



# Walking in Love: My Journey along the Camino de Santiago

*Roy W. Howard*

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## **Walking in Love: My Journey along the Camino de Santiago** Roy W. Howard

The journey begins in a French village at the base of the Pyrenees Mountains and ends in a Spanish village overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. In between is a path that millions of pilgrims have walked since the 12th century. In the spring of 2015, I was one of them, on sabbatical from my pastorate. The way is known as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela, a 500-mile path over the mountains and across northern Spain. Modern pilgrims are a mixed company of many languages, some traditionally religious and others non-religious, though walking with an explicit and often spiritual intent. I didn't walk as a religious penitent seeking absolution from my sins. I did walk with a purpose. I wanted to listen closely for God's direction, particularly for the next chapter of my life. I also wanted to be radically free from my normal patterns to see my life from a fresh angle. This is the story of what occurred as I walked this path with a remarkable company of pilgrims from all over the world. My daily observations are recorded here, along with a few chants and scriptures that guided my way and deepened my intentions. The poet Wendell Berry said, "Always in the big woods when you leave familiar ground and step into a new place there will be ... a little nagging of dread. It is the ancient fear of the Unknown, and it is your first bond with the wilderness you are going into. What you are doing is exploring. You are undertaking the first experience, not of the place, but of yourself in that place." From the first day I crossed the mountains, walking through snow and rain in the bitter cold, the Camino became an exploration of self-understanding in an utterly new place. The freedom was exhilarating. The sense of the Unknown and the nagging dread remained with me, along with the company of pilgrims who became my Camino family. Several remain so. Daily at dawn, I would arise from my bunk bed, place my belongings in a small backpack, and walk out the door. The Camino winds through wide valleys and small villages, among vineyards and the vast grasslands of the high plains. It crosses the rugged mountains of Galicia before descending to Santiago. The spring flowers are breathtaking, especially the acres of brilliant red tulips on the hills. Bird songs are abundant, including the ubiquitous call of the cuckoo. Most days, I didn't know what I would eat, where I would sleep, or whom I would meet. I had a wondrous sense of being on the edge of fear and faith.

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