

**This Peregrina's Autoethnographic Account of Walking the Camino Via de la Plata:
A Feminist Spiritual Inquiry into Human Transformation**

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

This is an autoethnographic account of my 1000km journey across *The Camino Via de la Plata*, framed within transpersonal theory. From my personal account of a peak experience on *The Way*, this spiritual inquiry attempts to connect myself and the reader to insights into transformation and living through embodied writing while contributing to the exploration of personal flourishing and growth in leisure studies. This process involved moving into and through Romanyshyn's (2007) *six orphic moments* found in re-search processes with soul in mind. I then unfold my journey along the Camino and deepen this inquiry by engaging literature that help to explore spiritual aspects of my journey on the Camino. Leisure inquiry frames this transpersonal peak experience in a number of ways: it is an act of empowerment (Arai, 1997), focal practice (Arai & Pedlar, 2000), resistance (Shaw, 2001, 2007), and an experience of liminality (Cody, 2012) with transformation occurring at the flux of it all.

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It is with deep gratitude that I acknowledge the assistance and excellent navigational skills of my advisor, Dr. Susan M. Arai. Sue is quietly fierce and ferociously dedicated to service. Her presence, patience, gentle humour and ability to accept others for who they are where they are at is greatly comforting and she is extraordinarily easy to be around. She has been an compassionate, kind, and supportive witness for me, not only my academic journey, but on my healing journey as well, as the two are so intimately connected. This is not a journey that I would have just anyone witness at such a microscopic level. When talking with Sue I always gain further insight into my experience as she listens at a level that is inspiring. Sue is able to synthesize my experiences and reiterate back to me all I have said, assisting me in deepening personal awareness. Sue kindly commands excellence and is exceptional at laying out a conceptual map of where I am and where I need to go to truly capture and convey my thoughts in an excellent way. She is an artist when it comes to linking ideas and reconstructing the written word for flow and fluidity. It is no coincidence that Sue is my advisor. Spirit is fully behind this composition and I have no doubt that Sue and I were meant to work together. I give thanks for this special demonstration of magical synchronicity in the universe's mysterious choreography of the big plan.

I also want to give my heartfelt thanks for that liminal space that is the Camino and the guidance of Spirit on my journey for the gift of recognizing the Sacredness of everyday, of every moment. Lastly, gratitude to the Ancestors, the ones who have gone before us and dreamed the dream of empowered women who work within the liminal realm and honour the guidance and wisdom of their bodies, hearts, souls, dreams and intuition for the greater good of the collective. Know this is the dream they dreamed for themselves and for future generations, for us. I so honour their journeys and dedicate myself to their vision for the collective by walking with courage and vulnerability into that dream.

With Love.

Kim.

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Chapter One

Opening Prayer

In 2012, the Camino via de la Plata (*The Way*) demanded I do the walking over an astounding distance in Spain across highways, mountains, forests and fields. It lovingly and clearly guided me, providing me with everything I could possibly need. This autoethnography expresses outwardly my deep appreciation and gratitude for the Camino and its tremendous ability to assist my healing process. After eleven and a half years of loving and learning together, I left my husband, Gordon. It was an extraordinarily painful move, one I would have liked to avoid all together, but the Universe was demanding I step into my beauty and shining, my fullest potential, and though I tried, I could not force my partner to move into that place alongside me. I could not hold back any longer. What had been holding me back? I really loved Gordon and remain committed to him as a friend. He was someone who accepted me for who I am. It was very hard to comprehend my own desire to leave someone I felt so safe with. To go out into the world as a thirty-something, single woman was a tremendously scary place to be after being with Gordon since I was 24. I was scared to put myself out *there*. I had a sense of obligation to our marriage. I mourned the marriage. It had been the loveliest ceremony I'd truly ever attended, and even that feeling, because the wedding had been so wonderful, made me doubt myself, my sense of needing to go. I felt I had to take care of him. I feared hurting Gordon so badly he wouldn't be able to take care of himself. I feared he would slip back into alcohol abuse, and the person I helped to come into being would die. I feared his sadness. I feared my sadness. I feared financial insecurity. I feared looking at my own shortcomings in terms of home and car care and maintenance. I feared the loss of the animals in my everyday life. Leaving behind Gordon, my pets, my garden. . .

I feared not being needed or having anything to tend.

I feared being alone.

Fear.

Fear constricted my world and made me see loss and sadness.

Fear held me back in a very strong way.

What propelled me forward?

I was propelled forward by a knowing. I knew that the more I held on to protect both of us, the greater disservice I was doing to us. That *holding on* was a warning flag. It alerted me to my fear of change. It was a disservice. Who was I to say Gordon can't take care of himself? Who was I to push my fears on him that way? Who was I to hold either of us back? Who was I not to listen to my own intuition, to hold back from my potential when that's exactly what I want for Gordon - for him to step into his potential? Who was I to demand such a thing from anyone else, if I'm not living it? How dare I not strive for greatness, to serve, to fulfill my purpose? Not when I believed it was achievable! It was lovely to be accepted for who I was by Gordon, but I felt like who I was, was ready to shed a skin and expand.

Voices battling in my head and heart were paradoxical—

both painful

and liberating.

My intention for this autoethnographic project was for my journey to be a very clear channel for the Camino, itself. With me on my autoethnography journey I brought the accumulated wisdom of men and women who had touched me through various circles, friendships, and sacred and blood bonds. My intention was also to offer a vicarious healing journey of transformation towards flourishing for women, past, present, and future. My hope in writing was for women to trust their intuition, their body sensations, and universal synchronicity as they walk beside me on this written voyage (embodiment); that they may find radical trust in the unfolding of life to bring personal empowerment and a sense of faith, hope and ease to their lives. The overall goal of this autoethnography is transformation for self and others to come into flourishing.

The Process of Inquiry: Transpersonal Autoethnography

This autoethnography of my journey across *The Way* is framed within transpersonal theory and informed by organic inquiry, and focuses on my journey of transformation. I frame my journey as a peak experience, which Ferrer (2000) describes as, "the most fulfilling, joyous, and blissful moments in one's life" (p. 19). As Abraham Maslow wrote, periodic mystical peak experiences produce a sense of union, and freedom from conditioned thought and behavior, and these peak experiences create possibility for *self-actualization*--"a high level of maturation, health, and self-fulfillment" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 19). Writing autoethnographically, this form of inquiry creates an emotional experience (Ellis, 1999) and a spiritual one for both author and reader as I recount moments in this peak experience. I call upon transpersonal theorists rooted in the work of Ferrer, James, Maslow, and Wilber to guide the writing. Transpersonal theory is a recent project, emerging from the encounter of the modern self with the sacred dimensions of life and existence. I also worked methodologically weaving autoethnography with organic inquiry with the hope that the text may be embodied—read, taken in, felt, and understood—in a way that invokes a possibility for transformation for the reader.

William James suggested spiritual experiences be judged by their effect on people, rather than prejudged based on a particular theoretical, cultural, or religious orientation (Paloutzian, 1996). James himself chose not to rely on statistical records for his research; instead using what we now call a phenomenological or interpretive-analytic strategy using biographical material, rich case studies, and vivid personal descriptions of religious experiences (Paloutzian, 1996). Arguing psychological development includes higher states of consciousness and can continue throughout life, Jung proposed transcendent experience lies within, is accessible to everyone, and healing and growth stimulated by such experience often uses the languages of "symbolic imagery and nonverbal experience, which are not reducible to purely rational terms" (Kasproff & Scotton, 1999, p. 12). Thus, Jung's *transcendent function*—a model of personal and collective transformation—arises in the union of conscious and unconscious contents. To arrive at the transcendent function, one must find access to unconscious

material. In a process he called *active imagination*, one pays attention to whatever fantasies and associations present themselves within the context of a prevailing mood. From this comes a "symbolic or concrete expression of the content of the mood" (Clements, 2004, p. 33).

In particular, my autoethnography is guided by transpersonal theory reconstructed by Ferrer (2002), which adds contours of understanding to personal experience by "unpacking many of the complex dynamics of psychospiritual growth" (p XVII). Transpersonal theory asks us to be very open to multiple ways of valuing spirituality, that we "expand the range of valid spiritual choices and root them in our unique psychospiritual dispositions that allow us to appreciate a rich variety of spiritual paths" (Ferrer, 2002, p. XXI). Specific paths, Ferrer (2002) claims, provide us with some freedom and happiness, but our minds tend to subtly devalue other paths, even those that work quite well for others. We have to make room for the unknown; to make the effort to peer beyond what we already know. There is no one privileged path of spiritual practice and the aim of transpersonal theory is to think about spirituality in a more diverse, multifaceted and fruitful light (Ferrer, 2002).

From my personal account of a peak experience on *The Way*, this inquiry attempts to connect myself and you, the reader, to insights into transformation and living. Here, autoethnography and transpersonal theory come together powerfully. Autoethnography seeks, at its end, to move from providing insight into individual experience to unfolding insight about larger cultural or societal concerns. In other words, it creates opportunity for this autoethnography to engages us in an act of Wilber's *transpersonal functioning* which "emerges when identification with personal concern diminishes, and it is associated with states of being and modes of knowing that arise from connection with levels of reality beyond personal identity" (Kasprow & Scotton, 1999, p. 14). This act toward transpersonal functioning makes it possible to move beyond the *experientialism*, *perennialism* and *inner empiricism* that characterized earlier transpersonal approaches (Ferrer, 2002). Rooted in Western scholarship, these previous approaches tended to reduce transpersonal and spiritual phenomena to individual inner

experiences (*experientialism*)¹, assumed and endorsed a universal vision of a common core of spirituality (*perennialism*), and studied transpersonal and spiritual phenomena through the language, methods, and standards of empiricist science (*inner empiricism*). The result was that in the modern Western world, spirituality came to be understood in terms of individual inner experiences which are "epistemically empty or not providing any form of valid knowledge" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 17).² When transpersonal phenomena are understood as individual inner experiences, transpersonal theory tended to fall into the two interrelated traps of intrasubjective reductionism (one-sided and limiting understanding of spirituality as individual inner or private experience, isolated from the world) and subtle Cartesianism (subject-object model of knowledge and cognition) (Ferrer, 2000). This experiential reduction is viewed as disingenuous because "spiritual phenomena are seen as resulting from the participation in spheres of being and knowledge that exceed the human" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 217-218). Further, at an epistemological level, subtle Cartesianism is regarded as contradictory with the nature of most transpersonal and spiritual occurrences because in transpersonal phenomena "not only what is subjective can become objective, but what is objective can become subjective" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 218). For instance, from the subjective-objective point of view, the self is able to disconnect from structures with which it was formerly identified and can act upon them as objects of consciousness; likewise, from the opposite stance, what once were objects of

¹ As Ferrer (2000) describes, with the onset of modernity came the breakdown of the unified metaphysical-religious worldview of the premodern era into three different worlds: The *objective* or natural world characterized as the realm of empirical science and approached by an instrumental-technical rationality; the *intersubjective* or social world, where politics and ethics, approached by a moral-pragmatic rationality reigns; and the *subjective* or individual world, where the arts, religion, and psychotherapy, approached by an aesthetic-expressive rationality lies (Ferrer, 2000). Due to this shift in worldviews, all religious and spiritual phenomena were consequentially demoted to the individual subjective world and viewed as not meeting the standards of objective (and therefore valid) knowledge characteristic of natural science. When transpersonal studies came into fruition, that emphasis on individual experience was incorporated into the root metaphors, philosophical assumptions, and research programs of transpersonal studies (Ferrer, 2000).

² Ferrer (2000) suggests one principal reason for the turn to inner experience in transpersonal studies was "the attempt to appear empirical, and therefore scientific, in the eyes of the wider academic and social communities" (p. 20) Ferrer believes there are three main factors behind the preoccupation of transpersonalists with establishing the empirical foundations of the field: (1) the immense technological success and social standing of empirical science in the twentieth century, (2) the historical alliance between religion and dogmatism in the Western world, and (3) the modern marginalization of spirituality to the status of subjective experiences. The combination of these factors made the empirical validation of transpersonal studies necessary; if spirituality was essentially a subjective experience, and if the only valid knowledge was the empirical one, then the epistemic legitimacy of transpersonal studies *had* to be defended as "'a science of human experience,' 'inner empiricism,' 'a subjective epistemology,' 'a science of consciousness,' and 'a science of spiritual experience'" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 20).

knowledge can be integrated, temporarily or permanently, into the very identity of the self. In an experiential framework, transpersonal knowledge is often linguistically conceptualized according to a Cartesian mode of discourse in that, when discussing *experience*, it is automatically assumed that a subject (who) is relating to an object (what). It not only merges a subject of the experience with the ego, it also objectifies whatever transpersonal awareness is revealed (Ferrer, 2000). Subtle Cartesianism, too, advances the narcissistic appropriation of spiritual *objects* by a reified egoic *subject*. That is, spiritual events in which I take part become *my* experiences, rather than the individual consciousness participating in a transpersonal event.³

Authentic spiritual transformation then, "involves a shedding of narcissism, self-centredness, self-separation, self-preoccupation, and so on" (Evans, 1993, p. 158). Spiritual narcissism or "the misuse of spiritual practices, energies, or experiences to bolster self-centered ways of being" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 220) including spiritual maladies that warp the spiritual path such as ego-inflation, self-absorption, and spiritual materialism⁴. It is thought that, the more we participate in spirit, the more we move away from self-centred ways of being. Conversely, the more we are preoccupied with self-gratification, the more we alienate ourselves from spirit. According to Ferrer (2000) "the goal of the spiritual quest is not to have spiritual experiences, but to stabilize spiritual consciousness, live a spiritual life, and transform the world accordingly" (p. 221).

³ Integrative arrestment is defined as that which hinders the integration of transpersonal phenomena into everyday life toward the transformation of self, relationships, and world. In this case the experiential features of intrasubjective reductionism and subtle Cartesianism have a heavy influence. When emphasis is placed on individual inner experiences (intrasubjective reductionism), a disregard toward other elements of traditional spiritual paths usually follows. Without an integrated understanding of the meaning that spiritual events possess in the larger scheme of things, that is, the wider ethical and social context, their sacred and transformative quality diminish. Subtle Cartesianism, too, is responsible for integrative arrestment in that, when one views spiritual phenomena as *objects* experienced by a *subject*, this conception also leads to an understanding of those phenomenon as having a clear-cut beginning and ending, rather than as realizations that, once learned, change the way one sees life and can potentially guide one's future actions in the world. Spiritual phenomenon, then, simply become a "collection of experiences" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 223) outside of the context of genuine transformative processes.

⁴ Ego-inflation is defined as the aggrandizement of the ego fueled by spiritual energies, while self-absorption is the over-preoccupation with one's spiritual status and achievements, and spiritual materialism is the appropriation of spirituality to strengthen egoic ways of life.

Attempting to shift beyond the challenges of assumptions of experientialism, perennialism, and inner empiricism, Ferrer (2002) expanded and recreated these concepts and advocates for new premises including *participatory vision*, *spiritual pluralism*, and *spiritual inquiry*. Ferrer (2000) argues for "a multilocal participatory approach" (p. 213) in which transpersonal phenomena are understood as "multilocal transpersonal participatory events" as they occur not only in the locus of an individual, but also "in relationships, communities and in places" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 223). He uses the term *participatory* as not just an expression meaning co-creating an event with others, which a *multilocal participatory event* can certainly encompass, but he also alludes to involving the opening of mind, body, heart, and soul when engaging in a participatory, connected, and often passionate activity. As an event, Ferrer (2000) compares the participatory approach to a party. A party is not an individual inner experience but a participatory event that is "neither objective nor subjective, cannot be possessed or forced, and can emerge spontaneously with the coming together of certain conditions" (Ferrer, 2000, p. 225). He recognizes the emergence of a transpersonal participatory event in the locus of an individual demands the participation of inner consciousness; however, the participatory approach reframes this experiential dimension as the participation of an individual *consciousness* in a transpersonal *event*, rather than an *experience*, and, thus, rejects the anthropocentric and egocentric influences of intrasubjective reductionism and Cartesianism, which, in turn, diminishes the occurrence of spiritual narcissism and integrative arrestment (Ferrer, 2000).

Trans translates to *beyond* and connotes spirituality beyond the personal, not simply confined to the inner depths of individual subjectivity, but also connected to the body, heart, vital energies and others via relationships and the substance of the world. Researchers are asked to shift from a Cartesian ego that experiences the sacred as *other* to a complete human being who "naturally and spontaneously participates in the deeper, sacred dimensions of life" (Ferrer, 2002, p. XIX). A participatory vision of spirituality enables us to understand lived transpersonal phenomena more harmoniously than an experientialist, individual framework (Ferrer, 2002). The participatory vision is a "turn from intrasubjective experiences to participatory events in our understanding of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena" (Ferrer, 2002, p. 2). Participatory events emerge through the locus of an individual, a relationship, a collective identity, or

a place. This participation engages us in participatory knowing, a multidimensional access to reality that involves not only creative power of the mind, but also "the sensual and somatic knowing of the body, the emotional and emphatic knowing of the heart, and the visionary and intuitive knowing of the soul, as well as any other way of knowing available to human beings" (Ferrer, 2002, p. 121).

Ferrer (2002) believes the truly essential message of different spiritual traditions can only be found in the multiplicity of its voices⁵. In giving up experientialism and embracing a multilocal way of knowing, perennialism will also naturally fall to the wayside and will allow researchers to look at the transpersonal project through new eyes that appreciate and honour the variety of styles in which the sacred is conceptualized, cultivated, embodied and lived (Ferrer, 2002). Through spiritual pluralism, one is able to break down the hierarchy of spiritual knowing and religious dogma and pave the way to a more equal, accessible, and all-encompassing exploration of spirituality. To distinguish the logic of spiritual *inquiry* and establish its own standards of validity is to embrace its emancipatory power for self, relationships, and the world. This places focus on *inquiry* rather than knowledge production and "the activity and *process that lead to knowledge* [italics added], rather than the competed and abstracted result" (Rothberg, 2000, p. 163).

As my autoethnography unfolded, I was conscious of experientialism, perennialism and inner empiricism. I developed reflexive questions based on participatory vision, spiritual pluralism, and spiritual inquiry to keep in the forefront of my mind during analysis. These questions include: *How did the knowing of my body, heart and soul participate in the co-creation of my journey along the Via de la Plata Way? How did my relationships with others and the environment influence my engagement in the participatory event of walking the Camino? Through a multilocal way of knowing, how did I*

⁵ This lies in contrast to defenders of the perennial philosophy who maintain there exists a single Truth in human knowledge that stems from the existence of a single ultimate reality and can be apprehended by human intellect under certain special conditions (Ferrer, 2002). The world does not have "an intrinsic nature waiting to be discovered and represented by human cognition" (Ferrer, 2002, p. 139), but, rather, the world, being plural, discloses itself in a variety of ways based on the character, intentions, and modes of consciousness of the knower. It is to distance oneself from the project as objective, replicable, falsifiable, verifiable, justifiable, and universal (Ferrer, 2002).

conceptualize, nurture, embody, and live the sacred while on the Way? How did the Camino disclose itself to me? How did my disposition, intentions, and modes of consciousness influence that disclosure?

As organic inquiry, explorations of risk, faith, trust, intuition, heartfulness, and shifts in the passing of time and possessions were a part of the walk. And too, I, like Horsfall and Titchen (2009) was “concerned with other ways of knowing and being: of body wisdom or embodied knowledges; of what is known in the silences, the spaces between speaking, between each other, between people and their environments and the land” (p. 151). And, like Hart, Nelson, and Puhalka (2000) saw differences in what counts as knowledge, how something comes to be known, and valued first hand investigations of the “knowing that reveals itself in the process of becoming aware of itself” (p. 3)

It was my desire to contribute to the re-imagining of qualitative research methodologies as a “combination of art, craft and science” (Horsfall & Titchen, 2009, p. 151). I saw a place for creative imagination, intuition and unconscious, and embodied knowing; as well as artistic, holistic and hopefully transformative research methodologies and research products. Ultimately, my goal in terms of contributing to academia was to deepen the merger of head and heart. And so it is that I believe autoethnography, informed by organic inquiry, and guided by transpersonal theory contributes to the exploration of personal flourishing and growth, noticeably influence and transform others, and lend to the re-imagining of qualitative research methodologies. This necessarily involves embodied writing, which as Anderson and Braud (2011) describe is “[d]esigned to further both personal transformation and research praxis” by portraying “the lived experience of the body by conveying in words the finely textured experience of the human body. Human experience is relayed *from the inside out*” (sic) (p. 267). As they describe:

...the value of embodied writing depends on its capacity to engender a quality of resonance between the written text and the senses of readers that permits them to resonate closely with the phenomena described from within their own bodily senses. The readers' perceptual, visceral, sensorimotor, kinesthetic, and imaginal senses are invited to come alive to the words and images as though the experience were their own... (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 268).

Approaches to embodied writing “call forth the unique qualities of a writer” and the act of writing engages the writer in “slowing down and looking for resonance within one's own body” and “seems to revere the tangibly unique - and sometime ineffable - qualities of the writer's experience and way of being in the world” (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 268).

According to Anderson (in Anderson & Braud, 2011) seven features of embodied writing are inter-related and flow easily one to another:

1. *True-to-life, vivid depictions intended to invite sympathetic resonance in the readers or audience.*
2. *Inclusive of internal and external data as essential to relaying the experience.*
3. *Written specifically from the inside out.* Like any medium of expression, words often elude the immediate fullness of experience. Yet, to the extent possible, embodied writing positions the writers' voice inside the body as it lives, letting the body's perceptual matrix guide the words, impulse by impulse, sensation by sensation.
4. *Richly concrete and specific, descriptive of all sensory modalities, and often slowed down to capture nuance.*
5. *Attuned to the living body.* Embodiment involves not only our physical senses here and now but our sense of being alive in the flesh moment to moment.
6. *Narratives embedded in experience, often first-person narratives.*
7. *Poetic images, literary style, and cadence serve embodied depictions and not the other way around.* Embodied writing values vivid accounts of lived experience over literary artfulness.

An individual writer or researcher might employ or emphasize some or most of these features to render an account, but not necessarily all of them all the time. Researchers are invited to include features appropriate to their research topics and intended audience as well as features that serve their abilities as writers (Anderson & Braud, 2011). The writer's work then is to weave these elements, like a spider magically weaving a web, to *show* the reader lived experience. The writer, like the spider is associated with the expression of the magic and energy of creation, and within the web that is woven, spiral energy

links past and future. Cresting several timelines and weaving together multiple voices and mediums of communication are a unique part of this writing experience. Spider is considered the teacher of language and the magic of writing, as many believe the spider’s web contains the original alphabet in its angles, and it was necessary to be creative in how those different voices and mediums would be represented. This legend shows how they can be easily deciphered:

<i>Journal entries</i>
<i>Blog posts</i>
<i>Email messages from others written to me</i>
<i>Email messages written by me for others</i>

The spider demonstrates the ability to work towards the goal, the center, to stay focused while not becoming too self absorbed. The spider is also the master of walking threads-between life and death, waking and sleeping, the physical and spiritual- and in this weaving creativity is stimulated. I give thanks for the message of Spider in guiding me on how to approach my work.

This process of inquiry, of unfolding this autoethnography, emerged in several visions and revisions of the content that appears in Chapter Two. This process involved moving into and through, and revisiting Romanyshyn’s (2007) *six orphic moments*—processes of witnessing and mourning in the transformational journey—that are necessarily found in re-search processes with soul in mind.

In the first orphic moment, ***being claimed by the work***, the researcher sees the work through the lens of those ancestors who linger with their still unanswered questions, the ancestors for whom the wounded researcher becomes a witness and a spokesperson (Romanyshyn, 2007).

July 16, 2012: This happened as soon as I returned from the journey, in Sue's office with her, while discussing my change in thesis plans. Along the trail I had sporadically thought about my family members, the women I love who'd been hurt by men, and how I wished they could walk, too. When I was in the safety of Sue's office, with her gentle, accepting presence, I realized that I'd done the walk not just for me, but for them. And they wanted to know how to feel free. They wanted to know what it's like to really love and trust yourself. They wanted to know what it was like to feel truly empowered rather than just angry. They were giving me permission - no - encouraging me, to seek out the answers for them, for us. After violation, manipulation, demands

and hurt they asked me to help them make it stop. Oh God, I want to help make it stop. I am so moved to have been chosen for this work,

Dreaming becomes a part of this witnessing. The dream calls the dreamer back to what is being neglected and forgotten, and has been lost...it asks the dreamer to let go of the ego's hold on things (Romanyshyn, 2007).

***November 20, 2012:** When I was a child I dreamed of being an archeologist because the desert fascinated me and I wanted to discover the next Tutankhamen. I fantasized about digging in the earth on my knees, painstakingly brushing, extracting, sorting, and putting back together again. The mystery and meticulousness of the work of an archeologist tugged at my soul and I wanted badly to unearth a treasure like the layered sarcophagus of the ancient Egyptian boy-king. I suppose, in a very real way, that dream is coming true via this work. This work...capable of bringing me to my knees in a mixture of joy, celebration, grief, awe, brokenness, and incredible insight into self and others...brushing away the dust of neglect or denial on memories that vie to be extracted in order to shine with the sheen of their precious wisdom...trying to sort through them on a chronological timeline, bearing witness to my life in a fractured way, piece by heartbreaking piece...and putting it all back together again to make some semblance of sense about how I came to certain understandings of myself and the world, the re-remembering of self and how and where I fit into the big scheme of life. And as I am guided by a dim light down a dark, deep and, yet, familiar corridor, I see that there are, indeed, a myriad of layers that must be broached before I will reach the core, to unravel the wrapping around the wound. That the work is steeped in mystery and meticulousness is undoubtedly true...for as I delicately pick away at and re-assemble the bones of my story, I never know what I will find next buried in the sands of my being, but I have every confidence that all the riches of the world are contained there.*

In the second orphic moment, *losing the work/mourning as invitation*, the writer is confronted with the notion that what we love we lose, and mourning is thus an inevitable aspect of love. In writing the autoethnography this demanded a mourning to release what had been lost. This phase of mourning has to do with the ego letting go of its hold upon the work (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 65).

***July 16, 2012** This is why my thesis moves me so. This is why I break down and cry when I'm writing and re-reading my chronology, and the methods and theory sections. The immensity of inner resources organic inquiry and autoethnography demand, the beauty and complexity of transpersonal theory seem almost overwhelming to me, while re-reading my story, my blogs and journals, over and over again just plain sends me on an emotional roller coaster, every time. I want to be back on the Way while also wanting to move on and away from the Way, get on with my life... Re-remembering what I've loved and lost throughout this academic journey, throughout my life! It's all brought me HERE, now. Fuckin' ironic, right? Turn around and LOOK at it, Kim, it as though the Universe is saying. Then you put it all back together in a way, re-remember it in a way, that does it justice! Put it together in a way that empowers you and the women you love. Help us to free ourselves. And I know there's no restoring all of these events, relationships, experiences that I mourn. I know change is inevitable. It's the letting go that is so hard...*

Mourning is a tricky business - a business in which the desire to restore what once was and has been lost outweighs the hard task of re-remembering the loss (Romanashyn, 2007, p. 66).

November 20, 2012 I wonder what special magic today holds? Today is the day I start fleshing out the bare bones chronology that I started at the very beginning of my thesis proposal journey. Today I open the journals I kept while on The Camino and start entering anything that sticks out about the day. Sue had a brilliant idea in suggesting that I write in a series of fonts or colours in order to differentiate the myriad of voices that I'll be using in this paper -- me on the trail, academic me, reflexive me, even pre-Camino me. That way the paper isn't written in a strictly linear way. I'm nervous to start my thesis chronology in a way, because then I'll be back THERE. What emotions are going to wash over me today...or even over the next weeks and months? What's waiting within to bubble up to the surface and be revealed? I trust it will all be wise and necessary. Hell, I've already got guilt pegged, let's see if it can't be alleviated, no? And this pressure I've put on myself to write brilliantly scares me, too. I think the key for today is just let it come, let the words flow onto the page of their own accord, then I can work towards perfecting the work and polishing each sentence word by word. I ask to be guided by Spirit in my writing today, and that I am able to manage my emotions rather than allowing them to sweep me to god-knows-where. Help me, Spirit, to find joy in this work, to play, to have some fun. Help me to gain insight from that wondrous experience and continue to learn about myself through this writing, reading and reflexive process. Help me to release that which does not serve me, while deeply absorbing that which does. Please help me to stop the guilt. Blessed Be.

