in contrast to typically busy, stressful, anxiety-provoking daily lives. The revival is a remarkably health social response to existential angst and has generated a great deal of individual and collective good over the last 50 years.

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In essence, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> C Europe decided to go on a long walk to its past and set off what would become the hugely successful international journey that it is today. Evidently many people all over the world feel similar needs because the Camino is now an international ‘bucket-list’ destination. The 21<sup>st</sup> C Camino de Santiago is filled with international travelers with often little or no connection to the cultural, religious and/or historical stories that produced and moved the Camino in medieval Europe. There is no end in sight to its growth and popularity. People in 2019 come to “experience” it. They feel

“called” to do the Camino. Others want a physical challenge, an adventure or to slow down mentally and physically. Today people come with a vast range of motivations and expectations that may have little to do with a search for inner meaning but they are drawn here nonetheless.

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Imagine yourself in this place, in this space. What does it conjure for you? Walking – healthy for body and mind, Nature – soothing, calming, Belonging and Camaraderie, The arrows lead you, give you direction and clarity to your goal. These are spaces of mental peace and tranquility. Psychology and

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neuroscience tell us that sustained exposure to nature is mentally restorative - where our minds can wander in patterns (clouds, wind in the wheat, fluttering of the leaves) without fatigue and yet exercises and stimulates on deep levels. Your campus is stunning. The nature surrounding you is

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restorative and I encourage you to walk your own Camino here. In sum, people on the Camino describe feeling good mentally and physically. Walking and nature are therapeutic to body and mind.

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But to what end? What ails many people in western societies? Mostly stress, a vague sense of anxiety and impotence in the face of a globalized world that seems to be spiraling out of control, pressure to do, perceived, distorted fears, plus overtaxed minds always ‘on call’ in the Digital Age. Much of our suffering is created in our minds and perpetuated by habits that keep it firmly in place.

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Remember pilgrimage is both physical and mental – body and mind working in conjunction. Inner well-being is developed through the outer movement of the body and vice versa. My recent research explores how the rise of the Internet and development of digital communication devices greatly impacts the mental part of this equation. Digital tech brings mental distraction and dispersion, fragmentation of experiences, connection and engagement with the outside world, an increased perception of needs that require mental attention and focus and a reduction in long-term, sustained periods of restorative disconnection from mental. I call this the Cloud Camino – a new mental space created in the 21s C and you can see this reflected in the slide.

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Ironically, people frequently talk about wanting to have a mental break free of anxiety and desire the peace, clarity and the mental restoration the Camino offers but don’t see any connection between

digital behaviors on pilgrimage and achieving inner and mental well-being. What we're going to do now is take a look at how this plays out on the Camino today and reflects our own lives.

## Vignettes

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Your theater department agreed to help me with this project and I greatly appreciate their participation. Your classmates are going to perform a series of vignettes set on the Camino now to explore what happens when you insert digital media tech into the pilgrim experience. The vignettes are

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broken up with narrative from me and designed to reflect the pilgrimage experience as a rite of passage with three parts – The Separation (from the known and familiar), The Limen (the journey, the part when you are away and must confront the new and unexpected) and The Return (where you have a new status at journey's end). No matter a pilgrim's motivation, the traveler leaves a familiar home world and begins a new identity as an anonymous pilgrim often outside of his-her comfort zone confronting adversity and emotional discomfort. Changes in external conditions can be destabilizing and disorienting and help the inner process that leads to insight and reflection. While 21<sup>st</sup> C pilgrims confront physical adversity more or less the same (blisters, tendonitis and suffering in the rain and heat), the major difference is how Digital Age pilgrims confront the normal mental adversities typical of pilgrimage. *21<sup>st</sup> C pilgrims tend to want to exercise their physical legs but not their mental legs when they let their cell/mobile phones solve all of their 'problems.'*

Rites of passage are found all over the world, such as being a college student in American society, ie, All of you right now. "Going away to college" can be seen as an important transition from adolescence into adulthood. You separate from home and parents in a new environment, to challenge ideas, learn skills of self-reliance and prepare yourself for your professional and emotional future as an adult. Graduation marks the end of this phase: you throw your hat in the air, get a couple letters after your name for your CV! It's a lot like being on pilgrimage as a potential growth experience and that process is also significantly impacted by our new digital behaviors that complicate mental separation and individuation. "Home" is now on campus in ways it never was just as on the Camino pilgrimage.

In these performances we will follow two pilgrims on their journeys in 2019. Keep in mind that for roughly 1200 years the Camino existed successfully without the presence of digital devices but by 2019 it is now considered a necessary and normal piece of equipment on most Camino packing lists. There are some people, very few, who choose not to carry an electronic device and others who develop strategies (larger percentage) to limit their connectivity but the trend is to simply carry one's daily life habits with tech into the Camino without much reflection about the potential consequences.

