

## PROPOSAL FOR "IT'S A LONG WALK HOME- A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF DUBIOUS MERIT" BY MARK D. WEST

"I wish God would've told me it may not be a good idea to begin a pilgrimage with three hours of sleep and a wicked hangover". Those words seeped into my booze and cigarette-smoke addled brain as I stood staring at a dirt path that wound its way up the Pyrenees, and a 482-mile walk across Spain on a centuries-old pilgrimage route called the Camino de Santiago. Then again, I hadn't been listening to god much lately, or anyone else who had an opinion about my reckless behavior and apparent lack of rational thinking. What a few years ago might have been a vast, open vista adorned with wonderment and adventure, was instead a dark, cold mountain devoid of any signs of life, short of the suffocating stench of loneliness and despair.

"It's a Long Walk Home – A Spiritual Journey of Dubious Merit" is a 95,000 word narrative/memoir about Mark West who, haunted by emotional abuse, depression, and dreams of suicide (not to mention divorce, a daughter who hates him, and a dead girlfriend), books a flight to Europe and attempts to stumble across Spain on an old pilgrimage route to face his demons, drink a little Rioja, and search for some sort of salvation.

From almost giving up without stepping foot on the Camino after getting lost in the bowels of the Madrid train station due to a "miscalculated cultural experience" (a hangover), to waking up with his ankle as thick as a Redwood with 150 kilometers to go, to being escorted by a thousand monarch butterflies through a Eucalyptus grove on the last day of his trek, Mark tells the story of the pain, heartache, and finally the joy, gratitude, and forgiveness he experienced of his journey with self-deprecating humor, beautiful simplicity, and an eye towards the ecstatic but absurd dance of the cosmos and our place in it.

The story is a cross between "Wild", "Eat Pray Love", "Everything is Fucked: A Book About Hope", with a little Bill Bryson and Paul Theroux thrown in for good measure. Mark uses humor, pathos, and a self-deprecating tone as he battles himself and 500 kilometers of bad road across Spain. His story intertwines three journeys- His walk on the Camino paired with observations of the characters he meets like Kento the "Beer Drinking, Chain Smoking Patron Saint of the Camino" who seems to show up out of nowhere sitting on the side of the Camino smoking a cigarette and drinking a beer; his emotional journey (the experiences and affects of an abusive wife, depression, an estranged daughter, dreams of suicide, and the near-death and subsequent breakup with "the woman who saved his life"); and the healing and personal growth he experienced during and after his walk.

In the end, "It's a Long Walk Home..." is more a spiritual and emotional journey than a physical one. It's about things lost and found. It's about sadness, grief, and joy. It's about wisdom gained through dark nights of the soul, and the redemptive power that resides in us all.

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In 2017, 45 million Americans practiced meditation and yoga regularly, and currently 200-500 million people meditate worldwide, yet another indication (amongst many) of our search for a deeper and more fulfilling understanding to our existence, as opposed to lives of quiet desperation assuaged by the distractions of consumerism, technology, and innocuous entertainment not to mention the mass hysteria and anxiety the world has experienced due to Covid. We live our lives searching for meaning while trying to understand our feelings of isolation, detachment, restlessness, emptiness and depression.

Another indication of this existential crisis is represented by the number of people from all corners of the globe walking the Camino. What began centuries ago as a religious pilgrimage to the tomb of the Saint who brought Christianity to Europe, has become a spiritual crusade for anyone questioning their lives and looking for meaning and a deeper understanding of their existence. According to the Santiago Reception Office for Pilgrims, the number of people walking the Camino has seen a steady increase over the last 30 years and has more than doubled over the last ten. In addition, 2022 is a Catholic Holy Year which has always culminated in yet more Pilgrims walking the Camino, and which will result in even more publicity and notoriety for the Camino de Santiago.

Also, the last 10 years has seen an explosion of books dealing with this existential angst and the search for meaning in the modern world from the likes of Depak Chopra, Dr. Wayne Dyer, and Eckhart Tolle to name just a few. And in fact, bestselling author Paulo Coelho (The Alchemist) used the Camino as a backdrop for his 1987 novel "The Pilgrimage" which dealt with themes of spirituality and self-discovery.

