

# You Can Never Step into the Same River Twice

## Returning to the Camino de Santiago

“All Roads Lead Home”. It’s what I called the blog I wrote about my walk across Spain on the Camino de Santiago. The first post began “...for now, I’m standing at the edge of uncertainty, staring at the abyss and a 482 mile walk across Spain on the Camino de Santiago. What brought me here? I guess it’s the same things that brought me to my knees back home in Southern California: the dissolution of a 23 year marriage that taught me how to hate. The teetering of my first real relationship after being separated that had taught me how to love again, and a gnawing feeling that after more than half a century on this earth i was still lost”.

Essentially, it’s the story of one man’s journey to take back his life after an abusive 21 year marriage, estrangement from his daughter, and the breakup of his recent relationship with the woman who saved his life, by walking 475 miles across Spain on the Camino de Santiago.

In it, I intertwine two significant journeys I’ve undertaken over the last decade of my life- the last 10 years of my marriage and estrangement from my daughter that ended in divorce, and the year before my walk when I began to take back my life and understand things with more clarity- therapy and my relationship with a beautiful Swedish divorcee with four kids and three dogs contributed significantly to this. I weave these two threads with a third: the physical journey that was my pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago.

In the first post, I also wrote: “I was hoping that a million steps down a path through Spain in the middle of summer to find some Saint buried in a church in Santiago de Compostella would help me lose sight of the things I needed to rid myself of. I would leave those things behind with each boot print I made in the dirt. And hopefully, I would see the path that lies in front of me more clearly, and figure out how to walk it with the time I have left before I shuffle off this mortal coil. So when I hit rock bottom, walking the Camino barged into my psyche like a bull running through the streets of Pamplona looking to gore a drunken tourist. And it wouldn’t let go. I’d never even been to Europe, but with everything I had known and loved tumbling down around me, I didn’t have to think twice.”

During the journey I met many interesting characters- Cormac the Irish teacher and not so skilled teller of donkey jokes; Kento the Zen Coyote Patron Saint of the Camino; Asia, the beautiful, mysterious Polish woman who keeps crossing paths with me along the way. I mixed my experiences with reflections on my failed marriage and recent break up, and try to make sense of the beautiful, fractured world we live in.

The story might be about the blisters, the intense heat, the swollen ankle, and the physical frailties of a middle aged man trying to do something a little extraordinary. Or maybe it’s about something more, for the real hero’s journey is travelled inside, from the brain, to the heart, to the soul. And those are the places I finds fascinating to explore, and describe, hopefully with humor, wit, and pathos.

I guess the blog struck a chord for some, and I thank my loyal readers. But, It’s been 6 or 7 months since that journey. I’m planning on going back to Spain in the Summer to “complete” my (internal) journey, tie up a few loose ends, finish up my book. I hope you will travel with me in these next few months. Thanks.

## CH 1

I woke up today in darkness. And it wasn't because it was 530. I'm not talking the darkness outside, but to the darkness inside. It's a blackness I haven't seen in awhile. I had chased it away. But there it was, reminding me of it's prickly nature. It was the blackness I used to see every morning. The blackness that caused my legs to shake while I lay there in bed contemplating the day ahead of me.

I now see it for what it is: an emotional reaction to the negative picture of my life I'd created in my mind, for various reasons, mostly due to my lack of self-worth, the lessons of the past whispering in my ear. In retrospect, It's probably one of the reasons I want to Spain. It couldn't follow me there. Well, it only showed up once or twice anyway. It had no reason to be there. I was a stranger in a strange land with no past, and the only future was imbued in my boots, and the next step I was to take. Literally.

Which leads me to the purpose of this blog. My goal with this is to sort of continue the blog I wrote while walking in Spain (which intertwined stories of my walk in Spain with stories and observations of my life) in the hopes that I can at least pass on a few bits of wisdom and maybe help others with some of the mistakes I've made, and the lessons I've learned. I will also include some excerpts from the blog "All Roads Lead Home"

Back to the darkness: If you wake up and can't shake off the darkness, here's where you need to start: go to bed thinking happy thoughts. Think about how lucky you are just to be alive, how beautiful the afternoon light is. Sorry to be so simplistic. Give gratitude. Pray. Doesn't have to be to god, but I theorize that this is why praying became a cornerstone of religion.

Praying is usually about positive things, and we need positive energy to roil around our brains as we sleep, and our brains prepare for the next day. There is even science to back me up ([click here](#)). But it's funny. At least with me, the darkness fades away slowly, like a physical malady. All things must pass away.

There you go. The following is from the bio on markwestwriter.com, and sort of states my purpose:

Last Summer I walked across Spain on the Camino de Santiago. I blogged about it, and the journey of my life over the last few years, which included divorce, estrangement from my daughter, therapy, loneliness, thoughts of suicide, insecurity, self-esteem and doubt, and finally a relationship with a recently divorced beautiful Swedish mother of 4 who was dealing with her own shit, who saved my life.

I'm not saying I know any more about life than you. And at times I read what I've written and see it as the ravings of a self-absorbed dude bent on self-destruction, or at least self-immolation. One of my favorite refrains is "...but what the fuck do I know? But life goes on. And so does the path in front of each and every one of us.

I'm heading back to Spain to walk part of the camino and finish up the book, walk a few parts that need to be rediscovered, meet a few new people, and maybe to discover a few new things about myself. I hope you stick around, and walk these steps with me. Cause one things I've discovered- life is short, and it's much more worthwhile traveling this world with someone.

Now the darkness only stays at night time  
In the morning it will fade away  
Daylight is good  
At arriving at the right time  
But it's not always going  
To be this grey

All things must pass  
All things must pass away  
All things must pass  
All things must pass away

*-George Harrison*

I had drinks with Amanda the other day. We talked. Like we always do. Like we did around that tall white table-clothed drink table in some woman's backyard while the two piece combo drum machine band played "Down on the Corner" and the music and everyone else faded away, so long ago....

We talked about her. We talked about me. We talked about her kids. We talked about mine. We touched some of the places we used to. And we talked about what was going on in each of our lives. And i reached out, tried to help. It's funny, back in the day, she was the one who helped me. I'm trying to remember the person she was, who I was. It's weird, the sense of self. We always feel we're more or less the same person at the core. And I guess maybe we are.

But those two people who sat across that table and talked about everything and anything, who subsequently layed in bed and poured themselves into each other...they were there, but they were not. Not sure what's changed besides...everything. It's funny, it used to be that Amanda would be the one to help me. Probably because I was the one putting more of myself out there, trying to figure things out. I was ready to heal, and she was the catalyst to push me down that path. And that was probably because she is empathic. And she needs to help others heal.

It's part of the reason I would often write in the Spain blog "...and of course, she was right". Even if I didn't want to admit it, because usually what she was right about was something about me that i didn't want to face. I think her heightened state of empathy makes her take on a little too much, whether she knows it or not. One might think being empathic is an awesome thing. After knowing Amanda, I have to think that, well...maybe. It seems that there might just be a down side to being empathic.