**[DIRECTIONAL NOTES IN BLUE: PILGRIMS 1 & 2 are on stage when describe who they are they will focus on each one role playing. DIALOGUE IS IN RED]**

**Pilgrim 1** has made a conscious choice to go without a cell phone or digital tech. In his daily life he's tired of social media, thinks he's too involved with Insta and Facebook and he wants to get away from it. He wants his Camino to be a true mental break from his life and has told his friends and family that he will be away and not to expect to hear from him. He is a rare bird. *[see him looking at his phone, getting frustrated and turning it off]*

**Pilgrim 2** will take his phone and keep up his normal habits when possible on the Camino without really thinking about it. He also wants a break from his daily life and routines but it doesn't really cross his mind that using tech media will impact his experience. In fact, Pilgrim 2 embraces the idea that digital connectivity will improve his Camino (safety, convenience, information, booking ahead, contact with friends, family and the world, etc). *[engaged in phone in normal, habitual way]*

While these two characters may be exaggerated to help illustrate my observations, all of the situations presented are real and can be found on the Camino. *[Pilgrims exit stage]* **[Main Characters (these can be any sex/gender but I have two guys in mind):**

**Pilgrim 1:** Has made the decision that he would like to walk the Camino without his cell phone and other digital devices. To show time progression he will develop a beard over the course of the journey. His clothing and equipment is adequate but not high tech.

**Pilgrim 2:** Will walk with his cell phone and other digital devices as is the current norm (ear buds, monitoring device of bodily functions with a smart watch). He will remain clean shaven the whole time.

His clothes and equipment are state of the art, high-end pilgrim gear. He's over-packed and over-prepared.

**Other Characters Vignette 1:**

Departure Scene: Pilgrim 1 with Mother, Father and Younger sister. Pilgrim 2 with Mother and Father

**Vignette 2:**

Being Where You Are: Pilgrim 1 & 2

**Vignette 3:**

Albergue Scene: Our two pilgrims plus four pilgrims on stage and two "home" speaking from off-stage

**Vignette 4:**

Getting Lost: Pilgrim 1 & 2 and Shepherd – old man with cane (could be old woman too)

**Vignette 5:**

Power of Solitude: Pilgrim 1 & 2

**Vignette 6 :**

Memory: Pilgrim 1 (with Stacy from Vignette 3) & Pilgrim 2 and 2 other random pilgrims milling about on stage doing their thing in the background at the arrival point in the Cathedral square.

**Vignette 7 :**

The Return – Pilgrim 1 & 2 and Family members as at beginning]

**PROPS & CLOTHING**

4-5 backpacks, basket, 2 or 3 apples, clothing for two pilgrims – hiking gear (pants/shorts, t-shirts, boots or walking shoes, plus smartwatch, earbuds), albergue scene – lounge wear – flip flops, t-shirts, tank tops, shorts, bucket for feet, chairs, parents and sister informal street wear, villager – cap, plaid

shirt for man or woman with skirt, apron and kerchief or hat. Smartphones for all the pilgrims except Pilgrim 1. Outlet for electrical devices with phones and other devices plugged in, charging.

### **Vignette 1: Leaving 'Home'**

29 **INTRO:** The first vignette relates to The Separation phase in our Pilgrims' rite of passage. Feeling anxiety before launching oneself into a new and unknown environment is normal. On the Camino people worry and have pre-Camino doubts about their physical capabilities, packing issues and what life will be like on the Camino. To counteract the anxiety, people typically prepare physically and mentally to some degree. With the rise of the Digital Age, the amount of information available to pilgrims has exploded exponentially allowing pilgrims to engage mentally with the Camino in ways never before contemplated.

30 Importantly, in the 21<sup>st</sup> C pilgrims no longer need to contemplate the idea of making a significant mental separation from their home worlds – including their families, friends, work and online activities. Pre-Internet there was an expected given between Home and The Traveler that communication would be broken and limited due to communication tech limitations. There was an enforced letting go on both sides, a true physical and mental break.

[Both pilgrims are on the stage with their families. They have backpacks and are ready to go. Use lighting to highlight one group and then the other. ]

**Pilgrim 2:** [Dialogue places emphasis on anxious parents projecting anxiety onto nervous pilgrim. While parents talking to him he looks at or reaches for his phone occasionally]

**Father:** Be sure to send a text as soon as you land.

**Mother:** And, don't forget to activate your TrackMyWalk app, okay? I want to follow you every step of the way.

**Pilgrim:** Okay, Mom. I will.

**Mother:** Yeah, your BLOG entry yesterday about packing was great.

Pilgrim: Packing was tough! Despite all the tutorials I watched and packing lists I read, I still wasn't sure what to take. I probably have more than I need.