Mr. West's existential struggle is what provoked him to buy a ticket to a continent he'd never been to and walk across a country he knew nothing about (short of Christopher Columbus and Rioja wine). What prompted him to write a memoir about his journey is still a mystery to him, although the book took root as a blog he wrote and posted nightly to a few hundred friends and acquaintances while walking the Camino - a purging of the events, emotions, and trauma from the previous few years of his life mixed with his experiences on the Camino; an explanation to those he loved of the man he had unwittingly become thanks to emotional abuse, depression, and heartache.

But as he walks, he begins to reflect on the crazy circumstances, events, and emotions that pushed him there, and starts to come to terms with his life, and delves into the emotions that scar us all, and the lessons he learned though some of the latest thinking such as the writings on shame and worthiness by Brene Brown, and recent studies in Neuroscience and Epigenetics.

Peter Gilmour writes: *"Memoir echoes larger worlds. Every memoir reflects not only the individual but also the social, not only the personal but also the communal, not only the local but also the universal"*. In other words, memoir transcends the author's personal story, and in doing so becomes a shared experience with his/her audience.

Walking across Spain was, for Mr. West, an immediate, and visceral experience that was a reaction to the emptiness, isolation, and depression he felt as a result of his life in America- a life woven with the same threads that constitute the lives of many Americans. And, like many Americans do, Mr. West took a pragmatic, "fix it and move on" approach toward his problem. Buy a backpack from REI, order a bunch of stuff from Amazon, book a flight to Spain and walk across it. Done.

Little did he know his "journey" would take more than the 31 days he walked the Camino. Unbeknownst to him, he was embarking on something much bigger than he could've imagined- the hero's journey. Joseph Campbell said of the hero's journey: "It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life. Where you stumble, there lies your treasure"

And indeed, his pilgrimage is fraught with stumbles. His walk across Spain is a fascinating, entertaining, and sometimes funny, "external" journey that lurks at the surface, a figurative mirror of his deeper spiritual and emotional journey, stumbling along in an attempt to reconcile the man he had become due to the traumas of his life, with his true, authentic self.

But Mr. West's journey doesn't end there. He also shares the traumas that unwittingly pushed him to Spain to walk the Camino, along with the things he's learned from immersing himself in the latest science and modalities (neuroscience, epigenetics), and the steps he took to begin to heal himself. His work is part memoir, part self-help, part spirituality.

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## Branding/ Special Features

- Mark understands the importance of branding- he spent 20 years in the advertising business. Up until now, he has been responsible for all branding of his books and himself as an author. He knows Photoshop, Illustrator, WordPress, and Final Cut Pro, amongst other germane platforms and programs. Many of the assets he's created for his book (and are subsequently discussed in this proposal) can be reviewed [here](#).
- The branding is bold, fun, and consistent throughout. Mike Loomis (*Your Brand is Calling*) reviewed Mr. West's assets (including his website) and was "impressed" with his branding and saw "absolutely no issues that needed to be addressed".
- The backbone of "It's A Long Walk Home..." is a visually stunning blog Mr. West created and posted to while he was walking the Camino de Santiago.
- His website includes a gallery of beautiful photographs taken while walking the Camino.
- "Fear and Self-loathing on the Camino de Santiago", an article Mr. West wrote for December's Wanderlust (online) Journal was chosen for their annual printed edition, available at Barnes and Noble and Amazon.
- Mr. West has created two promotional videos from pictures and video he took while walking the Camino. In addition, he's created other thought-provoking videos that tie into the Camino, his journey, and his book. They can be viewed on his YouTube channel.
- Mark has created "Mark's Camino de Santiago Spotify Playlist" loaded with songs he found inspirational during his pilgrimage. He analyzes the songs and comments on why they were included in a related blog post.

