

Charlie's Camino de Santiago Journal
September 22, 2022 through November 5, 2022

Thursday September 22 Day 1
(Pg. 1 -2)

Big Departure day to Camino has arrived. Beautiful 62 degrees. Walked to mass and after communion Fr. Freddy allowed me to express my thoughts to my fellow parishioners. I thanked them for their prayers and told them about the cross that mom made me. I invited them to touch the cross if they wanted and make their personal prayers for me to carry to Santiago to ask St. James to present to the Lord. It was well received and beautiful. Vindy and I picked up Bob and Noreen at 11:30 am and proceeded to airport for a 2pm departure to Chicago. Arrived in Chicago at 3pm and Bob had 2 passes to the American Airlines "Flag ship" lounge because of his frequent flyer miles. I had hot tea, banana and spicy almonds. It was wonderful. We boarded the plane to France at 6:15pm with 4220 miles and 7 hours to Paris. Found my seat 22C and sat down next to a cute couple from Iowa on their honeymoon – Matt and Kylynn. Texted Cindy some pictures of today so far. Cindy was going to see a show at the Fox with Aunt Janet and Terry Daugherty. She worked so hard to make sure I was ready for this trip. Our 45th wedding anniversary is next Saturday, Oct 1st. God has blessed me with the most wonderful wife, Arrived Paris 9am (local time) clear skies and 52 degrees. It was 1:40 am STL time. Retrieved walking poles/tube from baggage and then took a shuttle to terminal 2G. We checked into Air France to Biarritz. About 1 1/2 before boarding. We were allowed to carry-on back packs and walking poles. We then met our 1st fellow pilgrim.

Friday September 23 Day 2
(Pg. 3 -4)

Alga, she is from Poland and meeting a group from Switzerland, they are walking for about 2 weeks, she said she is a headhunter. Boarded Air France taken off 12:30 pm to Biarritz. Got to Biarritz about 2 pm and soon saw our shuttle driver standing in airport lobby with a card saying "BOB CONTI" we loaded our backpacks into the van then started the 40 mins drive to St Jean Pied de Port. The driver took us straight to our hotel in St Jean Pied de Port. The room was great we dropped off the backpacks and left to explore St Jean Pied de Port, which was bustling with people and pilgrims from all over the world. We then got our credentials stamped at the pilgrims office then found our route to start our Camino tomorrow morning. We then walked around town looking at everything and talking to some fellow pilgrim's. We noticed most restaurants were closed and didn't reopen till 8 pm. So Bob and I bought our supper at a small grocery and took it back to eat in our room after church at 7pm.

Saturday September 24 Day 3
(Pg. 5 - 6)

Up at 6:30 am. 1st day on the trail. Leaving St. Jean France heading for base of Pyrones Mountains. It is now 3:00 pm and we just reached Roncesvalles which is 25.1 km from St. Jean. We checked in at the monastery which was built in 900 AD just for pilgrims. We registered for a bed and for supper - \$25 total. Dinner is at 7 pm and pilgrim mass is at 6pm. Accommodations in the 1300 year old. Monastery is incredibly beautiful and modern. Newly finished bedroom areas, bath, shower, etc. Looking forward to supper and mass this evening. Our first day walking up the mountain was definitely a challenge; steep grades on mostly gravel trails, which we went up over 5000 feet in elevation. Tired now good to sit down and write in journal. Going now to shower and rest before dinner. Met many interesting pilgrims today

from all over the world and the scenery today was incredible. It misted rain part of the day and was around 50 degrees. Amazing day so far. My roommate is an attorney from Brazil. Probably in late 30's and name is Hugo. Went to 6pm mass at the monastery church I think built in 900 AD, stunning stone craftsmanship. The mass was beautifully said in Spanish and the small church was nearly full. After mass the priest asked all pilgrims to come up together for a special blessing. It was beautiful there were probably about 40 of us. After mass we went straight to the restaurant and had a wonderful dinner with people from France, England, Guyana and USA, it was great. God has showed us some of his perfect beauty today. One pilgrim said if you are stopped resting; do not resume walking as soon as another pilgrim arrives to rest. Greet and visit for a while to make others feel welcome before you leave. I said to the pilgrim from England isn't it great how 8-10 people from all over can sit down together for supper and have great conversation and laugh and he said it is wonderful and people have more in common than different. Pilgrim taking pictures must take notice of God's beauty. 18.6 miles.

Sunday September 25 Day 4 (Pg. 7-8)

Lights on 6 am got up had some breakfast cereal at monastery then started walking. Cloudy morning but got sunny and beautiful later in the day. Saw some pilgrims on bicycles, I would think it would be pretty hard on a bike with the terrain I've seen so far. Walked about 15 miles to Zubini, arriving about 2 pm. Found a grocery store and bought ham slices and fresh bread for late lunch ate our lunch at a bench on a sunny plaza surrounded by balconies with beautiful red flowers at the windows. It was so nice and sunny and still early so we called ahead to the next town. Larrasoana to see if any rooms were available at the municipal albergue. There were so we set out about 3 pm to Larrasoana. Arrived there about 4:45 pm checked in the albergue, got our bunk beds. Bob had top BUNK), then went in search for supper. While going to the local grocery/dinner we asked a man wearing a big cowboy hat for directions to the grocery store. He was an elderly man and his name was Leonard Padilla and he said he was a bounty hunter in his day. Had great conversation and he was stationed at Scott Air Force Base in the 1950's. Small world always treat people like you will see them again, because you probably will, great day. 9:30 pm lights out

Monday September 26 Day 5 (Pg. 9-11)

Up on the trail at 7:40 am made one wrong turn had to backtrack only about 200 yds. Beautiful day 50 degrees in a.m. Trail relatively easy some very narrow path. Met Richard Nock, from North Carolina and he began to join us walking. Rick is very interesting person. In his 60's I guess loves to hike he belongs to a hiking club. The three of us stopped in Burlada a large town and 11:30 am. I had some plums and apricots and some French style bread I had in my pack. Bob has a stick of fresh made bread, cheese and smoked ham. Richard had a pack of cold cuts. It was about 11:30 am when we finished lunch and we knew it was time to get back on the trail because our park area next to a grade school was being invaded by school kids with their lunch sacks. We continued walking thru town and then back walking thru town and then back on remote trail up and down hills full of rocks and trees. We did pass some harvested wheat fields with just tilled stubble left. Did not see many sheep mostly cattle. When going thru Burlada workers were setting up what looked like a sturdy stockade fence right thru part of town parallel with the street, made out of heavy timber it looked like it could be used for their own version of the "Running of the Bulls" We soon reached Pamplona which was protected by a massive stone wall at least 80' high. This ancient fortress wall even had a drawbridge and mote. A Roman emperor named Pompel started building the city of Pamplona around 50 BC. Amazing city. We checked in at the Cathedral Museo (Hostel), which was right across from the Plaza Nverreria Cathedral build in the 14-15 century. Undescribable beauty and unbelievable workmanship. A very

Holy place. Spent Bob and I 2.5 hrs. Touring the cathedral and still did not see it all. Went then to grocery store bought supper and went back to the hostel to eat in kitchen dining room. Then Rich and I went to pm mass at St San Saturnine. Going to bed now wonderful day with abundant blessings. Traveled 15.5 miles.