Father: (with anxiety picks up pack with effort): Yeah, it's really heavy. Aren't you going to hurt your back?

Pilgrim: I don't know. I hope not.

Younger Sister: You're not going to forget my birthday are you? Can we FaceTime? PLEASE!!

Pilgrim: Of course!

Mother: Have you booked beds ahead? I read there are bed shortages on the Camino.

Pilgrim: Jeez, I don't know. You hear so many contradictory things. I've booked the first few days. We'll see. Uh...Can you take my picture? I want to let my Camino Forum friends know I'm on my way.

Poses for the photo and light off them.

**Pilgrim 1:** [Dialogue places emphasis on saying goodbye. Clear expectations. Message from parents: we trust you. ]

Mom: Are you ready for this, will you be okay?

Dad: Are you sure you don't want to take your phone?

Pilgrim: Yeah, I've really thought about it. I need a break and this is a good chance. It's one of the few things I have clear about this trip and what I'm doing.

Dad: It's okay. We trust you. Use your head and you'll be fine.

Mom: We're going to miss you a lot. Have fun.

They hug with emotion and go to black.

## Narration:

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Digital era pilgrims, despite being the most potentially prepared pilgrims in history, still over-plan and over-pack. Having access to more information does not necessarily reduce pre-trip anxiety, in fact, it

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can increase it. In the Digital Era the Camino is no longer an unknown space. Pilgrims can now see where they are going before they get there, meet fellow pilgrims, villagers and pilgrim caretakers

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online before they physically meet them on the ground, develop a pilgrim identity before starting and have any potential question answered by an infinite number of helpful former pilgrims eager to share their experiences through Camino Forums and Facebook groups. Pilgrims connect themselves virtually to the police and family through GPS tracking. And people always seem to have a knack for finding something to worry about. If having access to information is supposed to improve our experience, why are we still so worried?

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Perceived fears often limit people more than real fears. When people feel anxiety before departing it's more often about confrontation with one's own inner unknown wilderness – how will I react in a new situation? All the potential 'what ifs' can create more anxiety. This is part of the pilgrimage process on the mental level and the beginning of the journey towards inner discovery. It's okay to make mistakes, take too much, not know what to do, face your fears and try to be brave. In the fumbling, discarding and reassessing, that's where people typically learn the value of things and the importance they have to them. People don't realize that in over-planning, you diminish the wonder, discovery and surprise that potentially await you on a journey of this caliber. One of the great challenges of the Digital Age is to know when to draw the line.

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In the 21<sup>st</sup> C pilgrims tend to separate physically but do not experience a profound mental rupture from their digital mental channels. While some people do establish limits, many pilgrims keep the mental channels wide open and are aware of the day to day routines, problems, stress, etc they have left behind physically. Constant maintenance of online relationships and activities keeps the pilgrim mentally distant from the present moment and safely in one's mental routines and comfort zone. It's

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as if you never leave home mentally. Anxiety and worry from home can also get projected onto the pilgrim. Pilgrims often enjoy a new mental space and discover they don't want to maintain contact in the same way yet feel obliged to do so. The old adage 'no news is good news' rarely applies anymore.

Our contemporary virtual, often enmeshed, relationships appear to have a greater fragility that need constant, often public, reinforcement. Part of the power of the Separation phase, that can be easily lost in the unmanaged digital experience, is giving yourself mental and physical space to take stock and to see your life more clearly and where you stand in it. As one 30-something Canadian woman said to me, “How can people miss you if you’re always there?”

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## Vignette 2: Being Where You Are

**INTRO:** In the next vignette our two pilgrims meet on the Camino. Of course people meet each other all the time even if tech connected and value highly the easy social relations possible on the Camino. How does tech engagement distract us from where we are though? One of the outcomes of walking through the countryside 6-8 hours a day can be an opening of the sense as well as a changing sense of time, place, space, speed and being in the world connected to the here and now.

[Both pilgrims walk along the Camino with different scenes in the background reacting to the different stimuli in the photos differently]

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Pilgrim 1 – Enters with backpack calmly paced seeing the views – 3 Photos- landscape smelling flowers, looking at sky and bodega. He’s relaxed, enjoying himself, taking it in. When sees bodega, looks curious and sits down to read guidebook to learn what it is.

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Pilgrim 2 - Comes after doing same thing with earbuds and looking down missing landscape, flowers, and sky. He has his phone in his hand walking. When bodega photo comes up he reaches Pilgrim 1 sitting by the edge of the Camino.

Pilgrim 1 (looks up): Hola

Pilgrim 2: Hi

Pilgrim 1: Oh, are you American?

Pilgrim 2 : Yeah, I’m from Virginia. What about you?