As Romanashyn (2007) describes, “loss requires a transformation in one's relation to the other who has been lost” (p. 67). This required a transformation in how I approached myself, attempting to let go of my tendencies toward perfectionism and self-judgement, as is revealed in this journal entry:

April 2, 2013: Today I will focus on the positive in my paper - with no judgment towards any of it. To attempt to be overly perfectionist is counter-productive...I just need to go along with the paper's natural unfolding: adding, simplifying, merging, synthesizing, slashing, massaging...I invite the genius that has been assigned to me to write and assist me in shifting the work, to move the conversation forward, to be wondrously creative! I vow to be the channel. I invite the genius, the sage, the artist, the alchemist, to write and create through me. I invite the ancestors to speak through me. I open myself, too, to my own potential. I will do my share of the walking today, making connections and further analyzing my work with my feelings, intuition, creative and thinking skills.

'The symbol of Red Moon⁶ appears like a beacon; a portal inviting us into self-rememberance of who we are in our purity. Red Moon is a messenger of the ever-present opportunity to renew one's

⁶ Rather than using a Gregorian calendar, I am guided by a solar-lunar Dreamspell calendar that assists me in taking creative control of my time based on energetic frequencies and the cycles of nature. To explain the science and art of the Dreamspell calendar is beyond the scope of this project, but my hope is that your interest is piqued and that you may take it upon yourself to find out more - I suggest the writings of Jose Arguelles (1987; 2002; 2011), founder of Planet Art Network and the Foundation for the Law of Time as well as the creator of the Dreamspell calendar. The Natural Time Dreamspell calendar is "designed to help establish a new foundation to support our transformation into the New World Age that is to dawn in 2013 and beyond" (Skytime Dreamspell, 2011). I believe there is a shift in

being; to refine ourselves as clear vessels; to restore well-being. Perhaps the strongest forces of purification are gratitude and forgiveness - acknowledging the totality of our human experience as a divine gift...we are innocent students of life"

April 10, 2013: I didn't accomplish a damned thing in terms of my thesis yesterday. Sure, I got some errands run, got the groceries but I've no idea what I did with the day. I claim time is art and I have created a situation for myself where I get to wield my time my way, but lately I just feel useless, purposeless, and depressed. The days come and go and I feel sometimes like I'm just drifting through them, accomplishing very little. These thoughts, of course, are NOT where I want to put my energy, but I honestly just don't know what to do next! It's so big. I don't know how to proceed. I hope I can meet with Sue soon and get a handle on this project. I don't like feeling this way- like I'm not contributing to anything or anyone in any meaningful way- or like I'm behind and may not reach my goal date. I'm sick of comparing myself to others who were able to get their MA degrees within two years, while I'm pushing three. And I'm really, really tired of being sad. This material is difficult, emotionally, to go over again and again.

There is great fear, even panic, encountered in this orphic moment. The work that initially claims us and that we would then make our own (in the first orphic moment), takes leave of us in this second moment. In this moment “when it feels as though the work has collapsed despite our best efforts to restore it, when it feels we have lost sight of it and no longer control it. In such a moment, the work is inviting the researcher to mourn the loss and let go of the work (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 67). The only thing that can be done is to release into it, and let the work unfold.

The third orphic moment involves *descending into the work/mourning as denial*. Research that keeps soul in mind is a matter of the flesh. One is “drawn into research as re-search not as a disembodied and dispassionate mind, but as a full-flesh-and-blood human being. One has to have the heart and the guts for the work as well as a nose for the scent of its scent” (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 71)

November 25th, 2012: Dear Journal, my chronology is growing and growing. Yesterday I inserted photos and today really begins the delving into the journals. I'm nervous because I'm not sure what feelings will come up, and yet I'm excited because now is the time that I'll begin to witness the cumulative transformation I underwent along The Way. I put pictures in already because I'm interested in seeing if the weather seen in the pictures is reflected in my writing, my mood, my perception of the day. There was so much, I already see, that I hid from my loved ones in my blogs and emails. I portrayed myself very positively to protect them, and also, perhaps, to convince myself that everything was going to be okay, even when I didn't feel that way. I also think that positivity, in the face of pain, is really my true nature. I get down, but in my heart I know I'm going to be okay - that pain is worthwhile and meaningful in its own right.

planetary consciousness occurring and that we are all a part of it, contributing to it every moment via our thoughts, words, and actions, right here in the now.

And, so, I feel that my primary responsibility on this written leg of the journey is just to seek out the black spot - the core of the wound- and surround it with love and light. To do the healing work, or rather, to continue the healing work, to get right down to the infection and rot and say, "Well, there you are! I see you. What do you need in order to heal?" To listen. That's my job now.

Coincidentally (or not) it seems as though, as I sift through the dreams I had on the Camino, I've given dreams permission to re-enter my waking consciousness. Albeit slowly, for I'm grasping at fragments when I used to be able to retain the mystery and insight of multiple dreams in one night. Why is it my dreams became so difficult to hold on to this past while? It's as though they came and went on such a deep, subterranean level that they never were. I am thankful for their re-emergence for what they reveal is so very helpful to my ability to navigate through waking life. I ask to remember my dreams tonight, please.

Looking back at the work/mourning as separation, the fourth orphic moment, occurs when the researcher "is forced to separate her image of what end the work serves for her from the work in its own right" (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 73). As Romanyshyn (2007) describes, "The backward glance is a pivotal moment, the moment when the work turns, when it turns away from the researcher... the researcher is no longer in charge, no longer in the lead, commanding the work. Rather, he or she is being led by the work. It is a shift in the research process from the being the author of the work to becoming an agent in service to the work" (p. 74).

April 11, 2013: I am feeling a shift in energy today. I've come to realize that it's really only been one and a half years since Gordon and I separated, and only five months since I broke it off with Akwasi and that these are not long periods of time - that it's okay that I'm sad and confused and even a bit depressed. I need to be gentle with myself, remind myself I'm only human and that healing is a process, not something that necessarily happens overnight. The anxiousness I've been experiencing is diminished. Productivity- bah! I'm okay. It's okay to rest, to lie low and conserve my energy. The essence of who I am is still alive...I'm just in a new place in my life and learning how to BE in that place. Yoga helped me a lot yesterday - to connect with my body and allow it to release in its own way was very decompressing. The time to be productive is coming...Spring is here, the Sun is coming! But while I'm as dormant as the season is right now, I'll keep tuned in, listen to my body and my spirit and my heart, and set small attainable goals for myself. One step at a time, Kim.

April 18, 2013: I am understanding this process today. Today I see that Sue is encouraging me to write, write, write, write and LIFT, Kim, because that is what my method encourages, too. My knowing is valuable. My story and my interpretation of it are valuable. When it comes time to add that literature, my current knowing will be there, too. Not lost or buried by the voices of the 'experts', but right alongside...comparing, contrasting, influencing, enhancing each other...I only wish to move into the literature because being an archeologist is actually really hard and emotional work. This digging up of layer after layer of my story and only coming up with more questions is exciting and taxing. Lately I've been able to look at the 'data' with the so-called 'cold-eye' - for me that is to really look at it, read it, scanning for key words...I guess be involved in the 'thinking'

aspect of the analysis process...and not get completely, emotionally, lost in it somewhere. Feeling analysis has been intense up until recently, and I'm honestly relieved that I've reached this point. I see why thinking analysis is so oft resorted to. But I'm thankful for it all, the feeling, the intuiting, the creating, the thinking... I feel cleaned out, SCRUBBED out, raw, and I need this self-preserving 'cold-eye' for now, because feeling at the level I've been feeling is tiring and I need to continue to work regardless of that.

As Romanyshyn (2007) describes, “truly letting go of someone or something is the way to find what has been lost, to be with it beyond the need to possess or control it” (p. 75). This leads us into the fifth orphic moment which involves the re-searcher ***being dismembered by the work and the process of mourning becomes transformational*** (Romanyshyn, 2007). This process involves grappling with doubt and losses of faith, and with not knowing where the process will lead.

June 15, 2013

I'm having a crisis of faith in my intuition, right now! In working on the illusion/dream section of my themes I was sitting with and feeling a current relationship situation in my life out and because of contrasting opinions with two very close friends whom I love and trust wholeheartedly I couldn't tell which realm I was existing in, or if it was even an either/or choice. Perhaps I am living both fantasy and dream? Why can't I sort it out? I mean, if my friends are seeing something I'm not, what does that say about me? About my ability to follow my intuition? Am I trying to pass off a fantasy for a dream? I'm really concerned about where my energy is going! I'm told that "by giving our dreams energy we empower them to happen, and the next thing we know - poof - there they are" (Perkins, 1994, p. 99). I've experienced that. I've manifested many dreams in the past. I should know in my heart what the difference then is between fantasy and dream shouldn't I? But I suddenly don't trust my heart and gut because my friends, my dear, good friends with their best intentions for me...they don't believe and so my foundation has been rocked. I feel upset and confused. I said I'd cut self-doubt! What is it they know that I don't, if anything? Is it me? Am I so damaged everyone can see I'm not ready to be in a relationship? I feel like a loser. I guess I should take the hint, eh?

STOP THE PITY PARTY.

IT ALL WILL BE WHATEVER I PERCEIVE IT TO BE.

Deep breath. Another. Another.

June 16th, 2013:

I awoke with the residue of doubt in my intuition heavy on my heart. This isn't a good feeling. Damn it, I know my heart and this feeling doesn't serve me! Therefore I have to shift the vibration to one that makes my heart sing. That is what is true. Intuition, I believe, should lead us to where joy resides. But I called one of my girlfriends anyway and asked her all the questions I'd pondered last night: What is it you're seeing that I'm not? Am I disillusioned? Is it me? Christ. And my girlfriend was awesome, as usual, and mirroring back to me what I've known all along...that I have to follow MY guts, MY heart, MY intuition, that's what ultimately matters. She said that she (and my other girlfriend, too) simply don't want to see me get derailed from pursuing my calling for a person they don't know. They don't want to see me repeat past patterns. I get it...and I appreciate it and love them for it. I want the same. No more will my happiness depend on the happiness of the other. No longer will I chase the potential of the other. I'm ready to be with someone who has their own dreams. Not immediately, of course, Universe! Let me finish this paper (this transition) first! Primarily, I want to trust myself. I need my friends to let go of my past self,

too, and support me in my transition! I swear I can manifest it all - the calling, the relationship, the self-care, the service...I can do it. I don't need a caretaker or to be the caretaker anymore. I just want a mutually supportive relationship where we both accept the other for who we are, where we're at. And I feel the vibrations that exist between me and this other. This is a low, slow burning fire...the best kind. My heart says it will unfold beautifully no matter what the outcome. Doesn't it always? So I will be patient and aware. I've got nothing to lose, because even when we miss opportunities or take a 'wrong' turn, the Universe always provides me with other options and routes along the path and in the end I'll get where I'm going, wherever that is.

This process of insight and awareness often involves the descent into shame, and the vulnerability of doing so. Shame is an emotion that expresses the desire to hide, disappear, or even die because we fear that the self is empty, bad, or inferior. When we are ashamed it feels as though nothing can be done about it, because shame is linked to a sense of *being*, not something that we're doing. If you believe you cannot do anything about feeling that there is something wrong with who you are, then it makes sense that you would try to protect yourself from being exposed. When we feel ashamed all kinds of deceptions and lies arise in us to provide a protective cover (Young-Eisendrath, 1999, p. 23). Related to this, this autoethnographic work is partially confessional, for that is how it feels to be dispelling secrets long held. And with this shame arises, like a confession of my sins which, of course, are not really sins at all - just long held shields or barriers against pain and vulnerability, a misguided mode of self-protection. There's no intention to hurt anyone in this work. I just have to get it off my chest. I want someone to hear, to bear witness. I want to be forgiven. I want to forgive. Shame is an epidemic, as Brene Brown says, and I believe it to be true. I believe it holds people I love like prisoners in a cage. And, for me, it's beginning to become uncontainable. It's slipping through the cracks and under the door. I can't hold it anymore. This is about what I need in relationship, for it's obviously what I seek out. Anyone can see that once reading the chronology.

December 1, 2012: *So this term, 're-membering', has really hit home for me. Yesterday I literally fell to pieces. I could not keep it together. I wept uncontrollably on and off the entire day between bouts of writing, eating, and napping and I was unbelievably hard on myself. This, for me, is about relationships. This is about relearning who I am as a woman, as a partner, as a family member, as a member of society. This is about the destruction and reconstruction of my most basic beliefs about myself. Re-membering. Taking all of those pieces and re-membering myself, putting myself back together in a whole new way. Re-framing my experiences in a whole new way. Seeing the patterns, discarding those which no longer work for me. Polishing and refining those that do work, those which are a good fit. Stepping into my power. And maybe this work, even in its darkest moments,*

even when at the breaking point, crippled by embarrassment and shame, always viewed as weak in our society, is really an act of strength, a movement towards reclaiming my power. Sue wrote me with an excellent reminder yesterday, saying

"it is important to remember that shame and embarrassment comes from those moments of isolation which disconnect us from those around us who hold us gently for our humanness... there is great potential here... it is a moment of release as the things that we have held on our own in silence and secrecy move into the world beyond us. Do not fear to allow your humanness to reveal itself, it is after all our greatest strength... in both the shadow and the light." (S. Arai, personal communication, November 30, 2012).

From this place of shame, if we're going to find our way back to each other, we have to know empathy and vulnerability as the antidote to shame (Brown, 2012). While secrecy, silence, and judgment allow shame to grow exponentially, empathy won't allow shame to survive (Brown, 2012). Vulnerability is essential to wholehearted living, it is not weakness. It is an act of courage in its emotional risk of exposure and uncertainty, that which lets us be truly seen, to truly express ourselves. "Vulnerability is our most accurate measurement of courage and is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change. To create is to make something that has never existed before. There's nothing more vulnerable than that. Adaptability to change is all about vulnerability" (Brown, 2012, Listening to shame).

Emerging through the shame in vulnerability and empathy, and in suffering the loss, like Orpheus and Eurydice, we experience mourning as a creative act of transformation in which each is freed into his or her own destiny (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 75). In this sense, "the work that is made from the wound becomes a cultural-historical therapeutics" (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 76).

In the sixth moment, the Eurydician question "who?" is addressed, as the re-researcher unfolds a process of *mourning as individuation*. As Romanyshyn (2007) describes, "a work that begins as a vocation ends with the recognition that to be claimed by a work is to be in its service and that in the end we have to let go of it again, but this time with awareness that we never really possessed it" (p. 79). The re-researcher is invited "to let go of the claims that she has made upon the work, even the claims of authorship and ownership...in an archetypal sense one has been merely an agent for the work that has come through one but is not about one (Romanyshyn, 2007, p. 79).

June 21, 2013

The mirror of letting go in my thesis and the process that's occurring in the now is uncanny. Everything I'm writing about - illusion and dreamtime, letting go amidst connection - is really happening. Life and research guided by organic inquiry are the same. Letting go is my lesson in all of this. Not getting my dreams tangled up in the illusion that happiness can be found in another is my challenge. While still inviting loving, compassionate others in to know happiness is all important. To love but not hold. To dream big without getting lost in illusion. These are my life lessons at this time. This thesis...this opportunity to reflect and re-member...I am so honoured to be smack dab in the midst of conscious awareness and insight into my (unconscious?) patterns.

June 24th, 2013

I was opened to and understand, now, the message of the ancestors. The underlying message that rises from the pit of the work, the cultural consequences of my long walk...

During my time with the Sacred Healing Fire I was engaged in conversation with many of my friends and fellow FireKeepers, most of them women and the theme of "letting go" came up again and again. And I thought to myself...as a collective, what is it that we're striving to let go of? I read my chronology again, looking for signs of things that I'd brought home as a part of my psycho-emotional inventory, and realized that grief had been with me every step of the Way and ever since, really, and that is an extraordinarily painful emotion that takes time to process and let go. The Grandmother teaching for the month of June is Storyteller woman, who explains that stories are passed down through the DNA and I have come to believe that I carry stories of grief, that all women carry stories of grief, from generations of women before us who have suffered at the hands of patriarchy and oppression. I believe that much of the grief I have is not actually mine. I have my grief, of course, for I have lost grandparents and friends, witnessed the abuse of women firsthand, aborted a fetus, experienced separation from a long term partner...I have my grief. And sometimes when I allow myself to mourn one grievance, many other grievances open simultaneously and I am caught off guard at the overwhelming expression of grief through my body. I found myself wondering where I hold grief in my body, that it is so well hidden? When mourning is expressed it seems the whole body reacts. When it is suppressed, the body is affected. I broached the question at the Fire and my friend replied that grief is held in the Heart, that grief rips the heart wide open. Another woman commented that she'd been describing herself as depressed, but with this new insight now believes she is mourning. However it is experienced by any one woman, the grieving must be done and our hearts broken because it is then that we can let it go, not before. That is the nature of grief. And the letting go takes time.

The grief of the elders must be honoured, by stepping into the dream they had for we women, the reason they mustered the courage, took the risks and made the sacrifices they did. The ancestors are asking us to stop grieving for what has been, let go of it, let it move through us as women, and birth a generation of beings whose DNA is altered, whose energy can be directed and wielded in a fresh, new way. I am so honoured that they believe my story is a contribution to that movement. I pray that we women, as a collective, give ourselves and each other permission to process and release old grief, to claim the time and space to do so.

Positioning the Study

The Camino Via de la Plata is a 1000km ancient Roman route used by the Mosarabic (Iberian Christians) pilgrims who lived under Arab Islamic rule during the period of Muslim domination and by all those coming from the south of Spain. Starting in Seville, the Via de la Plata takes one north through a myriad of rural communities, pueblos, and, especially, cities with strong Roman history including Merida,

Caceres, Salamenca, Zamora and Ourense to end in Santiago de Compostela. A fairly solitary and quiet route, its terrain undulating, varied, and, once one enters Galicia, is challenging with many steep inclines and declines. The distances between albergues are further apart than that of the popular Camino Frances (20-35kms) and so it is best to travel this route between April and June and September and October to avoid heat related incidents and illness.

This study of my journey across the Camino Via de la Plata occurs in and through leisure studies explorations into experiences such as travelling (Heimtun, 2007), backpacking (Heintum, 2007), the search for self and identity (Wilson & Harris, 2006), connecting with other people (Wilson & Harris, 2006), sightseeing (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991), photography (Markwell, 1997), relaxing (Kleiber, 2000), eating (Finkelstein & Lynch, 2007), and sex (Kleiber, 2000). This autoethnography also then situates leisure experience in spiritual inquiry, redefining the experience as transpersonal participatory events that are co-created with others and place, through the interconnection of body, heart, mind and spirit. Meaning is produced by how people, objects and events are represented through expressions, thoughts and feelings, the values that are placed on them, and how they are classified and conceptualized. This is true of the travel experience and as such, it becomes an important and powerful activity in identity formation in feminist tourism research (Heimtun, 2007). The travel experience is about finding meaning with life and the pilgrimage, in particular, is acknowledged as a *rite de passage* (Heintum, 2007). A *rite de passage* consists of three phases: separation, 'limen' or margin, and aggregation. Related to the travel experience the first phase is detachment from the home environment. The second phase, the margin, is the being at the destination, where the pilgrim is betwixt and between all familiar lines of classification (Turner & Turner in Heimtun, 2007). Everyday norms become suspended, the past and future do not exist and excessive behaviour is allowed or at least tolerated. The margin is not only normless, but also about *what may be*; it triggers self-change and identity formation (Curtis and Pajaczkowska in Heimtun, 2007). The third phase is reintegration into the social and cultural structures of everyday life (Heimtun, 2007).

Embodied knowing is well situated and located in feminist tourism studies. In the past, pure mind, free from body and social subjectivity was presented as having been at work when analysing social

tourism field experiences in order to maintain the distance required by scientific objectivity. The mind, though, cannot see everything and only sits on its own position (Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). Moving beyond the gaze to include the body in the situation and the written interpretation of said situation brings meaning, experiences and knowledge created by, in and for the body. The gaze, after all, is not readily detachable from the eye, or the eye from the body, or the body from the situation. Learning to see ourselves in the act of seeing allows one to thereby gain an immense reflective power (Veijola & Jokinen, 1994).

Furthering Leisure Inquiry into Spirituality and Human Transformation

Along The Way I came to many understandings about myself, and how my thoughts and beliefs influence the way I live, and my understanding of the world around me. There are many threads of personal truths woven into this autoethnographic thesis that I believe contribute to my ongoing transformation towards flourishing, as well as the transformation of others who read my work. The primary strands of thread contributing to the overall tapestry of my thesis have naturally shifted since the composition of my proposal. In this transpersonal autoethnography I draw on academic literature from many different realms, such as literature on: leisure and spirituality, spirituality outside of leisure, therapeutic recreation, feminist thought, environment, and, of course, transpersonal psychology. As a Masters student in recreation and leisure studies, I would like to introduce and acknowledge the scholars who worked to make these connections and who carved the path for feminist spiritual inquiry in human transformation in leisure studies. Along the way I dropped to the side of the path ideas in the original review of literature that were no longer useful, such as notions of spiritual health, emotion-focused coping and self-protection, and explorations of time. I also picked up new ideas that helped to deepen my reflection, primarily the concepts of feminine sovereignty, focal practices, and literature on Jungian archetypes. In the final phases of writing autoethnography there was a deepened return to the literature as I move from my personal story toward insights for a cultural level of understanding.

In the chapters that follow, I unfold my journey along the Camino (see Chapter Two) and then deepen this inquiry by engaging literature that help to explore spiritual aspects of my journey on the Camino. First, I explore the positioning of leisure in relation to work (Parr, 2009; Pieper, 1952) and specifically Parr's notions of experiential avoidance and spirituality's place in true leisure. I then explore the impact of experiential avoidance in the aftermath of trauma (Barker, 2001; Parr, 2009) and the potential of spiritual leisure to move towards sovereignty (Young-Eisendrath, 1999). From there, I explore definitions used and specific influences of spirituality named in the leisure literature (Doohan, 1990; Heintzman, 2000; McDonald & Schreyer, 1991; Schmidt & Little, 2007) and discuss the movement towards multiplicities, rather than dichotomous perception of spirituality in leisure. Insight into power and energy in transformation is explored in the leisure studies literature on empowerment in leisure (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Arai, 1997; Raisborough & Bhatti, 2007), leisure as resistance (Shaw, 2001; 2007), and communitarian notions of the collective power of individual-in-relationship (Arai & Pedlar, 2003) follows. This literature explores the potential of leisure in fostering interconnectedness and articulates the importance of a shift in consciousness incorporating a movement from thinking about independence to interdependence in the leisure field.

An invitation to the Reader

My worldview is fluid and ever-changing and up until now a myriad of spiritual practices and paths have influenced me over my lifetime including pagan, new age, Indigenous and Buddhist teachings. Creative writing and Earth-based spiritual practices including ceremony, prayer, and contemplation, for me, are essential in establishing and maintaining a compassionate, mindful, and committed relationship with me, others, and the planet.

Through story, characters, emotion, and dramatic and narrative plot, autoethnography aims to be a moral and ethical methodology that emphasizes dialogical communication (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Transparency, reflexivity, rich, concrete detail and my ability to display myself on the page, to take the reader on a journey from who I was, to who I am, is necessary as a source of helping others understand

the standards autoethnography sets for itself (Bochner, 2000; Clements, 2004; Ellis, 1999). I am asked to show moral commitment and concern for how other people in the story are portrayed and provide space for the reader's becoming (Bochner, 2000). I advocate trustworthiness and validity be considered for their ability to foster inclusiveness, equality, multiplicity, and personal and societal transformation, which are foundational premises of both autoethnography and transpersonal theory.

In the contexts of qualitative inquiry and transpersonal theory there is no one supreme truth, only multiple perspectives on truth, including the investigators perception, and so truth means "reasonably accurate and believable data rather than data that are true in some absolute sense" (Patton, 2002, p. 578). The conversational style of autoethnography has "potential to transform and change the world for the better" because, as a multi-voiced form, "conversation offers the possibility of opening hearts and increasing understanding of difference. The goal is to open up conversations about how people live" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 435); that being said, I understand that the reader is going to bring their own worldviews to their approach in reading this autoethnography and I would like to open space for difference and welcome readers perspectives in interpreting this work. The goal of autoethnography is to "figure out how to live and work in harmony with each other, regardless of our diverse desires" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 444). As an autoethnographer, I want the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act (Ellis & Bochner, 2006). The story is not meant to be generalizable or over-analyzed, the *I* is not a "disembodied authorial academic voice that tries to persuade" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 441); instead, autoethnographic writers are asked to be feeling and vulnerable actors that extend autoethnography to include the heart, emotions, body and spirit and celebrate one's unique experience and moment to moment details of their life. The story is meant to vicariously invite the reader to enter and feel a part it and to be therapeutic in that it helps others know how to live and cope (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Ellis, 1999). I am asked to write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about my life and their lives in relation to mine (Ellis, 1999).

In autoethnography multivoiced studies and personal stories are incapable of being generalized and the experiential merit of universality is unimportant (Ettling, 2000; Bochner, 2000). Social

phenomenon are extremely varied and context bound and, therefore, do not permit empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002). Instead, as a qualitative researcher I am encouraged to focus on the vicarious experience of the reader that comes from reading my account that can contribute to the social construction of knowledge that builds general, rather than generalizable, awareness (Patton, 2002; Ellis, 1999). Just as Ferrer (2002) argues against intrasubjective reductionism because it focuses solely on individual experience that is one-sided and isolated from the world, an autoethnographic study asks the researcher to go beyond self and envelope the perspective of the other, to consider the effect our work has on the other and, therefore, society at large. I want to evoke a response from my readers and open up possibility for dialogue, collaboration and relationship. To act as a guide for others on a journey of transformation, I must first gain their trust and request and honour not only my experience but also their own. I invite others to think through consequences, values and moral dilemmas (Ellis, 2004) to guide them towards their own personal transformation. Though it would seem ideal that readers personally connect with my journey I do realize there may also be moments of disconnect, when my experience does not resonate with the readers' own knowing and perspectives. In this experience of disconnection I believe the tension is important and to be honoured as a moment of recognition of difference.

Chapter Two: My Journey as it Unfolded in Chronological Timeline

It is said that a pilgrimage begins as soon as you pass over the threshold of your own doorway on your way to Santiago de Compostela. I believe my journey started long, long before, perhaps ten or eleven years before I made my way across the Camino, perhaps since the day I was born. Perhaps even before conception as a sacred contract⁷. It has been over 10 years ago now since I read Shirley MacLaine's *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit*. This was her personal story of her 780 km pilgrimage across northern Spain by way of the Camino Frances, the most popular route to Santiago de Compostela and the remains of St. James, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, who is reportedly buried under the cathedral there. Indeed, for many, the Camino Frances is *the* Way, the *only* Way, but there are a series of a minimum of thirteen Caminos throughout Spain and many, many more beginning in neighbouring countries and filtering into those series. MacClaine's book moved me deeply, mystically, and I keenly remember vowing to myself that, one day, I would make such a trek. I was about 25 or 26 years old then and life happens, priorities come and go and though I never forgot my vow, the right time to walk just never presented itself...until Gordon and I separated.

My Journey Unfolds

November 1, 2011, Moving from 82 Morris St., Guelph to 21 Fountain St., Guelph. This is it. The last day I'll awake in this beautiful house, wake up to this kitchen and the dogs wiggling with joy that I'm awake and available to feed and walk them. The last morning I'll listen to the coffee maker chug and grind and Gordon pattering around getting ready for work. The last morning of KissKiss (my cat) winding around my legs, meowing to be stroked. I'll miss these things tremendously...I don't really know what else to say, or how

⁷ [Sacred Contracts] are "the earthly commitments, the tasks you have been assigned, and the lessons you agreed to learn in this incarnation in order to fulfill your divine potential. We co-create our Contract with divine guidance, and it includes many individual agreements - or subcontracts - to meet and work with certain people, in certain places, at certain times. The experiences and relationships you are meant to have are with your parents, children, close friends, and any people with whom you share a passion for something. These people - as well as you adversaries - are in your life because you made an agreement with them prior to this lifetime to support each other's spiritual growth. Indeed, every relationship and experience is an opportunity for you to grow and transform your life. In every one you will have to choose how to exercise your own power" (Myss, 2001, p. 17).

to feel. I'm weeping. My heart aches. I've been told I'm doing everything right, that I did everything I could...

November 6th, 2011, Blog post.

The Guilt

*A friend once told me that when a heart breaks it only makes it bigger.
There may be scar tissue, but the heart has been expanded.
I can tell you that the pain of a broken heart is nearly unbearable. Nearly.
The feeling in my chest is grey and tight, the tension like a clenched fist,
all I can do is sit with the pain and really feel it.
I am a water sign and sometimes the feelings well up inside of me so big,
like a tsunami within,
that my entire body trembles, my throat opens with wails so that
I barely recognize my own voice,
and my eyes spill over with tears.
I cry thoroughly, tears literally pour out of my eyes.
It's very cleansing, and the skin under my eyes from consecutive days upon days of
shedding tears is sagging and loose.
I am showing my age.
But I don't try to cover them up with make-up and I am far from ashamed of my
exhausted and blotchy looking face.
My healing is imperative and when I look in the mirror I see a woman who openly wears
her truth,
even when that truth is
'I hurt, and I don't give a damn who knows it'.
I am not willing, nor, truthfully, even able to hide my feelings on days like today.
I picture giving the pain over to my heart and that helps to make me feel more calm,
more centered.
Oh, my beautiful, receptive, honest heart!
Help me to experience self-loving above and within this immense guilt.*

November 22, 2011, Blog posting- Ode to Burt.