Tuesday September 27 Day 6 (Pg. 12-14)

Left the albergue in Pamplona 7:30 am in a slight mist of rain but all three of us Bob, Richard from S.C. and myself. Were dressed for it with poncho and rain jackets. We followed the shell markers thru the bustling town with many people and marketers starting their workday. Many people on bicycles weaved in and out thru the small streets. The cathedral we stayed at last night was very nice with plenty of accommodations hot showers, kitchen, and stove and refrigerator for us to use. These were at least 40 pilgrims that spent the night there. Many made their dinners on the stove and most of us were all at the tables in the morning having some breakfast and hot tea or coffee that was provided. Sat across from a man from Ireland and we had a fun conversation and he cut me a large piece of cheese off the big pie shaped piece he bought the night before. As we left town the rain quit and weather was perfect 55 degrees, slight wind. We trekked up a continuous but mostly gradual incline toward a long string of wind generator perched and spread out along the top of the long mountaintop. The wind generators seemed a long way off but by noon we were at the summit with the generators very close, we could hear the air buffeting off the huge blades as they sliced thru the fast moving air. At the summit there were large IRON figures of men on horseback with flags with an unbelievable view of the country side below. Continued down the mountain and across fields of harvested wheat, oatmeal, barley, and broad beans. A market keeper in Zaniquiegui (a town earlier) told me that's what they harvest locally the young girl store keeper was so nice she could somewhat understand what I was asking so she used the translator on her phone to show me the crops of the area. There are lots of kind people in this world. Finally made our way to Puente La Reina which was going to be the end of 15.7 mile day at 4 pm. We couldn't find a grocery so we had pilgrim's dinner (\$8) at a small diner in town. Our albergue was mile out of town so we checked out mass time at the local church (Iglisa De Santtaigo) which was 7:30 pm mass. So we checked in to our albergue (\$13) which was very nice, got settled showered and went back to town for 7:30 pm mass. The church was beautiful all lit up and mass was in Latin but I followed along in my prayer book mom gave me. It was a beautiful mass and after the final blessing father asked all pilgrims to come up to the alter for a special blessing and he gave each of us a beautiful cross on a cord that he put on our neck. He asked our name and where we were from. There were 12 pilgrims there to receive that blessing and metal. It will always be special to me. It is now 9:48 pm what a great day.

Wednesday September 28 Day 7 (Pg. 15-17)

Woke up about 6:30 am lights were still out so used flashlight to get to bathroom area, which was lit. Got packed up ate a little fruit and peanut butter from my backpack. Bob had some hot tea. Our walking companion Rich and was ready to go so started our trek to Estella about 14.5 miles away. (8:15 am) Weather was warmer 56 degree and cloudy first part of the day. There would be 4 smaller towns that our path would take us thru the first would be Maseru. The rocky path wove its way thru the country side that was at this point mainly harvested wheat and bean fields. Their fields looked like a quilt with smooth fields surround by rocky wooded hilly borders, some steep. As we approached the towns we saw grape and olive orchards, which looked ready to harvest. Part of our trail looked like an ancient road built of large stones that were worn smooth. We also saw many new pilgrims and many we have seen days before. We heard about one pilgrim that fell and broke his leg and cut his head on a rock the day before. I could see how that could happen on some sections of trail. The rural countryside is so beautiful and the

towns many times are high on top of the hills. Also everything is very neat. No trash or old farm machinery sitting around. All of the cities are so neat, flowers on porches and everything is made of stone and masonry. When we reached Estella we checked out church time, check in our albergue, which was really nice, and only \$14 to stay. Then we bought our supper at grocery and took it back to hasta to prepare in the well-equipped kitchen dining room. Richard bought a bottle of wine that we all enjoyed. Then we all went to 7:00 pm mass, which was so beautiful in a church over 800 years old and almost full of people for mass. Beautiful music was coming from the organ in the choir left and we received our pilgrim blessing after mass. Seeing so many ancient beautiful buildings and walking the ancient pilgrim path make you realize and aware how short life on earth is how important it is to make the best use of it.

Thursday September 29 Day 8 (Pg. 17-21)

Going from Estella and because e felt good and trail seemed a little easier we went a little further to a small town named Stella. A total of about 18 ¾ miles. We left Estella in rain gear but the light mist/rain only was around till about 11 am and gave way to somewhat sunny but windy conditions. We were grateful to God for the comfortable were there conditions (mid to upper 50 degrees. As we journey several miles from town there was a split in the route. A split with one way staying on the trail route and the other up along the base of a mountain thru a thick forest where as both routes re-joining about 5 mile later. We chose the more secluded route thru the forest. It was a great choice because of the beautiful because of the beauty of this forest of mostly Pine trees leaving the trail covered pine needles which made it so soft to walk on. More so it was amazingly quite in the dense forest on the narrow path. Leaving the forest we were back in the countryside with 1000s of acres harvested wheat and beans covering the valleys and ridges skirting the mountains. The diverse colors and mountain peak could all be used on any postcard, so beautiful, God is defiantly showing us his amazing beauty and is speaking to us in the quite solitude moments that are abundant on this amazing trek. We have met so many people from all over God's planet and everyone is so friendly, inspired and set apart from their everyday life. Most of pilgrims I feel are on a journey unlike any other, striving to connect to God in a way like never before. As you meet people you have a definite sense that you have a special connection, something in common on a level like nothing you have experienced before, a prayerful journey turning yourself to God as completely as you can. Carrying everything on your back relying completely on God to keep me safe and give me the health and endurance to finish this pilgrimage age. But only in the sense that this spiritual journey can obtain all the graces and blessings that we desperately seek to be truly transformed into the person that our heavenly Father desires us to be In Jesus's Name we pray. We completed our 19 miles and arrived in Sansol around 4:30 pm. Found a great Albergue built of heavy timber and stone (\$10), visited the church but no mass available. Then went to grocery and ate supper at Albergue with other pilgrims. Had great conversation with Bob before dinner about our hopes and feeling of our Camino. I am so blessed. Its 9:45 pm better get to bed before lights go out.

Friday September 30 Day 9 (Pg. 21-25)

There were 18 cyclists that came in about 8 pm last night. They had reservations and rode in from Pamplona. They were all tired and hungry but they all got up early this morning and we did too. We were on the trail about 6:45 am heading for Logrono. It was misting rain and 52 degrees and still dark but enough light for us to find our way. It quickly began to light up as we left the city Sansol and walking into the beautiful rugged countryside. We would now recognize fellow pilgrims that we have met and talked to on previous days. Like Dennis from Sydney Australia and his walking partner Phil from New Zealand. They both spoke English and were fun to talk to. Dennis and Phil met walking the Camino years earlier and now walks a different route together every year to Santiago. It's amazing how people who live 1000's

of miles apart can connect on the Camino and be the best of friends. Another interesting pair were two doctors from France, a middle aged man and women who walk a segment of the Camino, about a week long, mostly every year. The sunrise this morning was especially remarkable with the orange brilliance of the sun just breaking above the horizon under a layer of dark rain clouds filtering light over a picturesque landscape. Along the trail sometime there would be rock shrines where pilgrims would pick up a stone and carefully stack it one that was previously placed there by an earlier pilgrim. Some stacks would be 3' or 4' high. I think it is a way for pilgrims to show they are on a common journey and pilgrimage. We are now walking thru miles of rolling hills covered with fields of grape vineyards and olive trees. We tried some of the purple grapes and they were so sweet and flavorful. We also saw from time to time what looked like an ancient stone shelters or small huts along a remote ridge or hillside. We thought they were built maybe for pilgrims of long ago to take shelter in or sleep. We did not stop and eventually got to the large city of Logrono, (population 155,000) about 1:30 pm and finished our 13-mile day. Light rain was just ending as we entered the pilgrim office and inquired at what time mass was tonight. There were many churches in the city but we chose Santiago Real-a church next to a hosta called Santiago – el Real" which was advertised in our guide book as having communal dinner and prayers. When checking in it was noted that mass is at 7:30 pm and dinner would be at 8:15 pm back at the albergue then after dinner we would go back to church for a pilgrim blessing to end the evening. . Richard picked this spot and it seems wonderful. There was no direct charge for the lodging and dinner that evening and breakfast in the morning, they only asked for a donation. It's now 4:40 pm going to take a shower and then we are going to tour the near by Cathedral de Santa Maria before going to mass. What a wonderful day.