Pilgrim 1 : I’m from Wisconsin. ... Tough day today, eh?

Pilgrim 2: Jeez, it's really hot. [Looking at the bodega and takes a photo] Oh, what's that? It looks like a hobbit house (ha ha). I'll definitely put that in my blog.

Pilgrim 1: It's a bodega, a cellar, you know, for cold storage in the old days on this hot plain. It's here in my guidebook.

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Pilgrim 2: Hobbit house makes a better story...haha.. I can't wait to get to the next village.[Looks at FitBit watch] My watch says we've got another 2km and we've done 25,000 steps! Good for us!

Pilgrim 1: Yeah, it's right over there. You can see the bell tower (Pilgrim 1 pointing)....[Pilgrim 2 looks up and focuses on distant village, surprised]. What we need is a cold beer in that village.

Pilgrim 2: Yeah! And WIFI!

Leave stage together.

**Narration:**

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The pilgrim's day is very simple: get up, find the yellow arros, walk, eat when you are hungry, drink when you are thirsty, and find a place to sleep. People also highly enjoy socializing with others, walking around the villages and towns and visiting the grand monuments of the Camino's past. Mentally and

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physically there is a lot going on but not the normal stress of everyday life where the responsibilities of work, family and daily life can be overwhelming.

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Consequently, pilgrims often experience a sense of freed up mental space like a cork being released from a bottle. When that mental space is opened, pilgrims describe feeling more intensely, remembering their past, dreaming profoundly, and experiencing unforced upwellings of emotions that give access to one's inner world. It can be disconcerting and uncomfortable but can lead to insight, decision-making, creativity, clarity and reflection. People frequently describing feeling something they call "the here and the now" or the power of the present moment and value the feeling of 'being where they are'.

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Digital Age pilgrims, to differing degrees depending on the person and digital management strategies they may employ, tend to complicate this simplicity by adding layers of self-imposed mental

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obligations and diversions onto their pilgrimages thereby keeping that cork firmly in place: tracking biorhythms, doing online work, email, FB, Instagram, SnapChat and all forms of social media platform engagement, online dating sites, sports, stock trading, TripAdvisor, books, apps of all kinds, games and entertainment, blogs, vlogs and video communications, etc. In addition, many pilgrims operate under an additional cultural layer that reiterates that life is a line towards a goal that one should rush to and the more you do (more likes, more followers, more posts, more KMs), the more value you have. Our busy fast paced lives also tell us that when we stop we should ‘do something’, be busy, fill the space, keep our minds active or otherwise we are “wasting time” and it’s good to avoid the potential discomfort caused by boredom, loneliness and doubt. It turns out that ‘wasting time’ often serves the opposite function – it becomes a productive opportunity to feel, observe, sense the world and to meet people.

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The distracted mind needs time to calm down and it can take days or more than a week for a pilgrim to achieve that feeling of the here and the now. It’s worth asking ourselves, Why do we want to be here and someplace else at the same time?

### **Vignette 3: In the Albergue**

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**INTRO: In the albergue.**

[There are people sitting around – four – hanging out in common room in the WiFi zone. There’s an outlet with tons of cables with devices charging and all occupied. Doing different things but they all have their phones. One person has their feet in a bucket of water. Pilgrim 1 comes in and looks around at the scene, a few people glance up and then look back down at their phones. He goes and sits down and takes out his journal. Pilgrim 2 does the same thing but with his phone. We then hear the mental inner dialogue of each person in the room. As each person has their monologue – the light should focus on them to make them stand out. Two people have texting/FaceTime conversations with others somewhere else in the world and they can be voices off-stage. As I read the first narration, actors set up the props and come on stage.]

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We now meet our two pilgrims at the end of the day in a simple pilgrim’s accommodation on the Camino called an albergue. Albergues vary greatly on the Camino in terms of size, facilities, services

offered and whether or not you can book ahead to reserve a bed space. In the modern Camino, the albergues are places where pilgrims relate, share experiences, interact, compromise and often provide some of the most memorable stories of a pilgrim's trip due to the funny situations that can arise due to cultural differences, sleeping habits and differing expectations. We're going to witness how Digital Age pilgrims tend to complicate the simplicity of the present moment and the social interactions with their digital needs and habits.

**Pilgrim 1:** [Light focuses on him and he speaks and narrates what he's writing in his journal by hand:] Today was a tough day....I feel my mind finally calming down. I realize how busy my mind is normally. Most of what seems important at home seems pretty meaningless right now. I feel much more present, aware of the world around me. I sat down and watched some ants today moving a huge dead insect towards their hole. I just sat there observing them and I was amazed at how much I learned simply by sitting still – strength, fortitude, patience, combined effort..... [he keeps writing the whole time]

Uploading Pilgrim – Darn it, this WiFi really sucks. It's taking forever to upload these pictures. I want to go out to the village but I don't know if I'll have time with how this is going...