If you believe in energies and the like, you could postulate that those with certain energies would be drawn to people like Amanda. Those who need help. And, she has always said that that seems to be the case. Not only humans, but animals as well. And what happens is, the empathic person takes on the emotions of others, to help them understand those emotions. And like Amanda, empathic people are usually strong, resilient, so they can handle it. But they also open themselves up to a lot of stress by doing so.

What seems to happen is they end up having two conflicting voices in their heads. They are constantly feeling the good and the bad, the negative and the positive. And so they become overwhelmed. Which is why they build walls. And have to become resilient. It's natural to assume that if they can take on the feelings of others, they're gonna get the whole package, the good with the bad. So they use the walls and resilience to shield them from the bad. And when they have really bad stuff happen to them they have to build really thick walls.

I've been told I'm empathic too, and maybe that's one of the places Amanda and my deepest bonds lie. We like to go to that level, talk about those things. And maybe that's why we enjoy each others company, Amanda is the first woman I've met who thought about these things, or at least had an instinct as to how things worked and wanted to discuss it. And I think that's one of the things she and I discovered in each other. By the way, what I am writing right now is so flowing from the back of my head to my fingers it's making my head spin- It's not even stopping at my brain. This isn't some theory I've been working on, it's just coming to me. Anyway, If I am indeed empathic like I've been told, it also might help explain my somewhat cynical nature, my mildly depressed state which I always wrote off to a quasi existential/there's nothing else view of the world. Steeped in science but hedging my bets to ward off the throes of having to live a life of quiet desperation.

Back to Amanda and I. She used to be the healer. And when I think back, it may be because she wasn't ready to work on herself yet. As I mentioned though, she was the catalyst that helped me move into the stream that is now pulling me along, forcing me to see the ever changing view, and incorporate that new view into my life. But now it seems the tables are turned. In the off times we see each other,

I find myself offering up suggestions for her more often. If she's asking for advice, she'll do it in a subtle way, gently changing the subject to something that concerns her. She will never really ask for help. She can be like a dude on a road trip lost at a cross roads in the middle of nowhere staring at a unfolded map, mind confused, refusing directions from all who pass by.

Anyway, I think maybe we also share a sadness from this empathy, and our experiences. Why does this negative energy even exist? I know. It's what we need in this crazy life to teach us lessons. The ultimate example would be trying to make sense of some of the most absurd things in life; a mother losing her child, genocides in other countries, etc. But looking at life with that in mind doesn't fit into most mindsets. Maybe it does in mine because I had to create a Universe that is sane so that I wouldn't go off the deep end.

Some research I did says that a side effect of empathic people seems to be that one is often exhausted and fatigued from what you are feeling, and the negative energies that you absorb. This sounds sort of like depression. I know when I was going through some of my most stressful times, I would be at my desk working, and I would literally crawl to my bed, roll up in a ball, and "hide", exhausted at just trying to move forward.

And another thing. I think being this way leaves you open to being taken advantage of. I think it did with me. But I don't think others necessarily do so intentionally. But I do think the instincts of a certain type of person will cause them to take advantage of another's weaknesses. As I've said before, I think this is simply what we all do in life: we do what we do to get what we want/think we deserve. How we go about it is what leads to tears, fights, wars. But as I often also say: what the f\*%k do I know?

It's funny, I also read that the dark side of being too empathic is knowing that you willingly neglect both your body and mind for the sake of others. A neglect that builds over the years, eventually resulting in the need to go soul-searching once again, a practice that we only take up when we feel completely lost. Sounds a lot like a guy I know who went to Spain to search for his soul...and in fact when I met Amanda, one of the first things she did was "clean me up". Why? well, because at the time I didn't give a damn about myself, was totally neglecting my body, mind, spirit.

Last thing- Empathic people need to learn to distinguish between emotions that are their own, and emotional energies that are impostors. They need people who understand who they are, people they can talk to and who will listen. They need to be able to let down the wall they've built up around their feelings so that they can let their empathic selves do good in their own life, but they're afraid if they do they will yet again succumb to an overwhelming love. But then again, if they don't, they're destined to fight a war within themselves that never ends.

# They say every Man must Fall...

Last years blog began with me pondering the eternal question: "Who ever thought my pilgrimage would begin with me jerking off into a plastic cup?"

I've rethought that. I'm thinking my pilgrimage actually may have started on a dirt path in the hills of Palos Verdes, where a beautiful blond Swedish mother of 4 took my hand and kissed me as the stars fell around us, and forced me to consider the wounds that I had been carrying with me, and that had been leading me down a path of self-destruction.

I'll get to that in a little bit but for now, I'm here in St Jean on the French side of the Pyrenees, looking at the same road I walked up last year, and damned if it isn't still uphill. Does it ever start to go downhill, or at least level out? I guess if it did, that would take the fun out of it.

Just for good measure (and not on purpose) I got lost again. At least it wasn't in the middle of the Pyrenees enshrouded in fog. It was before I even started- I neglected to follow a throng of Japanese pilgrims out of town, instead opting to trail a cute young French girl with a pack. Unfortunately she wasn't walking the Camino. I mean, who in the fuck is in St. Jean Pied de Port with a pack and not walking the Camino?

So I went back and walked through the ancient town of St Jean Pied de Port alone. After a short foray into town, I asked a middle aged Spanish guy standing in front of a shop "which way is the way?" (the Camino is aka "the way"- a little joke there in case you didn't get it). Sure enough, he directed me to where I started, just before asking for a cigarette. I don't know about you but I would probably assume that a dude in full hiking regalia with a backpack heading out on a pilgrimage didn't have a pack of smokes. But that's just me.

As I left the old town with its cobblestoned streets, the Camino turned into a paved road, and proceeded uphill. Steeply uphill. Did I say how steep it was? Pretty sure I saw the ghost of Sir Edmund Hillary pass me by, with Tenzing Norgay beside him. It was then I started to think about the things that pushed me onto the camino last year. As I mentioned in last years blog, I had never even been to Europe, but it was if I didn't even have a choice in the matter.

I thought about the road I had travelled since then. I thought about the road I was traveling on at the moment. did I mention it was steep? In the next few days, I will relate some of the events that conspired to bring me back to the Camino. And that road has been paved with good intentions, love and hate, and potholes the size of Kansas.

For the most part, things have gotten better. I've come to understand that, for the most part, people just do what they do. We're all just trying to get what we think we deserve out of life, by the methods and means we have been taught, good or bad. We don't even really understand what those methods are. If we did, there would be no abuse, no sexual harassment, etc. Where just being what we are: human beings, trying to figure life out.

A few k out of town, we began walking steeply uphill through farms. Cowbells rang in the distance, Christopher Walken brayed off in the ether. We then departed from the road and walked on a wide, stony path, that was well, steep. Hell, we were hiking up the side of a mountain range. What would you expect?

After 2 k on the stony path, we got back to the road. There was a deep valley to the left, you could see St. Jean Pred de Port. I finally ran into some more people, a group of young jovial Italians. It think I'm going to try and

transfer from being American to Italian. Can you do that? Pretty much every Italian I've met here has been happy, laughing, joking.