Saturday October 1 Day 10 (Pg. 25-26)

Cindy and I 45th wedding anniversary, Cindy is God special gift to me. Last night at the parish albergue was the most blessed experience. The Albergue was connected to the church and was operated by volunteers, some from the US. They volunteer for 2-week periods. They have bunk beds, which we had, and mats for over flow pilgrims. The Chef was also a volunteer and he fixed a fabulous Paella rice dish with mussels and clams, wine and yogurt dessert. But the best thing was the conversation around the table. Even thought, right around Bob and I, pilgrims from South Korea (Moon) and France they spoke English. Also there was a young girl from Chicago and a 19 year girl from Australia. She was going to Santiago but also traveling solo for a year, conversation around the table was amazingly fun, like a class reunion. After supper they took us thru a passage way back onto the church for a pilgrim blessing. He said the Camino should never stop. When you get to Santiago that part of the Camino ends, but the Camino should never stop spiritually. For the rest of our life, spiritually keep putting one foot in front of the other and never stop moving closer to God. No matter how much it hurts or tired you are, keep moving to our Heavenly Father. What a great day. Today in October 1, 1977 when God gave me my greatest earthly gift – Cindy.

Sunday October 2 Day 11 (Pg. 27-31) Najera to Granon

We left about 7:45 am and it was already 52 degrees and was going to be a beautiful "Not a cloud in the sky day". All 3 of us Bob, Richard and I , by the Grace of God are feeling strong with only minor issues. Richard was very blessed by not getting seriously hurt when he did not see a curb and fell flat. I think he rolled in time that the backpack took the brunt of the fall. So we moved out fast on our 18-mile day. We were originally stopping at Santa Domingo (13mi) but we all were still feeling good, sunny and 78 degrees, so we decided to continue another 4 miles to Granon. Richard wanted to end at Granon because there was a "Donativo there. Hostel connected to the local church that has no set fee, you just give a

donation. We stayed at one 2 nights ago and it was so nice. The people food and prayers were wonderful, hard to put in words. As we walked the Camino today we saw and met a lot of pilgrims that were hurting from blisters but they were determined to make it to Santiago. I met a young woman from Mexico who was walking alone her name was "Bona". When asked, she said she was walking the Camino because she wanted to have quiet time to reflect and think about her life. I also met men from San Francesco who were on their 3rd Camino together, all differently routes. They asked me why I was going and I said for spiritual blessing and to truly come to know God's way and desires for me. The 2 men from San Francesco agreed that the spiritual Camino should not ever end. Further down the path I met a pilgrim from England, Paul who was walking the Camino for 3rd time for the fun of it. As far as the country side, field after field of grapes which were all in full ripeness and being harvested was being replaced with 1000's of acres of harvested wheat fields with massive stacks of straw bales in the fields. For the most part we walk the day between mountains in the flatter planes. I think we could see fields for 30 miles on both sides of us, which stopped at mountain ranges. It is remarkable that when we did come to see a town appear we would always see a church steeple rising high in the center of town. One after another the churches are so beautiful and old. It's hard for me to imagine how the could there be enough craftsmen and materials to build such massive stone churches with such detail in these beautiful remote places. We reached Granon about 4:30 pm and checked in the donativo. It was very old stone and timber beautiful building which was physically attached to the Church. There were 4 floors all the way up to the church attic. Each floor was uniquely beautiful in antique wood and stone finish but with all modern bath and shower, kitchen and dining room. We were shown around and where we were to sleep and informed that everyone could help prepare dinner at 6:30 pm (chef would be there) and we would eat at 8 pm. After mass there would be prayers in church, I have been writing this in an exquisitely rustic dining room sitting at a table with an open window (79 degrees) full of flowers in front of me and to my left there are pilgrims playing piano, guitar with vocalist and others preparing what looks like a fabulous dinner. God is truly showing me such beauty, splendor and joy.

Monday October 3 Day 12

(Pg. 31-34)

Another perfect morning, clear skies and 49 degrees F in the am and warming up to 79 degrees F in pm. Everyone was feeling good so we set our goal on a long walk day. At the donativo the night before there were at least 3 pilgrims that could sing and play musical instruments. We had about 45 pilgrims at dinner and the meal started with fresh bread and homemade asparagus/lettuce soup that was delicious. Red wine was served and a pasta dish was then served but there was not enough for about 10 pilgrims (Bob and I included) lucky for us we had 2 bowls of soup plus a fruit desert. At dinner we talk to Jim and his wife who were from Australia. Probably in there 70's and there hope was to walk to Santiago then continue traveling thru Europe till January. After dinner we all were invited to a prayer service. So about 35 of us we shown passage was from the hostel to the choir loft in the old stone church overlooking the altar? There were special (very old) chairs built in the parameter of the loft that we all sat in. Each chair had a small candle lit and the only lights on were directed on the altar. Everyone was asked to say why they were on the Camino. It was really nice to hear so many different people with different versions of the same goal; to become closer to God and His desire for us. This was our 10th day of walking and as we headed toward Belorado (12 miles away) we passed again countless acres of harvested wheat fields and many fields of sunflowers. Walking "The Way" today was easier because the rolling hills were never steep. We see huge wind generators way off in the distance high on a hill that I know we will be climbing tomorrow. Reaching Belorado" about 12:45 pm, we bought some fruit at large market area where many vendors were selling clothing and vegetables in the open-air market next to a small park where we ate

our lunch. It was still early and we felt good so after eating we decided to get to Villa Franca about 6 miles and spend the night there. We were off and the sight of fellow pilgrims still on the path was fewer and fewer. We only stopped once for Bob to get an ice cream cone, which he said he was due. As we walked into V.F we saw Mike (from England) and a friend at a café table outside having a beer and olives, Mike told us where the only option in town with beds available was and we went and checked in, (15 euros). We showered, washed clothes and Bob and Richard went out to eat. I stayed at hostel in comfortable chair and table and ate my supper, which I had in my backpack. I just sat, rested, ate, reflected and called Cindy. Life is so good.

Monday October 4 Day 13 (Pg. 34-36)

Another beautiful morning, leaving Villa Franka, 49 degrees – 75 degrees. Leaving the wheat fields behind for now and going up into the high hills covering in forest; Pines and Oaks. Looked like a lot of the forest had been logged but full of replanted in pine trees, which are now maybe 30 years old. It was so peaceful walking in the quiet forest sometimes in soft pine needles. It was 8 miles in the forest before starting down the mountain and returning to wheat and sunflowers fields. Richard's upper ankle has been swollen and hurting since his fall several days ago, but now his left hip is really starting to hurt making him feel like it could give out and he could fall again. The small towns we passed thru had no grocery store and very little to no reason for us to spend the night. We kept walking to the big city of Burgos, got to town and hostel/hotel (26 euros) about 6 pm. We were tired from our 24 ¾ mile day and very hungry. We showered and Rich decided to take a nap and rest his painful hip while Bob and I went to grocery store to get supper for all three of us to eat together at the hotel. We went to 7 pm mass at the church next to our hotel. Then we all had a great supper in our room together and planned on sleeping in in the morning. Rich talked about he might have to rest his hip a few days and then take a bus to meet back up with us. We are asking the Lord for His special graces and blessing. Good night.

