

**LOST  
ON THE  
WAY**

*A Journal From the Camino de Santiago*

**BLAKE FARHA**

# Day 1

**IRÚN → SAN SEBASTIÁN**

*22 km / 13.67 mi.*

*Day 1*

*Monday, August 21st, 2017*

*11:10*

Such joy! Finally and truly on the Camino de Santiago!

Last night, I cannot express the relief I felt when a smiling, cap wearing, mustachioed man greeted me at the door of the albergue from a block away. I must truly look like a pilgrim.

“Hola,” he screamed through his snow white mustache.

“Hallo,” I responded, my subdued German greeting now my default. I’ll have to remember to change that. “Please tell me there’s a bed with my name on it.”

“Si, claro! There’s a bed with your name on it!”

I couldn’t believe my luck, and the relief I felt was instant and heavy.

I bought a proper guide book from the albergue and before going to sleep, gave the seemingly insufficient guide I printed to a Frenchman I met, who had apparently left the house with everything...everything except his guidebook.

I slept like a baby, apart from having to wake up a few times to change



positions. Another sign of my age. Apparently lying in one position on a bed is now a thing which certain parts of my body, my hips and ass in particular, take as tantamount to a kick from a mule.

This morning I departed after a very brief breakfast, at 6:30, with Leo, the Frenchman to whom I gave my guide.

I was glad to have him with me because I was worried I'd be unable to find the way out of the city. But, there were little yellow arrows showing us the way.

These ubiquitous little arrows, half a day into my trip, have already become happy little companions. Each one so bright, and individually sloppy, smeared across surfaces as varied as the lengths of their tails, and the angle of their points. They pop out of nowhere, slapped on the back of a sign post, wiped across a railing, spread across a stone, and

## *Day 1*

brightly beckon me forward. They remind me sunnily that the way is long, but I'm going the right direction, and that, even if they were my only companions, I'm not walking this journey alone.

Today I walked the entire journey with Leo, who walked at a good pace, and also reminded me to stop every now and then. I have a tendency to walk as hard and fast as I can until I reach the end point, so it was lovely to walk with someone who suggested, for example, that we stop at a beautiful lookout point to write in our journals for a bit. He's lighthearted, friendly, and funny, and made a great partner. Sometimes we walked in silence, sometimes we joked and laughed. It was very easy, and I was glad for the company after two days without having had a real conversation with another human, and for the chance to speak Spanish.

I also found two walking sticks for which I know my knees are very grateful. I decided to name them, since we'll become very close, and named them Emil and Jennifer, after two of my best friends in Berlin. I know they are rooting for me in Berlin, so it strengthens my heart to have them metaphorically supporting me each and every step of El Camino.

Between the sticks, the amethyst given to me by Alon, a stone meant to protect travelers, and the backpack I borrowed from Emma, I feel so much support from so many people who love me, and it makes me all the merrier literally carrying them with me on the journey.

Something else that I've been carrying with me just about every step of the way is The Bee Gees. I listened to a podcast about the secret powers of music, and in it the hosts interviewed someone who teaches a class in

CPR. According to him, it's necessary to pump the victim's chest 100 beats per minute.

Obviously, not everyone carries a metronome in their pocket, so the CPR technicians had to think of a way to help people estimate 100 BPM. As it turns out, the song, "Stayin' Alive," is 100 BPM, and it's something that everyone knows, so they teach their students to pump the victim's chest while thinking about that super groovy, incredibly famous bass line.

That got me thinking: How can I be sure to set my own rhythm on the Camino, and I got to doing some math.

$$100 \text{ BPM} \times \approx 2.5 \text{ feet (my stride)} = 250 \text{ feet per minute}$$

$$250 \text{ FPM} \times 60 = 15,000 \text{ feet per hour}$$

$$15,000 \div 5,280 = 2.84 \text{ miles per hour}$$

Verdict! TOO SLOW.

So, now when I walk, that song is pumping in my head, and I think of how groovy and confident they were in the video and it speeds me right along to a faster stride of approximately four miles per hour.