I stopped in Orison, one of the last outposts before Roncesvalles, my final destination for the day. The breakfast at the Auberge wasn't much, so I ordered the vegetable soup which was excellent. I followed it by a cafe con leche, which was excellent.

The road kept going uphill through sparse grassy hills. At this point I ran into Tina and Thomas, who had walked from Germany. Yes, I said Germany. And yes, I said they walked. Tina had recovered from some serious surgery the year before (I didn't pry) which contributed to her decision to walk the Camino. They were going to continue on to Finisterra, and then down to Portugal to Fatima.

Why Fatima, you might ask? Well, before I had met them, they were at a church in Lourdes and she had decided to light a candle and pray. Fatima floated through Tina's mind, the candle went out, and sunshine came from behind the clouds and streamed into the church. She figured that was enough of a sign.

After a few more kilometers, I ran across a van off to the side of the road that sold some food, hot chocolate, etc. It was the same van where I got lost last year. Then, I had walked about 2 miles down a road, trying to catch pilgrims I had been walking with. I realized they didn't exist, and that I was going the wrong way. Everything was a blur, I was so out of sorts. I think I may have mentioned that my brain and my heart, at that time, were a shit bag of chaos.

But today, it wasn't so. I had met Bridget a kilometer or so before, we took a break at the food truck, and continued on. I don't know how I got lost last year. I only had myself to blame. And, well, life.

Not too much further down the road (or if you're literal about these things, up the road) I met Rachel and Penny (not her real name) from Canada. Rachel was from Nova Scotia originally, and Penny from Toronto. So it's obvious how they met. I mean Canada is a small country, right? Not that many people...

Actually, they met while working on some projects somewhere, probably like in the middle of the country, like Calgary. And if you don't believe in forces beyond our comprehension, well, friendship like theirs is a reason you should. They met and, well, they "clicked" Sometimes you just know, and it's usually when you start talking about shit that you don't talk about with other people you meet.

Rachel and I were walking alone for awhile and she told me a story. This was her fifth time on the Camino. One time, the fog rolled in and she got scared. But as I've said before, the Camino provides the time and space for you to think. So that's what she did. She said that she never planned too much, and she realized the Camino was telling her that she'd always been scared of the future, what's in front of her. And that's what the fog made her realize about herself. I looked at her and told her "I know what's in front of you right now- about 10 kilometers of bad road".

With about 6 k to go I caught up with Penny, Rachel's walking companion (Rachel has the habit of running down hills, leaving Penny in the dust). We were walking up the last uphill, before the camino peaks at the top of the Pyrenees, and heads downhill. She told me a story about her ex-husband, and recent legal battle she had with him over child support. She represented herself in court. No, she's not a lawyer. Maybe it was finances, or maybe it was the universe forcing her to learn something about herself that needed has been holding her back.

Not to long after that we reached the Spanish/French border, denoted by one of those cow grates dug into the ground and not much else. I wouldn't have known unless Rachel pointed it out.

For those who read last years blog ([www.allroadsleadhometheblog.com](http://www.allroadsleadhometheblog.com)), walking with Rachel and Penny was so easy and fun, (part of the reason is cause they laughed at my jokes and at least seemed interested) and it reminded me of the two Portland girls I shared part of my journey with last year (day two). Why is it that, for some reasons, we humans simply “click” only sometimes. I mean were the same species. Then again, Rachel and Penny might have just been too polite to tell me to fuck off. They are Canadian after all.

Once I reached Roncesvalles, I finally realized the real reason for returning to the Camino. Yes, I knew part of it was to meet a few new people, fill in a few gaps, and provide more content for the book. But, as I approached the beautiful old stone monastery dating back to the 1200's I realized I came back for one other reason: To retrace some of my steps and look at things from a new perspective- one where I've began to learn to accept myself, and to love myself just a little bit more.

\*all of my awesome photos couldn't be included due to the excruciatingly slow wife at this 1000 year old monastery. Go figure...

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For those not in attendance last year, here's a brief synopsis of the blog/book (titled “All Roads Lead Home- Life, Love, and Forgiveness on the Camino de Santiago”):

“When 55 year old husband and father Mark West comes to terms with his wife's emotional abuse, his estranged teenage daughters hatred of him, and his break up with Amanda- the woman who saved his life, he books a flight to Europe and sets out to walk across Spain on the Camino de Santiago in an attempt to rediscover the man he used to be, get Amanda back, and make sense of the beautiful, fractured world we live in. The only things standing in his way are not knowing whether or not he can physically walk 472 miles across Spain, and the ghosts of the past that haunt him every step of the way. A shortened version of the blog can be read at [www.allroadsleadhometheblog.com](http://www.allroadsleadhometheblog.com).”

To further elaborate, the first post continued (after the jerking off part) “...for now, I'm standing at the edge of uncertainty, staring at the abyss and a 482-mile walk across Spain on the Camino de Santiago. What brought me here? I guess it's the same things that brought me to my knees back home in Southern California: the dissolution of a 23-year marriage that taught me how to hate. The teetering of my first real relationship after being separated that taught me how to love again, and a gnawing feeling that after more than half a century on this earth I was still lost.

I was hoping that a million steps down a path through Spain in the middle of summer to find some saint buried in a church in Santiago would help me lose sight of the things I needed to rid myself of. I would leave those things behind with each boot print I made in the dirt. And hopefully, I would see the path that lies in front of me more clearly, and figure out how to walk it with the time I have left before I shuffle off this mortal coil.”

My initial intent with writing the blog was to make it about more than just my walking the Camino- so I decided to intertwine two significant journeys I've undertaken over the past few years that contributed to me walking the Camino, with the journey at hand: putting one foot in front of the other and walking 482 miles across Spain.

The other two journeys are the last 10 years of my life which “taught me how to hate”, and included emotional abuse, estrangement from my daughter, divorce, loneliness, thoughts of suicide, insecurity, self-esteem and doubt; and the year leading up to walking the Camino that “taught me how to love again” and included therapy, friendship, a few crazy psychic experiences, and my relationship with a beautiful, recently divorced mother of 4 who was dealing with her own shit as well, who “saved my life”, or at least forced me to stand back and reexamine my it.



It was supposed to be well organized, the characters were supposed to be introduced, and there was to be an arc in each thread that would become apparent as time went by. But time ran out for me. I even spent the better part of two days in Madrid trying to get my shit together, but, well...once again, life got in the way. So it ended up being a daily journal of my walk (which included descriptions of the terrain, observations and conversation with the people I met, and beautiful photographs) with random experiences from my life that, as mentioned earlier, resulted in me booking a flight to Spain and walk the Camino.

In preparation I went through my journals and pulled out significant events and thoughts from the 10 years prior to my separation 3 years ago, mainly concerning my marriage, my daughter, and the eventual crumbling of my marriage. I reviewed my emotional state and subsequent growth with my therapist over the last 3 years. In addition, I went back to my journal to review the last year of my life, notes to my therapist, and reflections on my state of mind, and my relationship with Amanda.