Pilgrim (mother)– Okay, let's see about where to sleep tomorrow. If we do 25km we can stay in Frómista. Good, let's see what's available there. Ah, pilgrims have given this one bad reviews – unpleasant owners and bedbugs. Forget that. Oh here's a 5-star. What an interesting article about this cute dog these owners rescued on the Camino and he became the albergue's mascot. I'm going to like that and book here. I can't wait to meet the dog (Getting nervous) Darn, it's already full! What if we don't get a place and have to go to the bedbug albergue? Or worse, sleep outside?

Pilgrim (daughter)–[She's agitated. Texting to boyfriend back in States] : Babe, thank god your online. I am so irritated with my mother. I never should have come with her on this stupid pilgrimage. She's ruining it for me.

John (voice off-stage): Why don't you talk to her?

Daughter: (looks over towards her mother) How can I talk to her? She's totally oblivious. It's easier talking to you. I just need to vent.

John: But aren't you there to connect and bond?

Daughter: yeah, easier said than done. It's so much easier to deal with her from a distance. She gets on my nerves.

John: Maybe you get on hers too – hahaha.....

Pilgrim 2 – First I'm going to check the sports, then my stocks and then I'll finish my FB post. If I have time then maybe I'll watch a Walking Dead episode before going to bed! I kinda feel like a zombie myself – hahaha.

Pilgrim Stacy (feet in bucket): Oh god my feet hurt so much. Why am I doing this? I wish there was someone I knew to talk to. Oh, I'll try Margie [reaches for her phone and makes call].

Margie (off stage). [Sees the call but chooses to not pick up. Irritated] – Oh, It's Stacy again. I don't want to deal with her now. She's so needy.

Stacy: Shoot, she's not picking up. [She looks around the room for a friendly face and catches Pilgrim 1's eye who smiles at her.]

Pilgrim 1 – [Finishes writing and stands up saying to room] Does anybody want to go out to the village and have dinner?

Stacy: Sure. Yeah. Just a minute. [Starts to get her feet out of the water and put on flip flops, eager to connect with Pilgrim 1. ]

Uploading pilgrim (first after Pilgrim 1): Maybe in a minute, the photos are almost uploaded and I can finish my blog.

Pilgrim 1 and Stacy go out together.

**Narration:**

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An evolution in the Camino pilgrimage experience in the Digital Age was the birth of, what I call, Tech Time. After walking and reaching one's accommodation, pilgrims typically engage with their mobile

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devices to do many different tasks. There is a physical bodily presence on the Camino but a collective

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mental migration to the enormous Cloud Camino that exists on a mental level in the virtual space above them. Some people do develop strategies to control their tech habits either while walking or at the end of the day but progressively more and more people do not. In just a few short years, the tide has shifted so that someone who doesn't carry tech is an oddball, potentially putting himself at danger and maybe be suspected of being a potential phone moocher! This image illustrates the mental state of the digitally connected pilgrim.

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So what does Tech Time replace if it is a new phenomenon? In a world without digital tech needs, pilgrims did not interrupt their mental continuity on a continuous basis. Thoughts, experiences, events were anchored to the Present Moment. There's a trade-off. If you keep your mind busy doing smartphone activities, that means you're not doing something else that you would have in the past such as - socializing, exploring a village, simply being, reflecting, feeling liberty of mind and body, boredom, inspiration, spiritually lifted or discouraged, missing loved ones, gazing at the stars, learning

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to value what you don't have and what is important to you, experiencing the power of mental restoration by not having continuous focused directed attention on your phone, etc. All of these activities speak to the develop of one's inner world, one's inner landscape and Camino. Pilgrimage is now conceived of as a day with specific fragmented segments – tech time, walking, tech time,

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socializing, tech time, sleeping – and you're constantly parceling out bits and pieces of your inner world to the virtual Camino Cloud without processing them in a deep, prolonged way. The power of a prolonged ritual "out of time" experience is lost as we keep in time with life and the larger world.

#### **Vignette 4: Getting Lost**

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**INTRO:** In our next vignette our pilgrims are going to experience some adversity. Earlier I mentioned that in a Rite of passage the individual typically has to get out of his/her comfort zone and confront challenging life situations for there to be profound inner movement. Resolution of or struggle with the conflict, often leads the pilgrim to learn a life lesson, gain self-confidence, resiliency or perhaps lead to personal insight or stronger bonds with other people involved. How pilgrims face adversity with and

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without digital tech mediating their experiences is potentially very different. By the way, the type of adversity you find on the Camino is very manageable, and not life threatening, except in extreme cases. Let's watch and see what happens when our pilgrims get lost.