Tuesday October 5 Day 14 (Pg. 36 - 38)

Slept till 8am had a wonderful night's rest. It was different because we are in a hotel/hostel, which meant the three of us in a separate room with 3 beds and bath. We all needed rest from our 25 mile day yesterday. Rich said right away that he would not be able to go on today. His hip was hurting so bad from his fall that he just hobbled to the bathroom. He felt his hip to go out and fall anytime. With much sadness he decided to stay 2 or 3 days in Burgos and rest his hip and we all prayed he could be able to take a bus and rejoin us down the way. We helped Rich find a less expensive place to stay, got him some food and a cane. Then we all hugged and said good-bye and prayed we would join again down the path. I could see a tear in Rich's eye as we said our final good-bye. I couldn't help but think about what the "Personal Reflection" in our guide book said for that very day getting to Burgos—it read: *"I met them in the park, their welcome was ecstatic even though Ramon was in much pain and was making arrangement to go home. The hospital diagnosed a stress fracture. He had simply gone too far too fast. His disappointment and sense of failure was palpable. Above all he didn't want to leave his friends he had made along the way. We all have to leave the Camino at some stage but our friendships don't have to end. He looked reassured as I took my leave. I can still see his tears and his hand waving as I passed out of sight - but not out of mind Ramon; not out of mind..."* All three of us I think realized that God was close to us and speaking. Then Bob and I were off walking thru Burgos but before leaving town we toured the Cathedral de Santa Maria XIII: A true wonder of skill and devotion to our Heavenly Father. Leaving Burgos we went 16.5 miles to Hornillos and

checked in a great hostel called the “Meeting Point” It was a great and fulfilling day. I am so blessed and my friend Rich is in my mind and prayers.

Thursday October 6 Day 15
(Pg. 38 - 41)

Left Hornillos del Camino about 7:50 am with beautiful walking weather (a little cooler) 45 – 74 degrees. We walked thru flat farm fields as far as the eye could see. We were in a lower valley surrounded by very high hills off in the distance and we could see wind generators by the hundreds in rows on the surrounding hilltops. It was amazing not to see anyone working in the thousands of acres of harvested farms fields. The wind was at our backs and kind of pushed me along, which reminded me of my Uncle Dave’s wish for me on The Camino, “That my path be straight and the wind at my back”. Before we knew it we had gone 13 miles and in Castrojeriz, a town of 500 people. We found a small grocery and bought some food for lunch. We both felt good after lunch and it was only 1 pm so we decided to go to the next town, Itero de la Vega about 6.5 miles down the path. Before lunch we visited a church along the way and when we were coming out we could hear many school children laughing and talking. Then we saw 80 or more children (13-14 years old) in blue uniforms having fun in the square next to the church. They began walking the trail with Bob and I with three teachers in escort they walk at least 4 miles on the remote path, which was quite hilly at that point. When we came to a stopping point the kids wanted to talk to us and asking where we were from, many could speak English. We had fun talking to them and we spoke to the teachers, which were very nice. The teacher said the school year was just starting and this is like an all day field trip where they would all walk thru the countryside, some of which was quite rugged and hilly and they all brought their lunch along to enjoy later. The teacher said it helps start the school year with the kids getting to talk, walk and have fun together all day, said it helps them to get to know each other and have fun with there teacher. It was so nice and you realize that children are so much the same all over the world. We finished the day in Itero Vega about 19.8 miles today. Thank you Lord for keeping Bob and I healthy and strong today and showing us some of your glory.

Friday October 7 Day 16
(Pg. 41- 43)

Sunrise was beautiful this morning which promised another glorious day (47 – 75 degrees) as we made our way down the gravel path. We were entering farm country that used more irrigation with canals and water structures that were quite impressive and extensive. There were green fields what looked like alfalfa with some fields mowed and drying raked it windrows waiting for the bailer. We came upon a farmer with produce he grew and he insisted we have some of his tomatoes, they were delicious. All the people we meet, local people or pilgrims, they are all so nice and friendly. It’s amazing how little effort a smile or helpful hand is but has huge impact on people, that is not forgotten. Later that day while passing thru “Fromista” we stopped for a break and ate an apple. We there saw our friend and fellow pilgrim, Mike from Austria. Mike was stopping for the night but we were going on for a few more hours. We’ve known Mike since we started in France and he is fun guy to talk to. He is from Austria and manages a family resort. He went with his mom about six years ago on a shorter version of the Camino. His and my friend Greg (from England), who is now a day behind us was asked why he is doing Camino he said “purely spiritual”. Mike, Greg, Bob and I attend Mass on the Camino whenever it’s available. There are many pilgrims that are trying to become closer to our Lord, I can tell because from talking to them and to see them at every Pilgrim Mass & Blessing. The Camino is like life, it is a holy journey that we all have an opportunity to seek God’s will or not give it much thought. We are all on a journey. God will reveal Himself

to us if we just keep the door open to Him. The Camino I can feel is a Holy trip that I am so grateful to so many people especially to my wife Cindy and absolutely grateful to my Lord and Savior.

Saturday October 8 Day 17 (Pg. 43 - 45)

Leaving Villarmentero Campos, cool and clear morning that warmed up nicely (74 degrees) by noon. All day was a straight and flat on a white gravel path surrounded by farm fields. We walked with a young girl (pilgrim) from near Sydney, Australia who very nice to talk to. We walked together for several miles and discussed each other backgrounds and reasons for going on the Camino. She said she was always interested since she heard about the Camino and loves to meet people from around the world. She loved the beautiful churches and like the pilgrim blessings after some of the masses. I guess she saw Bob and I praying before our pilgrim dinner the night before because she said she liked and noticed how many Americans are not afraid to show and talk about their faith. She said in Australia people are very hesitant to show or discuss their faith. We walked extra long (23 plus miles), to get closer to a city we thought would have Sunday mass, (Sahagun). We finally stopped at a town and got a room about 9 miles from our mass town. We planned on getting an early start in morning to get to Sahagun by 10 am to find a church with mass. Bob and I had a wonderful pilgrim dinner tonight; Bob had garlic soup, steak, fries, and ice cream. I had navy beans with sausage, rabbit in a wonderful sauce, salad and pears for dessert. Also there was a stick of fresh bread and a jug of wine, included in the dinner for euro 12 each. Dinner and conversation was so nice. I wish Cindy could have been there, she would of loved it the waitress, room décor, food and conversation.

Sunday October 9 Day 18 (Pg. 45 - 46)

We left early in the dark, guided by Bobs phone light and we got to 11 am mass. Later that day we went over an ancient arched stone bridge that has been rebuilt in the 1600's but the original arches were still in place and to think Romans were setting those huge stones some 1500 plus years ago. There are so many things to write about and to tell but you can't describe everything in a small journal. However one young lady from Poland 23 years old we had conversation with her said she tried to pray while walking but feels she can never properly finish and wonders if she is praying at all. I said if she is talking in any way to God he is listening and loves you dearly for doing so. I said that this is a holy journey and if you completely open yourself to the Lord, he will answer your prayers. Just ask and you will receive. She had tears in her eyes and said she loved that thought. What a wonderful day!

Monday October 10 Day 19 (Pg. 46 - 49)

Leaving El Burgo, God is so good to us. Another beautiful day (52-70 degrees) a little changes in countryside. Not just straight and flat but gentle hills with ripe cornfields and occasional timber stands of birch and pine trees. Our hostel we stayed in last night was very interesting of how it was built. The roof structure was all visible and framed in tree log roughly hewed into beams and rafters. Not one stick of conventional lumber but all logs and limbs covered in sawmill lumber, then clay tile and mortar roof. Also, many buildings we saw have exterior walls of mud and straw bricks and very neatly built. Smooth stones and mortar make up a lot of exterior walls and patios, really beautiful. Along the way we struck up a conversation with a lone fellow pilgrim as we walked. As we talked we found out our fellow pilgrim walker was a Catholic priest on his sabbatical away from his parish. I really enjoyed talked to Father Kevin who said he was from Wisconsin. We discussed why so many people have not returned to church since COVID. I said I found it hard to understand the lack of desire to receive the Eucharist. Father said

people come to mass for many reasons other than the Holy Eucharist, some for the music, fellowship and for all kind of reasons. But he said a lot of people have not come back to church and just stop going because some can watch on TV and some have no interest. They think they have everything they need. Father thought that a large majority of people won't be back to church until the vast wealth and prosperity of our lifestyle and the way many live change. Many think there is no need for GOD, we can do it all on our own. Close to the end of our 20 plus mile day we stopped at a bench to take a drink from our water bottles and to look at our guidebook to see where we might stay for the night. We were about 4.5 miles from "LEON". We got up went down a side street that the guidebook recommended to stay but when we got there it was closed for the season. So we got back on the trail and headed for our next option. Just then a pilgrim on a bicycle went around us and said "does this look familiar to anyone" while he was pointing to my water bottle strapped to the back of his bike. I said yes and he stopped and said he was hoping he would pass the owner of the water bottle. I guess I left it on the bench a mile or so back. This was the water bottle Tyler and I got in Alaska 13 years ago when we were hiking to a glacier. I was so happy and so was the biker. God is so good.