As I walked the Camino, I think I came to understand at least part of what I think happened in our marriage, something about Janice, and human nature in general. I don't think Janice intentionally abused me. She, as we all do, was just doing what she thought she had to do to get what she needed and what she thought she deserved, by using the means she had been taught by others, specifically (possibly-I don't know for a fact) an emotionally abusive father. Since I was not providing what she needed, she simply turned to the tools she'd been given to get what she wanted. Unfortunately, those tools became weapons as they zeroed in on the soft underbelly of my soul and took advantage of weaknesses in myself that even I didn't know were there.

As far as the year leading up to my walking the Camino goes, and my relationship with Amanda, let's just say that I fell in love with her and she gave me something I had been missing, restored my faith in having a relationship again, helped guide me, and just made life so fucking fun again. It would take more than a paragraph to say what I really feel. To limit it to a few words, I'll just say this: thank you Amanda.

We all have stories to tell. I'm just trying to do the best I can in telling mine. I'm not trying to hurt anybody, not trying to make any points, no hidden agenda. I'm just throwing my heart out there. I hope you're at least entertained as you follow me stumbling through life, and down the Camino again. I am truly grateful to those who are reading and hope you may have the opportunity to find your own Camino and uncover some answers to questions in your life, like the ones I've been finding since life threw me a curve ball, and I ended up in Spain wondering how in the hell I got there.

*"They say every man needs protection  
They say that every man must fall  
Yet I swear I see my reflection  
Somewhere so high above this wall*

*I see my light come shinin'  
From the west down to the east  
Any day now, any day now  
I shall be released" -Bob Dylan*

# Just a stranger on the bus, trying to make my way home...

Last night's dinner in Rocenvalles was awesome. One might not think so considering what I had to go through to get fed. It was sort of as if the Keystone Kops were on Kitchen Confidential. I had been here last year and had experienced some sort of strange organizational schema about rooms, dinner, etc, and my meal last night was no exception.

There are a few places to eat at the monastery, and if you buy dinner you're assigned one of the three places to eat. So, I left my bunk before the appointed time and went downstairs and asked one of the "attendants" where to go (there's always someone with an officious orange vest hanging by the check in area- maybe they do flagging when their not working at the monastery).

I was told to go to La Posada. They let me into the room, but just as I was told to go sit by Rachel and Penny, at the last second some dude looked at my ticket and told me I was in the wrong place. As I mentioned, they are strangely organized in some sort of authoritarian manner. They seem very regimented, but no one seems to really know what's going on, so when there is a breach, or a question, no one seems to be able to deal with it.

Anyway, I went to another building, and just as I was to be seated with Bridgette, who I had met the first night in St Jean (we didn't see each other during the walk that day, so I was looking forward to catching up), I was whisked away, saying again that I was in the wrong place. I was instructed to go to a third place, so I dutifully went.

I got inside, they checked my ticket. I was in! Then the young waiter was trying to explain to me that there were a bunch of pilgrims in the back, but that there was no more room. Then he asked me if I would like to sit in the back. We went back and forth not understanding each other. Finally, I just said I would sit in the front room alone, not one soul at another one of the tables.

I could have got pissed. I could have bemoaned my bad luck. Instead I enjoyed a good meal and finished last night's blog, which I had been stuck on. In fact, I felt somewhat inspired, and that my writing had lived up to last year's material, the stuff that resonated with people, the stuff that made me come back out to the camino and turn these posts into a book. So once again, it seems that the Camino had provided what I needed. Oh, and the Tempranillo was awesome.

The final irony: I was sitting at dinner, in a thousand year old monastery and heard Joan Osborne singing "What if god was one of us...(just a slob like all of us...). The perfect caper to a somewhat absurd, but awesome evening, relative to the crazy dance of life were all caught up in.

The next morning I left Roncenvalles in the rain. Since I was walking alone I put my headphones on and turned my eyes to the ground and picked up the pace. "January song" by the Decemberists came on-

What were the words I meant to say  
Before you left  
When I could see your breath lead  
Where you were going to

Maybe I should just let it be  
And maybe it will all come back to me  
Seeing, oh, January, oh...

It made me think of Amanda, and how I hadn't heard from her in a few days. Not that she had to call or text me via WhatsApp. Its just that we usually talked to each other often, and this was probably the longest gap, well, since we met.

I thought about the times we had spent together, the long talks late into the evening, waking up with her head on my shoulder, how close we used to be. Or seemed to be. I thought about how it seems she used to hang on every word. And how I used to listen to her, how she would show me things about her that had been hidden for a long time (her creativity, her empathy and insightful nature) and how she would listen to me and tell me things about myself. Things I didn't want to know, but that were true nonetheless.

And I thought, well, if that was real then, we'd probably still be together. I guess need and want and just having someone to share with is a powerful thing. Especially after both of you have been hurt. Pain is pain is always pain. That's the way it is. We probably never really even had anything like I had imagined. It was just my heart wanting so much for something that was never really there.

Maybe we are just thrown together for awhile to help each other through hard times, to help us to understand ourselves a little better by putting our hearts in the hands of someone else. Although, it sounds to me like a simplification of things, something a gypsy or psychic might say. Don't get me wrong. I love psychics, witches, warlocks. Hell, I even love bigfoot. But, well, if psychics really knew, uh...they'd be hanging out on an island in the South Pacific living off their lottery earnings.

After walking through the woods, the Camino merged with the street again and went through Burgette. The rain started up again, albeit only a drizzle. After Burgette, the path went over a little stream about 10 feet wide, it was overcast and cool. Finally, I was in farm land again, and the rain was going down.

There were a bunch of adult cows scattered out in one field, standing in the rain. Closer to me just on the other side of a fence, there were 3 young cows huddled together. I told them (not sure if they were listening) that they might as well get out in the rain. They're going to have to get wet soon enough, and the sooner they got used to it, the sooner they would embrace it and realize it's a part of life. If you don't learn to love it, you're gonna hate it. And if you learn to hate it, you're gonna learn to hate life. So you may as well...

Another song came over iPod that resonated with me as I walked down into the valley floor. Its about a gambler (I swear its the only Dan Fogelberg song on my iPod). I had heard the song a few years ago and had thought of myself.

I was gambling when I moved out of my home, away from my old life.

I could have stayed with the situation I was in, muddled through, but something inside me made me leave. I still don't know what drove me to do that, I don't know how I had the guts. At that time I was somewhat codependent on Janice, and the life we had created, and it suited us both just fine. But time has away of creeping in and fucking with things. Speaking of time- 2008 did just that.

I walked on through farmland and saw a herd of sheep off in the distance. I wondered what they thought of us, probably something like: "there go some more stupid humans again. Where the hell are they going, and why?"

I met up with Rachel and Penny, and we stopped for breakfast and cafe con leche. After we left, the camino became a stone path, about 8 feet wide, going downhill at a decent grade, to get us to the valley floor.