Burt's my telephone counselor. In a state of sheer crisis I called my "husband-but-not-because-we're-separated-but-I-don't-know-what-else-to-call-him-yet's" Employee Assistance Program and they hooked me up with Burt. Burt is a swell guy. He sounds middle aged and like he's lived through some ups and downs himself and he's a great listener. So I told him about The Guilt and he, in return, said something that I really needed to hear. Our conversation went something like this:

*"Kim, let me get this straight, you feel guilty for growing?"
"Yep, Burt. I guess I do. My growth has really hurt my partner."
"And how would you feel if instead you'd stayed and stagnated?"*

"Well, Burt, I suppose I'd feel pretty resentful."
"Hmmm, neither's a great choice, Kim."
"No Burt, guilt and resentment both pretty much suck."
"Kim, I can't help but think that guilt is an emotion that's out of context for your particular situation. See, most people feel guilty when they've done something consciously wrong. Have you done something wrong by growing, Kim?"
Long pause. "I see where you're going with this, Burt, and, no, I guess I really haven't done anything wrong. Growth happens. It just hurts to see him so fucking sad. I guess I'm pretty sad, too, as a matter of fact."
"Well now, that's understandable, Kim. Grief is understandable. Grief is reasonable. You've said good-bye to someone very special to you. But grief and guilt aren't the same thing. You have a choice in how you perceive your role in this situation. Does that make sense to you?"

And just like that, my perception of the break up between my husband and I shifted. Guilt wasn't serving me one iota. Guilt was killing me and it was my own doing. Grief, on the other hand, I can live with because it's a natural reaction to this kind of experience. And with time I will heal and the grief will be alleviated. I could have gone on for years bearing the burden of self-imposed guilt.

Close call.

Burt, I owe you one, buddy.

Love and gratitude.

K,

December 11, 2011, Blog post.

The Light

Oh Potential!

Where did you go?

Why did I lock you away?

What am I waiting for?

I LONG TO SHINE

The light is spilling out of the cracks and I rush around placing towels under all of the doors so as to keep the light under wraps.

What am I scared of?

Being alone? YES

And when I tried to shine with you, you felt inferior.

So I put towels under all the doors and stayed in the dark.

I say I did it for you, but is that the truth?

Have I gotten to the core of the matter?

The cracks are widening, spreading;

something is going to give.

There's been a shift and the plaster is giving way, chunks of it are on the floor and bulges are visible in the walls.

Shifting ground crumbles structures.

I am scared.

I am excited.

I miss you.

I LONG TO SHINE
Where do you fit into it all?

December 17, 2011, Blog post - The Shift. Every day now, the pain of my 'separation' from Gordon lessens. I love him no less; in fact, my love for him has grown and I have moved into a place of accepting him for exactly who he is in all his Beauty and Shining. We keep in touch regularly and our communications are more gentle, more respectful, than they've ever been. I finally like who I am when I'm around him. I realize that, towards the end, our relationship wasn't healthy. But I have nothing but love for self in this new understanding. Breaking up has become a way to rectify my thoughts, words and actions about and towards myself and Gordon. This 'break' is the best thing that could have happened for both of us, though we've had to wade through a lot of pain and confusion to get to this place. There are no words to define what we are together now...not 'partners', not 'just friends', not 'lovers', not 'separated'...and I don't seek to define us. I have no doubt that our marriage was sacred and served a very important purpose for both of us. The shift we're experiencing in our relationship is quite profound and I'm very thankful for the peaceful and loving place we've arrived at.

In The Light I expressed fear of being alone and of loneliness. Since that entry I have shifted once again. My Self, I have come to discover, is wondrous company. I choose, now, to be my own best friend, rather than my own worst enemy. And, though it may sound cliché, I know I'm never really alone. The thrust, the longing of my light to shine, is real, I long to open to my true nature. I understand that before arriving on Earth in human form I wrote a sacred contract about certain lessons I'm to learn in order to evolve spiritually and I have chosen to be exactly where I am. I've spoken before about my absolute trust in the synchronic order and the guidance of the Universe I have come to accept this period of solitude as a gift to myself. That's right, a gift.

This time of alone-ness has been fruitful. I am moving into a place of authenticity that I was unable to find as a dyad. I've come back to vegetarianism. Dance and yoga and meditation are a part of my day to day life. This will not be an authentic lifestyle for everyone. But I am remembering, aligning with and living my beliefs, ideals and truths. I am able to focus on my inner soul in a way that was unavailable to me when I was with Gordon. The time I have for reflection and reprogramming is limitless because I am no longer responsible for another's feelings. Of course I care about Gordon's feelings; this isn't about being heartless. After all, we are unified by our Oneness. Rather this is about sovereignty and being guided by Heart. It is about non-dependency. It's about becoming whole.

I don't believe I'll be single always, but I do believe that there's a very Light reason that I'm single NOW. I embrace this period of sovereign solitude. Whatever happens in the future, I am thankful for this insight into co-dependency versus non-dependent sovereignty. I cherish my autonomy and simultaneously respect the interconnectedness we all share as spiritual beings. I am on the cusp of a great transition, a magical discovery, a rite of passage! I give great Love and Gratitude for this place and this knowing.

*Blessed Be,
Kim*

January 26, 2012. I book my flight to Spain. Through a fog of grief and guilt, like a beacon of light, I felt the pull of the Camino and I knew my time had come. I began researching and planning my excursion earlier in the month in this, the projected year of massive change on a planetary level, and started a personal blog about my intention to walk one month later in February.

My first posting is a poignant reminder of the fear that started to needle at me soon after booking my flight:

February 18, 2012, Blog post, Pre-Camino Jitters. 9 weeks, 4 days to go. Today I received my Pilgrim Guide to Spain: Route 2 Camino Mozarabe (or the Via de la Plata) and now I've got butterflies in my stomach, self-doubt is swirling all around me. Dear God, is this the route I should be taking for my first time along the Camino? Where is the fear coming from? Key phrases such as, 'alone', 'good use of Spanish required' and 'very, very few public fountains' are really triggering me and I need to write myself down.

I'm travelling to Seville to start the Via de la Plata by myself in late April because it is to be a spiritual journey of healing and a path of self-discovery, especially of the barriers I harbour that keep me from authentic self love and forgiveness. I enjoy my own company, and don't want to feel distracted (chit chat) or restricted (speed, distance) by anyone else. I'm very resourceful and totally capable of walking the required 25kms/day, but do I want to cover that distance day after day almost completely alone for 6 or 7 weeks? In a country where I'll have only a minimal grasp of the language and, therefore, be at risk of feeling alone even when surrounded by the local people? Is this going to be healthy for me? Am I capable of total independence, or even desire that? And what if I injure myself out there alone? What if I run out of water and fall ill due to dehydration? What if I feel threatened by a man? So many "what ifs."

I suppose fear, in this case, is natural and even healthy. But it's certainly NOT appreciated! I don't like second-guessing myself. I've got the flights booked, I've got the route planned, the insurance secured, the MEC shopping list planned. I know it's about being prepared. Heck, I was a Girl Guide for a short while and if there's anything that's drilled into one's head as a Girl Guide, it's all about being prepared! Take a camel bag for water. Carry a good first aid kit. Have a trusty walking stick. Continue with basic Spanish lessons on audio 3-4 days a week. Continue walking and strength training. Don't over pack! I can go as prepared as I can be and still won't be completely ready. That's life. It's bound to throw a curve-ball and it will come down to common sense, alertness, and a generous dose of humour! It's true, I could walk the vastly more populated and English-accommodating Camino Frances and feel much more secure about the whole excursion. But I'm not looking for just an excursion, I'm looking for an adventure! I'm looking to stretch myself! I have to trust my gut...I've dedicated myself to this route for a reason. It calls me for a reason. It won't last forever and I deserve to reach the goals I set for myself. Breathe deep. Be calm. I can do this.

February 20, 2012. I invite Sheila to live with Bruce and I at 21 Fountain St. E., Guelph. I've no clue the paradox, pain and learning I've just welcomed into our home.

Before leaving on my voyage, I sought therapy from a Shamanic healer in my community. We talked about issues such as my sexuality, empowerment, forgiveness, surrender....and she asked me to write a statement of what it would feel like to be in my power. On **March 6th, 2012** I wrote:

To Be in My Power

To be in my power is to look and feel like a brightly burning candle in a draft-less room. It is to shine brightly and warmly and unwavering. I am clear and graceful, beautiful and beckoning, welcoming, safe, especially in dark times. I radiate a pure white, healing light. With this power I radiate my inner knowing and wisdom.

I envision this power to be like silk armor...touchable, sensual, soft, vibrant, soothing...yet also provide me with a pliable, tangible boundary between myself and others. To be in my power makes me feel safe enough to take risks, to trust myself, to be an agent of calm. While standing in this power I allow myself to authentically be who I really am.

When I stand in my power my relationships with others are also authentic, warm, vibrant, well crafted, secure, and nurture feelings of equality and total acceptance. My relationships with others are woven of the best, most beautiful, strong, colourful threads into complex pieces of art, glorious to behold and timeless.

When I am in my power my relationships with men are based on respect and acceptance of one another. Again, there is warmth, healthy sensuality, open and honest communication and a sense of true equality. Sex, when in my power, is a sacred act of beauty and transcendence. There is mutual and shared fulfillment, joy, giving, sensuality, receptiveness, and openness to love and compassion.

In all of my relationships there is ease and laughter, honesty, gentleness, and security. There is mutual permission given to be authentic and loving. Forgiveness is possible and easy. When in my power, every faucet of my life is satisfying and fulfilling.

Blessed Be and So It Is!

Lovingly,

Kim

April 14th, 2012, Blog post: The Countdown is Officially On! Wow, is there really only 10 days left until I embark on the journey of my lifetime thus far? Amazing. Really. I can

hardly believe I've manifested this dream into reality. I'm feeling much more confident about who I am and what I'm capable of after re-reading "Pre-Camino Jitters." Journaling and supporting myself with strong, loving friends and family who imbue me with love and confidence are good medicine for self-doubt. This walk is a part of my sacred contract this lifetime and my ancient, indigenous heart and strong, long legs beg me to walk, and walk, very far. There's no doubt that once-upon-a-time I was nomadic...that I moved with the seasons, that I once hunted, gathered, traded, herded. I long for this Long Walk on a cellular level. I am so grateful for this synchronization, for this opportunity to fulfill a long overdue dream.

I've been busy...I'm not the type to over plan because I want to follow my natural rhythms and curiosity, but I have arranged for my first couple of days' accommodations leading up to The Long Walk, I thought you might be interested in checking out the cool places from which I'll start my journey. In Madrid I've chosen to stay at the Hostal San Blas. It's only a 5 minute walk from the Train Station, which is super, because I'm catching the 9am train to Seville the next morning. Plus I could get a private room with a bathroom, which will be considered a luxury just days after I embark on the trail! The next night in Seville I'm staying in this funky, avant garde style hostel called La Caja Habitada. The reviews (always check out the reviews!) are pretty positive and it looks clean and comfortable. Here I've opted to stay in a room that sleeps 4, moving into the refugio lifestyle that I'll be experiencing for the following 7 weeks.

Refugios and albergues are hostels meant only for pilgrims of the Camino and, as a pilgrim, you're expected to keep moving and so can only stay in each albergue for a period of one night unless you're unwell or injured. Some have curfews and many expect the pilgrims to be out at an early hour. Albergues generally consist of a room full of bunk-beds, cots or mattresses and a bathroom with shower. Some have a kitchen and/or washer, lots don't. But after walking 20-30kms a day between albergues I'm okay with paying someone to feed me and fine with washing my personals in a sink and letting them dry on the back of my pack in the sun. Albergues are generally very, very affordable and some are by donation only. They're often volunteer run and located in buildings such as old schools, churches or community centres. Basic, yes, but all one needs, really. I'm looking forward to a minimalist lifestyle, there's something about the simplicity of it all that feels really right to me.

If you're reading this, you're likely someone who sparks me, someone I care for, and someone who cares for me and that's why I've ensured you have this blog link. Thank you for checking in. I can't tell you how moved I am by the number of you who have taken the time to write, taken me out to lunch or for a brew, called or reached out in any way to wish me well on my journey. It means so very much to me. I have so many wondrous, beautiful people supporting me in this venture. My family: Easter weekend was a blessing! Feasting and catching up couldn't have come at a better time. I so enjoyed my time with you all! Also, I want to thank, in advance, my second family, the Firekeepers, for hosting a sweat for me. See you on the inside ;) And, as a reminder to you all, we're having a party at The Albion in Guelph at Norfolk & MacDonnell on Saturday, April 21st from 8:30pm until 2am. You're more than welcome and I'd love to see you out.

Sincerely,

Kim

Gordon wrote me a response (Apr 20, 2012 6:35 AM). As you know Kim, you mean a great deal to me. I will hold special thoughts and prayers for you on your journey. I know that you will have a most wonderful and joyous adventure while you are on your pilgrimage. It is very important to me that you are safe and warm, have good food to eat and that you get the rest you require on your journey. I will be thinking of you every day. I will miss you so very much. Be safe and stay healthy. I will be waiting to see your beautiful smile when you arrive home. I love you with all of my heart, your friend Gordon. XOXO.

Setting Intention for My Journey

April 20, 2012. The Firekeepers of the Sacred Healing Fire host a sweat lodge for me. I set my intent for my journey to Spain.

The sweat lodge: An embodied interpretation.

Darkness...the black of it so rich that I cannot see my hand in front of my face. I feel the knee and elbow of my neighbour, wrinkled flesh rubbing against wrinkled flesh, dry and soft as a whisper. Orange-red sparks jump from the hot, hot rocks in the centre of the pit, glimmering and winking their low light and the heady smoke of herbs rises to my nostrils, soothing and warm. I can feel it's tendrils wrap itself around my head as it rises to the highest point of the lodge, which is still so low I can barely sit with my back completely straight. My head gently brushes the willow limbs of which the lodge is constructed and I shift slightly, finding a place in between the ribs of the dome for my head to be held. The clamour of wooden spoon on metal bucket is heard and then the long hiss of water on hot stone fills the space. Pungent, moist steam fills the lodge and assaults my nostrils and throat with its stinging heat. I hear another of the Firekeepers gasp to my left. I take the sodden heat into my lungs and force them to fully expand, ribs pushing outwards the heat travels down into my belly and spreads across my groin. Breathe. Plop, clamour, sploosh, hiss. Two, three, four more ladles of water are poured over the rocks and the rocks effortlessly release their wisdom in tandem with the heat and steam. My scalp begins to crawl and itch as droplets of sweat begin to push forth from under my fine hair. My eyes retreat behind their lids to avoid the lick of heat that is slowly, tangibly beginning to penetrate everything. As my respiration system

begins to protest the searing heat against its sensitive tissue my heart takes over, it's rhythm quickening, chest expanding. I learned to breathe through my heart long ago because of sweats. I've seen people flee the lodge believing they are unable to breathe in such an environment, but the body knows what the brain cannot always fathom, and so I put all of my awareness into my heart, expanding and contracting, expanding and contracting...my throat and nostrils forget to recognize the pain they associate with the heat. They work in tandem with the courageousness of my heart, to adjust to the new texture and temperature of the air. Droplets of sweat begin to bloom upon my upper lip and trickle from my scalp down the sides of my face and back of my neck. I shiver as a pearl of salt water slowly runs the length of my back, to the crevice of my bottom. I begin to rock forward and back while the undersides of my breasts and knees become slick with wetness. Some of my friends begin to moan, others tone or hum or chant whatever sounds are moved to come. Intuitively we begin as a collective to stir, softly at first, rattles in hand, dampening flesh of neighbour sliding against the flesh of self. The sounds of seed on wood or hoof, grainy and gritty, begins. Chi-ca chi-ca, chi-ca chi-ca. My arm moves of its own accord and the vibration of the rattle against the palm of my hand is mesmerizing, a buzzing pulsation travels up my arm, then spreads throughout my body. The vibration is the key, as it stirs my cells and churns my blood. The pace within the lodge quickens and every inch of space is suddenly filled with guttural sound and damp heat, rocking, dripping bodies and blackness. Chica-chica-chica-chica. Plop, clamour, sploosh, hiss. Something is moving within, words can't explain...my eyes fill with tears and spill over, the space where my chest was is a black hole, infinite and immense...I want to fill it. Silently sobbing I open my mouth and out of it falls a throaty moan, then, hitching, out rips a violent scream. I stop. I have scared myself out of my trance. My eyes fly open, seeking the source. No one else seems to notice in the blackness. Everyone is somewhere different, even though our bodies occupy the same small space. I take this in and feel comforted by the chaos unravelling around me. Outside I can hear the Rock Carrier drum, slowly, rhythmically and with unbelievable calm comparatively, holding space for us, bearing witness as a sage outsider. I am safe to let go here. I close my eyes again and invite the chaos of the lodge to once again take me wherever it is I need to go. My fist pumps and flies, drops of sweat scattering, the rattle

shaking and rumbling like mad! My face contorts with effort and I shake my head back and forth, no, no, no, no, no! More sweat flies from my hair. I clamp my teeth together and growl and snarl through peeled-back lips. I tilt back my head, round back my shoulders, pull in my belly and scream, screech and shriek into the black, my energy whirling and pulsing like a hurricane, seeking to loosen the sticky, mucous-like energy that coats and hinders my life force. Where there is a space in my chest that wants to be filled, the pit of my belly wants to empty. I gag when I feel the loosening under my ribs and diaphragm, akin to a ball of snot running down my throat. Shifting to my knees, I gag and gag, my belly heaving, tears coursing down my face and dripping onto my thighs, body hair sleek, palms slick. I drop the rattle and wrap my arms around myself for comfort, stroking my shoulders and neck. I dig my toes into the crumbly, cool earth below me, seeking to ground now. The chanting and rattling of the Firekeepers are slowing. I lay the palms of my hands on the earth, too, pulling up its solid, trustworthy energy into the flux of my own. I feel the two energies, mine and that of the land, meet and clash and bring all of my focus to the cool of the ground. My head, up in the suffocating, thick heat, feels relief through my digits digging. The fierce beating of my heart quiets to a steady rhythm. I drop my head closer to my lap and take deep inhalations through my mouth, gulping in cooler air, and breathe in the scent of the earth, damp with my sweat. Then, still kneeling, I bend to kiss the ground. "To all my relations," I whisper, "Miiguetch. Thank you."

April 25th, 2012. Blog post, WOW! What movement, what insight! The intent that we went into the sweat with was of detaching...as most of you know, my partner of 11 years and I split up just 6 months ago and it's been a tumultuous, raw time for me. In embarking on this journey I wanted to go with no extra baggage, other than the pack on my back, so this was a biggie for me. I've been really working on becoming 'unstuck' and the sweat was very helpful in assisting me to move on psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. Blessings to the Firekeepers in bearing witness and holding sacred space for me to accomplish this. I, too, honour your personal shifts and give great thanks for the work we do as a collective.

The other, very important, intent that we went into the sweat with was to learn to encompass and radiate love back to those who give it so freely. I have this tendency to, when receiving a compliment, diminish it. I am honoured to say that lately others have proclaimed that I'm a nurturer, kind, wise...and I hear these compliments, but I have difficulty taking them in. My first reaction is to look down, not in the eyes of the other.

When the words land upon my heart, I feel something like a shield or armour, something steely and cold, slid up and encompass my heart, to deflect the loving kindness being offered. My self-doubt and sense of not being worthy come into play and, so, what is it I radiate back to the beautiful other who has given the compliment? Just that: self-doubt and unworthiness. In no way does my inability to step into my light and shining serve anyone. In order to let the compliments in I have only to look to the other, to the one who has complimented me. This person believes they see something really beautiful in me, perhaps something I've not even recognized within myself, and they have demonstrated courage in speaking this gift aloud, because an act of love is an act of vulnerability...in knowing this, it is disrespectful to both the other and me for me to carelessly, flippantly blow the compliment off. In order to honour the vulnerability and courage of the other, I am asked to honour myself, but graciously accepting the compliment, the gift, and, henceforth, be a good mirror and giving in return. It's simply (and deeply) a matter of shifting the focus away from ourselves and to others, wishing them comfort, protection, and happiness. From this perspective, it can be an act of generosity to accept from others, allowing them to also experience the joy of generosity.

This lesson has been a long time coming, but I finally get it! I really get it! To 'get it', for me, was a moment of luminosity, like a light bulb going off in my head, heart, cells...suddenly I am lengthened, heightened, brightened by this new understanding or awareness! You are me! I am you! I love you, so then must love myself. I love myself, and so love you with ease! I attract what I am, and so because you have said that I am kind or wise, by accepting that, I am THAT, and then, so are you because it is what you see in the mirror that is me. And so, I claim being a nurturer, being kind, being wise! I must in order to radiate it back into the world and allow others to step fully into their beauty and shining. What a powerful truth this is! I feel truly moved and blessed to be able to move into this place fully.

Packing for the Way.

*May 30, 2012. **Blog post, Inventory.** Packing for this kind of trip is easier than you'd think. Best advice I could ever give: Keep it Simple, Keep it Light!*

Clothes

convertible pants (1)

shorts (1)

short sleeved backpacking tops (2)

long sleeved backpacking top (1)

wick-away socks with attached liner (3 pair)

heavy socks (1)

underwear (3)

dress (1)

tights (1 heavy pair, 1 light pair)

cami-top (1)

beautiful sheer blouse (1)

bra (1 sport, 1 regular)

hiking shoes

sandals

raincoat
headscarf/shawl (an excellent multi-purpose item! used as bandana, extra blanket, scarf, etc...)
broad brimmed hat
bandana

Night time

silk pajamas (for keeping bed bugs at bay...thanks Diane!)
fleece sleeping bag liner
small pillow cover (to be stuffed with raincoat)
ear plugs
foam sleeping mat

Toiletries

toothbrush
toothpaste
floss
comb
sunscreen
campsuds (for body, hair, and laundry)
facial scrub
deodorant
nail clippers
nail file
nailbrush (for scrubbing laundry & cleaning my nails)
tweezers
lip balm with SPF
small pack of moist towelettes
shamy towel
hair ties/bobby pins
menses items (enough to get me by until I can hit a pharmacy, anyway)

First Aid

traumeel anti-inflammatory cream!!!!
polysporin
sting stopper
moleskin
cuttable bandaids
ASA
ankle wrap
cold compress
gauze
waterproof tape (the damn stuff doesn't work properly half the time anyway...)
latex gloves (you never know when someone else may need help...)
blister/chaffing stick
scissors
emergency asthma inhaler

Other Essential Gear

3 litre hydration system (to be used only in hot, hot weather and on walks longer than 30kms...otherwise, leave it empty and use the water bottle)

800ml water bottle

compact water filter

head lamp & batteries

camera & recharger

extendable walking pole w compass and temperature gauge

swiss army knife

electrical tape

thread & needle

whistle

plastic bags (1 for sleeping bag liner, 1 for dirty clothes)

small shoulder bag with zipper for evenings out and day trips

garbage bag (to act as ground sheet)(to protect pack)

Sacred Items

journal (with addresses for sending postcards on inside cover)

pens

dream dictionary

Dreamspell calendar

sage

lighter

shell

tarot cards

pendulum

crystals

rattle

full moon readings

prayers for St. James that any of you would like to give me to take (you can email them to me or hand write them and give them to me in person)

Other Practical Items and I.D.

Pilgrim Guide to the Via de la Plata

passport (I've also scanned my passport and emailed it to myself)

proof of travel insurance

all flight information there and back

hostel booking info (then throw out)

train booking info (then throw out)

Spanish phrasebook

VISA

student card

emergency contact info

Also, a big shout out to my friend, Jenny J., who is coming to stay in Paris with me at the end of my trip and who is kindly carting with her a small suitcase stuffed with dresses, sandals, jewelry, esoteric goodies, and fresh underclothes and p.j.'s for me!!! Much love, sister!

In preparation for the trip a different kind of packing unfolded. This was my *psycho-emotional inventory* and it went something like this. The suitcase is laid out on the bed. It's purple on the outside, a deep plum, and shiny, a hard case, very strong, compact and small. The liner is black, velvety and seductive, with a myriad of pockets in every size equipped with golden zippers. I'm preparing for a long walk and gathering what it is I think I'll need for my journey. I feel as though this is a decisive time of picking what's coming and what's staying. I'm unsure of exactly what I'll need but I know I must pack lightly, after all, to be a pilgrim is to travel with only what you need. Of course, I'm also looking to have fun, so might want a few things for off the trail, as well.

I straighten and start with the dresser, pulling out the basics, the things I use nearly every day. From the drawers I pull love, courage, excitement, anticipation, hope, and willingness to be vulnerable and to ask for help if and when I need it-check. Oh, and of course guilt and suffering over my agonizing decision to leave Gordon which I keep close at hand, hung on the back of the door. I've been wearing that particularly often, as of late and I'm not prepared to leave it behind...it's become so comfortable! I move to the closet, pause, then throw open the door. These are the things I leaf through occasionally, that I put on and strut around in now and again, deciphering their fit. I'll absolutely need an appetite for adventure! Ooh, that desire to change up my routine life and remove myself from all things familiar and safe, I'll bring this! Or...do I take the longing to escape from my feelings and submerge myself into an entirely different reality? I hold them up to myself in the mirror one at a time. They really are a mix and match ensemble, and depending on the day I'm having...Do I have room? It's only a couple of more things...Okay. They both come. On my bed lies the paradoxical demonstrations of respect, love, and admiration mixed with the jealousy and longing of my peers and family. I look at the pile, mulling it over. Well, the respect, love and admiration HAVE to come, so I guess the other shit is a go too! It's all good. And where is that...? I pick delicately through my jewelry box. Ah, yes, here it is—that nagging suspicion that joy wants to flow through me. I haven't quite figured out how to wear this precious gem, it's so stunningly beautiful! I've not yet found that special outfit to complement it...but the sense that joy is

possible must come. Perhaps I'll find something over there that will set it off perfectly. Is that all? Oh yes! Openness to transformation! I take this nugget from my altar, clasp it to my breast, close my eyes and feel the essence of it flow up my left arm. I don't know exactly HOW I want to transform, but I sure hope after this quest that I'll have something to show for it! Come back changed in some way! I wrap it in my prayer shawl and put in a pocket with easy access. Lastly, there's my special stash, the stuff in the bin with the lid under the bed. The stuff that doesn't come out very often because it's gear, for, er, alternative (alternative) occasions. I have to smoke up to collect these things...it's all too much to look at up close and sober. Deep breath. Okay. Out comes intense sadness (this goes into a special zip lock baggie that I hope will prevent it from spilling and contaminating my other gear); fears and insecurities around my abilities to actually succeed at anything in life; the secrets, self-sabotage techniques, self-loathing, pain, guilt and anger accumulated over the duration of my tumultuous lifespan. And that deeply ingrained longing to free myself from 'her', the girl and woman who I'd been up to this point. Cram her in there, into the deepest of pockets, stuffed way down into the liner of the suitcase. Am I done? Damn. My suitcase is a little heavier than I expected. There's a chance I may not need these things, but I want to be very prepared. And, hey, look at all of these things I've decided NOT to take...This attachment I have to Gordon and the sense of security he brings me...these can't come. Gordon isn't going to be there to fix anything or rescue me in any way, so it would be ridiculous to think I need them. This anxiety about falling behind in my schooling? Ugh, dead weight. Money worries. Nope, won't need those. I think I've got all I need. I'm tough, this is a weight I can totally handle, I think. Yeah, for sure. Good to go.

Pre-flight cosmic joke

April 25th, 2012, My April 21, 2012 Blog post continued... So, long story short, it was freezing out and we ended up on a patio due to capacity, which wasn't very fun for anyone. Spontaneously we took the party to a friend's back garden, fetched our drums and rattles, and raised a ruckus beside the outdoor fire with bottles of wine, beer and liquor until the wee hours of the morning! Now THAT is a party, a real ceremony! And, oh my, the LOVE! I was moved to tears over and over when holding each of you as you slowly departed and made your ways home over the night. So many of you are so friggin' talented! I think the entire neighbourhood enjoyed our musical merriment, we totally rocked it together, my loved ones!

This party left me feeling really supported and, honestly, special. I felt special because my friends and family were genuinely amazed that I was going to walk the Camino on my own. They acknowledged my courage in taking that journey, they tried to imagine it for themselves, some wanted it for themselves. They were moved by my decision. I felt admired. I felt bolstered. Them telling me over and over again that I could do this, they were proud of me for doing this, gave me additional strength, it fed my spirit. They lent me courage in their words. Their generous support expanded my heart, made it feel full and satisfied, like my tummy after a great meal. I felt celebrated.

