



## Villagers in the World: Walking the Camino (Part 2) (cont'd)

By Mary Anne Gibbons

On Day 6, we covered 16.59 miles (37,140 steps) on our final trek into the Plaza del Obradoiro, a large plaza in Santiago de Compostela that marks the end of the Camino. The Plaza is graced by a grand Cathedral containing the remains of St. James and a bust of St. James, which each pilgrim is supposed to hug or touch to mark the end of the Camino. As we approached the Plaza, we passed through a short tunnel greeted by a bagpiper. The thrill of entering the Plaza gave me and my cousins a great burst of energy, and we quickly snapped photos as we savored the moment. Unfortunately, the Camino had taken its toll on my brother's girlfriend, who had issues with blisters and sat down and cried upon reaching the Plaza.

Throughout the Camino, I thought often of my training mantra, "Trust the Training." I thought of how being able to walk over 70 miles in six days seemed daunting to me when my knees hurt many days. I may have given up if I had not kept telling myself, "Trust the training." I thought of how people sometimes decide that they cannot engage in walking or other exercise because it is just too hard. I wanted to return to Mount Pleasant to encourage my fellow Villagers to take those first steps towards a goal of better physical health and to just trust the training. Stay tuned as this idea germinates in my mind.



*From upper left and clockwise, Gibbons siblings Mary Anne and brother Tom; Mary Anne celebrates arrival at the cathedral Santiago de Compostela; and Mary Anne's husband Mike Healy finds a bit of shade. Photos: Courtesy of the Gibbons family*

As I approached the end of the Camino, I was both happy and sad. I was happy thinking that the days of challenging long walks were over. My husband had joined us in Santiago, and I could look forward to the next two weeks of vacation we had planned in Spain. I was sad, however, about the fact that my time with my cousins was coming to an end. While my brother walked mostly with his girlfriend, my cousins and I virtually talked our way through the Camino. Especially on long hills—and there were many—we had wonderful discussions about some aspect of our respective lives or compared notes on a part of our family history. Our discussions were deep and thoughtful. We laughed often over a pitcher of sangria at dinner each evening. We encouraged each other along the way. How I cherished that precious time.

Many walk the Camino to find themselves, for religious reasons, or as a way to transition from one job to the future.

I was walking the Camino for the physical challenge, for the added benefit of spending time with some favorite cousins and in memory of my sister-in-law. I left a small keychain at the Cathedral in Santiago in memory of my sister-in-law. It said "They had a love that was more than love."

I was able to tell her and my brother's three children that I carried the memory of their mom with me the entire week—that alone would have made it a Buen Camino, as we heard from fellow travelers all week.

Many have a life-changing awakening after leaving the hectic pace of normal life and walking quietly through nature on the Camino. I kept waiting for my grand awakening, which never came. Instead of a great "Aha," I will treasure many less dramatic things—the precious time with my cousins, the sunny days and beautiful scenery in rural northern Spain, walking through many quaint old villages and past stone walls that reminded me of Ireland, and being able to tell that orthopedist one day that he was wrong. I made it to Santiago de Compostela!!!