We crossed a highway and stopped at a little food trailer, decorated like a rock, with astroturf to cover the tires, I guess so you couldn't tell it was a trailer. A son helped his father on with his backpack. I thought about my dad and how I

never got a chance to do anything like walking the Camino with my dad. By the time I got my shit together and could have, he was gone. Never take anything for granted. You never know when it's going to slip through your fingers.

Rachel, Penny and I walked over the bridge to Zubiri together and checked into the first auberges we passed, the one I had stayed at last year, and a favorite of Rachel's. I was grateful for these new friends I had met, even though our paths would soon part. Maybe we do cross paths for a reason, to learn a few things from each other. Or maybe we're all just futile stars colliding in a galaxy of random and meaningless collisions.

Thomas Wolfe said, "You Can't Go Home Again" (always quote a great writer when you can- people will think you know what the hell you're talking about). I think what he meant was that when you return home after being gone, you're not the same person. It's you that's changed, not the town. So that nostalgic perception you had of your home just doesn't exist anymore.

I know that when I returned after walking the Camino last year, I felt like I didn't have a home anymore. I know I had changed, but as I got back into the rhythm and hues of my old life, I imperceptibly sunk back into being the same person I had been, confronting the same demons I had thought and wrote about last year on the camino. But I think my that time on the Camino, at the very least, gave me pause to think about the issues, the heartaches, the wounds that were already beginning to rear their heads. Things I knew I had to deal with.

And as I mentioned at the beginning of my first post, one of the things I had to deal with were my first real relationship after my separation. And not to bemoan things, at that point my self esteem had been whittled down to nothing (I'll get to that later too).

So when Amanda told me on our second or third date that she was Swedish (I had kind of figure that out by then) and so was perhaps more open, more sexual, more straight forward than most of the American women I had known, my head should have exploded. I mean, here I was, not even looking for any kind of relationship, and this beautiful creature, through some cosmic implosion, landed in my arms.

I don't remember what went through my head at that time. I can picture the scene very clearly, but my emotional state at the time, I don't know. I was probably overwhelmed. After starting to coming to terms with the man I had become (through abuse, bullying, etc) here I was with probably the most beautiful woman I had ever been with (well, there was Janine, the crazy Polish broad I had dated while at NBC, back in the day, but that's another story), who was clinging to me and I to her, who listened to every word I said, who actually respected me as a man and human being, and who, well, for want of a better word, wanted my companionship.

But In the long run, the rocky road Amanda and I were about to run down with dizzying abandon was probably the thing that made me start to look deeper, to question myself, assess myself, try to figure out what the hell I was doing on this piece of dirt called earth.

When I think back about those first days with Amanda my head spins. What happened? What led us down that road of discovery, that ruddy dirt path we walked together for awhile? I know we both needed someone to hold, to mend. As I mentioned before, in the beginning we'd always be sitting next to each other, holding hands. It was like both of us were hanging on for dear life. I should have known that things couldn't stay the same. If they would have, nothing would have healed for either of us.

And it seems like, in life, the bigger the lessons we have to learn, the bigger the events which trigger that learning have to be. That became clear to me the night Amanda almost died.

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I've lived in a dump for 3 years (I'll be moving upon my return). It was the prison I built for myself, the metaphor for me, my life. I know though that I had to be there. I needed that place to hide, remind me, laugh at me, and, after time, to recognize it for what it was – a necessary place to be, while I contemplated and licked my wounds, felt sorry for myself, faced myself in the mirror. It was another place that finally, after all that time forced me to understand that it, there, was really not me, and that I needed to get out.

I know now what I was: a prisoner that could not, for whatever reason, escape. In this case, I couldn't escape from myself. When we build walls for ourselves, we build them well. Listen to "World Leader Pretend (REM).

*I sit at my table and wage war on myself  
It seems like it's all, it's all for nothing  
I know the barricades, and  
I know the mortar in the wall breaks  
I recognize the weapons, I used them well*

*This is my mistake  
Let me make it good  
I raised the wall and I will be the one  
to knock it down*

It was like the prison movie you've seen before, where the warden comes to finally let the guy out. The prisoner is dressed in a new fedora and suit (pretty ironic for a hardened criminal), and holding a suitcase. But you can see the fear in his eyes. He's not ready for the outside world. Because he's changed, the prison has changed him, darkened his soul, it hasn't rehabilitated him. Yet he goes, because they tell him to. And a week later he's found, swinging from the rafters, a noose around his neck.

But I stopped being that prisoner awhile ago, by deciding not to be a victim, and with the help of others showing me the way. With the decision to stand on my own, take up my own space, be calm, but move forward. Take responsibility for myself. To act with integrity and love. I know what I have learned is good. And I am lucky if only to have lived the life that I have thus far.

The walls of the prison still have a few bricks left to be removed, but for the most part they're gone. At least enough are gone to allow me to walk through the wall and see the outside world again, as if for the first time. And it's beautiful.

# What's Love Got to Do with It?

I packed up and walked out of the small (2 rooms 16 beds) auberges in Zubiri, and across the street to the cafe where I had ran into Kento for I think the 2nd time last year. (Kento was the "Zen Coyote Patron Saint of the Camino" for those who were along for the ride last year).

Rachel, Penny (not her real name;) and I had breakfast together, Penny (not her real name) compromising her vegan sensibilities to partake in one of the local breakfast delicacies, the "tortilla"- not the tortillas I'm used to back in California, more like a quiche/omelette hybrid.

While we were eating Kirsten sat down. I had met her at dinner when I arrived in St. Jean, but hadn't seen her since then. She was a little down, was questioning herself, why she was there. I only spoke with her a few minutes since I had to go finish and post the previous nights blog, but I figured our paths would cross again during the day.

Paths crossing. It's kind of funny. Nicholas was my Uber driver to LAX when I left for Spain (well, I went to Paris first, but Ill leave that for a later post). Nicholas is 22. He's studying to be a pilot. I doubt my parents ever met a 22 year old Jewish kid giving them a ride to the airport studying to be a pilot. That's what's one of the cool things about the world today. That and the fact that I can fly to Spain and walk across it, and bitch and post my self-absorbed thoughts to the internet. How beautiful of a world is this?

Nicholas parents had separated when he was eight. His father got custody, and worked hard to give them a home. But then when he was a junior in high school, his father passed away. To make it worse, for some inexplicable reason, his aunt and uncle (his fathers sister and brother) went to court to have him cremated. I'm pretty sure the Jewish culture isn't hip to cremation.

Nicholas had to go live with his mom. They had a pretty tough time, she found it hard to make ends meet. And Nicholas was pretty depressed about his dad's death. But he found someone to help. He met a girl about a year after his dad passed. He married her. He says she's what inspired him to go back to training to be a pilot. She believed in him, so he didn't mind studying, going to class, and then driving for Uber to make ends meet and see his dream though. Cause that's what dreams do. And that's what love does.

Amanda used to do that for me. I actually realized it and thought about it when I'd be writing, creating. And it was as if, in a way, I was doing it to make her proud of me, because she had showed she believed in me when she rescued me, and gave me my life back. Maybe that's what a muse is. But those days are gone. I've only got myself to believe in now.