- Mr. West has created a fun eBook from his sometimes pithy, sometimes profound, often profane tweets, combining them with his beautiful photographs from the Camino in a twitter-like format (“It’s a Long Walk Home- Life, Love, and Tweets from the Camino de Santiago”).
- Mr. West has created an eBook of his Instagram photos paired with highlights from the first chapter that have been rewritten and reformatted into short little 3 paragraph stories.
- Mr. West has created several potential covers for his book.
- Mark’s current blog ties into “It’s a Long Walk Home...” by using short excerpts from his book, combining them with thoughts and research on self-help and personal growth.
- Mr. West has created an “audiobook” version of the first chapter of “It’s a Long Walk Home...”
- He has written an early reader children’s book called “Althea and the BIG IDEA” about creativity and where ideas come from and has created a website for the book.

#### Promotional Opportunities:

- Go back to Spain and walk the Camino again, blogging every night as before, stopping at bookstores, sporting goods stores, etc. to do readings.
- Take friends and acquaintances to walk the Camino, having them journal daily. Curate, edit and post their essays to a blog, for possible use in a book.
- Truncate and refine the original blog to give potential book purchasers a taste of the memoir.
- Continue to build fan base via social media by investing in a social media company.
- Sponsors- REI, Delta Airlines (or other) Apple (Mr. West wrote his original blog on a MacBook air he carried with him on the Camino), Spain tourism, winesfromspainusa.com, Merrill, Booking.com.
- Have a contest. Take a handful of winners to Spain, walk with them the first few days. Subsequently they will be required to post video or a blog to a page on my website. I’ll meet with them every few days and videotape them talking about their experiences.
- Speak at REI, etc
- This is a partial list. Mr. West understands the value of marketing and loves attacking a brand and devising creative marketing tactics for it, even more so when the brand is himself.

#### Sequels/ Subsidiary Rights Possibilities

- Sequel tentatively titled: “You Can Never Step in the Same River Twice- Returning to the Camino de Santiago”, or “All Roads Lead Home – The End of the Road”. A year after he walked the Camino, Mr. West went back and walked the first section of the Camino again (over the Pyrenees to Pamplona) and then took a bus to Santiago de Compostela (the traditional end of the Camino), walking from there to Finisterra at the western tip of Spain- literally considered “the end of the earth” by pre-Columbus Europeans. The book is about his walk and the people he meets, the deeper emotional traumas that hadn’t fully healed upon his return to the Camino (i.e.- forgiving his wife’s emotional abuse), and reflections on the changes he experienced over the prior year.
- Another passion of Mr. West’s is wine. “All Roads Lead to Wine -Walking the Wineries of Spain” proposes to walk the major wine regions in Spain (Rioja, Bierzo, Priorat, Rias Baixas, Ribiero del Duero, etc.) and bring this once maligned country’s’ wines back into focus as their industry recovers from the repressive rule of Franco (it takes awhile to establish vines that will produce exceptional wines), and crappy marketing in the world market. Spain continues to improve its wines and is making headway into the forefront of the world market, relying on better marketing, their long rich history, and the great value of their wines.
- Create a video series profiling Spanish winemakers while walking the major wine regions of Spain, partnering with Spanish speaking director David Lama of “Animal”, a Seattle based production company.
- Walk the Camino and bring a person of note- a celebrity, other author, self-help guru (Mark and Tony Robbins On the Camino!). Blog and write a book about the experience.
- The Camino as a metaphor/means for self-discovery- Mr. West walks the Camino and meets other personal growth gurus/thinkers who give talks along the way in the bigger cities- Madrid, Pamplona, Leon, Burgos, etc.
- Walk and write about other “pilgrimages”: Char Dham, India at the foot of the Himalayas, The Saint Olaf Way in Norway, The Camino Portuguese, Japan’s Kumano Ancient Trail, etc.
- A book of Mr. West’s photographs from the Camino.
- Mr. West received a degree in film, emphasis in Screenwriting and was in a Screenwriting mentorship at Paramount for two years. He has recently reconnected with his mentors and is working on the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of a screenplay based on the book, as well as two others.