Tuesday October 11 Day 20 (Pg. 49 - 51)

Left hotel well rested headed to LEON about 4.5 miles 46-73 degrees with a few clouds, we again blessed with nice weather. When Leon came into view we could see a large city with the large spires of the Cathedral XIII prominently showing its place in the bustling city filled with tourists and merchants. The narrow stone and tile streets were dotted with cafes with outside seating and some with awnings. We heard from Rich and he was waiting for us at the Cathedral. As we made our way thru town we came to the ancient Roman built wall that used to wall the city. Built out of large rocks the wall was tall and thick and to think it used to help protect the strong hold for the large Roman Garrison known as the VII LEGION. When we arrived at the massive Cathedral it was surrounded by a large Plaza bordered with cafés, shops and filled with tourist and pilgrims. We met our pilgrim friend Rich who was still using his cane. We all greeted each other and shared what our last few days were like. Sadly Rich said that he has decided that he would not be able to continue the Camino but would have to finish it some year in the future. We all went to 11 am mass then took a tour of the rest of the Cathedral. It was once again hard to believe how anything so huge and every square inch has so much amazing crafted stained glass, artwork, carvings and sculptures and that construction all started in the 12th century. As we were leaving the city we had a late lunch and made our way out of Leon several miles but still in the suburbs where we stayed for the night. While in Leon we saw and talked to several of our fellow pilgrims that we started with, that was nice. Bob and I both agree that the big city was nice but we will be glad to be back on the rural, quiet, "WAY" of the pilgrimage. We also look forward to being with our fellow pilgrims at the hostels, evening dinner and pilgrim mass. Also the solitude of the path has a grace we have come to look forward to. What a blessed day.

Wednesday October 12 Day 21 (Pg. 51 - 53)

Another gorgeous day 45-79 degrees. We walked next to many cornfields and some were being harvested and much was irrigated. Lots of John Deere farm equipment, New Holland and some Case International, medium size equipment – 6 row corn pickers. We again were passing through towns every 5-7 miles, almost all the towns have a Catholic church, no other denomination encountered at this point, but many closed or not open for us to visit. Some of our journey was thru very hilly, rugged and remote country. This journey I am on is so unique it reminds me what our retreat director at the White House. "To get to know our heavenly father you need quite time alone with him." I am finding out its true, those hours and hours of walking thru some difficult but so beautiful country, looking back on my life and talking to my

Heavenly Father and Him talking to me. Is a gift that is hard to describe. I am so grateful to all my family, friends and Bob that I could experience the Camino and it's gifts. But mostly I am so grateful to our Heavenly Father. We walked strong and hard (only sustained by God) today, walking 26.8 miles stopping in ANTORGA, a beautiful city of 12K. Bob and I found a nearby church and went to 7 pm mass which made the day. Then we had a most wonderful dinner at an outside café.

Thursday October 13 Day 22

(Pg. 53 - 54)

Clear day 45 – 78 degrees, walking today, we ascended about 400 meters and ended in a small town called FONCEBADON, a 16.5-mile walk. Along the way we met a pilgrim who's name was Christi and she was from St Louis, MO. We were both surprised that two people from the same town could meet on this pilgrim journey. Also I was amazed she grew up in Kirkwood and went to St Joe's Church, where Tyler lives then later on in life moved near to and went to Incarnate Word Parish, (Tara's parish). She now lives in Marthasville. She said she went on the Camino for an offering, for the salvation of her children. What a loving act, Godly. At the end of the day we checked into a Donativo which had a communal meal and prayers. These are such special places its hard to describe. Our meal was great, outstanding thick potato, rice, onion soup, with a hearty casserole dish served with wine. There were 12 of us and after dinner we were asked to say who we were and from where and why we were on the Camino. Its one of those times that you have to be there to understand but hearing everyone's testimony it is clear that God is working in all of our lives on this journey, another wonderful day.

Friday October 14 Day 23

(Pg. 54 - 56)

Clear sunny day 42-74 degrees. Lights were on at 6:30 am this morning at the Donativo and there was fruit, fresh bread and jelly provided for us for breakfast about 7:30 am in the dark. but enough light to see. We had about 1.25 miles to go up the mountain to get to a place called CRUZ DE FERRO, which is a place on the mountain 1504 meters above sea level. It is here a simple iron cross stands atop a very tall weathered wood pole surrounded by a huge mound of stones and some other sites taken that many pilgrims have carried from the home to leave next to pole with the cross above. Leaving the stone or memento at the foot of the cross is a way pilgrims leave an intention "life burden" or prayer to the Lord. With "Patti Webb's assistance, her and I wrote a prayer to the Lord on the back of a copy of her high school picture. Our prayers was to offer all of Patti's sufferings, disappointments and trials of being confined to a wheel chair since the school picture was taken 52 years ago for the atonement of all our sins against our Heavenly Father. Our Father, please hear our prayer. After leaving the cross we started a steep decline down the mountain descending 900 meters in 12 miles on a very tough trail. We were very glad to end the day safely. We met a man named Jose in a town called MOLINASECA. Jose said he was from Brazil and walked the Camino 7 years ago and when he passed thru Molinaseca he loved the town so much after he finished his Camino he bought a building that was for sale and opened an hotel/hostel. He moved his whole family including his Mom and Dad from Brazil and they all feel so blessed. We told him we were going to the next town for the night and were looking for a church to go to mass and Jose showed us on book/map where and what time mass was that evening at our destination. I thanked him for all his help and said I would pray for him at mass. He smiled warmly and said he so much liked that. It takes little effort to help each other and make a difference in this world.

Saturday October 15 Day 24

(Pg. 56 - 59)

YOU TUBE: Bendicion para el camino de la vida

We decided to do just a 16-mile walk today and finish in Villa Franc which has 8 churches and we thought we would be sure to find Sunday vigil mass that evening. We had a wonderful day walking and got to our town about 2:30 pm an early day for us. It was great finding a hostel early 10 euro with a communal meal 7 euro starting after mass that started at 7:30 pm. After checking in and dropping off our backpacks we explored the town, which was amazingly built so long ago with so much stone and mortar. Also how amazing so small of town population 5,000, could have 8 Catholic Churches, some were converted to hotel and such but most not. While exploring town and making sure we could find the church later, we ran into Christi and her friend, both from St Louis who joined us going to church at 7:30 pm. Bob had a delicious pizza and beer before mass and a young pilgrim from New Zealand joined him and discussed the Camino and such while they ate their supper. When Bob finished his dinner we went to the grocery and bought some fruit for tomorrow and we ran into Christi and her friend from Florida. We all shared an ice cream together then headed to 7:30 pm mass. The church was full for the Sunday vigil mass and we received a pilgrim blessing. After mass Bob and I went back to our hostel and I joined the pilgrim supper that had just started our dinner was outstanding-soup, salad and a sausage casserole of some sort. But more than that conversation around the table was again so unique and rich. At breakfast the next morning I sat and talked to a fellow pilgrim from England who was a Catholic priest, what a blessing. Before leaving the table I reversed my phone camera and took a picture of my new pilgrim friends and myself. Later, looking at the picture I took of the three of us and then I noticed in the background on the wall right over our shoulder in the picture was a picture of Jesus's face right with us. This is such a holy trip. In all aspects of it Jesus is always showing his face to me. What a great day.