By the way. Nicholas won the court case to have his father buried instead of cremated. He can now go visit that father that raised him through difficult times, loved him, and gave him everything he could to make him the man he is today. The man I met. The one who's dreams seem to be coming true.

Just our of Zubiri I climbed a hill and walked on the side of the valley through green glades of trees, with farmland on both sides, rolling up, and down to the river and the valley floor.

After awhile, I walked through a small town, Burguette in the rain, and moved on quickly. The path was dotted with small towns every few kilometers. I ran across one of the many fountains along the way and made a pit stop to fill up my bladder (the plastic kind for hikers) with water. It was quick, I was on my way. If I was in the same state I was in last year (shit bag of chaos) it would have taken twice as long. Crap would've fallen out of my bag, I would have lost something, I would have got pissed. But no, It was like a tire change at a pit stop at a Nascar race. Fast, efficient. I moved on.

As far as walking this year, I think about why I'm here. It's definitely not the same experience. I'm much more at peace with myself. So when I ran across Kirsten, I had some sage wisdom to pass on. I say that with a grain of salt of course. But she was in need of some kind words. She had been on the Camino 5 times before, but was doubting being here this year...she was contemplating quitting when she got to Pamplona.

She told me that if anything, this was the year she needed something like the Camino the most. After her husband suddenly left her a year and a half prior, she found herself out of rhythm with her past life because now, there was a profound shift in the foundation of it. But she had found a new milieu, a new life. She had a new job which she enjoyed, with more pay, but more responsibilities and stress. She enjoyed time with her friends, and taking care of and hanging out with her teenage kids. She laughed and shook her head when she mentioned the men she had dated.

I listened and told her about my life, what I had been through, and how the Camino, and writing about it had helped save me. She said she had always thought about writing, but she figured she had nothing to say. Well, this was enough for me to launch into a passionate and animated discourse on writing, life, etc. Things I am such an expert on ;).

It's kinda weird, but when I discussed these things, my brain and mouth went into overdrive. For what it's worth, I guess this writing thing is maybe something I should pursue. I told her that everyone has something to say, and that even if you're only writing for yourself, people like to hear the shit the rest of us are going through. These things we go through are what make us kindred spirits, they are the things that bond us in all of our human-fuckedupness. They are the things that teach us to stop beating up on ourselves. They are the things that teach us to love.

I left Bridget with that and moved on. I stopped at a lunch place on a river. Penny and Rachel were there so I sat with them for a little while. They finished and got up and left, I stayed to finish my bocadilla, knowing I'd catch them. I waved to Kirsten as I left, she was sitting alone. It didn't look like my sermon had helped.

As I got closer to Pamplona the Camino ran close to the freeway. I caught Rachel and Penny and we continued on to the town. Since Rachel had done the Camino 5 times (this was her 6th), it was easy just to follow her and Penny to the Auberges in Pamplona, so I did. We paused at the bridge that is the gateway to Pamplona,

Although even after crossing, one has a few k left to get to the center of town. By now several other pilgrims that I had seen along the way but hadn't got to know were trudging the final few kilometers to the auberge.

After showering and washing some clothes. Some old bearded dude who looked like Burl Ives on a bender kept giving me the stink-eye when I checked my clothes in the dryer and didn't take them out. Obviously, the Camino had not taught him patience yet.

Later I met Rachel and Penny for dinner. We had some tapas (well I did) Rachel had a bocadillo and Penny some pasta. I don't think it was penne. Drum roll please. Just before we left I saw Kirsten. She was sitting with some new friends, (Bridget and Bernadette) who I had met a few times along the way. She was smiling ear to ear and obviously having a good time.

I'm thinking she decided to continue on. And I am grateful that I was given the opportunity to talk with her on the Camino and possibly help her to make the decision to do so. In case she did decide to wrap it up and go home, I'm still thankful for getting the opportunity to know another soul in this lucid dream we keep insisting is real, called life.

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It took a few years for my therapist to convince me I had been emotionally abused. It's about as easy to teach a platypus to ride a unicycle as it is to get a man to admit to it. We have egos. We are hard wired to be the defenders, the providers, the ones who fend off invaders. The ones who are in charge of survival.

A note here- I'm not one of those fervent believers that thinks that therapy can change the world. I go sporadically, but somewhat consistently (if that makes sense) and have a wonderful therapist. But I'm not saying therapy is for everybody. I believe everyone could benefit from it if they are open to it, but it's a personal choice.

Dr. Tara J. Palmatier (a therapist who specializes in this) has this to say about it: "Do you believe it's possible for men to be emotionally abused by women? Believe it. It happens all the time. The stereotype of an abusive relationship is that of a man physically beating a woman. Society has yet to acknowledge the vast number of women who emotionally abuse men.

In fact, the men who are being abused oftentimes don't realize that their wife's or girlfriend's behavior is abusive. They use different terms to describe this behavior like nagging, bossy, difficult, strong-willed, tough, harsh, argumentative, "passionate," or aggressive, which they always follow up with some excuse such as, "She had a really tough childhood. She was abused." Lots of people have had less than ideal beginnings, but they don't take it out on others in their adult relationships.

Men have been brainwashed into believing that it's normal for women to be irrational, moody, emotional, and demanding. Most men accept these behaviors under the guise that a woman is 'just expressing her feelings' and men are uncomfortable with because 'men aren't good at expressing their feelings.' This is ridiculous. This behavior makes men uncomfortable, just as it would make most women on the receiving end of it uncomfortable because it's abusive.

If you walk on eggshells around your partner because you're afraid she'll flip out on you for minor transgressions or simply because she's in a bad mood, you're experiencing emotional abuse. If nothing you do, no matter how hard you try pleases her, you're experiencing emotional abuse. If she regularly puts you down, criticizes or demeans you you're experiencing emotional abuse. If she shuts you out, gives you the cold shoulder or refuses to have sex with you, you're experiencing emotional abuse.

Emotional abuse is like a cancer that eats away at your psyche until you're left feeling powerless, worthless, anxious and/or depressed. Most of the time it happens so gradually that you don't notice it. You explain away the first few tantrums, emotional outbursts and rage episodes. You take her criticisms to heart because you want to please her.

You won't be able to change her behavior. Why? First, it's highly unlikely that your girlfriend or wife will see her behavior as abusive ... and, most importantly, her abusive behaviors are how she gets what she wants. It's a learned and highly effective behavioral technique, which, even if she gains awareness about it, will be terribly difficult (if not impossible) for her to break. The goal of an abuser is control and the way they control you is through emotional abuse.

In the last few years I experienced some of the things Tara speaks of. But I have a slightly skewed perspective on the matter, documented in last years blog. It kind of agrees with Tara, but takes it one step further. I think abuse does exist, just as sexual harassment, and a lot of other crimes and misdemeanors that transpire between us humans as, for some reason, we treat other like shit a lot of the time.

I think we're all just trying to get what we think we deserve by the means we have been taught, usually by our parents. Those methods, or means, are so ingrained that we don't even realize we're abusing someone. Partly because the psychological/ emotional makeup of the other person is also part of the equation. Some (like me) can be hurt, devastated by those methods or means. Others, more resilient, might hardly be affected at all.