**Getting Lost** (Scene: Villager/Shepherd – man or woman - on stage with basket of apples sitting under a cross – image in background).

**Pilgrim 2:** (has ear buds in)

Reaches place and looks around confused. He sees no arrows.

**Pilgrim 2** (talking to himself) – *Where are the arrows? I think I'm lost* [pulls out his phone].

His eyes skim over the villager but don't rest on him. Villager points in the right direction and then Pilgrim 2 puts his back to him.

**Pilgrim 2:** *He's telling me that way. But who knows? I'm going check my GPS.* [ looks on GPS or app.]  
*Oh, great, it's that way. I'm not lost.* [Walks on in direction indicated by the villager and leaves the scene.]

Villager observes the whole scene.

**Pilgrim 1:**

Comes to same place as Pilgrim 2. (Speaking out loud to himself)

**Pilgrim 1:** *Jeez. Where are the yellow arrows? Am I lost?*

Looks around and sees the villager.

**Pilgrim 1:** *Buenos días. El Camino?* [The villager points the way.]

**Pilgrim 1:** *Gracias.* Villager offers Pilgrim 1 an apple.

**Pilgrim 1:** [smiles] *Gracias. .... Cómo se llama?*

**Villager:** *Pepa....(pauses and then says slowly) Voy a ordeñar mis ovejas* (makes sound of sheep: beh beh in Spanish) *Quieres verlo?*

**Pilgrim1:** [says with difficulty] – *or/deñ/yar?*

**Villager:** [smiles and makes movement of milking].

Pilgrim 1: AAH [with a big smile]. Si! Vamos.

And they leave together, pilgrim eating the apple.

**Narration:**

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In the end, getting lost can actually be about finding ourselves. We miss opportunities for growth and connection with others when we resolve them too quickly with our tech. When we outsource our interpersonal and dealing skills, to our devices we atrophy those abilities within ourselves. Media tech can offer us fabulous resources but they can also progressively erode our confidence in our own abilities when we come to depend and rely on them for resolving basic life situations where life experience, instinct, reading the natural world and other human beings may very well suffice. Progressively we tend to trust technology more than we trust ourselves or others. Even though the villager has lived here her whole life or the guidebook indicates the trail goes this way, our digital age pilgrim has to check the tech just in case.

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We often don't allow ourselves to have a pilgrimage by pushing the panic button too quickly. The tendency is to want to have what I call a 'Trip Advisor Camino' where we bubble-wrap our experiences so nothing goes 'wrong,' without realizing that on the Camino pilgrimage is about living your own journey, not somebody else's. **Both mental legs and physical legs atrophy without use. We need stressors to gain strength and confidence.** There's nothing wrong with getting lost because there is always a way of finding yourself back to the main path. Many times what happens to you when you get off course makes for the most significant memories of your Camino.

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**Vignette # 5 – Power of Solitude**

**INTRO:** Our two pilgrims meet again, towards the end of the journey near Santiago de Compostela.

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They've been on the road for about 3 weeks and have mixed feelings about reaching the long awaited goal. They both have had very positive experiences and aren't sure they want to reach Santiago yet.

Background Scene: Galician scene – forest. Pilgrim 1 has a beard now.

Pilgrim 1 is sitting by the side of the road under a tree writing in his journal. Pilgrim 2 comes by and recognizes him. Very friendly.

Pilgrim 2: Hey, I didn't think I'd see you again. How are you?

Pilgrim 1: Great. And you?

Pilgrim 2: Really good. It's been amazing. I'm really excited about reaching Santiago.

Pilgrim 1: Yeah, me too. What's been your most memorable Camino experience?

Pilgrim 2: Well, there have been so many – the food, the wine, the landscapes. Most important though are all the people I've met from around the world. We're now connected on FB and Insta. Everyone's always out there supporting you giving you likes when you post on the Forum and my Blog. I feel so connected with the Camino community; it's my "Camino Family".

Pilgrim 1: Yeah, I know what you mean. I've met people I'll never forget.

Pilgrim 2: You know – the Camino is "freedom and caring". Where can you go and just walk, make friends, meet people who take care of you and it's cheap? My sister is starting now too. We're chatting all the time. She's posting, making friends. I think a lot of us are experience junkies. I'm already planning my next Camino for next year, the VDLP. I've met people who've gone 5, 6 and 10 times! It's amazing. What about you?

Pilgrim 1 (thoughtful): I have lots too but I think the most powerful experience was the first day. It really made me doubt everything about my choices. I actually thought I was going to die.

Pilgrim 2 – Really? Wow! That sounds dramatic, what happened?