However on **April 22, 2012**, my roommate said she would walk home from the party the night before, but does not return until nine the next morning. My instincts are on fire, seething. Boundaries have been crossed and I have a difficult day, knowing my roommate invaded a world that was once sacred to me. I inform my roommate she must be out of our home by the time I return from Spain.

April 23, 2012, my roommate, having nothing to lose now, informs me that she and Gordon did, indeed, share a bed on the evening of my party. "Sheila, pack up your toiletries and work clothes for tomorrow and get the fuck out." "But, Kim", she whines from the couch, "I don't understand." "I don't really give a shit what you do or don't understand. Get your stuff and get out. Don't make me tell you again. Five minutes, Sheila, I mean it." Bruce looks at me, questioning me with his eyes. I head up the stairs, enter my room, close the door and breathe deep, trembling slightly from the adrenaline coursing through me. Bruce sticks close, I can hear him rummaging in his room, then I hear him say, "Sheila, I think you just do as she says and leave." I know she is right outside of the door, I feel her. I am repulsed by her. I am losing what little of my cool I have left. I turn to face the door and in a burst of rage I throw it open and move directly, aggressively into her space, our faces mere centimeter's apart. The shock effect works and with each word that bellows forth from the depth of my belly her hair flutters out to the sides and her eyes grow until they consume her face. She quickly backs up with small, scuttling footsteps and I move with her like a dance partner, staying stuck to her like glue. I love that she is afraid of me, that I can invoke such fear in her eyes. "Get. The. Fuck. Out! I can't stand the sight of you! After tomorrow I'll never have to see you ever again, but until I'm gone, you need to show some respect, pack your shit and

run home to mommy and daddy! Get out!" I guide her roughly by the small of her back into her own bedroom and slam the door, then head out to the backyard to suck back a cigarette and stare into the darkness of the night sky.

I have it out with Gordon, throw my wedding ring at him and thank him for being such a fool, because now I can go to Spain as a free woman. I am devastated. Trying to hold freedom and devastation is as paradoxical as it sounds; there is lightness and there is heaviness. It is like looking into a black, swirling, starry void. It is vast, looming, spinning, pulling - terrifying - yet wondrous, mysterious, magnificent and beckoning. To be free and devastated is a state where fear of approaching the void is dulled by having nothing to lose. I am empty and unafraid, yet not clear. When devastated, part of me shuts down a little and stays very quiet, hazy with mourning and sadness. So with a sort of numbed anticipation I left for Madrid, Spain to set forth on my journey along The Way.

And then some last minute packing.

Guilt?! What the fuck was I thinking?! You goddamned assholes! You bitches! How could you!? Get this shit away from me! Strip that guilt off down to the bone! Oh man, I am so done with this fucking useless emotion! I rip it out of the suitcase, scream at it, AHHHHHHH! and cast it to the floor where I stomp on it, swear at it, throw a bloody temper tantrum all over it! I am so angry I can't see straight! And it feels GOOD! Yes, yes, this anger is a much better fit than guilt! I feel liberated, motivated, no longer small; rather I'm larger than life, baby! I feel strong...I could eat a gladiator for breakfast kind of strong! Don't fuck with me because I will tear you apart, kind of strong! This anger, like a chainmail vest meant to shield my heart, is a welcome addition that makes me feel protected against the feelings of humiliation and shame that threaten to attack. I dawn my armor like a soldier preparing for battle and raise my head high, knowing tomorrow I walk into a new reality prepared for anything! This anger is actually a gift, I think to myself. Imagine me leaving without any protection in a world where betrayal is so close? Oh, betrayal. I hadn't counted on you wanting to come along. But there you are, my insoles of lead. How heavy you are! I know you won't serve me, but I don't have time to deal with you, so I guess that means you're to come along. I caress the smooth, cool links of the mail and admire the way the light catches the

contours of each silver-blue metal link. No more slashing blows will I absorb. I am *not* the victim, I am the warrior.

On My Way

April 25, 2012. I arrive in Madrid, Spain. I cry. I sleep. I eat a meal and take a walk. I cry and sleep some more.

Blog post, April 25th, 2012, We Walk Together. And so, here I am. And here you are. I feel you with me. I'm gifted with feelings of abundant support and comfort because of it. Every step I take on my journey I know one or more of you will be accompanying me...I just know. I'm blown away by the quantity and quality of the friendships and familial relationships I have and the honesty and love each of you reciprocates with me. I don't know how it happened, that I came to attract such loveliness into my life, but there you are, you beautiful, shining mirror, you! I love you so much. Blessed Be. K.

April 26, 2012. I take a bus from Madrid to Seville, the starting point of the Camino Via de la Plata.

- Soul: This is it. There's no turning back. This has been perfectly choreographed. I trust this process.
- Earth: Walk upon me. I will carry you. I will show you the way. You can trust me. Feel me pulse under your feet. Fall into rhythm...follow rhythm...feel my heartbeat and the rhythm of your feet and of your heart synchronize into perfect timing together. We are One.
- Sky: I promise nothing but that all will be perfect and you're exactly where you're meant to be. I welcome you and watch upon you and believe in you. The rains will wash you clean, the winds will blow you clear...your head, your heart, residue held in the body. The Sun will radiate your own beauty and shining back at you. Have faith and rejoice!
- Heart: bum_ bum___ bum_ bum___ aligning with the rhythm of the earth...mother I feel you under my feet, mother I hear your heart beat...I will follow you where you take me. I am safe. I am loved. I am courageous.

Blog post, April 26, 2012, Encouraging Signs from the Universe. I've had two very heartwarming experiences since my arrival in Spain that I'd like to share because I think they're very positive signs that the Universe is continually smiling on me and that I'm well watched over by angels in the guise of human beings.

Yesterday in Madrid I was looking for directions to my hostel and I approached a friendly looking man with a big belly, copper skin, an unruly beard and mustache and a smile on his face. He was smoking on a stoop and it was about time I had a smoke, so I approached him. I speak almost no Spanish, and he spoke almost no English, but the most amazing conversation unfolded between us despite the barrier. Once I deciphered his directions I told him that I was preparing to walk the Camino de Santiago Via de la Plata route. He asked me what religion I was...was I Catholic? No. Evangelist? No. Buddhist? Well...

Spiritual, I said, just spiritual. Bueno (good) he said. Catholic and Evangelist all money, money, money. No good. Spiritual good. But why, why walk the Camino? he wanted to know. Michael asked the same question...Michael was my cab driver...

Today, on my way from the Santa Justa train station to the Caja Habitada I was waiting in line for a taxi and prayed to Great Spirit to send me a driver who knew a little English and who would be kind and patient with me due to the language restrictions. Up pulled Michael. A kind-hearted, roly-poly man with crooked teeth, but a beautiful smile. Michael didn't speak much English either, but more than smoking-on-the-stoop-man and was kind enough to tell me I would have a hard time on the trail knowing so little Spanish (just mirroring the fears I have), but he wanted to know my motive, as well.

So, in three short and poorly formed sentences I told them my story. Here it is:

"Yo separado" (I separated) and pointed to my ring finger. "Yo duele" (I hurt) and put a hand over my heart. "Caminar es mi medicamento" (Walking is my medicine).

And their responses warmed my heart!

Smoking-on-the-stoop hombre (man) told me "you walk spiritual, you good person!" and pushed at the sides of his mouth indicating my smile, then put his hand over his heart, indicating my heart. He said, "you be okay" and I took it to mean that I would be watched over on my journey.

Michael pointed at his ring finger, too, told me about his recent separation, his two small children ages 7 and 4 and said maybe walking would help him, too. When we arrived at Calle de Crédito, where my hostel is located, he realized, with all our chit-chat (he indicated this with the "puppet hand" action) that he hadn't set the meter. I asked him ?Cuánto es (how much?) and he smiled at me and waved his hand and said, nada (nothing). It brought tears to my eyes. We were empathetic of each other's experience. He gave me the traditional kiss on both cheeks and a big hug, helped me put my pack on and drove away.

It touches me that these acts of loving kindness unfolded with men. Before leaving, I raised concerns about men and travelling solo on this journey. It's as though the Universe is telling me, no worries, sister! We're watching over you, here's proof! So, if these two strangers are any indication of the encouragement and support that I'll undergo along the trail, then I am one fortunate woman! I give great love and gratitude for the affirmation!

Blessings, K

On The Way



Figure 1: I ask for nothing more: Heaven over me and the road beneath my feet.

April 27, 2012: 25kms to Guillena. The markers out of Seville are very poor! As I was attempting to leave the city this morning I couldn't find my way! Some pilgrim I am! Jeez! I found my way over the river and to the outskirts of the city, but didn't know where to go from there. Where are the bloody fletchas? To top it all off, it started to rain and I still had some 20kms to go. I thought to myself, I can't become deflated, I'm just setting out! So I prayed. I asked Spirit for a sign, any sign, an angel, por favor! And then, not 10 minutes later, I saw him in the misty distance standing at a crossroad. He was wearing a poncho, carrying a wooden walking stick and I knew instantly that I was seeing a fellow pilgrim of the Via de la Plata Way. José, my heaven sent angel! Blessings, Spirit, much thanks.

Not that I fared significantly better with José by my side!

Our first day walking turned into a complete adventure! Hey, you ask and you shall receive! We completely missed the markers not long after adjoining and became completely lost! We had to jump kiosks at the train station, then toss our packs over a partition wall and gingerly ease our own bodies over, hang, and release, falling four feet or so to the ground! We ended up beside busy highways on the pavement and even had to do a river crossing! We hummed the Indiana Jones theme song every now and again and shared a good laugh. What else can you do? I hope my shoes are dry for tomorrow. My shoulders hurt more than any other part of my body and I have a feeling that I'll be pretty stiff come morning. Ah well! That's life on the Camino!

We meet Fiona and Philipp that afternoon at the albergue in Guillena.

May 10, 2012, Blog post, Mi Familia. I want you to meet the wonderful people I've been travelling with for the past 13 days or so.

José: 62 year old Libra with Aquarius rising! I met José while leaving Seville, where the Camino is very poorly marked. Getting in and out of cities is the most frustrating part of walking The



Figure 2: José

Way and I had just asked the Universe for an angel to guide me out of Seville when up in the distance I saw a person with a pack, a walking stick, and a poncho, because the weather was miserable that day. A fellow pilgrim! I couldn't have met a better comrade! He doesn't speak a lot of English, but more than I speak Spanish and we talk with our hands or through beautiful Bea, smiles and body language. This man has seen it all and is a pelegriño extraordinario! He sure knows how to pack, too...his rucksack only weighs 5 kilos, compared to my 10! I envy his little pack and I've done some clearing out since the beginning.

José has walked through Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and more and has finished the Via de la Norte and Camino Frances here in Spain, as well as a series of the other, smaller caminos. José is a kind hearted, good humoured man and he has taken me under his wing, so to speak. José always ensures the familia has a place to stay, especially as we move on and the albergues become a little more busy. He walks muy rapido (very fast) and since my injuries I've not been able to keep up...but once I get to the final destination he pops out of some cafe or bar as I pass by and guides me to our home for the night. I love José, he is an angel.

Fiona: A Leo with Scorpio rising!



Figure 3: Fiona

Fiona is from Switzerland and is a talented, bright, energetic woman who speaks multiple languages including German, English, French, Spanish, Italian, Polish and Swiss! Whew! This group is very fortunate to have her, as she translates between us all, and she joined José and I on our second day, after meeting her at the albergue on our first night in Guillena.

See her photo? That eye-liner she wears so beautifully? That's tattooed there, friends! Yep, she's my kind of woman, fierce and feisty! She knows what she likes and it's posh! Fine wine, fine food...she cringes at the less well kept albergues, which are fine for José, Philipp, and I. She loves her single life, her parents, and travelling. She's just finished a 5 week course in Salamanca learning Spanish and will continue to do so for the month of June. She's pretty incredible. We have our differences, but we always work it out...people can't be together as much as we all are and not have their mini fallouts. She's been a terrific listener for me, overall, and I've gleaned much wisdom from her strength and independent attitude. Unfortunately, we won't be with Fiona much longer, as she will skip The Way through Salamanca and continue the route further north until her classes start. We'll miss you, chica!

Philipp: Philipp is, a very sweet 73 year old German Gemini who amazes me with his endurance and laid back attitude every day. Nothing flusters or frustrates this man! He walks at his own pace and while I was injured we walked together, which was reassuring for me. Philipp always manages to find us at the end of the day and loves his vino!



Figure 4: Philipp

Philipp is a concert pianist, a retired university professor, and also a

master of languages including Spanish, French, Greek and Latin.

All three patiently work with me in teaching me Spanish and were incredibly supportive of my decision to rest while hurt. We spend the evenings in the cafe, bar or albergue eating or cooking, sipping wine and journaling...as well as swapping first aid items while performing foot care. Foot care is a daily ritual amongst all of the pilgrims and we all have our magic creams and medications. Feet aren't always pretty, especially amongst pilgrims, but these are the kind of things that bring us closer together!

May Great Spirit bless our little family...I'm so thankful to have them with me here on The Way!

April 28, 2012: 17kms to Castilblanco de las Arroyos. Already, on this, the second day of walking, I know I have too much weight on my back. It's a process of live and learn for a first time pilgrim.

I was so hoping to go to the post office and forward some of my belongings to Santiago, but, alas, it's not to be, the postal is closed! Today was only a 17km trek, but I felt the weight of my pack acutely. Tomorrow is double, 30kms, so I guess we'll see how I fare. And it's supposed to storm. Today, too, started with rain and I really regret not buying a poncho, or, at the very least, a cover for my pack. Thankfully I packed that lone garbage bag! I'll rig something up with my remaining bungee cords.

April 29, 2012, 30kms to Almaden. I have a dream that I am quick to jot down in the morning before packing up. In it there is a gargoyle with no legs scaling a high rise and I feel thankful not to live in a city (even though I do). I am driving an old truck with bad brakes, destined for an unfamiliar countryside where Gordon lives. He has a new lover and I rage about it, making a scene in front of three other women who happen to be in the dream. Upon analyzing this dream I see that I fear the loss of my support system and the fear is trying to infiltrate the behaviours, beliefs and attitudes that protect me, mainly a sense of independence and confidence. My motivating drives are outdated and hard to stop. This dream shows me I am thankful to be away from society and familiarity, having to put on false attitudes around others. But Gordon is a force of nature for me, and his betrayal has made me furious. I feel as though caught in a love triangle, facing the collective will of others, and unable to do anything about it.

My pack is too heavy and my left ankle is swollen and tight. The hours we walk, again, do not work around the hours of the post offices and post offices are only found in cities anyway. Metaphorically and physically, I continue to bear more weight than serves me.

April 30, 2012: 15kms to Elreal de la Jara. My nights are filled with dreams, my unconscious shedding important light on what is unfolding for me within. First I dream that I am moving my younger sister. Her apartment is a mess and there are Barbies and animal hair everywhere. A black man is stalking her and I try to talk sense to him. He tells me, revealingly, that 'volume doesn't work' in this instance, even though Kelly explicitly states that she wants him leave her alone. In a second dream I work at Wendy's. I am toting around a yellow garbage bag through the dining area, disgusting the guests who eat there. They are angry, and the supervisor wants to talk to me, but I send my sister in to talk with the boss rather than doing it myself. I work with my dream dictionary to decipher their combined meanings.

The vulnerable, lesser expressed part of myself has been oppressed and needs dusting off - it is moving into a new state, likely meaning I am coming into a new relationship with my body. My natural drives, which were depicted as Gordon in my dream before, are stalking me aggressively. Volume, yelling, ranting, won't work to bring in into understanding. This is something I have to approach sensibly and assertively. My vulnerable self wants my natural drives, as driven by Gordon, to stop. I seek emotional stability, perhaps through the new friends I've made on the Way. Parts of my experience and feelings that are no longer useful are wrapped in cowardice, the fears that I'm afraid to face. This garbage disgusts, or is in opposition to, my psyche and emotional state. I send my vulnerable, lesser expressed self to see my power, which, I am not yet willing to face. In short, I must not fear my power. By bringing my vulnerable self into a new place I may be able to 'see' it, or step into it. There are feelings that need to be dealt with in order to reach emotional and psychological health, and these revolve around Gordon. My sociability and the changing relationship I have with my body will help.

May 1, 2012: 20kms to Montesoría. Tomorrow begins the month of the Spectral moon, so I've no choice but to see my issues in the face, dissolve them, and be liberated in the process. This process has already started and I experienced a huge release today upon awakening.

My embodied experience of releasing sadness.

When certain memories surface they're like a black hole. My heart feels as though it is collapsing inwards, hiding, retreating, shrivelling. I curl into myself, back hunched, shoulders rounded, all of me convulsing and heaving. My stomach hollows inwards, my guts crawling upward, protectively, around

my heart. I unconsciously hold my breath. I remember to breathe, and force the breath out of my lungs. My face draws in on itself, eyes closed fiercely, crows-feet deeply furrowed, lips curled drastically downwards, a mighty frown, while cheeks pucker upward and my hands cover the whole reddened, sad mess. Sadness can be so revealing, being a feeling that *wells* in the body. Sadness dredges hidden grief's from where they hide and moves them up and through the heart, drives past the lump in the throat and frees itself through my wailing and tears. And as the tears roll down my face I can feel the sting of the pains I've been carrying. My tears taste familiar because I know the sadness they carry well from another time and place, though I can't always remember it's name. Tears blur out the world around me so that I have to look inward and the sadness reveals itself further in snapshots of memories as they rise to the surface of the eye, then are replaced by others as they slip over the rim and down the cheek. The energy held in my body is a tension that is so immense it has its own white noise, I can hear the blood in my head pulsing between my temples. No movement, only the moment. Only the overwhelming sadness. And I feel this is good - to feel it take me over completely, to let it grow so big that it consumes me, then passes right through me. Whoosh. The experience of extreme sadness isn't pleasant, but it's better not to fight the memories and, instead, let them flow through me...give the pain a passage out of me. To choke sadness back is like giving it permission to gnaw at my sanity and fester within until it's poison has no choice but to manifest itself into a holistic dis-ease that eats at my physical and emotional well-being. It is kinder to invite the sadness, rather, to sweep through me, to clean out my insides, to expel, to release, to surrender.

May 1, 2012 After a series of intensely terrifying and emotional dreams last night all I could do was cry, as though I had no control over the tears. I cried while eating my breakfast this morning, forcing food into myself, snuffling while chewing, tears rolling off my cheeks and onto my bread. I cried while walking out of beautiful Real de la Jara. I cried and cried for over two hours while stumbling and limping along the Roman road. I am thankful for the good conditions of the Camino here, for I could barely see through my blurry eyes and just kept putting one foot in front of the other. The day passed by in a haze. Fiona and José let me be, offering encouragement periodically, ignoring my yelling and swearing at the grim skies above that perfectly mirrored my grey, fogged mind, emptying myself of the anger I held for Gordon and Sheila. I've no doubt I looked like a mad woman. But I trust all is unfolding as it should and ask Spirit to assist me in releasing myself from the confines of my own mind. I give gratitude for this day.

Tendonitis begins to set into the right ankle, as well. I write a message to my Camino email list asking them to send out prayers of healing for me.

***Email from Kim, May 1, 2012, The Tendonitis Plea.** Hello friends, I hope this finds each one of you well. I have fallen in with three very lovely people and am enjoying the company, scenery, and journey very much. However, as of yesterday I have developed tendonitis in my left ankle. Not surprisingly it is this ankle that was identified as holding hurt and anger during my reiki level 1 course. Needless to say, I am working hard to release those feelings which do not serve me. I ask that all of you send healing energy to me, my ankle and my shoulders, and my heart specifically, please, in hopes of a speedy recovery, as I do not want to part from my new family, who will have to continue without me as pilgrims are only allowed one night per alberque. I am so thankful to have such an amazing network of friends and family to support me. Blessings.*

I will try to write another blog post as soon as I reach Zafra in two days time...because I have no doubt that I am capable of pushing on with your loving energy assisting me.

*Gracias,
Kim xoxo*

One the same day I send out my request, I receive an onslaught of love and support and continue to do so for days. Figure 5 contains s pastiche I created from the emails I received.



Figure 5: Communication pastiche one

I also receive the message Gordon sent me on April 27th. I cry some more, the tears are endless on this day, then write a response on May 1st:

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>April 27, 2012, Email from Gordon</i></p> <p><i>I am a bit down at this time. I am feeling very ashamed and guilty. I messed things up and I'm not feeling too good about it.</i></p> <p><i>I wish I could take back the hurt that I have caused you. I acted very selfish and I am truly sorry.</i></p> <p><i>I wish you all the love and happiness that you deserve. Please try to find it in your heart to forgive me if you can. I am a fool. Please forgive me.</i></p> <p><i>I am thinking of you, you amaze me. Be well and be strong, I know you will.</i></p> <p><i>Please stay in touch with me. Have a most wonderful and joyous beginning to your walk.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>May 1, 2012, My responses.</i></p> <p><i>I left very angry and hurt. You should be ashamed, I cannot understand why you did what you did when you did. It was an awful way to part.</i></p> <p><i>Thank you for this. I have been trying not to think about it since I arrived, but today I cried for two hours, thankfully the road was smooth as my sight was blurry. I hate Sheila and am trying to release these feelings as they do not serve me. However, I never want to see her again.</i></p> <p><i>I don't know where you and I go from here, as this is new territory for us. I am trying to find forgiveness for you...you will have to give me time.</i></p> <p><i>Unfortunately, I have tendonitis right now, but am determined to carry on as I have fallen in with a lovely group of people and do not want to get left behind. Many people are concerned for the famous Canadian woman on the Camino. Wish me a speedy recovery.</i></p> <p><i>I will keep in touch. I hope the move with your dad goes well.</i></p>
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May 2, 2012: 21kms to Fuento de Cantos. Fiona and I begin walking late in order to send 2.6 kilos of weight onward to Santiago composed of my sacred bundle, tarot cards, water filter, scissors, pendulum, and, sadly, my dream dictionary. All my esoteric tools are now gone. I've only my intuition to go on. But my back, shoulders, and feet are certainly thankful. José walks ahead and ensures us beds for that night.

There is a new man amongst us...Maalik from France. He is a tricky, slick, and sexy man and I don't trust him. Nonetheless, we are obviously attracted to each other. Oh, inner prostitute, I see you in this mirror!

Support and encouragement around the situation with my tendonitis continue to enter my inbox:

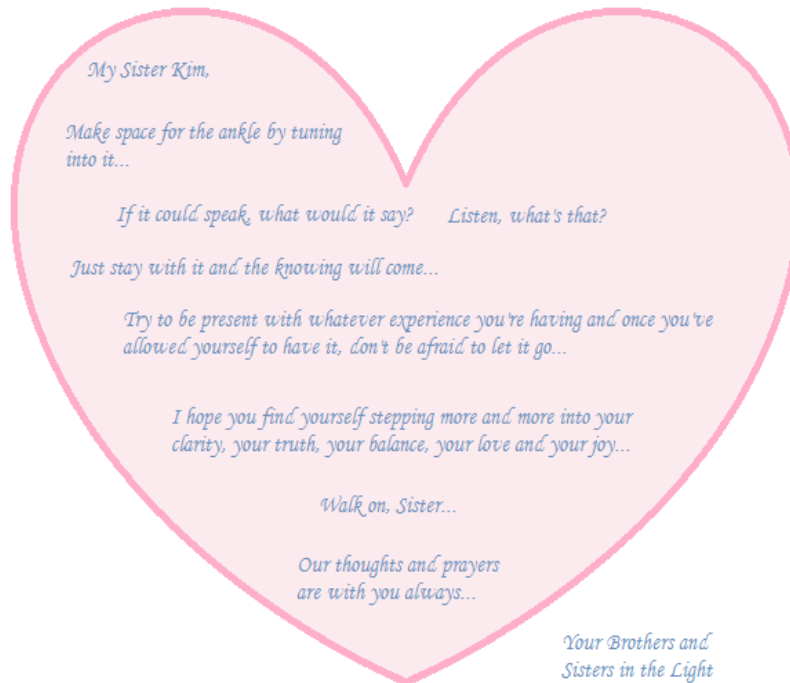


Figure 6: Communication pastiche two

May 3, 2012, 26kms to Zafra. My tendonitis is at its height. My ankles are red, angry and inflamed. The rain has poured down off and on all day. And because I had to walk so slowly today, there were no beds left at the only albergue in the city. I was not a happy camper upon arrival. Sad, thinking that I would have to be separated from my companions, and in a lot of pain, all I wanted was a hot shower and a bed. Out of nowhere appears Paco. It's raining, but cheery Paco didn't seem to mind. He walked right up to me and said in broken English, "I am your friend in Zafra. My name is Paco. What can I do for you?" Out of this world uncanny, right? So, Fiona explained in Spanish that I need a hostel because the albergue is full, does he know where there is one close by? Of course he does! In fact, he'll walk us there! He took me right to the door, told me to have a good night and when I turned to thank him, he was gone. Poof! It gives me goose-bumps just retelling the story. A heaven sent angel if ever there was one...

In Zafra I must stop to heal from tendonitis. I am conflicted between being separated from my travelling companions, José and Fiona, and continuing on alone once my ankles heal, or 'cheating' and taking the bus to be able to continue travelling with them further along The Way. I clearly witness, then question, my fear of not being able to speak the language and how dependent I've become on José and Fiona to communicate for me. This is ultimately the final push for me, for I must prove it to myself that I can go this alone! If only for two days even...

May 4, 2012, Mi familia continues on The Way and I have a one night affair with Maalik who fancies himself to be mysterious. We sing to the moon, watch a street troupe play music and perform acrobatics and we drink wine until curfew. He stays in my hostel with me that night. Why not? After all, I am a single woman and this is my adventure. But because my companions do not like Maalik, and for fear that the news may reach Gordon, I keep this night a secret for the next six weeks.

Maalik truly was my inner prostitute reflected back to me. I found him to be an incredibly sexy man with copper skin, thick, dark hair, full mouth, sly grin, and disarmingly tender, brown eyes that encase a glint of something deeper and darker behind the buttery softness that made me want to know more. I could also sense a tinge of slime, a gut feeling that this man played the game with bent rules. A whiff of something a little off that set off my senses and told me to beware. I know how José felt about him, didn't trust him. But I trusted myself to listen to my gut and keep my senses heightened while also pursuing what I wanted. I slipped my wallet into my toiletries while he was in the shower the next morning before I showered and left him alone in the room, for instance. Sometimes it's all about playing the game, the chase, that's a turn on. I like the game and I had not played the game in a very long time.

I met him in the bank my first morning without my companions in Zafra, a totally random event, and he kindly guided me to the library, explaining that he was taking a day off of the pilgrimage to wander and explore the city. He had also been at the albergue the evening before when it had been decided that I would rest a day and one more night in Zafra, then take the bus to Merida, so, perhaps the run- in wasn't totally random, after all? We agreed to dinner together that evening and I knew he would be in my bed later that night. For me, it was about the sex and, quite simply, because I could. Maalik, I see now, symbolized a major shift in my attitude towards the whole mess of intertwined relationships that had unfolded pre-Camino. I had no sense of wanting an actual, meaningful relationship with Maalik - I desired him and enjoyed the smoky flirtations that led up to Zafra over a period of three days. It was as though we found ourselves locked into a contract, synchronistically brought together, none of our pilgrim entourage around to find us out, our attraction to one another buzzing for days - were we or were we not going to follow through and allow ourselves a night of romance on this great journey? His voice was

melodic and I liked to listen to him talk in his charming, broken accent. And, most specifically, he was also in it for the chase and there was an innate understanding between us that it would only be what it was and nothing more. I wanted to kiss and get fucked. The sexual tension crackled between us and I wanted to disperse it. I wanted to know more about the mystery of him and of our chemistry together.

I send an email to friends and family about my journey to Merida. There is no mention of Maalik.

04/05/2012, Email from Kim. Hello Dear Friends and Family, I've got limited time on the internet here in Zafra, so no time for blogging...

The tendonitis has moved into my right foot as well as the left. I have decided to take 3 days to heal. Tonight I'm staying in a hostel in Zafra in a private room so that I can rest. Tomorrow I will take the bus to Merida and stay in a hostel there. On Sunday I will meet the others that I have been travelling with in Merida. On Monday, I will resume the Camino with them. Yes, taking the bus it 'cheating' in a way, but we all talked about it and decided that I deserve to be in the company of those I have come to love and who love me while taking time to heal. This is just good self care, in the end. After all, what is 50 or 60kms out of 1000?

*Lovingly,
Kim*

I receive an outpouring of responses.