## Platform.

- The inspiration for the book is a visually stunning blog Mr. West wrote and posted every evening to a few hundred friends and acquaintances while walking the Camino de Santiago ([www.allroadsleadhomethebook.com](http://www.allroadsleadhomethebook.com) - password "livewithgrace").
- His current blog which ties into the book (using short excerpts from it, combined with self-help/personal growth research) is on both medium and his personal website.
- Branding is consistent throughout. Mr. West is currently interviewing social media marketing companies to take over the day to day tasks of his social media marketing.

## Misc.

- "Althea and the Big Idea", an early reader about creativity and where ideas come from, and a resultant website for the book.
- "Milo and Otis- a series of 3 early readers aimed at imparting traditional emotional values to 7-10 year olds.
- Miscellaneous short stories, poems, etc. [www.medium.com/@markwestwriter](http://www.medium.com/@markwestwriter).
- Chosen for a screenplay mentorship at Scenario. Three unproduced screenplays- "Are you Bipolar or Just a Bitch -a Love Story", "Throb and the Love Muscle", "Undercover Mother".
- Screenplay treatment for "Throb and the Love Muscle.

## Chapter Overview

### 1. Fear and Self-Loathing on the Camino

Introduction- The things that sent me there. Setting off over the Pyrenees amidst fog and rain alone. I introduce Janice (my wife who I was separated from at the time), Hannah (my 12-year-old daughter) and Amanda (my girlfriend, my life for the previous year). Going to the fertility clinic to jerk off into a cup and conceive Hannah. Feelings of worthlessness, dreams of suicide. I meet Kento (The Zen Coyote Patron Saint of the Camino) Asia, Park and Hyun.

### 2. Gorillas, John Varvatos, and the Fabric of Life

Walking the first day to the old Monastery at Roncesvalles in the Pyrenees after a sleepless night due to my phone chirping periodically with suggestions from an old friend on what to do in Spain. About the Basques. Amanda and I on a park bench after she broke my heart. Getting lost and more feelings of worthlessness. The Dali Lama and Deepak Chopra on self-hatred. The beginning of my therapy 3 years prior. My wife's Emotional Abuse. Psychological assessment. Shame- Brene' Brown. Anxiety reducers: wine, cigarettes, coffee, masturbation, Ryan Reynolds romantic comedies. A little bit of peace- a smile as I sat on my bunk writing.

### 3. Tom Hanks

Up late. More reasons to hate myself. Turning emotional molehills into mountains. Mistakes as signposts. Fellow pilgrims think I'm Tom Hanks. Walking through farmland and cowbells. Remembering when my wife and daughter made fun of me for trying to sing. I meet Damian who began his pilgrimage at his doorstep in Poland. I meet Emma and Baya from Portland. She tells me a story that reminds me of Hannah and brings me to tears as I walk off from them as they start singing "Watching the River Run". How I met Amanda. The science behind striving for happiness and love. How I met my wife Janice, and our early life before Hannah. Being a twin, codependence and resilience.

### 4. The Old Man and the Sea

I meet Cormack- he's in a bunk below me in Zubiri. I go to café to write feeling Hemingwayesque due to heading to Pamplona the next day. I compare my journey to that of Santiago- Hemingway's "Old Man and the Sea". Have dinner with Rosemary and Caroline who tell us a funny story about Kento. I wake everyone up when my Kindle starts making noises which adds to my feeling like a worthless shitbag. Left Zubiri late, I ponder why I feel worthless, and why we, as humans, hurt each other so much. I catch up to Cormack, we walk and talk together, check out some old 12-14 century Knights Templar churches, soak our feet in the river. We walk into Pamplona on the final day of the running of the bulls, I splurge on a nice hotel. Amanda and my magical first date, Story of how Janice became smitten with me.

5. Windmills, Dreamers, and Don Quixote

Walking alone out of Pamplona. The windmills in the distance remind me of Don Quixote and myself, hopeless romantics in a world that has no patience for such. I run into Cormack in a small town, we walk together and climb the “Mount of Forgiveness” which provokes some initial thoughts on forgiveness. It gets hot, we check into the first auberge we see and make dinner with a few other pilgrims. I think about Janice and my early years together before and after Hannah’s birth. Amanda and I cement our relationship, and our codependence on each other.