Sunday October 16 Day 25 (Pg. 59)

Dry day 52 – 70 degrees and mostly a flat level walk until we got to the last 5 miles of the 18.5 miles day. That last 5 miles was going up 700 meters to the top of the mountain to the town of O'Cebreiro which is where we stayed the night. It was there in the year 1300 that a Miracle of the Host occurred in the church Santa Maria that the host changed into flesh and the wine changed into blood. Bob and I with about 50 other pilgrims attended the pilgrim's mass at 7 pm in that Holy Church. What a great day.

Monday October 17 Day 26 (Pg. 59 - 61)

Left the holy town of O'Cebreiro early while still dark. It rained last night while we were sleeping but has stopped for our days walk down the mountain. It was a beautiful days walk winding our way downward and across mountain rims with a remarkable view of valleys and mountains in the background. Did not see any row crops in this mountainous stretch of 14 miles but many pastures with cattle quilt the mountainside boarded by forest. We concluded the short 14 mile day in Triocastela which our guidebook said had daily mass at its church named Santiago. We were sad to learn later that Father took the day off on Mondays to rest, so no mass today. Bob and I rested, showered, and went to grocery, read the daily mass reading and made our supper in the hostel kitchen/dining room. While eating we talked about the two young teachers from England that unfortunately quit their teaching jobs because they were dissatisfied with the rules required to teach. I was sad to hear they quit. In my humble opinion one should stick with paths in life realizing that everything has faults and is imperfect but knowing that each of us has the potential to make a difference and the world a better place. We also talked about how we are closing in on Santiago and our possible plans for going to Finisterre and Maxia. Also we were happy to hear from Rich still in Leon but has seen a PT and feeling better. He is going to start walking again tomorrow and has hopes to join Bob and I again on this Holy Trip. What a great day.

Tuesday October 18 Day 27**(Pg. 61 - 62)**

Nice warm 52 degrees clear sky morning. Didn't walk far, and we met up with our pilgrim friend Jim from Juno, Alaska. He was doing well and feeling good. Jim amazed me that he, at 79 years old, was walking so strong and going the whole 500 miles for the 2nd time. He said he was Catholic and loved the spiritual richness of the Camino. Later that morning we came upon a small one room stone studio where a man who is an artist had beautiful paintings of the Camino for sale. Many pilgrims stopped and bought his paintings. Also he stamped our credentials and then made a small abstract painting next to the stamp that said "Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life". I love the painting he did in my book. His small studio was so nice with stonewalls a foot thick, an open Bible on a stand and a beautiful painted crucifix. We ended today walking 21.5 miles. We met again so many nice people, joyful, appreciative people. It's so evident that this Holy trip brings out the Godliness in people and pilgrims. I pray that God will keep me in that union all the days of my life. What a great day.

Wednesday October 19 Day 28**(Pg. 63)**

Very wet morning with steady rain from 8 am till 1:30 pm. Then the sun came out and our pants were completely dry by 3 pm. Walked 23 miles today stopping in PORTOMARIN. Went to 7 pm mass, which was so beautiful with video and music. Our priest played the guitar and singing beautiful songs during the mass what a great day. So many special people and experiences. Another great day!

Thursday October 20 Day 29**(Pg. 63)**

Left hostel well rested, 52 degrees cloudy noticed more new pilgrims now, but not crowded, most younger 22-30 year olds but still a lot of 65 and up year olds pilgrims, more pilgrims since passing SARRIA which is the minimum (100 km) distance to walk in order to get a Compostela at Santiago. Started raining at 11 am and still raining when we stopped for the day at ARZUA, 19.5 miles, went to 6:30 pm mass and there were 2 pilgrims priests that were co-celebrating with the parish celebrating the mass. There also was a Religious Sister playing a guitar and singing during the mass. The two pilgrims priests were with a parish group from Italy and all walking the Camino. Also we were staying in the same hostel with the whole parish group and priest and had dinner with them. What a great day!

Friday October 21 Day 30**(Pg. 64)**

55 degrees, cloudy skies in the morning with rain in the forecast. Leaving ARZUA this morning we noticed many transport services vans being loaded with suitcases and backpacks being moved to the next stop for many pilgrims. A minimum of 100 km by walking and 200 km by bike or horseback all accompanied with 2 stamps day on your credentials are required the pilgrims office to be awarded a Compostable in Santiago. It is noticeable amount of new pilgrims since getting within 100 km of Santiago. What a great day.

Saturday October 22 Day 31**(Pg. 65 - 67)**

Bob and I were both excited as we started walking this morning, knowing we would be in Santiago by 10 am. When we got to the Cathedral Plaza, which is in the front of the church there were hundreds of pilgrims in the square. After celebrating that we actually made it, we went to the pilgrim's office a few blocks away to get our Compostela. I was in line with a 74 year old pilgrim from Oregon who just finished her pilgrimage from Porto, Portugal. She was so excited and nice. I received my Compostela, verification that I walked the Camino based on my stamps I got along the way, from a fun lady from Chicago who was a volunteer and veteran pilgrim. Also she told me that there would be a 5 pm high mass tonight that would have full ceremony and incense swing using the Botafumeiro. We couldn't go to the pilgrim mass at noon as planned because we could not take our backpack in church. So we had to find a place to stay, so upon advice from a kind soul we went to the tourist office two blocks away and they found us a place to stay only five minutes from the Cathedral. We got our room and was in church an hour early for 5 pm mass. It was a special hour thanking Our Lord for all His blessings and especially allowing Bob and I and to endure and for our Lord being with us on this holy journey. When mass started it was amazing to see two bishops and about 10 priest presiding the mass. It was so beautiful of a mass with the huge organ making music and later at the end of mass the Botafumeiro (incense vessel) was swung back and forth across the width of the church in a 213 foot arc. An unforgettable experience! What a great day. We set out that morning about 8 am with only 8-9 miles to Santiago. What a thrill it was when we arrived at the Cathedral in Santiago. Bob and I along with hundreds of fellow pilgrims celebrated in the Plaza in front of the Cathedral. That was an amazing sight to see so many joyous pilgrims, some we have been with along the way. We then went to the Pilgrims office to get our Compostela. That was well organized and went rather fast 50 mins considering there were over 1600 issued that day. Sorry some this is a repeat you can tell it's been an exciting day.

Sunday October 23 Day 32 **(Pg. 67 - 68)**

A day of rest, church and mass at 9:40 am then rest, lunch sight seeing and shopping "really". We leave for Finistererre in the morning. What a great day, as we met and talked to so many helpful and friendly people today.

Monday October 24 Day 33 **(Pg. 68 - 70)**

Leave Santiago for Finistererre. It was raining lightly when we left the hotel this morning. I asked Bob the night before if he minded if I could go to a post office to mail post cards and I still had a few gifts to buy before we left Santiago. Bob graciously said no problem. So Bob was going to have a hot tea and Danish at a café while I went to post office. After leaving post office I texted Richard while I was walking back to meet Bob, I texted Richard about mass times that he requested and our plan leaving Santiago and that we would touch base tonight. When I got to the Café Bob was finished eating and ready. I said I still had a gift to buy and it was at the first store we looked when we got near the Cathedral last Saturday. Bob said he remembered where it was, Bob has a great memory and so we headed there. It was raining again now and as we went around the corner of a building I looked up and I saw Richard walking towards us with his head down in the rain. I couldn't believe it and yelled Richard! He looked up and then burst into the biggest smile and laughed. We all three hugged each other and could not believe we could have met each other again like this. We stepped uncover and discussed our plans and that Richard was going to spend two days in Santiago before walking again. We had a great visit and all three of us realized it was a total gift from God that we could have possibly met each other in this town with 1000's streets and 1000's of

people, (we know it all you O God). We said our so longs and Rich headed for his hostel and we headed to the gift shop where I found what I wanted then we left for Finnesteer. It rained for the rest of the day but we were blessed with 60 degrees. We spent a wonderful night at a municipal hostel with great hot showers and kitchen where we fixed ourselves a wonderful hot supper. We even ate with and celebrated the 23rd birthday of pilgrim young lady from Berlin. Also God answered my prayers and the swelling of my foot disappeared. What a great day.