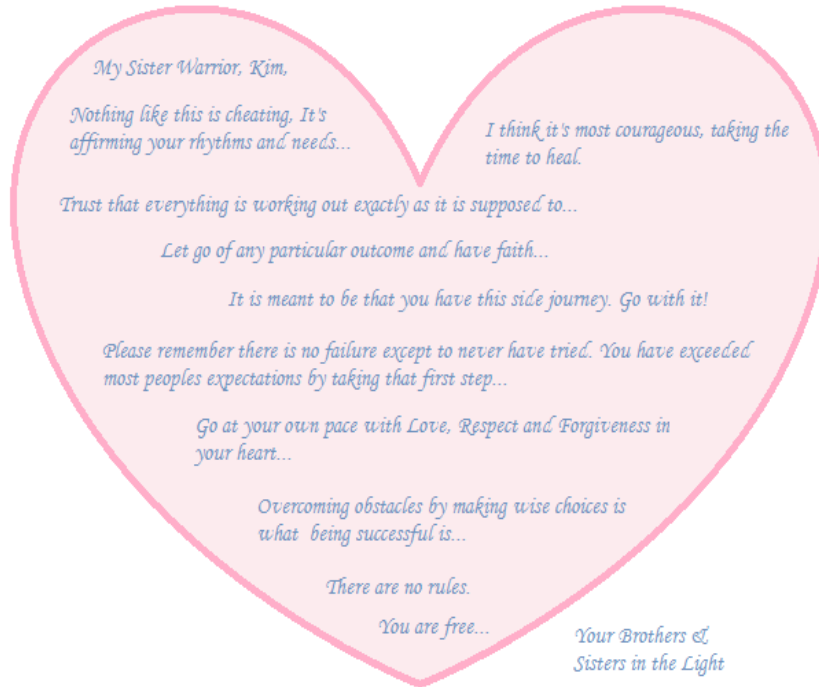


Figure 7: Communication pastiche three

May 5, 2012. I catch a bus to Merida and reserve a hostel room for me and mi familia. I have a Full Moon Ceremony by myself out on the terrace of the hostel.

It felt very good to smudge last night. It's as though I could ethereally feel the prayers the Firekeepers infused into the sage wash over me and penetrate into my spirit...

The dream I had speaks to me of something very 'off' within - babies are reoccurring in my dreams as of late. Either I desire children, or the immature feelings I retain from my childhood are really taking effect. Perhaps a little of both? As a child I worked so hard to fit in, but was so awkward and often rejected - chronically the overweight, awkward 'new girl'. To feel accepted now and the fear of losing those who accept me here has really triggered those old fears. But I 'wrap' my stuff up in other emotions - in this case unconsciousness as symbolized by the black bag. Apparently my childhood fears of dejection are very small, but cause me anxiety, nonetheless. Admittedly, I don't want to deal with those feelings, but here they are, at the surface. 'Help!' I cry out in my dream, 'I don't want to touch this by myself!'

May 6, 2012: Merida

I reconnect with mi familia. We sightsee around Merida including the Roman aqueducts and the local museum.

Dear Journal,

Was reading through my emails last night and could hardly believe the number of responses I got from friends and family congratulating me on my choice to rest and giving me advice on how to care for my feet! I've come to realize that this journey has to be taken one day at a time. That, though I love Fiona and José, I cannot fear being alone or getting lost or the language anymore. I am committed to this journey, one way or the other, with or without them. The fear, the anxiety, the worry... These emotions must be released, else I'm not truly committed, I'm just bobbing along. Not that I don't want to walk with them, I most certainly do, but whatever happens I must tune into the body and respect it. I have to go at my pace, do this long walk my way. Deep breath- in and out. I'll be okay, I truly will. People sense that I am friendly and approachable and I have a myriad of angels all around me all the time. I trust. Again and again I've been sent angels. And the love that is being beamed to me from home is more than I could have ever hoped for. Why hold on to low vibration emotions that don't serve me? The Universe loves me. The Universe holds me and supports me and is conspiring on my behalf.

06/05/2012 Email from Kim

Oh my, the love I feel from all of you is tremendous! Your outpouring of support in terms of my decision to rest is so very appreciated... I am so moved! I am reunited with mi amigos now and ready to move forward. I will take this journey one day at a time; indeed, The Way demands this frame of mind. I love you all so very much. I am feeling much better, though a little tight, still. I ask that, when thinking of me, you pray that I have healthy tendons, healthy ankles, and healthy feet. Tomorrow is an easy 17kms, then 28, then 35, so pray for my endurance, please! I love you all and hope you are well. Holding you all in my heart, knowing you walk right beside me...

Love,
Kim xoxo

May 7, 2012, Journal entry- 17kms to Aljucen

I made it! Only minor swelling and no pain! Hurray! Also, having only walked 17kms, I now have plenty of time to rest for tomorrow's whopping 37kms. Scary, but I'll get through it. Fiona really struggled with what she would do today - continue on with Philipp, or stay with José and I. But she's having some sciatica nerve pain and decided to keep the distance minimal and stay with us. I must say I'm thankful. And while she was thinking about moving on I'm happy to say that I felt no fear. Of course, I knew José was staying, and if my entire troupe had decided to continue I may have as well - but the Universe, as usual, is smiling on me. Always smiling on me. And, so, here we are in this little pueblo, in this adorable, simple little albergue with plenty of time for rest, relaxation, and perhaps even a therapeutic bath at a bath house!



Figure 8: Albergue Aljucen

May 8, 2012: 37kms to Aldea de Cano. To walk so many kilometers so soon after my injury is to be a test, I know. I am nervous. But the day is beautiful so I take it slow, rest every hour, and play photographer. It is a test for *mi familia*, too, and I can tell they are somewhat resentful of my pace, José worried about getting beds, Fiona bored. I tell them it's okay to go ahead, no reason to wait, I will see



Figure 9: Romanic bridge

them when I arrive. But, stubbornly, they stick with me and, inside, I know it is because they would never forgive themselves if something happened to me. I feel loved and burdensome, simultaneously.

May 9, 2012: 23kms to Cesares. I remember the mounting tension between Fiona and I on this day. Something snappy said over vino in the plaza major. It was happening more and more frequently. We clung to our identity as a family, especially in the wake of my injury and having been separated for 3 days previously, but more and more Fiona was pulling away. She would be branching out on her own within a week, she told José and me. I had mixed feelings about it, for I loved her, but also felt the hot sting of her Leo/Scorpio temperament often. At any rate, we all needed our own space and found ourselves doing our own thing on this day.

I send another email to friends and family about this leg of the journey.

May 9, 2012, Blog post. Just a quick note to let you all know that I've made it to Cesares! 300kms down, only 700 left to go! Monday we walked an easy 17kms, which was kind to my ankles, then yesterday we put in a whopping 37kms! I rested as often as I could, then laid with my feet up against a wall for 20 minutes upon arrival to the albergue! My tendons were swollen, but not red or hot, which was a gift. And after 37kms, I was not the only pilgrim with tired, swollen feet/ankles, of course! Today we put in 23kms and I feel very good. Thank you all for your loving messages of support and advice! I think of all of you often and feel tremendously loved! Working on a blog post, hoping to publish later tonight!
Sincerely,
Kim

They email in response:

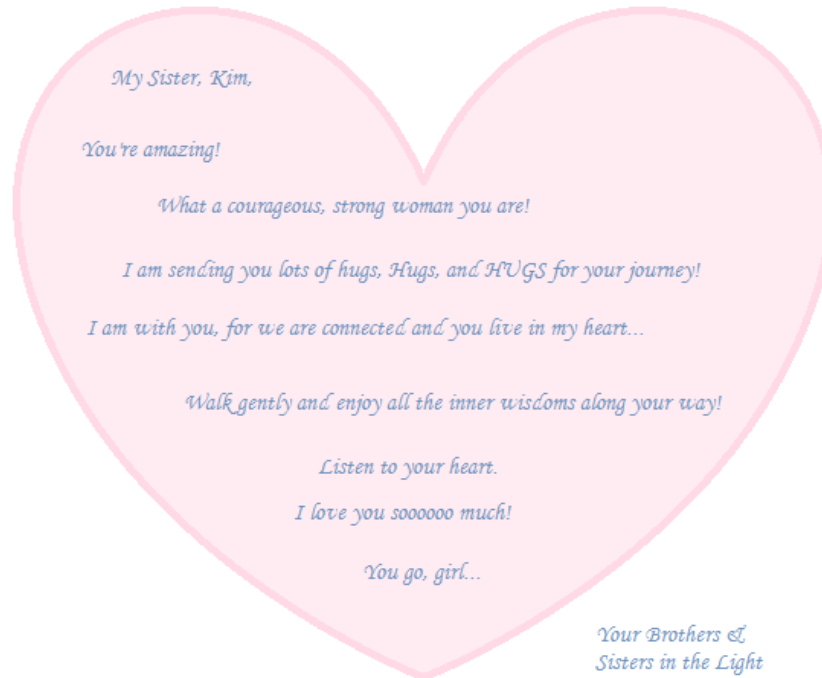


Figure 10: Communication pastiche four

May 10, 2012, 33kms to Albergue de Alcantara.

May 11, 2012, Blog post, The Heat Cometh. The spring here is officially over, it seems, and the sun is ramping up the temperature. Up until Monday we saw a lot of clouds, mist, cool temperatures and rain...and I mean RAIN! which equals thick, red mud that make ones shoes as heavy as winter boots and river crossings that equal a day's worth of wet shoes and itchy feet...No longer!!! Yesterday was a gorgeous 28C and today it reached 30C! Lovely, to be sure, but made for a long 33kms over paved roads and mountainous terrain today! Saw a lot of pilgrims come into the albergue (in the middle of nowhere!) dehydrated and exhausted! It's a quick transition and took us all off guard.

I know 33kms may not sound like a lot to some of you, but we do this day after day, many of us since Seville, and though we're strengthening and building more and more endurance every day, really getting into the flow now...the weather and terrain are always influential factors. The roads are toughest on the legs and the noise pollution sucks. Plus there's generally no shelter from the elements. Yesterday was perfect, plains and fields, dry trail and sun...ahhh, cherish those moments!

My feet, it seems, are healed! Sure, they were swollen pretty good today, but the heat and distance does that to us all. I know I owe this rapid healing partly to you, friends and family, who sent me multiple forms of healing energy via prayer, reiki, bowen, imagery, and just through loving me. I am so very grateful, thank you! I am only taking 50mg of anti-inflammation meds a day now and doing lots of stretching and applying of the glorious Traumeel.

Tomorrow is up in the air...this is a week of many long distance hikes and tomorrow could prove to be either a 20km day, or a 40 km one. Pray with me that it's the former rather than the latter, especially if it's hot again! It all depends on the albergue, as, at the 20km mark, it only hosts 12. The day after is another 30, then another 30km. I haven't even looked to see what follows...remember, it's day by day now.

I hope this finds each of you well. I miss you all. Don't know when I'll have access again, but thinking of you until that time...

Kim, out. xoxo.

The sun is white hot in the sky, it is 30+C, and the heat is rippling off the charcoal pavement. The mouthful of water I have left in my bottle is piss warm and I don't dare touch it yet, especially when it's this hot; by my guess I still have another four or five kilometers or about forty-five minutes to walk. My skin, dry and salty, has been tingling and now a hot, stiff breeze raises goose-bumps to the surface, lifting the delicate blond hair on my arms ...not a good sign. I should think about taking a break, but I must first get to a safe place off to the side of this highway. On my left is an endless length of grey steel median, traversing the edge of a steep cliff lined with shale rock and weeds. On the other side of this winding road the craggy rock face climbs straight up with no shoulder to speak of. I feel the blood start to drain from my face as a long, cool shiver runs up my back and I pull a sharp breath in through my teeth. If there's a time to drink, it's now. I sip twice, still careful not to completely empty the contents of my water bottle and carefully lean on the barrier for a moment, the heat of the metal burning through my shorts, and lower my head to my knees. The traffic is steady and the whoosh of the cars passing closely by, kicking up pebbles and dust that make me sway where I sit, prompts me to slowly raise my head, push myself off of the median, and turn to keep walking. Eyes squinting I peer ahead beyond the next curve and see that the median ends as the hilltop broadens just slightly. There is a low, jutting cluster of rusty rock that may even provide me with a patch of shade. My blood pressure is too low and my head is swooning as I force one foot in front of the other, trudging to get to the end of median, to safety, to a place where I can become horizontal, because I suddenly, desperately need to lay down. The charcoal grey of the tarmac begins to lighten and shimmer, as if it is actually mirroring the blazing rays of the sun above, and I realize my vision is narrowing, everything within the peripheral is smudged and fuzzy and too bright to bear. My

heart begins to thump in my chest as I realize I'm in trouble and I hunch over, feeling tremendously groggy and unsteadily grab for the median to use it as a railing. The shoulder of the road is only five or six steps away now and with my washed out, monotone sight I fixate on the spot where I will collapse. With my right hand I start to fumble with the clasps on my pack, desperately pulling and yanking on them...the pack, I have to get my pack off. Shaking I let go of the median and reaching out to the rock to steady myself, I let my pack drop off my back and lower myself drunkenly to the ground, resting my head on the bag, scrunching my *sombrero*. With eyes closed and my face, dry and ashen, turned up to the sky, I barely acknowledge the tough, wiry scrub and sharp fragments of rock digging into the underside of my body. My heart is beating madly and the rush of blood in my ears drowns out the cars swooping by. Instantly relieved to find itself in a supine position, my whole body feels as heavy as lead. Just relax, I tell myself, just lay here as long as you need to. And I do. At least 20 minutes go by until I feel well or confident enough to raise myself into a sitting position, sluggishly pushing myself up to sit with my back to the rock and wrap my arms around my legs. In another ten minutes or so I plant my pole firmly in the ground and stand slowly, waiting for a wave of dizziness to pass over me. When it doesn't come, I offer a quick prayer of thanks to my body and drink another sip of my water. And while I'm feeling rejuvenated, I also know it may not last, so I hasten to put my pack back on and continue. With the extra half hour that's just been eaten up, I don't want to worry mi companeros.

May 11, 2012, 20kms to Grimaldo

Dream One: *I dream I am selling my old Ford and it's been totally reconstructed - like new. Gordon did the work, but it's my car. I sell it to a very friendly black man after it wins a contest. **Keywords:** car, black man (one's own natural drives).*

Interpretation: *The motivating drives I used to have were reconstructed by Gordon. I am selling those reconstructed drives to my natural drives. My natural drive is friendly and wants to own my winning, refurbished motivational drives. My motivational drives (which can be mislead, not always healthy...) and my natural drives (my authentic drives) are merging. My motivational drives are becoming more authentic.*

Dream Two: *I dream I am at a party and we are secretly passing a bottle of wine around while the 'mother' is in the room. An old male friend (brief crush) from high school lifts me*

from behind, lowers me down the front of his body very sensually and complains that his teeth hurt. I feel amorous. **Keywords:** party (Feelings about groups; social skill or lack of it; social pleasure), alcohol (an influence which changes the way we feel, moving us towards negative or positive feelings; prelude to friendliness or intimacy; an allowing into our life of another influence we do not immediately feel is our own conscious will), mother/woman (The Great Mother Archetype: The symbols of mother represent not simply our relationship with her, but also how it influences our own growth towards independence. As a baby our consciousness of self does not feel separate from mother. The gradual separation of the sense of self is difficult. In some people it is never managed, even though they separate physically. Their mother, or their sense of their mother within them, still directs their decisions; Woman in a woman's dream: an aspect of herself, but often a facet of herself she is not immediately identifying with); teeth (the ageing process as it relates to maturity. Also aggression; ability to 'chew things over').

Interpretation: I am secretly engaging in changing the way I feel, moving towards positive feelings and wanting to be friendly and intimate with others, despite the Great Mother aspect of myself, being stern or overly watchful about how much or even if I change. My attraction for others, my sense of sensuality, is maturing and approaching a change. I feel amorous.

May 12, 2012, 33kms to Carcaboso

I've been thinking about love. I found myself rambling on to Fiona yesterday about children and names I love...Levon, Woodrow, Millicent, Ellie...I miss Gordon. I suppose I should put it all aside and just focus on my thesis, it has to become my primary responsibility upon return. Fall in love with my work, for a time, and put romance on the backburner...no easy task for a die-hard romantic such as myself! But a lover will come eventually, likely emerging from a place I cannot even imagine at this time!

May 13, 2012. What was supposed to be a 23km walk turns into 27kms as we get lost briefly on our way to Hostal Asturias.

Getting lost.

Damn. That bull incident really freaked me out back there! He was massive, jet black, with sharp piercing horns and balls hanging practically to his fetlock joints! How did I let them convince me to get into the same field with that beast? And me wearing a bright red rain jacket, to boot!?! Those two have no clue about farm life or the temperaments of bulls. I felt as though I were tiptoeing across that field. How could I keep from looking behind me to see if he were watching us? Fiona and José barely seemed to notice him. They were all chatty and smiles. All I could think about was great-aunt Leta and the story of my great-granddad being mauled blind by a bull in front of her when she was just a little girl. I can still

see the shadow of , disbelief and sorrow that still passes over her face when she tells it. And my mom, long ago, being chased by their roan bull across what's now the soybean field on the farm, while my aunt and uncle hollered encouragement from the fence, edging her on "Run faster, Nancy! Faster! Hurry! You can do it!" Then laughing at her mercilessly, as brothers and sisters are want to do, when she scrambled over the fence and broke out in tears. Now, I wonder if it's true about bulls and the colour red? I'm grinning like a banshee now, because it was actually pretty liberating walking right past him, not more than 20 feet away. But did I breathe a sigh of relief when that gate was finally shut and chained behind us! What the hell would any of us have done had the damn thing charged?

But, hey now, what's this? I break out of my reverie. These animals, here, are turning away from us? That whole herd of cattle is on the move! And the horses are shifty. When's the last time we saw a *fletcha*? I don't think there were any marks on the last gate we passed through. The animals along the Way don't react this strongly to humans. Humans become part of the day-to-day scenery for animals whose homes and pastures are along the trail...Uh-oh.

Head: Oh man! We're going the wrong way! It's certain. We're no longer on The Way. We've all been lost in our thoughts and now look where we've wound up! The middle of nowhere! Stupid! I wonder how many extra unnecessary kilometers we'll put on today? What a waste of time and energy! (anger)

Heart: Oh, come on Head. Be gentle. Besides, it's a beautiful day. And look at this farm! All these animals co-existing with one another. It's calving season, and we love calves! You wouldn't have come into contact with these beautiful horses without veering from the path. What's another couple of kilometers on a 23 kilometer day anyway? (acceptance)

Ankle: Now it'll be more like a 27 or 28 kilometer day and yesterday we walked 33! I can't catch a break! Christ, Head, where were you? Daydreaming away, as per usual! You can't depend on Fiona and José to always have their eyes peeled, you know. Wake up! (resentment)

Head: Come on, Ankle. I feel bad enough as it is. It's not my fault you're weak. (blame)

Ankle: Weak? That's nice. That's really fucking sensitive of you. You know, I hold all this shit and anger so YOU don't have to think about it and you call me weak? Go to hell. (anger)

Heart: Ankle! Head! This really isn't helping. Please, please stop. How is your fighting serving this moment? (reason)

Shoulder: I agree with Heart. We're here now. Ankle, I'm tired, too, but attitude is everything. We might as well settle into the fact that it's happened and accept it for what it is. (acceptance)

Heart: The sun is shining, that sky is the most perfect shade of blue, and it smells good here, with the fields and flowers and animal smells mingling perfectly together...Maybe we were supposed to get sidetracked? Hey, we already survived potential death by raging bull. This is nothing, right? (wonder, trust)

Head: Okay, okay. We're off the path. It is what it is, but what to do about it?

José: "We go northwest direction. Which way we are going?"

Me: (I pull out my compass) "North east. We should be going in that direction" (pointing left).

Fiona immediately, almost comically, turns to face that direction and starts walking.

Ankle: I've no intention of following that woman. All I see beyond are fields and wire fences. Who knows where we'll end up if we start bushwhacking? (doubt, resistance)

Shoulder: Um, yeah. We tried that already and had our little adventure for the day, remember? Surely trying to blaze our own trail, when we can simply retrace our steps on a clear and somewhat used one, is the more difficult route? (resistant, safe, secure, rational)

José looks at me as if asking, what do you want to do? I listen to my body for answers:

Head: "Let's turn around. We've simply missed a marker. Maybe the farmer who owns this property will know where we went astray." (rational)

Shoulder: It can't hurt to ask for help and retracing our steps to find where we missed the guidepost means that we get to traverse over now familiar ground in a new light, from a different perspective. This farm really is very pretty. We couldn't have wandered too, too far from the true Way. (optimistic, hopeful, rational)

Heart: José looks a little disappointed, he loves a good adventure and trekking over new ground. Are we ruining a potential opportunity for exploration for José and Fiona? (empathetic)

Head: I can tell even José's doubtful about where we could conceivably end up. Fiona will do whatever Fiona wants to do, as is Fiona's nature, but look closely...see her glance back down the trail, then into the waist length grass that covers the field? I can tell Fiona is also calculating just how much energy it may take to traverse the plains versus the beaten path. (resistant, stubborn, certain, clever)

Ankle: We're simply providing the voice of reason. What's wrong with being rational and following a safe plan? Retracing our steps could save us time, energy, and daylight in the greater scheme of the day. I don't want to trounce on anyone's good time, but...ah shit, are we stomping on opportunity? What are we going to do? (authoritative, rational, then doubtful and empathetic)

Shoulder: It's said that when lost either stay put or go back the same way you came from to find where you missed your marker. Staying put isn't an option. (certainty)

Heart: Hmm. I do feel this is the best route for us. I'm just concerned that we're only thinking about us and not them. (empathy)

Ankle: That's very tender of you, Heart, really. But I'm not receptive to their needs right now. We've trekked through fields enough for one day and they know it. I just want to get back on The Way and know that we're going to end up at an albergue with a bed for the night, rather than potentially find ourselves really off the mark. We're at the point where if we turn around now, we're going to find where we went wrong. Going on a field trip just means we could potentially become more lost and I'm not up for that at all. *Vamos.* (resistance, exhaustion)

May 14, 2012: 23kms to Bano de Montemajor

Walking is becoming easier and easier and I'm enjoying the pilgrim life style very, very much! No wonder people find it hard to go back to 'reality' after walking the Camino! I like what's happening to my body - my legs are, of course, getting stronger, my arms toned from using the pole, and my skin is slowly turning brown. I love the leisure time in the afternoons after a long walk and using my body to its capacity. I like taking two hours to eat a meal, drink and socialize. I like staying in a different place night after night - it's a very refreshing change for this homebody. I ask that the Universe pair me with a partner who also enjoys this sort of lifestyle so that I may continue it and not get stuck in a rut. Philipp, José, and Fiona inspire me - I want to be as assured as they of my body's capacity as I age. Walking 900kms at 73, imagine!

I give thanks for this day and the insights given to me. I give great thanks for being here, now, in Spain, walking and talking in a whole new way. I give thanks for those at home holding me lovingly and following my journey. Blessings. I pray tonight for Gordon, that he is healthy in body mind and spirit and finding forgiveness for himself. I pray he is coping well and is happy. I give thanks for minimalism and living simply and in a balanced way. I give thanks for this big, beautiful planet and all of the wonders it has to offer and willingly, joyously gives without a hint of holding back. The earth is a selfless entity. I have great Love and Gratitude for all of this...

May 14, 2012, Blog post, [A Day in the Life of This Peregrina \(Pilgrim\)](#). Hello All!

Day 18 and I am walking at a magnificent pace now and alongside my friends, rather than trailing behind! THIS is how I imagined it would feel to be a peregrina before I left on this amazing journey! THIS is me walking healthy and free! THIS is my body and spirit singing and dancing The Camino and I give great Gratitude, Universe! Blessings!

The life of a peregrina, for me, is absolutely ideal! I love it! I thought you might like to know how an average day might unfold for me...

6:20am - 7/7:15am- awake, arise and eat breakfast...just started this new schedule about, oh, a week, week and a half ago. Before it was dark when we awoke around 7am and cold

(and generally wet) outside. We normally didn't leave until 8am. Now the sun gets hot around 8:30-9am, so we get up and start walking earlier now. I do the normal toiletry stuff, get dressed, perform my ritualistic foot care, apply sunscreen and pack up my bag. Depending on the albergue and how many people are there, one may have to wait for the bathroom, so sometimes we eat breakfast while waiting. Breakfast...this normally consists of either fruit, yogurt, juice and tea (lots of liquids first thing to hydrate up) we've purchased from the supermercado the previous day, or tostados (toast) with butter and jam (and lots of liquids) from the local bar/cafe...usually the one closest to the albergue as they're the only business open at that time of the morning.

7/7:15am- walk...and walk and walk and walk and walk some more. Break every hour and half or so just to take the weight off of our backs, pee, drink, maybe snack on something, stretch...depending on the day we're on the Via de la Plata anywhere from 4-8 hours. Five to six hour walks are perfect, for me. Again, it all depends on the terrain and the weather, which are hugely influential on the mindset. But as my body strengthens, I find tough terrain easier and even enjoy the challenge!

The afternoon: Once the days walking is over and we've arrived at our destination we check into the albergue and immediately shower! Ahhhhh...water never felt so damn good! Love, love, love water so much! Then, down an ice cold beer. Again, I never appreciated beer the way I do on The Camino...it's so fortifying and satisfying! If we have to wait for a shower or wait for the volunteers to open the albergue, the order of the shower and the beer are reversed. Life is simple here.

After beer and shower (or shower and beer) it's generally time for more foot care, laundry and lunch. Foot care is becoming more and more simple for me, as any blisters I may have had are now turning into calluses. Just a little anti-inflammatory on the tendons, and I'm good to go. Many are not so lucky. Laundry is generally done by washboard in a sink, I sing Dolly Parton songs while I wash my clothes the old fashioned way because it just feels right :) Then, out in the sun on the line they go to dry and freshen.

Lunch is the biggest meal of the day and tons of restaurants offer a peregrino menu for around 8-10 euros consisting of a starter, a main entree, and a dessert plus water and either a glass of wine or a beer. In Spain, lunch is served between 2 and 5pm...only restaurants are open, everything else (and I mean EVERYTHING ELSE) is closed. Therefore, what else does one have to do after eating but take a nap? SIESTA! Love, love, love siesta! Of course, I could go site-seeing, and I have once or twice, but it's really, really hot between those hours and I want to enjoy my evening, so I normally opt for the nap.

After siesta it's generally time for another beer and to take the clothes off the line. It's cooler after 5pm so this is the ideal time for site-seeing, if we happen to be in a place with a population over 500. This is also the time we start planning the route for the next day, discussing the terrain, pueblos (villages) where we might get a snack, whether there will be any pueblos whatsoever and how much water we might have to take with us, looking in the paper for weather reports, etc...Often we head to the supermercado to buy dinner and/or breakfast items. I journal at this time and go through my photos from the day. I might try to find a library or internet cafe where I can write all of you or check up on my

emails. I hunt down/write postcards. There's a lot of socializing going on between pilgrims. It's extraordinarily leisurely.

Evening- Supper isn't served in Spain until 8pm and most locals eat later...around 10pm. This is too late for most of us who need to be up and walking in the morning, so my Famino and I generally eat around 8-8:30pm. Supper is generally salad that we prepare ourselves, or tapas. Tapas are small, appetizer size portions of food that are served at the bars for a decent price. As a vegetarian I'm somewhat limited at the cafes. I'm pretty in love with the cheese here, and the tortillas, which are basically a piece of potatoe omelette. I also eat a lot of green salad (always iceberg lettuce, but whatever), gazpacho (when I can get it), ensalada ruso (a potato salad), olives and bread. That's about it. I had a vegetarian pizza the other night and thought I was in heaven. Bread is served with every single meal and the Spanish eat it in amazing quantities (along with their beloved pork) and I try to keep my portions of bread minimal, but when you're walking 20-35kms a day, you need the carbs. This is also when I chug the water, and maybe another beer or glass of wine...but lots of water!

10/10:30/11pm- Bedtime! Depending on the albergue this could mean crawling into a bed surrounded by anywhere from 3 to 15 other people (and this is excellent, really, some of the albergues on the popular Camino Frances sleep up to 70 people in one room. Ugh.) José is pretty amazing and has found us some really awesome accommodations where we get a room for just the four of us, or even 2 doubles so that Fiona and I have a room all to ourselves! Sweet! No earplugs! All of these places, the good, the bad, and the ugly, never cost over 15 euros and, on the average, cost around 10 euros. The other night, due to distance, we stayed at this wee little refugio that was by donation only where we stuffed the place like sardines! There were only 12 beds in 3 tiny rooms and there were people on mattresses on the floor in the entrance for goodness' sake! This was the night we had to make the choice between 20 or 40kms and opted for the 20. A lot of people opted for the 20. Fiona was feeling very sore and poor José's heels were cracking open they were so dry! I felt good, but they'd accommodated me in the past, so you do what you have to do for the family. Falling asleep and waking in a new place day after day is actually pretty cool. You get used to it.