Pilgrim 1 – It was my first day. I was excited and started late. Before I knew it I was lost. It got dark and I didn't have a flashlight. My worst fears were coming true. I didn't have a place to sleep and I didn't know where I was. I started to doubt everything including my decision not to have a phone. I had no option but to wait out the night. I was really scared but I got out my sleeping bag. I felt like a terrified child again and even found myself crying. I decided in the night I would leave the Camino the next day. But you know what? I got through that night, overcame that fear and when the day dawned I knew I wasn't going to give up. I could do anything, get through anything. That experience of solitude, being

lost made me really look within. It's given me strength to go on. I'll know I'll take this home with me. I'm not scared to be alone anymore.

Pilgrim 2 – Wow. (Looks a bit in awe.) Ya know..... if you'd had a phone you could have just called emergency services.

**Narration:**

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We live in a world with a fragmentation of social life and meaningful community. People look to slow travel as an antidote for speed and to virtual communities for the antidote to the disappointments of real face-to-face relations. In a world where 'being alone' or unoccupied is frightening or anxiety provoking, these virtual spaces can fulfill many social, psychological and spiritual needs. In the Digital Era, the Camino provides both – an on the ground real-time community and a 24/7 virtual community that generates an oasis of well-being and belonging in what can seem an unfriendly world. Herein lies one of the paradoxes of pilgrimage in the Internet Age: If I want to belong, I have to connect and feed the virtual machine - to be seen, recognized, listened to, liked, supported - but if I have to connect to the Cloud Camino how can I just be, nourish my inner world and get out of the connected cycle? It's no longer easy for people to see that these are choices. The desire for belonging may be so great you don't realize that there is any trade-off. We increase virtual connections to the detriment of our on-the-ground, face-to-face engagement with self, others and nature.

It's a great temptation to resolve uncomfortable situations with your smartphone. If you're bored, entertain yourself with music, a podcast or a book. If you're lonely, call a friend. If you're worried about the next day, book a room. If you want an upper, post a photo on Instagram and wait for a like to come in to get a little shot of dopamine. If you're sad, pour your heart out into your blog or the forum and wait for some virtual feedback to cheer you up. Instead of exploring and struggling with the power of solitude, we are encouraged to quickly resolve supposedly uncomfortable life situations with tech. Self-empowerment, autonomy, inner strength are not tested, honed, built up when you never give yourself a chance to experience discomfort or simply daydream and let your mind wander to remarkable unexpected inner worlds and connections. Tech usage can have a numbing quality on both positive and negative emotions and keep us from ourselves and the community of those on the ground with us in real time on the Camino. Ironically these technologies that supposedly free us up often are

intentionally designed by the tech engineers to mentally bind us to them, creating dependency. *What appears to free us can become our mental shackles to self-knowledge and growth as we build invisible walls between ourselves and others every time we look down at the screen or put in our ear buds.*

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## Vignette 6: Silently Creating Memories

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**INTRO:** Our pilgrims reach the grand Plaza del Obradoiro in front of the Cathedral, the great gathering place of pilgrims and visitors to Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims express a large array of mixed emotions upon arrival – triumph, joy and sadness that the journey is coming to an end and its often a time of goodbyes to new friends. We’re going to see how our two pilgrims experience the arrival in the square in different ways.

Image: Façade of Cathedral of Santiago

On stage are two pilgrims lying on ground with their backpacks. One just there taking it in and the other texting. Pilgrim 1 is already sitting down on the stage with his pack. He’s also with Stacy – the bucket pilgrim. He has his arm around her and he’s looking up at the Cathedral, taking it all in, feeling moved, being. Stacy’s head is resting on his shoulder.

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,69

10 sec pause and then Pilgrim 2 comes in and starts taking pictures of the façade and the plaza [SLIDES 66, 67, 68 – THESE NEED TO BE STAGED AND I WILL EXPLAIN], the other pilgrims and then turns his back to the Cathedral, starts to fix his hair, shirt, clothes and takes a selfie. Then he looks around and sees Pilgrim 1. Transmit peace, tranquility.

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**Pilgrim 2:** [very friendly]. **Hi! We made it!** [Pilgrim 1 is in his own world and Stacy and smiles] **...Can I take a picture of you? I want to remember you – the guy without the phone.** [Takes photo of P1 in his own world. Pilgrims stay on stage during the narration until the line “Memory, afterall, in not a video recording.”]

## Narration:

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There is a very strong tendency in the Camino today to capture our experiences with photos and posts vs living experiences in the moment. We live in a tyranny of happiness where we are encouraged to be and show our best faces. In the Digital Age our memories seem to lose value when we can't share them. What are the value of our experiences, if we don't post them online or receive external affirmation when we do? Do I have to prove I'm having a good Camino to have a good Camino? Do we rely on external affirmation for our inner well-being? If we do, then how does one achieve inner well-being unless you have a device mediating your experiences?