I'm not trying to make excuses for those that abuse, I'm just trying to understand why they do it. I want to believe that people are basically good. And if there's any meaning to my universe, that meaning is derived through what we experience, good or bad, how we choose to react emotionally, and if we decide to learn from the experiences and move on. I know I am simplifying, and I certainly am not condoning abuse of any kind. I'm just trying to accept the fact that it happens, and find a way to deal with it. And if you were a fervent follower of last years blog, you know what I always say- What the fuck do I know?

For more information on Dr. Tara Palmatier go to <https://shrink4men.wordpress.com/2009/01/23/when-love-hurts-the-emotionally-abused-man/>

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I had been communicating with Amanda the last half of my walk on the Camino last year. Even though I was accomplishing something (as far as some are concerned) that is a bit extraordinary, I didn't see it that way. As far as I was concerned, as I noted in my video ([click here](#)), I felt that if I could do it, anyone can. That's pretty much how you gauge everything you do when you don't think much of yourself.

As I finished the last few days of my walk, she was with me more and more, via text and phone calls. I was happy to have her in my life. So when I got back from Spain, both of our codependence kicked back in (even spending 30 days walking across Spain wasn't enough to fix it) and we started seeing each other again. But we knew we couldn't continue as before. We both knew we needed to grow, and the best way to do that was to be apart. But, hey, sometimes life gets in the way.

What's funny is, early on I had an inkling, a feeling that we were being unhealthy in our relationship- we spent every moment we could with each other. But again, when I look back, in my mind we were helping each other heal.

I was the one who told her that I should probably not be spending as much time there, that maybe that's why her kids were acting out as much as they were. I did leave for a few days, but was back full time in short order. Who was I to say no? I still needed her just as much as she needed me.

Maybe it just took awhile to sink in. Because eventually, Amanda began to separate herself from me (emotionally), I could feel her moving away. It was best for her, but at that point, unfortunately, it was not in the best interests of me. For some reason, even though I was the one who had recommended we spend less time together months earlier, I was also the one who had a harder time reconciling myself to the new "arrangement". Looking back, maybe she never really loved me, maybe she was only being weak and needy at the time she grabbed me and wouldn't let go, and the same goes for me. And maybe we were just thrown together by the forces of the universe to experience life together for awhile and learn from each other. All I know is that what she gave me is truly a gift. And I love her for that.

# A Day Off with Jesus in San Sebastian

I left the auberge in Pamplona at 630 and walked across the street for a cafe con leche. Penny and Rachel had left earlier so I sat down for a coffee alone. After a few minutes other pilgrims streamed in. I sat at the bar and listened to their excited chatter, knowing that I would not be continuing on with them that day. Not that I knew any of these folks, but the groups of pilgrims that start off together kind of fall into a rhythm, and if your walking more or less the same pace, you end up in the same places. It's sort of like a grove of Aspens. Their all really just one organism, connected by their root system.

And maybe that's how we are, as humans. But we're connected by the ethereal and incomprehensible (at least to science) energies of emotions- love, hate, empathy, compassion, et. al.

The pilgrims sat at their tables talking about what lay in front of them for the day, where they were headed, where they would end up at the end of the day. Of course it was in Spanish and French and a few other languages so I didn't understand much of it. I started to feel a little melancholy, knowing that I wouldn't be continuing along with them, until after about 2 seconds when I consoled myself thinking about lying on the beach in the beautiful town of San Sebastian, which is where I was headed.

My original plan was to take a bus to somewhere in the middle of the Camino and walk a few days, then take another bus to Santiago and walk to the coastal town of Finesterra. The "official" end of the Camino is in Santiago de Compostella, where St. James is buried, the dude who brought Christianity to Europe. But the additional 3 day trek I'm going to make is supposed to be less traveled and scenic, and ends up at a beautiful little seaside town, where one is supposed to burn their clothes and swim nude in the ocean. I had chosen to lose the middle portion of my trek in favor of a "day off" in San Sebastian.

At the bus station I ran into Roberto who was also heading to San Sebastian. He was Spanish, about 65 or 70, tall, thin and gangly with a bit of a grey beard. He reminded me of many of the illustrations I've seen of Don Quixote. Except he wasn't going to slay any dragons. He was going to lay on the beach.

We talked for a little while waiting for the bus. About the town, about the Camino (he had a bum leg so hadn't walked more than a small portion) and about rock n' roll. It's weird how often music comes up in conversation. Rock n' roll might just be the universal language among us on this planet.

We parted ways and soon I was off, on a short bus ride to San Sebastian. After getting off the bus and taking a short walk, I emerged out of a tunnel to sunshine, and a beautiful town on the other side of a bridge.



I lingered on the bridge, taking in the sun, the cool breeze, and looking down into the wide river flowing underneath to the ocean. Once I got to the other side I walked through a little square. In the middle was a fountain, and beyond it down the street, an old cathedral with spires reaching to the sky. I continued on through an upscale shopping district to the pension Gagbai, where I was staying.

The pension was awesome- clean, modern, with an epic espresso machine in the common area. And the proprietress, Christina, was gracious and super helpful. I checked into my room and was feeling a little tired so I opted for a short nap.

Upon awakening I threw on my short pants/ swimming trunk hybrids (Costco- \$18.99) and proceeded to the beach. Everyone was out, either walking along the esplanade above the beautiful crescent of a beach, or down on the beach, sunning and swimming. The city was teeming with life, everyone seemed to be happy, in the moment. I felt like I was being washed down the promenade, just soaking it all in. I walked down stairs to the beach and walked along the water from one end to the other. After going for a little swim I headed back- there was still a lot of the town to see.



Then I headed to the old town and walked through it's thin, cobbled streets of shops, bars, cafes. There were people everywhere, tourists and locals walking, talking, eating drinking, enjoying each other and life. It felt a little sad not having someone to share it with, but I decided to sit down on a boisterous square with cafes and have a glass of wine and some tapas and get over it.



I did some writing and soaked in the afternoon. After awhile though I felt a little queasy. shook it off and walked over to a restaurant for dinner- "La Mafia". It was somewhat upscale, fortunately I was a little dressed up in Michale Stars beige slacks and a white linen shirt, which I had brought with the intent of shipping back home upon leaving Paris but, well, the only box the post office had was too small, so I shipped off what I could, left to carry some non-essentials with me on the Camino.

The meal was excellent, a lovely boursin and greens salad with bread and a truffle aioli, followed by a mushroom, chicken, and something else risotto which was nice and thick. I paired it with a Crianza, which was luscious. Cost me \$35. Does it sound like I love this town? Well, except for the hangover.

The next morning I felt like I had been run over by a truck. I looked at myself in the mirror and had huge bags under my eyes, like I had been sick for a week. My stomach was in knots, and I didn't feel like getting up. At first I thought it was the wine (I had had two glasses over a 4 hour stretch) but in retrospect it was probably some water I had drank on the Camino. Last year I had no problem drinking from the local fountains, but there was one near Pamplona that tasted a little funky...