Just a quick side note: the group dynamics are about to change as tonight is Fiona's last with us. Tomorrow José and I head out together without her and with Philipp trailing behind, going at his understandably slower pace. I'll let you know how it all works out. Being the only woman and having no interpreter amongst us should be very interesting...I'm trying to look at it as my opportunity to fully embrace learning Spanish.

So, that's about it, and my time at the computer is almost up, so I'll let you go for now. I hope this finds every one of you well! Know I miss you and love you very much! Until next time...

Adios!

Love, Kim.

May 15, 2012: 30kms to Pico de la Duena. José and I separate from Fiona.

May 16, 2012: 16kms to San Pedro de Rozados. On the trail today a cyclist stopped to chat with José a few meters ahead of me. I heard him ask José about walking with the Canadian woman and José reply, "She is bonita, no?" The man agreed! I was blown away and smiled inside. That I am thought of as attractive amazes me, but I am learning to claim it and ask to wield this knowing in a humble and gracious way.

The past two days we've stayed in sleepy little pueblos - quiet and slow paced - these are good, restful environments and I feel very calm, peaceful. I had a very long siesta today. I was feeling quite spent and my sexy dreams kept me in bed longer than usual. I hope I'm able to sleep tonight! I love that my body has actual physical orgasms when I orgasm in my dreams, because I don't masturbate in the albergues! I've never witnessed anyone else masturbating, nor any couples engaging in sexy action, and to do so would just be awkward. I'd rather not inflict that kind of awkwardness on any of the other pilgrims. But I can't help but wonder, who my next lover will be? I know I 'should' be focusing on my inner self and healing and becoming...but I long for romance! Maalik was magic and fun, but unsatisfying - I need a partner who is passionate for me! Tireless in bed! I ask for meaningful, romantic, hot sex with my next partner.



Figure 11: Wildflowers

We have a beautiful Siamese feline visiting us tonight. She's a very affectionate, assertive, strong willed kitty. I think she's symbolic of my sexuality and how I'm feeling about myself - sleek, independent, not afraid to get close and express my needs!

May 17, 2012, Blog post, 24kms to Salamenca. The Quick and Dirty Update.

Day 21: Salamenca (HALF WAY TO SANTIAGO!!!)

Not much time to write today...so quick and dirty it is!

As you know, Fiona has left us to travel further north. On the same day, José and I chose to walk 34kms while Philipp opted for a shorter journey, so now it is just José and me. It's all good, we make a very good dyad. We travel mostly in silence, which suits me just fine, and at an incredible pace. Truly, I can't believe how quickly we get around. We are often the first peregrinos to reach the albergue each day now, but it's not like it's a race for us. This is just our natural pace. I tried walking with Philipp for a couple of hours one day and, now that I am well, found it more exhausting to walk slowly. My hips hurt afterward...I have heard other pilgrims say that they, too, have to walk their natural tempo, else it causes them to become tired more quickly and it's true. So, José and I keep a steady, quick pace that works for us and at the end of the day we pat each other on the back and give thanks for another beautiful day. No matter how quickly we travel, though, my eyes are constantly roaming the countryside and my camera is within easy reach. I always, always make time for picture taking and soaking in the beauty around me. The

wild flowers are exploding in the bright green fields. The sky has been blue and cloudless, now, for three days. Life couldn't be better. It has been beautiful!

Walking north in Spain is like moving north in Ontario...the further north you go, the cooler it gets. Yes, it reached 30C here in Salamanca today, but the mornings have been very cool, only 9 or 10C and it's very comfortable for walking as the day warms up. I am thankful I held on to my coat, as I was prepared to mail it ahead, but I've been warned that it may get cooler yet the further north we go. So, I carry it with me still.

Good news! José has decided to travel with me as far as Ourense! Originally his plan was to walk to Astorga, then head home. But, with some persuasion from me, he has changed his mind. He has only until May 31st in this part of his country, so, in order to make it to Ourense on time, we have decided to take the bus to Zamora tomorrow and skip two long, and I'm told monotonous, days of walking there (38kms x2). Therefore, we will continue to walk together for the next 12 days. Blessings, Spirit! This is good news for me in other ways, too. It means that, once I reach Santiago de Compostela, I will be able to continue west for another 3 days to visit the coast in Finesterre, then a fourth day to Muxia. Finesterre was once considered the edge of the world, to the Spanish, and, the sunsets are supposed to be breathtaking. I am thankful for this opportunity. I will still have time, after that even, to return to Salamanca to visit Fiona for the weekend or else visit Barcelona for a couple days (I've not yet decided) before heading to Paris. The Universe is, indeed, conspiring on my behalf!

So that's it for now. I've got to run, er, walk fast!

I hope this finds you all well! Loving you so, very, very much...

Kim.

May 18, 2012, 18kms to Montemarte. José and I take a bus to Zamora to skip two long, grueling days of walking along highway a total of 76kms. After disembarking the bus, we immediately decide we will walk the 18kms to Montemarte that day.



Figure 12: River on the Way to Tabaras

Another gorgeous day on the Via de la Plata! The days are quickly slipping by and I can hardly believe I've less than 400kms to go until I'm in Santiago de Compostela. I'm very, very glad we decided to bus from Salamanca to Zamora today! The Way between those two cities is solely highway, not a scrap of shade, with consistent traffic. As I looked out the window of the bus I could feel my spirit withering with the thought of walking those two long, hot, monotonous days. It is better to do it this way and the three days travel I will undertake from Santiago to Finesterre more than makes up for the distance we skipped today.

I'm going to miss José when we separate. Not that there's any use in thinking about that now for there are many kilometers to go for us together yet. His company is very good, though...quiet and reflective along the Way, laughter otherwise. Not a day goes by when I don't enjoy a good belly laugh with José.

May 20, 2012, 26kms to Tabaras

The scenery was unbelievably stunning today! Mountains, river, fields...the dusty black back roads lined with wild lavender and bottle grass. Big, voluminous white clouds filled the skyline. And I got to thinking, as I walked those splendid back-country roads, of how important the environment we surround ourselves with really is. I'm so thankful that José and I didn't walk from Salamenca to Zamora! While watching the scenery change around me as I walked, I dreamt of a little place in the country with a donkey, a couple of horses and a handful of goats. I love rural life.

A cute new face arrived in Tabaras today! Unfortunately he's a cyclist and we won't get the opportunity to know each other, but the energetic sparks were flying around the albergue between us! Santo, a 42 year old Taurean, was interested in me from first sight, I could tell. His eyes followed me wherever I went and when we shook hands and exchanged names, he held my hand longer than was necessary. He joined José and me for a beer at the bar and our knees touched under the table, our elbows above. We couldn't stop looking at each other! I would have liked to travel with him a while, from the look of his body in cycling gear I'm sure he'd be a decent lover, but I suppose I'll never find out. Le sigh.

There is a couple on bikes among us and they said they'd heard of me further down the trail from pilgrims José and I have already passed - word spreads like fire among the pilgrims about who's who. I'm sure I'm only brought up because of where I'm from, but I can't help but wonder what's said about me. Heike and Meik, when reunited with José and I said they were happy to be around my 'joy' again! That's very kind and I hope it's a unanimous feeling amongst the others! Another interesting perception of others in regards to me is my age. Santo and Heike both thought I was younger than I am! I'll take it as a compliment! Of course, I, too, thought that they were younger than they actually are. Peregrinos, it seems, are a youthful-hearted, youthful-looking bunch! I think lifestyle has everything to do with it and one cannot help but be exuberant on the Camino.

May 21, 2012, 23kms to Santa Croya de Tera. *Santo on the brain today. He slept in the bunk beside me last night. Lots of looks this morning and the traditional kiss on both cheeks goodbye. The walking pilgrims, of course, leave much earlier than the cyclists and I waited in anticipation for him to pass us. When he did finally catch up to us a couple of hours in, he slowed to talk to me for a few moments. He asked about my schedule - when will I be in Santiago? I'm aiming for June 1st, which happens to be the same day he returns to Italy, at 6:30pm. I've only a 16kms walk on the final day and I can be in Santiago before lunch. He looked at me and said he had a feeling that we will meet again. I would really like that...I want a real kiss before he goes to see what he's really made of. Beyond that, I've no expectations. He's a good person, a focused man, and obviously interested in me. My curiosity is peaked and I am committed to following my curiosity.*

This night, the hostel owner asks José and I if we would like to have a fire, as he is fond of José. There are many people at the albergue and, yet, José and I find ourselves in a little room off of the albergue drinking wine and toasting around a beautiful indoor fireplace, alone. José seeks out our most recent travelling companions. They ask me to sing for them and I do. The hostel owner, drawn to my voice, joins us with another bottle and I sing until I run out of songs. Then it is their turn and they have fun with it, pulling out old Spanish songs from their childhoods and chinking their glasses together. I see their bonding, and the love they carry for their country. The room is toasty and comfortable, shadow and light blending and dancing on the walls. It is a magical evening.

May 23, 2012, 27kms to Asturianos. *I dream that a book with a monkey on the cover of it is eerily magnetized towards me. I can feel it draw me in. I rip the cover and shred it, then rip up the entire book and throw it away, in multiple different places. The book spooks me, as though it's haunted. I want rid of it badly. **Keywords:** book, monkey*

When I woke from this dream I felt shaken, spooked, untrusting...like I feel after watching a horror movie. My heart beats quickly and there is a rush of adrenaline that brings the spirit crashing back into the body. It is a feeling of being startled badly. I'm in a strange place and I immediately want to rid myself of feeling like something is watching over me, following me, taunting me...haunted. I gather my wits and remember where I am - another albergue on the Way. I hug my pillow tight and I try to turn my mind to more positive thoughts, the days scenery, a joke shared with José. I am afraid to close my eyes again for fear that the image of the monkey will come to the surface.

I later look up the keywords book and monkey. A book represents memories; things you have learnt from experience; attitudes toward learning; other people's opinions. Monkeys represent foolishness; thoughtlessness; being ruled by impulse. My interpretation is that I have a collection of memories and experiences based around foolishness, thoughtlessness and being ruled by my impulses. They are calling to me, wanting me to revisit them. I want to destroy those memories and scatter them so that they can't be re-assembled. They haunt me. I want rid of them badly.

May 24, 2012, 26kms to Requejo. *Today the Way was very, very poorly marked for the last 13kms as the trail has been rerouted due to construction. Truly, if not for José I'd have ended up somewhere in Portugal, mucho fucked-o. Frustrated, we sat on the side of the*

road, undecided about whether to turn back or keep walking in the direction we were headed. José desperately wanted directions, so I prayed. While he paced I prayed steadily, over and over, for someone to stop who would know where José and I needed to go. There's no traffic whatsoever for about 15 minutes and then who just happens to pull up but a Castilla y León regional worker who knows the area like the back of his hand! Word, Spirit! I remember Fiona saying she was looking forward to travelling apart from us because she felt like a sheep being lead around by José, but I can't help but feel that her perception was skewed. Rather, I think José is a wonderful travelling companion, who really embraces the Camino and is fun and interesting. I've absolutely attracted him into my life for a reason and am grateful to be walking alongside him.

I've decided to try to make it into Santiago a day earlier. I am pulled to Santo. Again, I've manifested this person...literally! I asked to meet a Taurean, I asked to meet someone who would love the Camino lifestyle and travelling, I asked for someone who takes good care of themselves and then, presto, there he was! I want to see him and I'm determined to make it so. As Gloria Steinham said, "dreaming is planning". And so I dream of time for just Santo and me to get to know each other over food and wine, laughter and lightness, an opportunity for a little romance. I don't think it's too much to ask.

May 25, 2012, 20kms to Luvian.



Figure 13: Me & José

Today was the most astounding hike! Four hours of mountains, forests and natural springs, oh my! All the melting snow from the mountaintops has created miniature cascades everywhere and the path was spongy with oak leaves, moss and ferns! It was breathtaking - literally and figuratively as there was also an abundance of uphill trekking to be done! I loved every single minute of it.

May 26, 2012, 23kms to A Gudina.

Only 23kms today, but primarily uphill! A very strenuous workout and my hips really feel it! The water and mud adds that extra bit of challenge to the workout, but my shoes continue to hold out. Travel at the top of the mountain was cold and windy, and, as a final touch, it rained the final 4kms. I think José's knees are hurting him from the final downhill trek, but he won't admit it. I can tell, though, because I caught him limping and he's a bit grumpy. As soon as we finished eating he laid down and is resting now, as well as he can, anyway. We have almost a full house now and some people just have no respect for others. Truly albergue living can be so annoying sometimes!

A very frustrating, early morning. People getting up at all hours, some out the door by 5am! Only three nights left with these people! It took one woman an hour and a half to get ready! How can that be? We're pilgrims, for goodness' sake! How long has she been at this? As a test from the Universe, she'll be sleeping in the bunk next to me again tonight...ugh. But I get it, she's a single woman and it's primarily men in the albergues. We women have got to look out for each other and we feel safer and less under the gaze of the men when we strategically choose our bunks. That's why I always choose a top bunk, I need to stretch before sleeping, so it gives me more space, and no one on the bottom bunks,

except for one or two, can see me. From the top, you can see everything except the person under you, and, for me, that's always José. When I return to Ourense from Santiago it will be very interesting to see who I'll be staying the albergues with from there on in.

I made a new friend today. Jackie is very fit, has funky long hair, big, bulging eyes and seems like a pretty cool guy. We have lots in common. I think he's attracted to me, but it's not reciprocal. Too bad - he's very liberal (for a Spanish hombre), eats all natural, good-for-you food, cooks, cleans, grows weed...ah well, it is what it is. I'm into the straight-laced banker. Weird.

May 27, 2012, 35kms to Laza.

Scene I:

José and I have soared this day and we are heading today's pack of pilgrims. The final stretch to the albergue is well-paved tarmac through a pretty little pueblo. On the left is *bosque*, forest, a vast stretch of varied leafy greens flitting easily in the breeze, the perfect, pale blue sky highlighting the scene. To the right are small houses with big yards and gardens lined with roses, shrubbery and mature trees intermittently drooping their shade over the road. Panting and the sound of hurried, heavy steps come from behind us and we turn to see Jackie and The Almanian jogging, thumbs tucked under the arm straps of their packs as the weight clunks and sways on their backs. What are they running for, I wonder, and pose the question out loud to José just seconds after they pass us by, eyes forward, barely giving José and I a glance. José turns his head and looks me gently in the eye, "Woman cannot be first." I blink and snap my neck to the right. Pardon? "Do you really think so, José? You think they're running to beat us to the albergue? Because they don't want me to get there first?" "Si," says José, "I know it. They are machismos. Woman in they head," as he points with index finger to his temple, "cannot be first."

Scene II:

I turn my back to The Almanian to continue my conversation with Jackie and that's when he slips the plate into the soapy, streaked water and disappears around the corner. I turn back to the sink and, counting the dishes, know what he's done. I feel my cheeks flare with blood and take a deep breath in through my nose. I calmly finish washing all of the dishes and stack them in the drain board, clean and glistening wet. I wring the dishrag, slowly, unplug the drain and take another deep breath. I fold and drape

the dish rag over the faucet, dry my hands on the faded tea towel and walk around the corner. The Almanian is slouching over the arm of the black faux leather couch in the common area, a short glass of red wine in his right hand. Sitting adjacent to him is José. I am glad that José is in the room as I walk to the couch and face the other.

"I asked you to wash your own dish", I say, "*Lavar la plato.*" I know he doesn't understand English or Spanish, but he can tell by the motion of my hands pretending to wash dishes and the scowl on my face what I'm talking about. "You," I say and point at him, "put the dish in the sink anyway", and I pretend to slip a plate into thin air, wearing a tricky look on my face. Wagging my index finger fiercely I raise my voice another decibel. "Don't pass your work off on me just because I'm a woman!" I throw open my arms and run them the length of me to intensify the point that I am, indeed, a woman, one who is visibly pissed off, and this raises the defenses of The Almanian. He starts to protest, to yell back, but I turn on my heel and walk out of the albergue.

Lord help me, but some of these men are making me crazy! Rather than do the 32kms José and I had previously planned for tomorrow, we will walk only 24kms, then 30 the next day, our last walk together, in an attempt to shake some of them off. José, too, is tired of what he calls 'the machos'. They are loud and condescending to women, to me. All I want is for José and I to have a peaceful walk together on our last day. I wonder who I'll be sleeping amongst at the albergues when I return? I ask that there be a few kind, open-hearted, open-minded folks, that would be wonderful. Oh, and who don't snore, please! And who maybe speak a little English, to boot! Thank-you.

I walked with Jackie for a couple hours today and it was engaging. I enjoyed his company well enough. But when the group stopped at a bar for the morning coffee break, José told me that Jackie has violent tendencies and that he doesn't like him, thinks he's a strange one. Apparently he made some guy cry, or that's the gossip. I do sense a chaotic, whirling energy about him. I asked José, because I do truly trust his judgment, if he thought Santo was a good man. He said he did, he thinks Santo is responsible, kind, sensitive, and good to women. I'm getting excited about my three day adventure in Santiago hunting down Santo! The journey, no matter the outcome, is what matters. It feels good that Santo was attracted to me and there's no guessing about how my body is perceived by him. It's a secure feeling.

The views and vistas blew me away today. This has been an amazing week for scenery! Three and a half hours of upward climbing again! The entire trek on an old paved road that cars no longer travel. And though the vistas were gorgeous, it wreaked havoc on our feet - many of us have new blisters to show for it! I will have to wrap one toe tomorrow.

My legs really felt it, but, even more, my knees felt it! I took one anti-inflammatory because the left was tweaking. No doubt I am one of many, I can only guess at how José is faring, since he always just says he's fine anyway.

May 28, 2012, 23kms to Vilar de Barrio. Jackie was slow today, waiting for José and I in the morning and then, despite his companeros going onward, he is staying at the same albergue we are tonight. José doesn't like him at all, his distaste of him grows. He thinks Jackie is confrontational and following me. Jackie is keeping his distance though, giving me privacy, and I stick close to José. I want my time with José, anyway, the end is drawing close. As of today the last of the difficult uphill climbing is over. Tomorrow is a level and pleasant 35kms.

Surprisingly, the Korean women gifted José and I with lovely charms today and we both put them on our backpack zippers. It was very touching. They thanked us for being very kind to them. It's true I've been protective of them- the men flock around them, like hungry animals to prey, for Christ's sake! It's pathetic to watch and I've shooed them away like flies on more than one occasion. These sisters in their young twenties, not a word of Spanish between them - they've got guts, I'll give them that. The men, in their forties (and older), attempt to talk to them and interrupt them while they're eating, then high five each other when they get a signature written in Korean in their guidebooks. Do they ever grow up?



Figure 14: South Korean sisters

May 30, 2012, Ourense to Santiago de Compostela. José and I part and I have a mini-breakdown. He catches a bus home and I take a bus to Santiago de Compostela to seek out Santo and take some time for myself. Upon my arrival I am reunited with a wonderful Italian woman, Rosalia, whom I had met weeks ago on The Way. She and I instantly connect and I am thankful for the diversion of her friendship as well as the ease I feel in simply being myself with her. At first she is sceptical of my motive to come to Santiago to seek out a man, but as I explain to her that my actions are driven by heart and curiosity, I see a shift within her, too. She tells me she'd felt an energetic connection with a man in Finesterre and again in

May 29, 2012, 35kms to Ourense. José and I walk together for our last time. No journal entry. The Spectral month is over.



Figure 15: Rosalia

Muxia and she wishes they'd exchanged contact information, but didn't. He proceeded to walk the Camino Portugal and she stayed in Santiago, nursing fresh blisters after a long, wet walk on pavement. She is inspired by my story and decides to contact a couple of albergues along the Portugal Way to get a message to him, and, happily, he contacts her and they arrange to meet when he returns to Santiago! She is amazed and declares herself converted - dedicated to listening to her heart and taking risks, even when it makes her feel vulnerable and scared. Over the next two days she and I eat frozen yogurt, drink chocolate, smoke cigarettes and talk about men and this helps to take my mind off the search for Santo, missing José, and walking by myself once returning to Ourense.



Figure 16:
Hippy José

May 31, 2012, Blog post, Santiago de Compostela. Dear José

Day 35: Santiago de Compostela

Well, here I am in the city that, for many, is the final destination whether on the Camino Frances, Camino del Norte, Camino Primitivo, Camino Portugues, or, my path, the Camino Via de la Plata. I am here for three days, resting from a sore shoulder and an aching heart. Mi companero, José and I parted ways yesterday. I was doing really well while we waited at the bus station together for the coaches that would take us our separate ways. Then the bus pulled in and I looked in José's gentle eyes and there were tears there, and he couldn't speak, and so, then, neither could I. We hugged

fiercely, we patted each other's shoulders lovingly, we sobbed, then that was that. Once started, I got on the bus and cried the whole way to Santiago. I cried for the loss of my very good friend. I cried for all José had bore witness to for me. For the times he likely didn't really understand what was going on for me, but knew I hurt and kept close, or, adversely, gave me space...and he always knew which was more appropriate. For all the times we'd simply walked in a comfortable silence together...the sign of a truly healthy friendship. For belly laughs every day. I cried for my marriage, now over and done. I cried for who I was and who I'm becoming. I cried because I miss you all and simultaneously wish I could keep walking forever. It all flowed through me and by the time I got to Santiago I was exhausted from crying. I thought I needed a rest day for my shoulder, but what I really needed was time for processing, release and mourning and I'm so thankful that that time is available to me. I awoke this morning at exactly the same time José and I arise every day and wave of sadness hit me so hard I had to sit in the bathroom for a half hour and went through practically a roll of toilet paper, wiping my eyes and nose. I can't explain the type of relationship José and I had, except that it is truly unique in my experience. I'm sure we were a funny dyad to see together, a 62 year old, brown Spanish man and a 35 year old, white Canadian woman, communicating via simple sentences and charades. José was a commodity for everyone we met on the trail...he knows all the

albergues and the best bars. José and I have been privileged to sit in people's homes turned restaurants and eat with them, because they remember him for his previous trek along the Via de la Plata. All along the trail other peregrinos had heard of us. Cyclists would come and say, "Oh, you're the Canadian woman! We heard about you! Your companero is the Camino expert, no?" Tomorrow I will return to Ourense and June 2nd I continue on the Way alone. No more José...but I carry him in my heart now, just as I carry all of you.

Lovingly,

Kim.

May 31, 2012 I didn't know how greatly I'd grieve the loss of José. He helped to make me feel secure, he accepted me for who I am. And, it's not as though I'm frightened of walking without him- I've learned to find my way and have picked up enough Spanish to get what I need (thanks to him)- but I'm scared about what I'll feel and how it will express itself. Having José beside me, in silence, going at our natural rhythm felt really good. I'm scared to be alone and not feel really good and get lost in myself with no one to listen to what's going on for me or simply hold the space around me. When I reread this it sounds like what I've been writing about Gordon all along...the condensed version of my marriage. I feel accepted by Gordon, I know I can be on my own, but I don't want to be on my own. I want to be with others who make me feel safe and loved.

I sat outside of the cathedral last night and thought to myself "what are you chasing, Kim?" Santo didn't show up at the albergue yesterday and I've no idea if he'll come today, or, if he does, how we'll connect, this place is so big and there are so many people coming and going all the time. And I look around and think, What am I really here for? Romance? Why? To distract myself from knowing that, eventually, I'm going to have to walk out of that albergue door alone in order to get to the next destination? Rosalia does it every day, walks alone, and always finds her way. Lots of people do it - what makes me different? What makes me think I can't do it? I'm allowed to be a little anxious, but I can do it. I spoke to a Native woman from Manitoulin Island yesterday, and to Bryan from Ireland, who both travelled the Camino Frances, and I've come to understand just how much more difficult the Via de la Plata is. The distance of the trail and the distances between albergues are greater, the language barrier is stronger as fewer locals speak English on the Via de la Plata Way, and the presence of sheer conveniences such as supermarkets and bars are far less frequent. It's okay that I didn't walk alone, in fact, for a first time pilgrim speaking no Spanish, it could have been downright dangerous and even a little foolish, especially without a proper guidebook, and my guidebook is not a proper guidebook! José laughed at it. Now that I've learned all that I have with dear José over our 32 days together I am ready. I just had to work it out, and that's what I'm doing, right here and now. And this, regardless of Santo, is really why I'm here. It's suddenly very clear to me.

I find Santo in Santiago in the evening. We go out for drinks and look at pictures we've taken until it is time for curfew at our albergues.

June 1, 2012, Santiago de Compostela to Ourense. A full day of breakfast with Rosalia, lunch with Santo, then catch a bus back to Ourense...to continue along The Way. There I meet a lovely man

named Placido. I am amazed at the level of magnetism I am radiating and the men I am attracting. I revel in it.

Thank-you Great Spirit, for helping me to manifest my dreams! I found Santo! It was a bit of a hunt, and took me places I wouldn't have otherwise gone, but it was worth it! I'm embarrassed to say that I was looking for him at the wrong albergue all along, for this is not the municipal albergue at all, it's private! Why hadn't I thought of that before? I went to the municipal albergue on the outskirts of town, no Santo. I was crestfallen. I decided to ask the hospitalario if there were any other albergues near the airport and on the map he showed me two others, both within the same vicinity. I figured I'd come this far, why give up the search now? The bus driver was wonderful and pointed out both albergues to me before letting me off. I was walking towards the closest one when I glanced into a restaurant I was passing and there was Santo! He recognized me right away and invited me in to sit with him. He kissed me on both cheeks and then, admittedly, it got a little awkward. Why am I in Santiago, he wanted to know. Well, I told him, I'm sore and José and I parted ways and I needed to rest in more ways than one. You are early, have you finished? No, I have to return to Ourense and finish the last four days. So why are you here? And I simply came right out and said, it may sound strange, and a little assertive, but I was looking for you. I don't think he knew quite what to make of it all. Regardless, though, we talked and talked. I showed him pictures of the mountains, which he wasn't able to manoeuvre on his bike, and we touched shoulders. I asked him if he's like to go for a walk, maybe have a glass of wine. He said yes and we visited the centro and found a lovely little bar with very good wine. He was touchy, touching my arms, sitting knee to knee, as before, but not expressive. I invited him to share his photos of Zamora, a city I didn't see much of and discovered he loves history and has a wonderful memory for places and monuments. He has a handsome face - a wide forehead, fine, straight nose, big brown eyes that cross when he takes off his glasses (which reminds me of my sister, super adorable!). He's thick and well-built, very sturdy, but no taller than me. He commented in Italian on how I looked. I couldn't understand and was too shy to ask him to translate, but it was positive. And every once in a while I caught him studying my face, as I would study his. Yet he was definitely holding back, I could feel it. Was he happy I'd found him, or was he feeling shy about it? He said he was happy, then he told me he'd thought about me yesterday, the day I arrived. Psychic telepathy at work? We made plans to meet again today, then he walked me by the cafe we'd agreed on and by this time I was feeling brave and put my arm in his, sometimes touching his back, once touching his neck. He didn't seem to mind, and perhaps he even wanted it, but he didn't demonstrate any affection until the moment we were to part. It was then that he gave me three hard kisses on the cheeks and held me tight for a while. I so look forward to seeing him today. This will be no big romance, for he has walls up for reasons that have nothing to do with me, but I like being with him. And maybe my affection for him, and seeking him out will open something in him. I won't ask for his contact information, he's opened up some now and I don't want him to close. I'll just let it unfold as it will.

Later

And so we ate salmon then went to a bar for a beer and I could tell the whole time that Santo was sweating our parting. I kept cool and calm for both of us, in an attempt to ease his anxiety. We walked slowly, so slowly, arm in arm, to the same spot we'd parted last night and he hugged me fiercely, his arms lingering around my waist. I teased the curls at the base of his neck and each time I thought we were parting for the last time, he'd take my hand and pull me close to him again and kiss my cheeks. I kissed his neck, then took his face in my hands and gently kissed him on the mouth. He kissed me back. We said goodbye. Then, just moments ago, he showed up at the bus station. I'm here to return to Ourense, he to catch the shuttle to the airport. I accompanied him to the platform and felt very fortunate to be able to hug and kiss him once more. He was glowing. I waited for him to board and as the bus pulled away we waved and I blew him a kiss. Ciao bella was the last thing he said to me. He waved and waved until the bus was out of the station. And, as I intuited, he never did ask for my number or email address.

2012, Blog post, [Quick and Dirty Update 2](#),

Day 36: Santiago de Compostela. Hello Friends and Family!

I am feeling much better today and have been having a wonderful vacation while on vacation in the beautiful city of Santiago de Compostela! I have been reacquainted with a wonderful Italian woman that I met during our first week of the Camino, then lost track of. I feel very fortunate that she is here also, as we have been splurging on sweets and drinks and simply walking the city and enjoying each other's company. I was also reacquainted with an Italian cyclist I met about 3 weeks ago in Tabaras and we enjoyed some wine together last night and will have lunch together today before I leave to return to Ourense. This has been a time of organizing and getting my head and heart in order as well as accomplishing practical and necessary tasks...got my haircut, did my banking, unloaded another 1.6 kilos from my bag and sent it to Canada, arranged a flight from Santiago to Paris for June 11th (only \$106US and a 1 hour flight! the train would have cost double and taken 19hours! WOW!), and bought a new bra as the other was becoming rank.