It also makes me feel closer to my mom, who would be thrilled to know that The Bee Gees are with me literally every step of the way.

Today's only day one, and while I have a long way to go, today helped me to see that this journey is well within my reach. Today I finally felt the confidence that, yes, this will be hard, but I can do it!

*Day 1*

And barring unforeseen circumstances, I shall.

Only about 800 more kilometers to go.

*All my lovin',*

*- Blake.*

## *Pride*

1. I'm proud I completed the first day of El Camino.
2. I'm proud that I'm being really social, and am unafraid to speak with anyone I meet!
3. I'm proud that my body is in quite good shape, and is getting me where it should
4. I'm proud that I was brave enough to do Tai Chi on a beach full of people with a group of youngsters laughing at me the whole time.

## *Gratitude*

1. I'm grateful that I had Leo to walk with today.
2. I'm grateful that my body is strong and healthy enough to carry me down El Camino
3. I'm grateful that the beach in San Sebastian was fresh, and that I could return to the Ocean!
4. I'm grateful that the older gentleman in the city helped me find a kebab shop.



# Day 2

**SAN SEBASTIÁN → ZARAUTZ**

*19 km / 11.8 mi.*

*Day 2*

*Tuesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017*

*no time recorded*

**T**oday I woke at 5:00, and was out on El Camino by 5:30. It was a wonderful day.

Climbing high into the hills on the West side of San Sebastián, I watched the Sun rise up behind the hills on the East side of the city. It almost looked like the hills were on fire, the massive statue of Jesus atop the peak, only a silhouette against the morning light, looking down, hands open, watching idly as the blaze approached.

I spent today walking alone, and apart from a few minutes and the time to have coffee and tortilla in Ondía with two guys I met at the albergue yesterday, my walk was a solitary one. And I thoroughly enjoyed it. I even found myself half dancing and singing, “Stayin’ Alive,” in my highest falsetto.

My therapist and I discussed this before I left. The hope that some solitude on El Camino would help me learn to truly enjoy being alone; to truly enjoy my own company, and understand that time with myself is as wonderful and enjoyable as time spent with others.

Of course, now that I think about it, it’s no surprise that I’ve always



hated being alone, and avoided it at all costs. The number of times I spent hopping from coffee with this friend, a beer with that friend, a film with that friend, a meal with that acquaintance, a skype call with a family member back home, pushing that inevitable moment where I had only my thoughts to accompany me...

...Like a child trying his hardest to delay his obligatory return home at day's end where he knows his alcoholic father sits chain smoking at the kitchen table, waiting to take his day out on someone smaller and weaker than himself.

Who could ever love spending time alone with a self that knows only how to lash out angrily, irrationally, violently, relentlessly at the only victim who can't say "no?", who can't fight back?

I finally am beginning to understand why alone time has always been so

## *Day 2*

dreaded...I've always been the kind of company you come to expect from an abusive husband. I've spent a lifetime being so cruel to myself. This realization has literally brought tears to my eyes.

It hurts to know how poorly I've treated myself. Deeply...the way it hurts to know how much time one has wasted on an undeserving partner whose neglect and cruelty finally drove one out the front door, duffel bag in hand, stuffed with whatever physical manifestations of a life were within reach.

But today marks an incredible turning point in that life I've lived, in that relationship with myself. My therapy helped me see who I was living with, showed me it was time to pack my bags and leave that undeserving version of myself behind.

As I discussed with Michael, my therapist, this trip was that opportunity, now freed from a relationship with myself that wasn't serving me well, to find a partnership with that side of myself that I give to everyone else; that smart, fun, happy, loving, caring, giving part of myself. And I believe today marked the start of that partnership.

I don't remember even what I was thinking but at some point early in the morning I burst into laughter; roaring belly laughter, and said out loud, "Oh, Jesus CHRIST I am funny!"

I spent the rest of the Camino laughing, singing, dancing down the road, truly enjoying being with myself in a way I don't think I ever have.

Zarautz is a small beach town with the largest beach in this region. Like yesterday in San Sebastián, the albergue is a stone's throw away from the beach, and like yesterday, as soon as we were given beds, I threw



down my things, put on my swimsuit, and headed straight to the sea.