Tuesday October 25 Day 34

(Pg. 70 - 72)

We left this morning with dry 60-degree conditions but steady rain started about noon and didn't quite let up for the rest of the 20-mile day. Beautiful countryside with gentle rolling hills covered with wheat fields (6" high), cattle farms, cornfields and forests. All the newly planted wheat fields and pastures are lush green. It was good to get to hostel, hot shower and dry clothes. I had food for supper in my backpack and ate supper in the hostel kitchen and dining room with two young men from France 22 years old who went on Camino with their parents when they were 10 years old and wanted to do it again. Met another young lady 24 year old who left on Camino from her home in Germany starting walking four months ago, hard to believe. Everyone we talk to, say the Camino is like nothing else in their life and is very special. Tomorrow, God willing, after 19.5 miles we will be in Finisterre and I plan on going to the beach and find a SHELL (symbol of Camino) to bring home to always remind me what Father Kevin the pilgrim said. The Camino doesn't end it just starts" What a great day and exciting day, tomorrow will be.

Wednesday October 26 Day 35

(Pg. 72 - 76)

We left for our day walk this morning; it is 8 am in a heavy rain. Our pants legs and shoes were soaked within minutes, but we and many other pilgrims pushed on just as in life, keep pushing on. I was so thankful that it was 64 degrees. The heavy rain persisted all morning but was all-bearable do to the hooded rain jacket and water proof wide brimmed hat Cindy got me for this trip. We stopped at a café for a break and a bite to eat about 11:30 am, still raining. But as we caught a glimpse of the Atlantic coastline through the thick forest trees the rain stopped, and some sun started to filter through the clouds. As we continued near Finisterre's coastline, white foam and beaches became clear and were beautiful. Soon I was walking the beach collecting Camino sea shells to bring home as a reminder of this pilgrimage. It was getting late so we found a hostel for 8 euros and dropped our backpacks. Since the lighthouse (at the END of the WORLD) was 2.25 miles up the mountain and sunset was in 90 minutes, I promptly set out up the mountain, right as the skies re-opened up and rain poured down. I met many pilgrims coming back down from the lighthouse, they cheered me on. As I made my way through the torrents of rain I could see down over the edge of the cliff, the white foam of the huge waves crashing on the jagged rocks of the coast and the vastness of the Atlantic Ocean beyond. I finally arrived at the lighthouse, which was on top of a huge long finger of solid rock that protruded far out in to the vast sea. It was sunset now and the sea storm was raging with wind, rain and lightning flashing across the dark rolling clouds and fog. I made my way to the base of the lighthouse where I was somewhat sheltered from the raging storm. I was in total awe of the display of God's unlimited power, beauty and vastness. I prayed to the Lord thanking him for revealing himself so vividly throughout this entire pilgrimage. I reflected, just as in life, in good times and what seem like bad times, always keep looking and relying on God, and he will sustain you. I walked back in the darkness of the rain and storm but could still see the foam of the shoreline and waves, which the flashes of lightning exposed. I finally came in view of the city lights poking through the darkness and when I was again walking in the narrow streets of town. I must of took a wrong turn and couldn't find my way. I saw a lady buried under an umbrella and asked her for help showing her my water-soaked hostel receipt with it's name on it but she didn't speak English and she motioned me to follow her. So I did, and followed her

in the rain. We went thru some short alleys and soon was on a street which had a well lit tavern that I remembered passing and asking directions earlier when leaving for the lighthouse. My angel lady with the umbrella knew they could help me and she turned and vanished in the darkness and rain as I shouted, thank you! I was only one block away from my hostel and soon I was there, took a hot shower, put on dry clothes and ate supper with Bob in the Kitchen/a dining room. Again God revealed to me how sometimes a person has to go out of his way a little but the impact on the person you help, many times is profound. I slept well that night and was so grateful for all my experiences today.

Thursday October 27 Day 36
(Pg. 77 - 78)

We left on our 32nd day walking which we started in France on Sept 24, 2022 and this was going to be our last day of walking, finishing in Muxia. We left on our last 18-mile leg to Muxia in dry 63-degree conditions which we were so grateful for. We skirted the edge of Spain, now and then catching a view of the coast thru an opening in the forest and mountains side. Wind generators were strung out along the tops of almost every hilltop and you could hear the huge blades slicing through the air sounding like a distant jet engine. We were up so high in the clouds that many wind generators were only partially visible and could only hear thru the fog clouds. When arriving at Muxia, (just like life), God rewards thru perseverance and focus on Him. We were rewarded with a view of crashing coastline seas around the lighthouse and a shoreline still fueled by the severe winds that still prevailed. We were blessed with the opportunity to go to 7 pm mass at a big stone church only 100 yards from the foaming shoreline. What a great Day.

Friday October 28 Day 37
(Pg. 78 - 79)

Our long walking days of our pilgrimage are over and do to the grace of God we stayed healthy and walked strong, we have six days before our flight home. Last week we decided to use this time to visit Fatima Portugal, which we feel so blessed to do so. We got up about 4:30 am to be at the bus station for our 6:15 am departure to Fatima, which will take 8 hours. Due to Bob's expertise, we obtained our bus tickets and schedule via phone and all went so perfect. We got to Fatima about 4 pm and only had to walk four blocks to our hotel and again because of Bob's planning our hotel is only 1-½ blocks from the Fatima apparition site. After checking in we went to 7:30 pm mass at Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, one of the two main churches at Fatima site. In this church are the final resting place tombs of the three children- Jacinta and Francisco, youngest saint 9 & 10 years old, who did not die as martyrs and Lucia who has not yet been canonized, died a religious sister in 2005 at age 97.

Saturday October 29 Day 38
(Pg. 80 - 83)

Started with 7:30 am mass at the "Lady of the Rosary" which is 100 yards from the "Chapel of Apparitions" (actual site of Mary). Then Bob and I decided to go each on our own to explore, pray and meditate in this Holy and huge religious site. After attending rosary at the Apparition Chapel I visited the second major church, "Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity" completed in 2005. This church is one of the largest Catholic Churches in the world and has a 9000 seating capacity. A truly remarkably built church, with no support columns in the center. Also, I visited the underground structure below the church. This vast area had beautiful religious art, a large Eucharistic Adoration chapel the size of a small church, a large confessional room with chambers for up to 16 priests. On the message board, it noted what language each priest could speak, many knew more than one language but one priest could speak 5, (amazing). After leaving the Basilica I went to the information building and got directions and

information to where the Fatima Children lived and where their homes were. It was only about a 3 miles walk and it was a beautiful 60-degree day. What a great job this community did preserving the area around the children's homes and the Apparition's site. I am guessing it is over a 100 acres area that is preserved in an undeveloped county side that is much like the way it was when the children saw Mary. The only apparent change is the beautiful stone walkways and stations of the cross built in the preserved area. At the houses where the children lived there were Religious Sisters at the museum like homes to direct and answered questions from the many visitors. When viewing the small bedrooms and kitchen with a fire place for cooking and heating it was apparent that the Fatima children and their families were just common everyday people that were blessed in such an uncommon and unique way. Later that evening I attended a service at the Apparition Chapel, held every night at 9 pm, called "The Procession of Candles". It is the praying of the rosary and everyone has a lighted candle and at the end, everyone walks in procession behind an Honor Guard carrying a lighted cross and a statue of the crowned Virgin Mary. It was a moving sight to see, 1000's of people with lit candles in prayerful procession. What a blessed and wonderful experience visiting Fatima was, that I will never forget and was so fortunate to witness at the end of the walking part of the Camino. What Great Days!