It's amazing to me that I've walked 30 or so days with the weight of my pack and then, just five or six days before I reach Santiago, I experience pain in my left shoulder. What is more amazing is how very little we actually need to get by comfortably in life day to day. Do I really need a dress? Four pairs of underwear and socks? Or a 3 litre water bladder? No, I don't. Rather I've come to wash my walking clothes every day and have one other outfit for the afternoon/evenings and carry only 500mls of water and fill up from the tap in bar bathrooms, use the public fountains that many pueblos have, or simply ask someone "Agua, por favor?" Easy. Shedding, shedding, shedding. Now everything I need to survive the peregrino lifestyle weighs about 7 or 8 kilos. I came with 11 or 12. It took me 33 days, but I'm getting it. Better late than never, I suppose.

Now, I've eight days left to walk starting tomorrow. Four days back to Santiago from Ourense, then another four days from Santiago to Finesterre and Muxia. I apologize that this post isn't more engaging. I have many ideas for truly unique posts about the albergue life and important reflections and insights I've experienced along The Way, but today I

just don't have it in me to write for long. Hopefully you'll hear from me in about 4 days from now. Wishing you all well and loving you from a distance!

Love, Kim.

June 2, 2012, 22kms to Cea. *A terrific walk today! I am well rested and vibrant! I found my way out of Ourense to Cea with absolutely no problems, a very beautiful trek. I was the first to arrive at the albergue, even with a stop for a little something to eat and drink. My prayers for English speaking pilgrims was answered! There are two men and a woman travelling together from England, Gert, and a very good looking young Spanish man named Placido. Miguel, my 'doctor' from four weeks ago (I had tendonitis only four weeks ago? Seems like a lifetime ago!) and his two companions are also here and I will have dinner with them tonight. José would be proud of me.*

June 3, 2012, 40kms to Laxe.

I don't see another single pilgrim along the long walk on this day. Though I attempt to find the primary route in the early morning dawn, it is not to be. The alternate route that takes pilgrims to an ancient monastery pulls at me instead and because I simply cannot find the other, shorter path, I surrender and mentally prepare myself for a 40km walk. No use wasting time wandering around Cea. How can it be that every other pilgrim can find the more direct route to Laxe when I cannot? I chalk it up to fate, pull back my shoulders and enter the grey woods. The forest along the first seven kilometers leading to the monastery feels enchanted, and I have a sense there is something following me. To my left I hear loud stomping and snorting and, at first, am afraid. Heart pounding I freeze, body rigid, listening intently. The image that comes to my mind is that of a centaur. A centaur?! Come on Kim! A bull? Whatever it is, it sounds very large. I take a deep breath and surround myself with

white light, which breaks the paralysis and I become simply curious. I can see nothing through the thick brush and the light at dawn, the time between dimensions, plays with the shadows. There are obvious hoof prints pressed into the trail...bovine.

Perhaps it is just a loose bull, after all, but still too close for my comfort. I press on, senses acutely alert, breath shallow,

walking quickly and silently as I can. My energy is unfathomable and I break only once for 15 minutes



Figure 17: Oseira Monastery

the entire day, including a self guided tour around the dark and eerie monastery. It is a surreal day of travelling alone.

No Placido and his English companions don't know where he got to. I wonder if he walked the same route I did? He is certainly handsome! Yowza! His friends have become icy, though. Can't be sure why and refuse to take it personally, but I let Miguel take a picture of my ass last night (clothed, of course!) and I don't think Betsy approved. At any rate, I'm getting absolutely no good feedback from them whatsoever. I am, though, getting feedback from Placido. There's something up with this one. He pokes fun, ignores me, gets close, ignores me, flashes looks, gets close, plays cool, ignores me...Last night the hospitalario made an announcement to all of us in the kitchen and I looked to Placido to interpret and he told me the man had just said that "Kimberly is very pretty". Like, what? What's his story, I wonder? Perhaps the English are protective of Placido, see us making a connection and don't want him hooking up with a slut? They do know I went to Santiago to see Santo (I hadn't met Placido when I told them). Oh well, doesn't really matter what they think, does it? Placido seems like the type of person who knows his own mind. They've been a Famino for almost four weeks Betsy told me.

Again, today, I thought of Santo and I think I helped something small shift in him. I hope I made him feel very special. He dreamed me into his life as much as I dreamed him into mine. He made me feel attractive and I have been liberated by my actions to seek him out. I hope I was equally impactful for him.



Figure 18: From left to right: Blais, Edmund, Cassandra, Camilla & Carrie

June 4, 2012, 33kms to A Verde. I have a wonderful

evening of feasting, drinking and connecting with fellow

peregrinos Carrie, Edmund, Cassandra, Camilla and Blais. With

this group of pilgrims I feel accepted, enjoyed, even, for just

being me. And I certainly enjoy them! This easygoing troupe just

love to laugh together! They live for putting their feet up, sucking

back cigarette after cigarette and drinking beers. They genuinely want to be around each other, saving

beds and waiting at bars for each other. They're super chill. No big agenda. They stop when they're tired,

eat when they're hungry. I feel at ease with them. I feel a part of their gang, even though I know I'm only

really on the margins. But maybe it's because I know 'my place' and respect them as a Famino and

understand their energetic dynamic that I am accepted and invited in.

Betsy, a member of Placido's Famino, asks me to save a bunk for him, as he will be arriving later and all of the beds in the room they've chosen are full. I am a bit confused by her passive-aggressive

disposition when it comes to Placido and I, but I am happy that she has come to me with the request and agree. There are only two beds available in the room I'm in, and one of them is under me. I consider whether I would prefer Placido or a stranger sleeping under me that night and I choose Placido.

June 5, 2012: 16kms to Santiago de Compostela. The Way Will Not Deliver You to Happiness, Rather Happiness is The Way

Day 40: Santiago de Compostela and My Final Day of the Via de la Plata

Hello Dear Friends & Family!

I have walked alone for 114kms without folly or strife and have experienced a powerful and lovely transition over these past four days! I am very ecstatic to report that I am a fully liberated woman! Walking solo has been exhilarating and José and I could not have parted at a better time. The Way from Ourense to Santiago is very well marked and extraordinarily beautiful! I have had absolutely no problems manoeuvring the trail! On Sunday I walked a whopping 40kms by myself without seeing another single pilgrim! Yesterday, 36 kms. The forests have been enchanting, the birds sing just for me, and my body feels as though it is soaring! I have absolutely no pain anywhere in my body and my spirit is dancing! I have manifested lovely people all around me at the albergues and again here in Santiago! I feel super fit, strong, and I am brimming with joy!

Last night was the full moon and I enjoyed an incredible night with 5 lovely individuals! Carrie from Ottawa(!), Cassandra from Brazil, and Camilla, Edmund, and Blais from France. We feasted on pasta, tomato and avocado salad, empanada, wine, bread, chocolate pastry, fresh cherries and champagne! And did we deserve such extravagance! The final four kms of our walk was straight up, smack dab in the heat of the day, and we had to carry our groceries in our packs as there was no market anywhere closer to the albergue! Just knowing that today would bring us to Santiago was reason enough to indulge and we did! We had a wonderful evening! Today I walked the final leg of the Via de la Plata (a mostly uphill 16kms) with another lovely young man named Placido. I can hardly believe my journey along the Via de la Plata is over. I don't think it's really sunk in yet.

Getting lost . . . again: The final stretch to Santiago de Compostela.

In the morning Placido and I awaken at the same time, very early, the rest of the pilgrims snug in their bunks. There is no reason to hurry, after all...we're all headed to Santiago de Compostela on this day and there are many albergues there, but, to be honest, neither Placido nor I slept all that well. I know because throughout the night I was extremely aware of him in the bunk below me and with every toss and turn I executed, I feared disturbing his sleep. And with every movement he made I knew he was awake and equally aware of me. As we eat our breakfast I ask him if he would like to walk with me. He replies

yes and so we walk together on this, the final day of the Via de la Plata. We talk and lapse into comfortable silence repeatedly and I come to find that he is 34, has two bachelor degrees and is a head nurse at a methadone clinic. He's fresh out of a six-year relationship with the woman he thought he would marry and has only been single five months. This is language I understand fluently. His behaviour - the honing in and pulling away - now make sense to me and I feel very tender towards him. On our journey the following conversation unfolds between Placido and I:

Kim: I think dreams are fascinating, that they hold a multitude of insight into our subconscious drives! I record my dreams when I can remember them and then look for symbols and metaphors within them that speak to me of my day to day waking experience.

Placido: I think is very interesting, Kim. I have a dream recently that I don't like, it is ugly and scares me. Maybe you can help me understand what it means?

Kim: I would be honoured to hear about your dream, Placido. Of course I can try to help you interpret it, but you let me know if it makes sense based on your experience, okay?

Placido: Okay. In my dream there are many rats and mice and they are picking through garbage. Then, a big snake comes and begins to eat the rodents. It is very real and terrible. I can see their eyes looking scared and the snake opening its mouth so big. What do you think this means, Kim?

Kim: I think your dream is actually quite revealing after what you've told me of breaking up with your girlfriend recently, Placido, and the pain that you feel in her immediately connecting with another while you are left feeling alone, abandoned and confused.

Placido: Yes, this year has been quite hard.

Kim: I can well relate to that, Placido. It's been a hell of a year for me, too. Here's what's coming to me. To the best of my recollection, and perhaps more importantly, intuitively, rats and mice symbolize pests, or undesirable infestation of that which doesn't serve us. In your case it could be many things, anger, abandonment, embarrassment at being replaced, inadequacy, fear, loathing of self or your ex, confusion...so many things that only you can know you feel. Snakes, on the other hand, are a powerful symbol of transformation in that they are able to shed a skin and come into renewal, and they are often shown swallowing their own tail in a symbolic gesture of the circle and cycles. The snake, your desire to transform and close this current cycle, is actively engaged in ridding you of that which doesn't serve. You are in a process of letting go via your drive to change.

Placido: Kim! That is amazing! I can feel that this is true, it is why I'm here! It is why I walk. I don't want to feel bad anymore. What is done is done and she has moved on. I want to move on, as well. This dream is good, then, even when it feels bad.

Kim: I find my worst nightmares have the most to teach me when I'm able to be with them. I can understand no longer wanting to feel badly, too...wanting to move forward in life

despite pain. Thank you for sharing your dream with me Placido, I really appreciate that you trust me with something so personal.

We then drift into our individual contemplations and walk a while in silence until it becomes obvious to both of us that something is off. When did we see the last marker? As we enter a very small village consisting of only a handful of pale yellow and tangerine coloured houses, Placido approaches a woman walking her spotted dog along the paved road and addresses her in Spanish. She is pointing in the direction we have just come from and I can tell from Placido's face and surprised tone that we are no longer on The Way. Two kilometers we must retrace in order to find the crossroads where we went astray.

Head: This is a little embarrassing, isn't it? I mean we hadn't meant to let our fascination with one another show, we hadn't meant to become enamored in discussion, and now, here we are, backtracking because we let our defenses down and got caught up in each other.

Heart: I'm pounding with excitement for the same reason, Head! I'm actually glad it had happened, I feel really good in the company of this person and, apparently, he feels the same about us! He trusts Kim.

Head: I think that's true, Heart, but feel this out. Look what this realization has done to shift the energy between the two of you! Placido has picked up the pace, eyes looking directly ahead - he's seeking space to himself, putting distance between the two of you now. If I didn't know any better, I'd think that perhaps Placido is a little angry and flustered.

Heart: Hmmm, yes. Wow, that hurts a little, but, you know, he's been like this, near and far, close yet distant, simultaneously now, since we met him. I'm not taking it personally, the man is in pain and working through it. I feel entirely empathetic to him.

Head: So how do we act in front of him now?

Heart: Give him time...he'll come back to us. It's been the trend so far.

And he does. I can tell my feminist attitude is admired by Placido, and his eyes flash and sparkle as we discuss life for a woman along the Way. He insists I attend a Pilgrim Mass saying that it's a truly important part of the Camino experience. I promise him I will go. I, again, meet up with dear Rosalia and decide to stay an extra day in Santiago before leaving for the coast. That night I go out with Placido and a few other pilgrims for drinks and dinner. The two of us sat side by side and shared our meals, made a lot of eye contact and laughed. Our parting is awkward and beautiful.

While we were finishing our dinner I realized that I was late to meet Rosalia. Placido said good-bye to his Famino, as they had to dash to meet their curfew anyway while the newest tag-along, the Italian 'total pilgrim' joined Placido and me. The Italian man lagged, wanting to find hash or marijuana, and I needed to get to the cathedral - Placido seemed torn. It seemed as though he didn't want to be alone with me. We went to the cathedral, but no Rosalia. Placido hummed and hawed about being tired and having to get up early and I felt a shift in me. I felt sort of pissed off. I'd hoped to maybe go for a beer, to get some time together before going our separate ways, but I guess it wasn't meant to be. I walked with him to his pension and took his arm, getting no reaction. I asked him if he was okay with it, he looked me in the eye and said yes. I felt frustrated and told him he was being standoffish. He asked me to explain what that means so I said, 'When you open, I think I'm safe to open, too. But when I open, you close off again. Open, close, open, close. I don't understand it, Placido.' He grinned, understanding what I was saying and said, 'So I am like clam, no?' I, of course, could not help but grin back. Then we are at his albergue and it's time to part and he says, 'I've given you my email right?' I tell him no, he hasn't, and so he asks for mine and I plug it into his Blackberry and he immediately sends me an email that simply says 'hi kim - testing' and says, 'okay, you have my email now'. I thank him for the evening, we kiss on both cheeks and he says 'two kisses on the cheek...okay' which I didn't understand at all! What did he expect? He didn't touch me all night except maybe two or three times on the arm! I'm the one who took his arm and even asked if it were okay because I couldn't gauge his reaction! I complimented him, I teased him kindly and he goes and says, 'two kisses on the cheek...okay.' Arggh! I felt so frustrated! Hot, cold, hot, cold! He's lucky he's fresh out of a break up! I wanted to scream! Well, at least he ensured we exchanged emails, because I wasn't prepared to ask...just like with Santo. I want to follow up and ask him what the hell happened. I want to tell him I think he's lovely, make it better somehow. At least with Santo I got closure...and a kiss.

June 5, 2012, Blog post. Today I have been again reunited with Rosalia (I love this woman!), the same Italian woman that I befriended over my last three days in Santiago and will meet with Carrie and the others tonight for drinks and tapas. I am staying at a beautiful albergue right in the heart of the city that is always, always booked full to the brim, yet they just happened to have one single bed left when I arrived just before noon today that I've booked for two nights. I have much to do before Paris, including booking a hostel for the night I arrive, laundry, and, hopefully another blog post...and it is forecasted to rain tomorrow so will also stay in Santiago for an additional day and head out to walk the Finesterre-Muxia Way on Thursday. I have seen the mountains and the plains...I am ready for the coast! On Sunday afternoon or Monday morning I will return to Santiago for the last time and fly out to Paris Monday night. Life is so sweet. I hope that, wherever this finds you, dear loved one, that life is equally good for you.

Lovingly,

Kim.

June 6, 2012, Santiago de Compostela, Kim emails Placido.

Hi Placido, I didn't feel good inside about the way we parted last night and walked with those feelings for a while after I left. I feel we played hot and cold with one another for a couple days...I immediately felt attracted to you as you are handsome, funny, and confident...and you telling me I'm pretty made me feel wonderful...but we're both hurting, and walking with purpose, and relationships are scary...especially when it's unlikely to last as the Camino must eventually end and so, too, the people we've met must leave. And especially after all both of us have been through in the last few months. I would have liked to gotten to know you better, but I trust the Universe knows exactly what it's doing.

We are all mirrors for one another and I believe we attract into our lives others who reflect who we are in the moment. Thank you for being a reflection of depth and honesty. It was a pleasure meeting, walking and connecting with you, even for a short time. You're a lovely man and it was an honour to have such open and intimate conversations with you...thank you for trusting me with your dreams, your challenges and your infectious sense of humour! I'm very thankful that you asked for my email and, in doing so, presenting me with this opportunity to speak my truth.

Be well. Take good care of your heart. Fear not vulnerability, for it will bring magic into your life.

All the best,

Kim

June 11, 2012. Email from Placido.

Hi Kim!!

Thank you for all the beautiful words you sent in your mail, you are right when you say we are mirrors for one another..., I really feel the same, also thank you for walking with me the last day, you are a very unique and special woman It made me feel very comfortable telling you my thoughts and dreams, as you say it could be... "vibration"? you are the specialist!

This Camino has been very useful for me, it has been a very hard year and to walk with you even just one day was a fantastic end after 30 days, I even learnt how to "read" my dreams too!! :)

I hope you visited the cathedral just to feel what millions of pilgrims felt first, that is pure energy!!! ;)

I am already following your blog!

I know you will take care of you but let me wish you all the best in this life....

Thank you again

Best wishes

Placido

June 6, 2012 I have an affair with a magical man named Akwasi. He puts a spell on me and terrifies me simultaneously. The source of Akwasi's magic, for me, was his absolute willingness to be vulnerable. At the time it seemed immensely courageous for him to come right out and speak what he wanted...for me to stay the night, for me to consider a relationship with him based on heart energy. I'd no idea it was coming. His fearless words and actions were like a train charging out of the fog and I found myself on the tracks paralyzed by the headlights. Caught completely off my guard, I felt like I wanted to flee. I wished for a hole to open in the wall behind me that I could escape through. How was this happening? It started to pour rain outside. I was confused by the conflicting signs between my gut and nature...stay or go? Why the torrential rain at that moment? A sign to stay? God I was scared. My heart and head were racing. I was terrified of what he wanted from me, that his motives were not integral. At the same time I was terrified of him being too good to be true...I felt out of his league physically, his body so lean and lovely. And I was really terrified of the whole situation being an illusion, a figment of my imagination. I felt like I'd somehow fallen down a rabbit hole and then found myself in a strange land with no map. How was this happening?!? My admiration for his daring won out, in the end. I saw such a clear picture of myself in his willingness to spontaneously open to me. Lord knows I've done my fair share of freaking people out by expressing my truths my whole life! Look at the letter I'd written to Placido just that day! My only hope was that Placido would respond with grace and compassion or not at all! Now here I was, the tables turned, and no place to go. I was forced to act in the moment...this was no email that could be ignored or stalled. I thought to myself, "This man is a fellow warrior, following the signs, following his gut, how can I shut him down? How could I trounce on this magnificent demonstration of courage? What's the worst thing that could happen to me if I stay? This brave and sexy man and I have sex? How could that possibly be a bad thing?" To him I said, "I'm scared". He said, "Yes, I see this and I feel your heart beat very fast. You should stay with me tonight. You need to trust me, I know. I will show you you can trust me." So I stayed.

November 30, 2012. Well, here I am, at Akwasi, and I want to stop. I've been avoiding this, I don't want to deal with it or live it over again. This first draft was due yesterday,

but I couldn't bring myself to look at these entries. I am so gullible, naive, stupid, stupid, stupid! And I'm sad. After reading this draft over I feel so desperate and foolish. My journal entries can be deflating. Adventure, ha! A desperate manhunt more like it! It wasn't my intention, I swear. I feel so incredibly silly...did I really think my story was important? What am I looking for from a partner that I can't provide for myself? I'm so scared of being alone. I'm 36, it's okay to not want to be alone, isn't it?

Later

Okay, I can admit this now and fuck the shame. I got swindled. I pulled a rebound. I'm not the first, that's why there's a label. Rebound. And after I promised Burt I wouldn't! Ha! Akwasi was a rebound. I was in a vulnerable place and he's a very keen, street-smart, man-child looking out for himself and seeking new opportunities. And I was a good opportunity. Smart, sensitive, educated...and gullible, it seems. He tried to make me feel bad about wanting him for the sex, but that is, honestly, how he reined me in. He was looking to blow my mind and get me hooked and it worked. But I did fall in love with the idealized story of 'us'. The one where he's an energetic young dad who's willing to stay at home with the baby while I continue my education here as a Ph.D. student. He cooks and cleans and looks amazing with a beautiful malado baby with gold skin and kinky hair in his arms. Or the other dream, where we start our own albergue there, somewhere along one of the many caminos and work together building a viable business where we can eventually take vacation once a year and co-parent on the go. The ultimate international family. It all sounded so sweet at the time. But when I landed in Santiago I was awakened to entirely new Akwasi. This Akwasi said he loved me, but wished I would cut my hair and dye it platinum blonde. This Akwasi told me when to shower, or how to dress, that I must wear slippers in the house, that I must never be caught in a position where I may bring shame on myself or him, like not wearing a bra underneath my t-shirt when I get up to pee in the morning, just in case one of his roommates or friends see me. This Akwasi told me to pull my shoulders back and to try specific exercises for certain areas of my body. This Akwasi thought he owned my body and could do as he pleased with it. Not that I took any of this. I retaliated. I rebuttaled. I rebuffed. It got into my brain anyway and suddenly I knew I would never be enough for him. He loved my status...educated white Canadian woman. Hell I KNOW there's a whole lot of privilege in that one tiny phrase! I know that one tiny phrase holds a world of possibility for a young, black, male immigrant from Ghana living in Spain. He may have thought he loved me, but I think he loved what I represented, loved my status, but who I actually am wasn't enough. My body wasn't good enough. My style wasn't good enough. I am everything he needs to start new, but I am not what he wants. I don't even think he knows what he wants, except to get out of Spain, to have a fresh start, to gain status as a man in his culture by having a wife and children. Love has got nothing to do with the dream in his mind. And that stuff gets in your head.

Jesus, the last thing I want is to come off a victim. How can I empower myself in this story? What's the rewrite?

June 7, 2012, 22kms to Negreira. The craziest turn of events has occurred! I mean, totally out of the blue, blow my mind, turn of events! Akwasi, the gorgeous hospitalario at mundoalbergue, took me home last night and made love to me unlike any person has ever made love to me before! And, of course, I am completely confused. I write Placido in the

early afternoon, completely, scarily, open my heart to him and in the evening I'm in Akwasi's bed. And there are so many dimensions at work here that I don't really know where I stand. I see Akwasi's exploited in his job. I've been chatting him up these past couple of days at the albergue and I know he's unhappy. Absolutely he may be latching on to me because I'm a white Canadian woman, yet we also share very similar philosophies on life and living and have a spiritual connection. I expected nothing in going to his home except to smoke some weed and chill. Truly. Then out came the family pictures, and we started talking about really personal things...my separation, his childhood. I didn't see it coming and he scared the shit out of me, coming on so strong and honest and forthright. "Kim," he said, "de more we talk de more I see we de same person, we share de same heart." He had the nerve to put his hand directly on my heart and tell me that he thinks we should be together! My brain and heart are all shook up, stirred up, gobs of jelly. They don't know what's going on anymore. All I did know for sure is that I needed to keep walking. I wish Placido would write me back.

June 8, 2012, 33kms to Olveiro.

I did a lot of thinking today about why I've met the men I have along the way - Maalik, Santo, Placido and Akwasi. What have they to show me? What have they to teach me? Each are a mirror, what are they reflecting back to me? Maalik, without a doubt, is my prostitute...suave, sexy, desirable, looking out for personal, (and in my case, sexual) needs without any emotional ties. I think, Santo, on the other hand, is a clear reflection of my adolescent self. He acts confident and together, but really lacks self esteem when it comes to relationships. He's scared of getting close and getting hurt...a man who has not released past hurts. Placido showed me my pain post-separation. He wants to heal, he's here on a mission, like me, to chew on what happened and find his place in the world as a single person again after years of being someone else's other half and they yours. I suppose the Placido image is who I still am. Akwasi, though, is like looking into an actualized me. He's ballsy, brave, honest, kind, sensitive and worldly. And incredibly good looking. How is this happening, all these beautiful men and these short, complex, intense relationships? I never knew I was attractive like this to men. I am thankful for these heart connections and this sense of altered reality, mystery and magic. I'm going to put on my brave hat and open up to Akwasi. I'm going to take the risk and jump in with both feet. He's ready. I didn't walk 1000kms to flake out in the end, especially when it's there for the taking. I wish Placido were ready, but, sadly, he isn't.

June 9, 2012: 35kms to Finesterre ...my last and worst day of walking along the Camino on my entire journey. The crowd of pilgrims began forming at noon outside of the albergue and still the staff insisted on making us wait until 2pm before opening the doors, leaving us shivering in our soaked clothes in the damp wind. The relentless, driving rain, the overcrowded albergue, the grumpy, bickering pilgrims fighting for space...all of it settled in me and it was there, in Finesterre, that I realized the Camino, for me, was really over. I'd had enough of being patient, of compromising, and of the lack of privacy due to sharing close quarters with the others. I was tired of walking in unpredictable circumstances and waiting

for the shower, the toilet, the stove. However, that evening the little group of pilgrims I'd connected with - Carrie, Edmund, Blais, Christobal and Stephan - are invited to a local festival and it is a wonderful ending to a long, long adventure. Fried fish and dense, chewy bread are offered around. We buy three bottles of wine and chink our glasses together. There is a band and the locals dance together and clap for the children, twirling and smiling. It is an honour to be at such a close-knit event as an outsider. Carrie and I have a conversation that splits my heart wide open.

Kim: I'm excited! I'm being given a gift! It's like it's the perfect ending to the Camino fairytale. Everything I ask for has come to me along this journey. My faith and trust in a source of universal synchronicity is so strong that it seems almost silly to not at least try to have a relationship with this man! And on the other hand, it all seems too good to be true. He may just want to use me. I'm afraid, Carrie. I'm afraid it's all an illusion. A gift or an illusion. What does the timing of it all mean?

Carrie: Well, Kim, you've been a peregrina for a while now and you know the magic of being provided for on the Camino.

Kim: Yes.

Carrie: The Camino is magical and we meet who we're supposed to meet and we end up where we end up. What Akwasi said and did is compelling and it's natural that you'd want to follow your curiosity. You've got to go with your gut and your heart on this one. What have you got to lose? So what if you get hurt? Pain happens in life. You'll pick yourself up and get on with life and be better for it, if so.



Figure 19: Carrie & me

Kim: This walk was brimming with magic, but it was also tough, and bodies ache, and feet hurt and there is pain involved, and it ebbs and flows, you're right, Carrie. It's like I've got nothing to lose. If I don't attempt to have a relationship with this man, then I'm left with 'what if?' and 'what if' sucks! I don't want to be left wondering what COULD have happened had I tried, I'm just going to TRY! And if I get hurt, well, I get hurt. After my very painful separation from Gordon I feel like I could get through anything. You're right, if my heart gets ripped out of my chest and stomped on, I pick it up, dust it off, give it's boo-boo a kiss and move on. On the other hand, we could have an amazing relationship, he could be the love of my life. Just imagine how my life would change to date a man from another culture, who lives in another country! The possibilities for us are limitless. Where would we live? Would we have children? Ugh, they'd be so beautiful, if so! I'm never going to find out either way unless I try.

Carrie: It sounds like you know what you need to do. I wish you all the best, you know.

Kim: I do know. Thanks for bringing me back to the magic of it all, Carrie. This has just been the most amazing time here in Spain. I'm so glad you've been a part of it.

I went with all my senses into that relationship with Akwasi knowing that his using me was a very real possibility, but I didn't want to believe it. I denied many signals in the name of magic. Signs from my body, from my intuition...But at the same time, if I hadn't

tried with him, I would be left with 'what if?' and wouldn't know this feeling of being able to let go of someone who had betrayed me.

June 12, 2012, Blog post, Saturation.

Hello Friends & Family,

I am in Paris now and what a journey it has been!

But first, my excursion to Finesterre.

Walking to the coast was ultimately just a reason for me to simply keep walking and thinking and feeling. Before I left Santiago I experienced a major heart connection with a very special man and didn't quite know what to make of it. Walking helps bring clarity, for me, so three more days felt necessary. I was also able to connect with Carrie, Edmund, & Blais again and this felt really right. Carrie is a woman who fully understands the peregrina mindset and the spirit the Camino infuses in one. She gave me permission to really contemplate some far-out dreams I'm dreaming lately and life will never be the same. My talk is no longer just talk, I am ready to walk my truth now. The past is the past; with every step I took over the 1000kms I walked I left bits of my old self behind. The butterfly is spreading her wings wide NOW. NOW is all that matters and I am astounded at what can be manifested in the moment!

Many heartfelt thanks to Carrie, Placido, and beautiful Akwasi...I love you all.