The water is clear, and reflects a glassy, frosty aquamarine. The waves today were incredible. INCREDIBLE!

I haven't seen waves like this sense I went to the Mud Festival in South Korea in 2010.

They were massive, but not dangerous; manageable, but threatening, the biggest danger being hurtled into a small child basking in the surf.

I could hardly contain myself. Body surfing is one of my most loved activities in the entire world. There's nothing like it. I never stop. I'm like a dog playing fetch, still bounding while his master has long since tired of throwing. I dive with the waves time and again, and before I've even been deposited in the sand, hair draped over my face like a swamp creature emerging from the deep, I'm leaping back into the breakers,

## *Day 2*

digging into the water to propel myself against the tide, making every effort to snag each and every worthwhile wave. It is, for me, pure, unadulterated joy. I must seem like a man possessed to the people around me. I shout, I scream, I curse when I miss, and I laugh maniacally when I feel the wave lift me into its peak, and shriek with joy when I'm flung on the beach like so much jetsam and flotsam.

I've been watching the waves roll in for the last hour as I write this, endless streams of Spaniards strolling along the stone promenade, partners, families, friends, seemingly unaware of the late hour on what is ostensibly a school night. It's been a joy to be part of, a banging soundtrack including Brown Eyed Girl, Like a Rolling Stone, Mrs. Robinson, Anything You Want, Fire and Rain, and every other beachy hit in the genre, locals singing in thick accents as they pass by, words a slur of poorly comprehended English, playing from the terrace bar where everyone is drinking.

It has truly been difficult to keep myself from jumping into the sea and continue catching waves. If I were more certain Spaniards were as okay with nudity as Germans, I'd go in naked.

But I keep reminding myself, I must try to rest and save some energy. I have a long road ahead, and a left knee which is almost certain to give me gradually more trouble as the journey continues, and potentially for a long time after...I realized today that I have passed that age where aches and pains coming and going is a given. I've entered the realm of crossing certain beloved activities off my list of hobbies due to physical maladies which I bestowed recklessly upon myself back in that era when I could still take my health for granted.

*Lost on the Way*

I have to return to the albergue before the doors shut at 22:00. I hope the waves have worn me out enough to sleep. I'm sleeping very poorly, waking every hour.

If not, no bother. Tomorrow starts at 5:00, and the Camino to Deba awaits.

*All my love,*

*- Blake.*

## *Day 2*

### *Pride*

1. I am proud that I got up at 5:00 AM and headed straight out of the albergue
2. I am proud that I completed the 1st step by myself, and was smiling the whole way
3. I am proud that I practiced the three P's to keep from ruminating about commenting on the age of 71 year old Jacob, whom I met on El Camino. I was embarrassed about what I'd said to him and had to stop my head from looping.

### *Gratitude*

1. I am grateful for the delicious tortilla and café I had in Ondía today.
2. I am grateful for the amazing waves in Zarautz today! BODY SURF!!!
3. I am grateful for the lovely people I'm meeting already on El Camino



# Day 3

**ZARAUTZ → DEBA**

*23 km / 14.29 mi.*

*Day 3*

*Wednesday, August 23rd, 2017*

*22:15*

**T**he life of the pilgrim is very simple.

Wake.

Walk.

Wash self.

Wash clothes.

Wait.

Sleep.

Repeat.

I suppose it's this simplicity that makes it so beautiful; that makes the pilgrim open himself/herself to new thoughts and new people. There's really nothing else to distract you from the people you meet along the way, and the things that pop into your head.

This simplicity truly lightens the spiritual load on the heart. Travel, for all the ways in which it is glorified, is actually quite stressful. There's always a bus to catch, or a flight to get to, or an item that might be



robbed, or luggage to be lost.

But on the Camino, these burdens don't exist. I have nothing worth stealing, unless there's a rogue thief with a dirty sock fetish roaming the Camino...There's nothing to do but walk, and nowhere to be except on El Camino.

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Thanks for reading, and Buen Camino!