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We also don't seem to trust our memories or the inner process of taking in life experiences and learning through them over time. There's an urgency and need to record and share as if it by not doing so it will be lost or forgotten. Maybe details will be lost but perhaps it's often the essence of an experience that provides the lesson rather than the focused image. Memory, after all, is not a video recording. [\[Actors get up and leave\]](#)

How does mediating the experience with the phone as does Pilgrim 2, potentially impact his creation of a memory of it? He is capturing this moment, half living it, half filming it – neither in one space or the other fully. Will he need to use his phone in the future as a memory aid to help him remember what it was like? Pilgrim 1 is 'in the here in the now' in the moment, living this arrival, fully and intensely. He will probably also remember this moment as well intensely because of the way he's taking it in with his senses, focused and present. Our tendency is to outsource our memories to the phone thereby eroding our memory capacity and engaging in spaces in a more dispersed, distracted manner. Are we progressively developing an ability to stay simultaneously on the surfaces of our experiences and connected to another reality? Is that progress? If it is progress, in what direction is it taking us? Is it progressively increasing our dependence on digital devices to make sense of our lives, our memories and the world around us?

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## Vignette 7: The Return

**INTRO:** The Return is the third phase of the pilgrimage as a rite of passage. Now our pilgrims are ready to go home and see their families again. They've said their face-to-face and virtual goodbyes and have

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gotten on planes to go home. Pilgrim 2 has been in contact with his family the whole time who has been communicating with him back and forth. Pilgrim 1 has sent a couple of one-way messages to his family to let them know that he was okay but hasn't had news about them for about a month.

Pilgrim 2: family is there, excited but considerably less so than the other family.

Dad – Hi! We got your text that you landed.

Mom: We've had fun following your blog and posts. It looks like it was a great experience. . Yeah, we really felt like we were there with you.

P2: Yeah, it was. The best of my life. I can't wait to go back.

Dad: You got the news that we're going to the party now right? Yeah, good, come on let's go home

Pilgrim 1: [Comes on stage and greets parents. Everyone is very excited to see the pilgrim after being away 4 weeks with little to no contact. Actors should take time. Big long hugs, for example]

Mom: Oh, my god! You look so thin! How was it? Look at your beard. You didn't shave??? You don't look like yourself.

Pilgrim 1: Yeah, I don't feel like the same person either. It's been really intense! I've got so much to tell you.

Dad: Was it what you expected at the end?

P1: It's gonna take me awhile to figure it all out. But I do know that so much stuff I thought was important really isn't. I've also made some important decisions. Let's talk about it on the way home.

They hug and leave.

**Narration:**

When the mental proximity is maintained, there is a blurring of the sense of separation in the three stages of pilgrimage. When the mental distance is reduced, the proximity of the return is much closer. Sharing of an experience becomes very different. If you already have created the virtual version of your

Camino for your virtual audience, it is not necessary to share or remember the journey in the same way. When the journey is contained within an extended, bracketed period of time away, the Return is essential for the unpacking of what has happened. The trend in the contemporary pilgrimage is for pilgrims to repeat the journey over and over again, feeling good on the way, sharing their experiences, exploring different Caminos and maintaining virtual connections with a vast network of former and new pilgrims around the world. The traditional concept of pilgrimage as a bounded and bracketed rite of passage as I described it in the 1990s is nearing its end as we unreflectively incorporate new technologies into our experiences without pausing to reflect on the potential long term consequences on a profound inner journey such as a pilgrimage.

## CONCLUSION

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We are in the midst of a data flow tsunami and the Camino can be an island of calm. People are often at sea in the tsunami but don't want to admit it or recognize it. My goal has been to draw your attention to a reality that is more and more normal and to remind and show you that you do have choices to imagine other realities, to shape your own future and not just be a passenger in the experience. We can create spaces for ourselves and places of mental calm and well-being. One of the most valuable gifts your liberal arts education can give to you is to develop critical thinking skills. Keep questioning why things are they way they are.

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And, even if the macro situation is beyond your control, you can influence and make choices about your micro-situation. What do you want on your pilgrimage of life? Do you want to be the driver or the passenger? Do you want your smartphone to sit in the driver's seat or do you want to sit there with your phone accompanying you and empowering you? If you do decide to go on pilgrimage, how can you manage your tech usage to enhance your journey towards inner growth, or the development of inner resiliency and exercise your real and mental legs? What strategies can you employ to manage your devices that allow you to be present fully on your Camino and to attend to your lived reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> C? These are not easy questions to answer and each person will have different responses. Sometimes life asks us, though, to be brave and I believe that they are questions worth reflecting on. As pilgrims say to one another on the Way - Buen Camino (good Journey) or Ultreya – Go forward with courage! Thank you.