6. Losing My Religion

The showers played music, I heard “Losing my Religion” as I bathed. I left in the morning with Cormac and walked together most of the day, telling each other about our lives. He told me about his grandmother who almost didn’t travel to Spain (coincidentally) to see his brother get married. She was worried about travelling. Alan Watts on worrying. I talk about my early adulthood, the foundation of who I am today. Janice wanting a child at 45, me agreeing. A poem I wrote about our disintegrating relationship. Amanda and her kids, a magical night of singing, dancing, and a lunar eclipse.

7. Free Wine!

Up late again, walk out of Estella alone serenaded by some gentleman who gather every morning to sing to pilgrims. I question my worthiness as a pilgrim, talk about growing up in America. Don’t fuck with the Camino! Nearing Rioja, I discover the wine fountain. Going down into a valley I walk with Ciera, who’s also at a crossroads in her life. Advice from the Buddha in regard to travelling. Emotional intelligence, relationships, baggage. I meet Pasquel the laughing Belgian. I run into Kento on the side of the road smoking a cigarette. I analyze Amanda and my relationship, why it fell apart. It get’s hot, I run into Cormac in the town I was going to stay in, we go to the next town and luxuriate in the pool at the auberge. About my early married life, Americans as “children that have grown old”. Relationships, love, codependence. A poem I wrote for Amanda.

8. The Zen Coyote Patron Saint of the Camino

I meet Heather from Brooklyn, and Jennie from Cologne (a life coach), two more with noble purpose, making me feel spoiled and shameful. Have dinner with 10 other pilgrims including Pasquel the laughing Belgian. Finishing my blog for the night in the bar, Kento shows up offering up a 6 pack of beer and a smoke. I compare Kento to the Coyote in Native American myth. The next morning Cormack and I leave together at 6, watching the sunrise behind us. I try to explain how I came to walk the Camino and write about it, part of it attributable to Amanda. Loving yourself and loving someone else. I consider my future, and the cage I’ve built for myself. Cormac and I finish the day in Logrono with tapas and wine. A story about Amanda and me in Santa Barbara. “In the end it’s memories like these that tell our stories and breathe life into our short time on this ball of dirt”. My dad’s death and what he used to tell me as a teen: “take it easy...but take it.

9. Of Grace and Blisters

Cormack and I leave Logrono together, my blisters rear their ugly heads. Cormack tells me he’s meeting his girlfriend in Burgos, I’m glad but trepidatious about walking alone. Walking through vineyards, it’s hot. A discourse on grace. A letter to Amanda about me recognizing our codependence. Cormac and I trudge into Ventosa as the temperature hits 95 in the shade. “Every day on the Camino is a day of departures and arrivals. There’s no need for goodbyes. As in life, you move on, realizing you may cross paths with that person again, or not. The difference is that when you’ve thrown your soul to the universe and decided to walk 470 miles across Spain, the moments you spend with others on a similar journey will stay with you forever.”

10. Alone with my Underwear

Cormac and I have a reunion with the Portland girls and Pasquel the laughing Belgian and we make an awesome dinner. Leaving Ventosa alone under a full moon (the Portland girls were bunking with me and woke me up at 4). Traveling alone I think about independence and codependence. Still walking in the dark, I think I’m lost, it’s only insecurity. I run into Cormack. I discuss my Camino underwear choices. We run into a pilgrim we know who just found out her daughter had died in a car wreck. I cry, knowing that I too had lost a daughter (metaphorically). It hits 95 again as we get to Santo Domingo having walked 30 kilometers. Psychological assessment, my therapist maintains I was emotionally abused. Getting served divorce papers. Amanda and I go away for the weekend and face our demons: “But there, on that balcony, it was as if we were sharing our hopes and dreams for the future, the scars of our pasts, while holding on to each other for dear life in the present.”