Of course this is when everything else went to hell. I had no motivation yet I had to get my shit together and walk over to the train station to catch my ride to Santiago at 12: 20. Unfortunately, the train had already left the station, literally. Due to a miscommunication with the dude who sold me the ticket, I had bought a ticket for a bus that left while I had slept, just after midnight.

With Christina's help, we pieced together what options I had. It pretty much boiled down to taking the same bus that night which meant I would be hanging out with a backpack until midnight, and remember I felt like crap. There was a train that left the next morning, but the web said it was sold out, but Christina said that they often have tickets if you go to the station.

So I trudged over to the station with visions of barfing over the side of the bridge dancing in my head. When I got there I took a number and waited. There was a young blond woman from Germany wearing a backpack with a scallop shell- the sign of a fellow pilgrim. She looked confused so I asked if she needed help, due to my firm grasp of the language, and veteran Camino experience. Okay, well due to the fact that she was hot. She was under the impression that her train to Logrono didn't exist, or that she had missed it. She took me up on my offer to talk with Mr. ticket counter guy when her number was up.

The dude was having a bad day. Or maybe every day is a bad day for him. Anyway, she and him started instantly not communicating. He was gruff and was the type who didn't suffer fools easily. Not that she was, but he had that condescending attitude, and was just spewing out stuff in Spanish that she obviously didn't understand. So I asked him if there was a train with the number she had identified. He said yes. She kept asking if she needed a ticket. He said yes. She pulled out her ticket. I said, is that her ticket? He said yes. I asked him where it was leaving from, he pointed out the door to the tracks, and the waiting area.

We retreated, she put her ticket away and thanked me, looking at me with big blue eyes and kissing me on the cheek. I wished her a "Buen Camino" (the calling card of pilgrims on the Camino) but it didn't seem like she knew what it meant.

I went up to the counter when my number was called. It was easy to understand him when I asked him if there were any tickets for the train to Santiago. No is pretty much the same in any language.





So I bought a bus ticket for a 12 hour bus ride along the Galecian coast, figuring I would catch up on some writing at the very least. I had to move out of my pension to a more “traditional” one, but it was still in a great area. I still felt like crap so I laid down, getting up just long enough to get some tapas and walk up the hill to visit Jesus. He overlooks the bay, and helps provide miraculous cell coverage to the city, due to the cell phone antennas placed on him. I got to bed early hoping that a good nights sleep and a few prayers to Jesus would set me straight, or at least get me better cell reception.

But I dreamt of getting lost on this more desolate stretch of the camino, not finding a room, running out of water...all the things that the unknown present to you, if you’re in a bad state of mind. It never lets you dream of sunny fields, meandering paths, and bright beautiful days if you’re feeling like crap. I think it is most difficult to “feel good thoughts”, be centered, be closest to your “authentic self” (the self we spend our life trying to find) when you don’t feel good physically. The other thing that does this-the emotional reactions we’ve trained ourselves to have to various stimuli in our own personal milieus (how’s that for a fancy word- I’m such a

writer). I finally fell into a fitful sleep, hoping that the Camino would indeed provide.





When I walked the Camino last year, Cormac reminded me of something when discussing Hannah: she's a teenager. And I guess it took awhile for that to truly resonate with me. I just wanted her to be the same she had always been with me. When Janice and Hannah returned from their summer vacation in Cape Cod, Janice and I took the recommendation of Hannah's therapist and started to see a parenting counselor.

It's funny, I never thought, in a million years that I'd ever go to therapy, and now it seems like I can't escape it. Not that I don't think it's done some good, but I think if I was reading this, I would think that me and mine are going a little overboard. And in fact it seems a little ironic that Hannah is in therapy, I am, and Janice and I are going to a therapist/counselor for co-parenting. It's especially ironic since Janice told me that she had been to therapy once but didn't see a need for it. I guess times change.

My relationship with Hannah has improved slightly, it seems to have coincided with the divorce and since that's winding down, so it seems is her hatred of me. A little interesting research about the teenage brain: In the June 2015 issue of Scientific American, Jay Giedd, from UC San Diego, explains the teenage brain "is a unique entity characterized by changeability and an increase in networking among brain regions." The adolescent brain is neither a big child nor an incomplete adult. It is unique to itself.

He further explains that there is a mismatch in growth rate between the limbic portion of the brain, which is the center of emotion, and the prefrontal cortex, which controls logic and reasoning. This mismatch explains the adolescent proclivity for risky behavior. Teenagers are impulsive because the emotional part of their brain develops faster than the logical part.

Now, if they can only figure out why teens like Justin Bieber. Much to her credit, Hannah doesn't. I can only hope she continues down this path, and in the future we can agree on more than just the Justin Bieber thing, and she continues to grow into the beautiful woman she is already becoming.

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Amanda decided that maybe we could still have some sort of a relationship, and that maybe we could just "be in the moment", not have any strings, no dependence on each other. What she might have been talking about was trying to have an interdependent relationship, but at that time we were both incapable of such. At least I probably was. I knew deep down we needed to be apart to heal and work on ourselves, but at the same time we enjoyed being with each other, and we all need closeness sometimes.

By the way, I only throw this shit out there in hopes that it might help someone better understand themselves, their lives, through what I've learned from mine. I certainly am not an expert. But I'm sure you've figured that out by now.

According to Psychology Today, In an interdependent relationship, each party is able to comfortably rely on the other for help, understanding, and support. It's a "value added" kind of thing. The relationship contributes to both individuals' resilience, resourcefulness, and inner strength. All the same, each party remains self-sufficient and self-determining. They maintain a clear identity *apart from* the relationship and are quite able to stand on their own two feet.

We tried to be in the moment but we still were acting more or less like a couple. Amanda's mom and sister came into town for a month, so it too was convenient to have me around. I was confused, and still codependent, and being selfish, not knowing where I stood. In retrospect it wasn't working for me. So I did what any man-child would, I started acting out like a child, in essence being a dick.

Amanda hosted a halloween party, I didn't want to go, but it was a big deal to her sister, who was visiting from Sweden, and loves the holiday, and Amanda wanted me to go, so I attended. I was entertaining at the party, dressing up as Bruce Springsteen with a toy guitar and leather jacket, iPod and speaker in pocket playing the karaoke version of "Born to Run" as I shrieked the lyrics. But being there really just served to confuse me more.

A few days later there was another party for a mutual friend that I was expected to attend. It was kind of a big deal for her, so I did. I didn't know too many people, so I had a few drinks, talked to a few people, and left. I found out later that Amanda was upset that I left. Ill let you do the math- let's see, we had broken up (pretty much her idea), still I went to the party for her and our mutual friend (who I knew through her) and I left at 10 or so to be somewhere else. Again, I was confused.

And hurt. I was reacting not only to us being apart, but also old wounds from before I even knew Amanda. But at times like that, sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees. But I sure felt like a selfish prick when, a day or two later as i mentioned in an earlier post, Amanda was taken to the hospital with meningitis and almost died.