**Sunday, Monday and Tuesday October 30 – November 2 Day 39, 40, 41
(Pg. 83)**

Our visit to Porto was a switch from Pilgrimage to tourist but was a most wonderful experience. We walked and visited as much of the Central Old City, which is so beautiful the way it was built on such hilly and steep terrain with a beautiful river dividing the old town and flowing to the Atlantic Ocean only a few miles away. We went to museums, town plazas, beautiful churches, attended mass and watched 1000's of tourists enjoying the sights and beautiful weather. I never saw so many people having fun and enjoying so many outdoor cafés and shops in one place. Truly, a great tourist town with incredible beauty.

**Wednesday November 2 Day 42
(Pg. 83 - 84)**

We left Porto heading to Madrid, (where we will board our flight home on Saturday, Nov 5), on an 8:30 pm bus from Porto and arriving in Madrid around 6:45 am.

**Thursday and Friday November 3-4 Day 43-44
(Pg. 84 - 89)**

We travelled all night and I watched a Disney movie – "The Lone Ranger" (which was great), and only got only about 1 hour of sleep. We were glad to see dry warm 64 degree weather when we arrived in Madrid. After getting off the bus and retrieving our backpacks we checked our phone for orientation to our Madrid Hotel, which was about 2 ½ miles away. We followed our phone direction and began to walk. Upon arriving at the Hotel around 7 am we found the door locked and nobody answered the doorbell. So we decided to have some breakfast at a Bread-Co just one block away. After a refreshing breakfast we returned to our hotel/hostel and the door was open and we were allowed to drop our backpacks off there and to come back around noon when our room would be ready for us. They were very nice and we were grateful. Later after checking in we found a beautiful church nearby that was about to have mass so we stayed for mass which was a perfect way to begin our two day visit of Madrid-capital and largest city in Spain, 6 million people. Over the next two days we walked everywhere we went and tried to visit the most interesting places in the central old part of Madrid. I would say the most interesting sites we saw were it Botanical Gardens of Madrid and a Madrid Central Park. We enjoyed many other sites in this large

city which was full of tourists having fun and spending money. There also was a large building we visited that was full of vendors with every kind of delicious food you could imagine. Bob loved the small desserts that had some sort of custard in the center. All in all we had a nice visit and experience in Madrid. We visited many churches and went to mass everyday. Bob especially liked the squid (calamari sandwiches) and other Spain foods. On our last evening in Madrid when Bob and I got back to our hotel room we had a great talk and reflected on the incredible pilgrimage and Camino that we completed. We discussed how so many times God showed us he was intimately with us every step of the way. In the incredible beauty of the sunrise in the mornings and the beauty of the layered mountains ranges that seemed unending at times. To meeting Richard, his miraculous healing after his fall, meeting him again in Santiago, how we found a so wonderful Hotel room to stay in Santiago only five minutes from the Cathedral when most accommodations were over 3 miles away. Also, by us meeting, and being inspired by so many pilgrims along the entire Camino. By the recognition that every time (it seemed) we would speak to some stranger or pilgrim we would come away gifted in some way. It's hard to describe but there were blessings and happiness that our Heavenly Father was pouring on Bob and I that we could feel in an extraordinary way. There is no doubt that God wanted us to be here on this Camino, which is so much like life in general. Life and Camino, with its pains, hardships and sufferings but ultimately, coming to the end of our steep, seemingly endless up hill or rain soaked climb arriving at a level unobstructed mountains tops where the warm sun breaks through the clouds, drying our clothes, warming our bodies and highlighting the incredible beauty of His creation that our Lord is putting in front of each of us. Bob and I recognized also the remarkable gift we were given of the fact that Bob and I, nearly strangers at the start for this journey, could so enjoy and appreciate each other in this Holy trek. We both recognize the blessings we received from all the prayers from family, friends and fellow parishioners said for our sake. Bob and I walked strong and prayerfully thru this Holy Camino knowing God wanted us to be there and poured His Graces upon us. We humbly pray and are committed to make sure the Camino never ends in our Lives and continues everyday of the rest of our lives to show us and guide us to "The Way, His Way". As I write this last entry while sitting on board our return home flight somewhere over the Atlantic. I profoundly thank you Heavenly Father, and look so forward to being back with my wife Cindy and family to continue my Camino with only you as my guide. Sincerely Charlie P Schaeffer

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There is one final observation in need to make regarding my wonderful Camino. After getting off the airplane from Madrid to Dallas Fort Worth Airport, Bob and I had to go through customs, because we were entering the USA from another country. When we were making our way in the direction of the arrow marked "Entering USA/International Customs", I noticed another gentleman getting off our plane who was wearing a backpack and walking with a slight limp and using a trekking pole. I walked up next to him and asked if was on the Camino and he said yes. As we were walking toward customs we discussed our Camino experience. It turned out that Bob, because of his frequent fliers miles has a priority customs clearance card. It was decided he would go thru the priority clearance much faster and I would find the line to customs and get in line with the rest of the people and I would meet up later with Bob downstairs after we cleared customs but it would be a much longer process for me. After parting with Bob I quickly caught up with the pilgrim with the limp who's name is Juan from New Mexico and we continued our Camino discussion. Juan said he so enjoyed the trip because he and his daughter walked their trip together but she lived in another state so he was traveling alone at this point. He told me even though he walked a somewhat shorter Camino, 5 days, he so much valued his time with his daughter and his time with God and thinking about his life. He made it to Santiago and went to mass at the cathedral, which made him very happy. We finally made it to the customs, area that was full of hundreds of people from different planes that unloaded at the same time. The line of people waiting to go thru customs filled up entirely the zigzag line and then the two-person wide line of travelers continued to backup, at best

another 50 yards. As Juan and I with our backpacks on and walking sticks clicking continued walking into the next area of the airport still looking for the end of the line, still not in sight. All of a sudden out of nowhere a man in an "American Airlines Uniform" motioned to Juan and I to follow him. So we did and turned around following him back toward the front of the line. Soon we were back into view of the customs checkpoint area and we continued following the American Airline representative who was still waving Juan and I to follow. I asked Juan where did this person come from and why is he taking us to the front of the line, and Juan said he just saw that I was having some difficulty walking (limping), and I don't know why. I also asked and "why me also", and Juan said "because we're together", two guys with backpacks. We ended up following him all the way to the customs station itself, passing everything and everybody else and we were thru customs in five minutes. Juan and I smiled at each other, said goodbye and parted ways with me heading downstairs to meet up with Bob again. Going down the escalator I saw Bob talking on his cell phone and when he looked up and saw me waving he stared in disbelief. When I got to Bob he asked me how in the world could I ever have gotten thru that huge line at customs, that fast, knowing it would be impossible. Bob said he has been traveling all his life and cannot believe what he just saw. I told him what happened and I didn't have any other explanation. Bob just shook his head in disbelief smiling. Later that night reflecting on this somewhat unbelievable, somewhat funny happening, I came away with only one real reason why and how it ever happened. I believe with my whole heart it was not that God would put you in the front of any line or anything else by walking the Camino Pilgrimage. However, I do profoundly believe that God in this very unusual way was demonstrating to Juan and I that the Camino never ends for all who seek Him and His WAY. A most fitting thought and start for the rest of my Camino and Life.

Charlie Schaeffer, a pilgrim on "The Way".