## 11. What the F

I leave Belorado by myself and feel a change, although the voices in the back of my head question my sunny attitude. I ruminate about life and change, why half of the world seems scared of change, and the absurdity of clinging to irrational world views. Amygdala vs. pre-frontal cortex, trying to figure out why rationality seems to have gone out the window, along with facts and science. I catch up with Cormac whose hobbling slowly due to blisters. I leave him behind and come upon my first sunflower field and reflect on our loss of individuality vis-a-vis the Sunflower scene from "Harold and Maude". Cormac and I meet Juan, a father who proudly wears a t-shirt with a picture of his three sons. I compare Juan to Kento, both representing different aspects of life. We leave Juan and walk from flat farmland uphill to a Camino surrounded by pines. We walk with a few idealistic young pilgrims as I cynically consider the state of the world. After taking a break at a roadside stand, we fall in with four Italian dudes. Cormac tells a few donkey jokes and I wryly observe Cormac's Irishness as Steinbeck did: "...a dark people with a gift for suffering way past their deserving". We stumble into San Juan Ortega and stay at a traditional auberge in an old stone monastery, ending the day drying our clothes and sharing a bottle of wine in the plaza in front of the church as Heather (who I'd met a few days prior) teaches a few Pilgrims how to waltz. I finish my blog alone at a desk by the front desk of the auberge and the woman behind the counter grabs me by the hand and whisks me outside to watch the sunset with her.

## 12. Nobody Can Look at a Sunflower and Not Smile

Cormac tells me he woke up to see the woman in the bunk next to me angrily staring at me for snoring loud enough to wake the dead. Sadness as I leave the old monastery knowing it'll be my last day walking with Cormac. His blisters scream as we walk through a forest and into Ages for breakfast. He leaves and I stay to upload my blog, Heather and the Buffalo couple stopping by for food. I stop at the next town (Atapuerca) and learn it lies a few kilometers from an archaeological site that's revealed remains of the first inhabitants of the European Continent. I ruminate about how little we've evolved since then. The Camino goes up a small mountain where I run into an ancient scene: an old shepherd herding his flock to the highlands. Soon I'm walking next to a military zone and I note the irony. The well-marked Camino somewhat disappears forcing me to scramble up the mountain as I think about Amanda and navigating the slippery foundations of relationships. I run into Cormac at the top of the hill where he's talking to a Gandalf-looking dude and his small tribe of pilgrims. He tells us about the four stages of the Camino and what they mean, contributing to his sagely personage. We walk down the other side of the mountain and into Burgos where we find a café and book hotel rooms. I have dinner with him and meet Sinead and then walk back to my hotel, lonely and sad. I conclude that in life, our hearts must bear the burden, but it's our souls that have to show us the way.

## 13. The Goat Always Heads towards the Mountain

## 14. The Patron Saint of Blisters

## 15. Dinner with the Mamas and the Papas

## 16. All Things Must Pass

## 17. Maybe There's a god above, but All's I've ever Learned from Love...

## 18. Clangers and Crack

## 19. Wrecking Ball

## 20. Shine

## 21. That each Tomorrow Finds us Farther than Today

## 22. A Habanero Souffle in Hell

## 23. Banjos, Butterflies, and Boxcar Willie

24. The Wind
25. Watching the River Flow
26. The Camino Not Taken
27. We Make a Life by What We Give
28. It is in the Shelter of Each Other That the People Live
29. We should Consider Every Day Lost on Which We Have not Danced at Least Once
30. Who Knows Where the Time Goes
31. Birds, Butterflies, and Beginnings
32. A Brand-new Day
33. The Road Home, Odds and Ends

“Sitting in front of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela at the end of my journey, I pulled out my journal and wrote: “For a few moments anyway, I’ve thrown out the vestiges of the past and done something that, I guess to some, is a little extraordinary. I never looked at it that way since, when you see yourself as worthless you figure anything you do is, well...not of any consequence, and that anyone can do it.

Maybe the key is to recognize that when magic gets thrown your way, you need to grab it and accept it as though you deserve it, and let it show you it’s secrets. The hard part is to recognize that all the pain, heartache, and suffering are meant to teach you how to appreciate, accept, and in the end, love yourself, so you can show others the magician you’ve become.”