As for Muxia...it wasn't necessary. On my way to Finesterre it rained the entire day, the whole 6 and a half hours. The wind was strong and it was chilly. I tried hard to keep my spirits up and walked alongside Christobal, who did the same, but it was wearing. By the time I arrived at the albergue, I was saturated, both literally and figuratively. Soaked to the skin, cold, all of my possessions wet and heavy, and so saturated with feelings and insight that it was as though Spirit was telling me that enough is enough, Kim. Time for you to absorb and dry out, take it in now, right down to the cellular level! Your Camino is over. It's over. And, yet, I feel like the real journey has just begun...

Loving you all,

Kim.

June 10, 2012. I return to Santiago to be with Akwasi. We agree that we will attempt to bring him to Canada so that we can be together. I excitedly contact my roommate, Bruce, with the news, asking him to consider Akwasi as our newest housemate.

June 11, 2012, Santiago de Compostela to Paris. Q. What message does the Universe have for me today?



Figure 20: Motherpeace tarot, The Priestess of Wands

A: Priestess of Wands: A beautiful, full-bodied black woman with a wand walking with her arm around a lioness--in the other hand she holds a wand and walks by (what looks like) wild lavender and a newt. From the Sun shines a rainbow into a pot and from above the pot it rains. "The priestess, with the help of the lion, just made it rain in order to renew the life and energy of her community" (Vogel, 1995, p. 81)

Personal Interpretation: I feel like this card it is a symbolic melding of Akwasi and I. The priestess has my body type, but is black with kinky hair like Akwasi. I could be the full bodied, powerful woman walking along with my Leo partner. My last name is Lyons and the lioness is a very strong animal symbol for me, so I could also be the lioness, a symbol of my prowess, strength and feminine sexuality. The Sun is Leo's (Akwasi) ruling planet. And there it is, shining it's rainbow rays through the clouds in order to bring new life to the collective pot. What's really crazy is that, just this morning, I told Akwasi he was like the pot of gold at the end of my rainbow! No matter which way this card is interpreted, it makes me smile. In my heart I feel it's very affirming...like being given permission to believe that a fairy tale ending to my Camino story is really happening.

Author's Interpretation: "She has the ability to direct her creative, healing, and sexual energy to bring about transformation. She is direct, passionate, and loving in her action. She has a sense of purpose and the ability to go after what she wants" (Vogel, 1995, p. 81).

I part from Akwasi and catch a flight to Paris, France.

June 17, 2012, Blog post, Angels Everywhere (The Gift of Trust). The most important lesson that I have learned over the course of my travels is that the Universe loves me unconditionally. I am blessed to have known this for quite some time, but never has it been so ingrained and so clearly demonstrated as during this time abroad. Every single day I walked the Camino I had only to ask for what I needed and I was given exactly that almost immediately. From the little things, such as clothes pins or the sight of a marker during times of doubt that I was on the right path, to big things, like affordable shelter or safe companions, I am ever provided for by Spirit. Take for instance, my arrival in Zafra, day 7 of the Camino and Paco, the man who disappeared into thin air after ensuring I got to a hostel.

Or, as another great example of the Universe conspiring on my behalf: my arrival in Paris.

Remember when I told you all that I had to make arrangements for my first night in Paris, that I was going to book a hostel? Well, I did. For the 13th of June. My arrival date, though, was the 11th. How does something like this happen? Who knows...bad oversight on my part. At any rate, I left the airport at 9 at night, caught the bus to Goussainville, and went to the Comfort Hotel there only to be told that there was no room for me. For that matter, there were no rooms in the entire area...I would have to take the train into downtown Paris. So, I cancel my reservation for the 13th (won't be needing that now will I?), take a deep breath, and walk to the train station 10 minutes up the (deserted) road. I felt surprisingly calm. Considering I'm not much of a city girl, don't speak French and that

it was getting late, I found myself noticing how calm I was. I had an even heart rate, wasn't sweating, didn't demonstrate any signs of anxiety...and when I really sat with it I realized it was all because I was fully aware that this was just one more test of my faith and trust in the Universe, which, as I mentioned, I have fully down pat. I give generous credit to the Camino for this, I am not so sure I would have been as accepting of this situation had I not been fresh from the trail.

So, I board the train into the city and ask the Universe to please lead me directly to a place that I can afford, near an internet cafe so I can let my family know I'm safe, with a concierge that speaks some English. (Rule number one when speaking with Spirit, know exactly what you want or need.) On the train I show a man the approximate area where my apartment is (which was booked for the 12th) and ask him which train station I should get off at. Knowing the Bastille region will be expensive, I am relieved when he suggests a stop just prior to that region of the city. The train station is huge and there are many exits to many streets. I have no idea where the heck I am, so I go with my gut. I leave the station and intuitively turn left. Within two blocks I see a sign for an internet cafe pointing to the left, so, because it was one of the things I asked for, I go left. There are two hotels directly in front of me. One looks very expensive, I head for the other. It is now 10:30 at night, dark, and I am exhausted. I open the door and ask, "Parlez vous anglais?" The man replies "Yes" and I just know I've got a bed for the night. I ask him if he does, indeed have a room available. He tells me he just had a cancellation. And the price? 95 euros. Okay, well, the room at the Comfort Hotel was 77, so what's an extra 18 euros, really? However, I do ask if there is anything in the area that's a little more affordable. He immediately gets on the internet and looks for a room for me and, can you believe it folks, but the whole damn city of Paris was fully booked for that night! He looks up from his computer and says to me, "God must have sent you here". "Yes," I reply, "I believe he did."

Trust in the greater good in this world is my ally. I give thanks for angels on Earth. Life is a beautiful journey when you know you're well looked after, friends.

Love and Gratitude.

Kim.

June 12, 2012, Paris. I meet my very good friend, Jen, who has flown in to join me for 5 of the 6 days at the apartment I've rented in France. It is a time jam-packed with processing and sightseeing. I SMS Akwasi every day via Skype. I fully step into a heightened sense of my own aesthetic beauty sparked by all of the beautiful people in Paris and wanting to shine for Akwasi, who makes me more sensually confident and secure than I have ever felt. I vow never to dress plain again. I release mediocrity.

And, as I had not yet heard from my roommate, Bruce, I decide to write a heartfelt email reaching out to him and he responds within mere hours.

June 13, 2012, My email to Bruce.

Dearest Bruceji,

I have been thinking of you and how it must feel to be in your shoes right now. I am far away now, but still, intuitively, feel resistance coming from where you are. I think to myself, how would I feel if Bruce asked me to bring a woman into the house that I had never met before? And to be honest, I would be resistant too. One, you have become one of my closest friends and I it would be difficult, for me, to accept that someone even closer to your heart would be sharing the same space with us and become your first priority. Two, there would be an underlying fear of, what if I don't like this woman? What does one do with friction? How does it get worked out without interfering with the relationship you and I have previously developed? What if the dynamics shift into something I'm not comfortable with? And three, the sex. Will those two always be going at it? Everyone needs nookie, but there IS a bit of a privacy issue at our house.

Bruce, I love you. You have bore witness to emotions and outbursts from me that others can't imagine. I have lived with you, now, during one of the most important transitions of my life and I am so, so thankful for you. I know that me asking to bring a man you have never met before must raise many questions and/or fears for you. You need to know how important you are to me. I know how selfish it must sound for me to ask for Akwasi to live with us, but I KNOW you're part of the equation and, when I think of us as a family, I think it can work. You're in my life because we've dreamed each other into our lives. I can't predict what's going to happen for us if Akwasi moves in, but I ask you to see it not as a challenge, but as an opportunity. How you see it as an opportunity will be completely up to you. I know that the Sheila thing didn't work and that it was me who picked her. That being said, she and I also had an obvious spiritual contract and, though it ended with pain and anger, in retrospect I see that she was also an agent of my liberation, for I could not have worked through my separation from Gordon and let my heart move into the space where it now is without her.

Please open up to me and let's talk about this. Lay it all out for me, bro. I have a computer and the internet right here in my room in Paris. Open the gate, Bruce and let me in.

Loving you always, always, always,

Kim

June 17, 2012 Email from Bruce.

Kim,

Your news has ushered quite a difficult passage for me. It comes at a time surrounded by other stressors that have brought up a lot of fears, insecurities, confusions, and strife. I have been really battling with finding focus, falling into self-deception, and difficulty completing tasks, such as getting this email to you. I am just going to trust that all this channels out coherently and clearly. I am going to be honest and entirely honour how I feel.

Here's the bare bones:

I am not comfortable with Akwasi living here.

I don't want to live in a house with you and your fresh, new partner. I wouldn't want to do that with anyone.

I implore you to reconsider having him here so soon.

If you truly wish to have him over here to live with you, I have to say that you will need to find another house/apt to do that in. What happens with me and my ability to pay for this place is entirely up to me.

That you would ask me if you could move in for July seems extremely hasty. I feel like what I want is not considered when that request is made. Why so soon? How can I, or you, make a decision so quickly? I just can't understand why you would expect that from me. I make this point to help demonstrate how this issue is so not clear cut, and there is no "good" solution. I feel I am in a difficult situation, and all I can do is voice my truth.

We want two different things.

I think it's wonderful that you have found someone that you feel this strongly for. That is always exciting, especially at first. But, what is down the road? You are asking me to live with you and someone who you just met. Who knows what will transpire for you two? You may live the end of your days together, you may dissolve in a month. What I am getting at is that you are asking me to commit to something that appears to me to be inherently unstable (that is, a new relationship), AND invite something into my day to day life that I don't even want.

Again, we want two different things. The most we can do is voice where we stand. I am really sorry that we are not lining up on this. I don't know what else to say, or what else to do.

It may have been entirely different if you told me about this love; then, came home, and much later discussed with me his trip over... This all seems too fast. I feel really weird about it. And, as I said in my last email, I want to maintain my home as a place of sanctuary.

I am really bummed out that this is the situation that we are reuniting in. I don't feel like I can voice my truth without upsetting you. None of this is purely a personal issue. It is mostly circumstantial. I fear that you and I will never be the same again...Bruce

June 17, 2012 My email to Bruce.

Bruce,

I will love you always. Your fear of our relationship turning into something foreign and uncomfortable is solely up to you. I am willing to sit with you and have a heart conversation. I am willing to compromise and meet you where you are at. I hear what you are saying when you express that your home is a sanctuary and I honour that. I also asked if you would be more comfortable with Akwasi coming in August and being introduced to him via Skype. Anyone who we would have agreed to see for the room would have had to go through an interview process. I am asking for an introduction between you and Akwasi. Are you willing to consider this?

What I am having difficulty with is that the most magical transformation is taking place in my life and that my brother, Bruce, may be the only obstacle that need be overcome to see my dreams unfold before me with ease and joy. You are seeing only one side of the equation, the negative, and there can be no dualism in this, Bruce. For instance, what if you and Akwasi ended up as lifelong friends? What if his culture fascinates you and spurs you to explore new and wondrous countries? What if the three of us live harmoniously as a beautiful family based on heart connection? Your fear is poignant. My request for him to be by my side in our beautiful, tranquil home may sound selfish, but I could say the same in return. That your mind has immediately turned to asking me to leave because you are scared is quite astonishing and hurtful. I LOVE YOU. I WANT TO CONTINUE TO GROW WITH YOU. Where is the fear really coming from, Bruce? There are two sides to this, yes, yours and mine. But at the very core we are one, Bruce...we've been brought together to learn from one another and, it seems, challenge each other...or not. This can be easy. I can't ask you to understand the relationship that Akwasi and I have, and you seem unwilling to bear witness to it, but it is quite profound. If you are worried about two against one, or feeling like a third wheel, I can only say that relationships are based on open and honest communication and that I'm mature enough and sensitive enough to ensure that the lines are always open. We do not want two different things. We want the same thing. A safe sanctuary of a home blossoming with love and light where we both feel respected and loved. This can be co-created. I believe in us, you and me, strongly.

As for what will transpire between Akwasi and I you are right, it is a mystery. But this is a heart connection unlike any I have ever known. We are amazed, truly.

After my journey along the Camino I am a complete believer in the Universe providing us with whatever it is we need in life, the moment we ask for it. I believe in miracles and this is a miracle in the making. I can't make you believe or trust, but I do ask that, rather than doubt it, you wish me the very best in its manifestation. Perhaps even open to being a part of it. I would love that very much.

I don't want to make any hasty decisions such as, yes I'll move out or, yes, Akwasi will be here in July, or that it should be just the two of us. I want to sit with you, look you in your beautiful eyes, and talk. It is easy to be angry when your mind is creating stories that you can't know will unfold. Be at peace, Bruce. Never doubt my respect for you. Breathe deep. Let's connect when I return from the Sacred Healing Fire.

*Sincerely,
Kim*

Heading Home

June 18th, 2012, Paris to Reykjavik. Just about to depart from Reykjavik airport and feeling dark towards Bruce. I just wish the guy would take a fucking risk for once in his sheltered life. He's so tied up in that house being his sanctuary - and I get it, we all need sacred space to retreat to sometimes, but I just feel like he's got nothing to retreat from but rejection. He's been rejected by jobs, schools, and girls/women and he still doesn't get it - he doesn't get that the Universe is ready to support him in obtaining, in accomplishing,

whatever it is his heart really desires. I know he longs to go to India, he has said it many times. He's let fear hold him back from really living and it's affecting my ability to really live, to feel free to invite the man I love into the home I love. Bruce wants so badly to hold on to that space because he's safe there...he's afraid of change. We've all been there. It makes me want to slap him, though, and tell to wake up and snap out of his routine and comfortable life. I suppose if he's already considered kicking me out, I have nothing to lose by telling him my opinion. Would it be cruel or liberating?

Reykjavik to Toronto. Still just over three hours until we land in Toronto and I find my mind wandering towards my thesis - the transition from European fairy tale to Ontarian reality begins! I am terribly excited about this project! I am so thankful that I have journaled my day to day experiences as well as my dreams, blogged, saved emails, taken hundreds of pictures, and bore witness to the transformation of others, as well as self, due to our shared interactions! I see clearly how I have been influenced by other peregrinos and the environment over the 40 days I walked along The Via de la Plata Way. I see José, now, as a wondrous teacher and myself as the willing student turned flourishing peregrina! I see how older pilgrims inspired me and who I want to be as an elder. No matter where this relationship with my new love, Akwasi, goes, he is my fairy tale ending, the pot of gold at the end of my 1000 kilometer rainbow, and I am thankful for this powerful heart connection that caused me to feel both terror and joy simultaneously and challenged my faith like never before. I am thankful for Gordon and the transitions that took place in our now-ended relationship and how that spurred me to seek out healing and life force based on free will. And, as my story continues to unfold and I return home only to seek another beautiful space to live, a transition that I didn't expect, I love that this sort of tale can never really be finished, for the adventure has motivated and shifted me in so many ways. I have experienced true heart openings into what I really want and who I dream of becoming while loving exactly who I am, where I am, and the mystery and magic of it all. Blessed be. A-ho!

Gordon picks me up at the airport. We have both been seeing other people. We miss each other.

Unpacking inventory.

In actually walking The Camino I've changed my mind about the ideal weight of my pack and what I need and don't need! In the first week I got rid of 5lbs of material and that 5lbs, believe you me, made a world of difference!

On the first day, I emptied my wallet, put all of my ID in a plastic baggie, and gave it away. I also gave away 2 of my 4 bungee cords and a big handful of my safety pins. By the end of the first week, I'd gone to the post office and mailed my dream dictionary (which was a painful giveaway), my sacred bundle, my shoulder bag, my water filter, my pendulum, and my tarot cards to Santiago de Compostela to pick up when I arrived there. After resting from tendonitis, I left behind my sleeping mat. After suffering from an aching shoulder on days 31-33 I got rid of yet another 1.6kilos. Bye-bye water bladder, dress, light tights, one pair socks, one pair underwear and big journal (which I replaced with a smaller, lighter journal) as well as one of the wet bags (I just carried my sleeping bag in a plastic grocery bag from there on in). The blister stick went to José and the cold compress and moist towelettes were left in a albergue. These are all things I can easily live

without. New rule when walking *The Way*: If you don't use it every day, you don't need it.

Clothes

convertible pants (1)
shorts (1)
short sleeved backpacking tops (2)
long sleeved backpacking top (1)
wick-away socks with attached liner (3 pair)
~~heavy socks (1 pair)~~
underwear (3)(2)
~~dress (1)~~
tights (1 heavy pair, 1 light pair)
cami-top (1)
beautiful sheer blouse (1)
bra (1 sport, 1 regular)
hiking shoes
sandals
raincoat
headscarf/shawl (an excellent multi-purpose item! used as bandana, extra blanket, scarf, etc...)
broad brimmed hat
bandana

Night time

~~silk pajamas (for keeping bed bugs at bay...thanks Diane!)~~ (mostly I ended up sleeping in underwear and my cami top...colder nights, tights and a t-shirt)
fleece sleeping bag liner
~~small pillow cover (to be stuffed with raincoat)~~
ear plugs (very, very important! Snorer's be damned!)
~~foam sleeping mat~~

Toiletries

toothbrush
toothpaste
floss
comb
sunscreen
campsuds (for body, hair, and laundry)
facial scrub
deodorant
nail clippers
nail file
~~nailbrush (for scrubbing laundry & cleaning my nails)~~ (there are generally washboards to be found in the albergues)
tweezers
lip balm with SPF
small pack of moist towelettes

shamy towel
hair ties/bobby pins
menses items (enough to get me by until I can hit a pharmacy, anyway)

First Aid

traumeel anti-inflammatory cream!!!!
polysporin
sting stopper
moleskin
cuttable bandaids
ASA
ankle wrap
~~cold compress~~
gauze
~~waterproof tape~~ (the damn stuff doesn't work properly half the time anyway...)
latex gloves (you never know when someone else may need help...)
~~blister/chaffing stick~~
scissors
emergency asthma inhaler

Other Essential Gear

~~3 litre hydration system~~ (to be used only in hot, hot weather and on walks longer than 30kms...otherwise, leave it empty and use the water bottle)
~~800ml water bottle~~
~~compact water filter~~ (water in public fountains and in restaurant taps is potable)
sunglasses
~~head lamp & batteries~~
camera & recharger
extendable walking pole w compass and temperature gauge
swiss army knife
electrical tape
thread & needle
whistle
plastic bags (1 for sleeping bag liner, 1 for dirty clothes)
~~small shoulder bag with zipper for evenings out and day trips~~
garbage bag (to act as ground sheet)(to protect pack)

Sacred Items

journal (with addresses for sending postcards on inside cover)
pens
~~dream dictionary~~
Dreamspell calendar
sage
lighter
shell
~~tarot cards~~
~~pendulum~~
crystals

~~rattle~~

full moon readings

prayers for St. James that any of you would like to give me to take (you can email them to me or hand write them and give them to me in person)

Other Practical Items and I.D.

Pilgrim Guide to the Via de la Plata

passport

proof of travel insurance

all flight information there and back

Spanish phrasebook

VISA

student card

emergency contact info

The best purchase I made was just hours before actually leaving for the airport...\$35 insoles that have made a world of difference to my journey!! Also, I didn't go a day without giving thanks for my sombrero (hat)! Whether rain, shine or cool outside, that hat was a godsend!

As for my psycho-emotional unpacking...

It's good to be back! A bed to myself in a room just for me...sheer luxury! I love you, ray of golden sunshine splaying across my double bed. I love you my double bed, outfitted with clean cotton sheets! Sheets! Oh sweet simplicity, I can't believe what I take for granted sometimes! Crisp, cool, sage coloured cotton sheets, I love you, too! I gaze at the four high clean white walls, walnut-coloured hardwood floor, battered old metal desk and chair on rollers, and raw pine shelf lined with books and plants - all of these things, all of this space - just for me. After sharing sleeping space with others for the past eight weeks this feels just fine, indeed! Such a simple, organized, cozy space, this room. It really doesn't take too much to live a life of extravagance! Too bad I'll have to leave it again so soon. Ugh. I don't want to go there. Anger and blame, hold off. Stand down, frustration. No use concentrating on the only black cloud in the sky unless it's blocking out the sun, and right now I'm basking in the glow of the Camino! I don't want to put out the energy to think about moving and why I'm being asked to leave. Life certainly has a way of handing out surprises when you least expect them. Wish I could stay, but it's not in the cards...

The suitcase is on the bed, no worse for wear. I unzip the case and throw back the lid with a smile. I've brought home some lovely, pared down, lighter, brighter items to round out the wardrobe! I've rolled

them neatly so they're ready to unravel for the wearing and now I'm ready to show them off and mix and match the new with the old that still fit well. For instance, take this new silky, slinky thing! Wow. I'm going to turn heads! This new relationship I have with my new (firmer, trimmer, weathered yet rejuvenated) body really suits me! A sense of poise and strength has come over me! I'm holding my head higher, my back seems straighter, and that smile! When did I develop that strut? Wear it, woman, wear it! It lends me a new air of confidence. That once flickering ember is now a brightly burning flame of sexiness! Good for you, you deserve it, I think to myself. Put that in the top drawer.

Hello trust, you beautiful band of golden brilliance 'round my belly! I didn't even know I had you wrapped about me when I left but I can see you've been with me all along and now I've the opportunity to offer you thanks and a renewed appreciation! What a wonderful item you are! Trust really brings out something radiant and stalwart in me! From the beginning, in arriving to Madrid, you drew to me men that I didn't have to fear, you magnetized amazing, supportive people to me, you connected with universal synchronicity and everything I needed came time and time again! You simplify my life and the simple life, free of extraneous weight, I have found, is the life for me. You vibrated clearly when something was off, or very on! You worked in tandem with my power centre and helped me navigate relationships and experiences. Best of all, though, you helped me to release fear-driven dependence on others and on tools that only exist to affirm what I already innately know. You've allowed me to come into a state of trusting myself! I am forever grateful to you. You are a part of me now, and I'll never take you off.

This heightened sense of magic is like an opalescent silk chiffon shawl, smoky soft, transcendental and pearly. I am in awe of how it enfolds my body and drapes in all the right places. To allow myself to be wrapped in magic fosters an innate knowing, remembering, that I am special and I am powerful and gracious beyond measure...that I have a purpose in every moment. With the pairing of my belly chain of trust and my chiffon shawl of magic I feel like I've been gifted the ability to walk towards wonder with a steadfast sense of hope. That's what risk really is, isn't it? The willingness to pursue something despite our fear because there's hope of magic? How wonderful that I no longer need armor to pursue my dreams! Chiffon and a thread of gold are far easier to move freely in.

Did I actually let myself get bogged down in fears and insecurities around my abilities to actually succeed at anything in life before The Way? Talk about self-loathing and self-sabotage! It didn't take them long to start breaking down on the Camino, fraying at the seams and rotting around the soles. With every step they split a little more. I let that pair go at point zero amongst the collection of things that no longer serve pilgrims, and so are left at the edge of the world to be broken down by the salty Atlantic Ocean air. 'Cause guess what? I just walked 1000 kilometers across Spain, step by step, over 40 days! I can do anything I want in this world! Success? Geez. What is that, really? Give judgement a kick in the ass and just go with the moment. Anyway, look what I'm walking in now! This newfound resiliency is springy, my perception of accomplishment heightened. I have a sense of the suppleness of my adaptability, now. I'm still tough and durable, yet somehow softer and more pliable, feather light, breathable, beautiful. I feel I've been given permission to walk fluidly in this world. Yes, these new shoes will go right by the door, I have a feeling I'll be wearing them a lot. And oh yes! New rose coloured glasses! I got these in Santiago, I remember...for Akwasi. He looks so good when I put them on! Gosh they make the world look so lovely and soft and beckoning and so full of new potential and squishy baby dreams that...well, how 'bout I just make them a permanent accessory for a while? It's summer, after all, and everything is shiny, lush and ripe! I'm flying around on gossamer wings of hope and it feels good, so it does! Yeah, yeah...I look *good*.

And joy...joy? Where did that get to? I thought I had a piece of it in here, tangible, like a token rock from that far away land. Proof that I'd been there, that I'd been able to reach out and take it and it was solid, breathing and lively. But it looks as though I've lost it, or perhaps I forgot it, if I'm lucky it's hiding in one of these pockets and I'll accidentally come across it in the future to light up my eyes another day...I swore I had it. I thought I put it right here, in this pocket, but...Oh, oh my...there's a tear in the liner here. It's been ripped. Anger! Damn you! Trying to escape again! You just insist on coming to the surface over and over, don't you?! Now you've gone and ruined a perfectly beautiful pocket and I'll have to find somewhere else to stuff you. Damned shameful, anger, you are! Don't you dare show your face! I walked all those miles just to shuck you off and you followed me around like some pathetic beggar, and I

wouldn't feed you then and I don't want to feed you now. Disappear! I don't deserve to feel you anymore. Don't you know what I've just done? Do you know how many people would like to do what I've just accomplished? Do you not realize how fortunate I am? You don't go on the walk of your lifetime and get to come back angry, that's not how it works! I'm supposed to be better. I'm supposed to be happy! Fuck you, go away!

Guilt. Huh. You little bugger...snuck back in my pack post-tantrum did you? No wonder anger still lives. Well, look here. You no longer fit as comfortably as you used to - you're tight, constricting and make me feel suffocated. You make me itch and scratch at myself until I'm left with rashes and angry red marks that remind me how very little you, guilt, serve me. Your new home is under the bed, there's no room in the dresser for you now! But wait. Do I really want to keep you at all? Even though my body has gotten smaller, there's something that's grown, that no longer allows you to drape yourself over me as comfortably as you used to. What is it? Just an intertwined reaction to all of the other changes that have unfolded? What is it that has changed in me that the guilt is diminishing? I can't help but think that my guilt has shifted because I am learning to forgive myself...moving into a more compassionate heart space for "her". What was it really that I longed to release about "her" before I left? An accumulated and conflicting combination of guilt and grief over losses perceived to be my fault, directly linked to a desire to release an obligated sense of responsibility for others. I wasn't looking to be rid of "her", rather I was rejecting the life of servitude, sense of obligation, and insecurity that comes with always living inauthentically that I associated with "her" and which were the source of my grief and skewed guilt.

That's where you come in, I think to myself, as I cradle the Ziploc bag of sadness that I've carried with me the entire trip. I now know the source of this sadness and it is grief, an emotion intertwined in my association with "her", and brought to the surface with the separation from Gordon. The baggie is a little lighter than it was, grief being one of those emotions that evaporate like tears over time. Holding it tenderly, I see how contained it's been. I see how it's carried me, even driven me sometimes, from the inside out. I've not carried it without problems. To contain it took its toll, for sure. Day after day I was aware of its weight. If I listened hard enough I could hear the stifled sloshing of it, even through the tough

exterior of my pack, and, once I could hear it, I couldn't *not* hear it and it would echo in my heart for the next while, or until I put the case down for a needed rest. I packed around it, cushioning it with my good ole go-to's: love, courage, excitement, anticipation, hope...and sometimes, sometimes I sought out my willingness to be vulnerable and I asked for help. I am sympathetic to my sadness and grief, for they served a purpose, and I'm not sure that they don't have more to teach me. Pinkola Estes (1995) says tears "are a river that take you somewhere. Weeping creates a river around the boat that carries your soul-life. Tears lift your boat off the rocks, off dry ground, carrying it downriver to someplace new, someplace better" (p. 374). I am fortunate that my tears carried me all the way to Spain. And now I am again in a new place. Perhaps when I've settled in a little more I will find what it takes to release this sadness and experience of grief and learn to simply accept "her" for who she was, who I was. I don't want to feel shame for my past. I want to be gentle on "her", me. I thought I needed to release old me, but really I need to embrace and honour old me and all that she achieved, all the work she's done to bring me to this moment now. I need to be able to mourn my traumas and let go. I need to stop and deal with it, rather than push "her" away, and let the river of my tears transform me and carry me where it will...at some point. But not now...no time! I've got Akwasi now and these sunglasses will help to keep me focused on the positive. Who wants to dredge through the mud right now? I'm still soaring, still walking...I'm not ready for the Camino to be over. Reality, ugh. No thanks. Not just yet.

June 20, 2012, The Summer Solstice Sacred Healing Fire, Glamorum. The Sacred Healing Fire is lit to bring in the Summer Solstice. That evening Gordon and I have a private launching ceremony to officially declare the end of our marriage and the beginning of our new relationship. I spend the next four days in a little cabin in the woods participating in ceremony and reconnecting with the Firekeepers and friends.

The separation ceremony.

June 21, 2012 Ila held the feathered wand to the sky and spoke with Great Spirit to signify our presence and to invite the ancestors to join us, bear witness, to our ceremony. We smudged to clear our energy and ability to see, hear and speak clearly. Our wrists were bound by a pale blue ribbon, and we stroked and softly fingered one another's forearms, the

tears slowly etching trails down our ruddy cheeks. Then she asked us to start by clearing, each of us witnessing the others fears, worries and any residual anger we might be harbouring for ourselves or the other. Our responsibility, when not speaking, is to listen with compassionate detachment, not taking anything the other says personally, just allowing the other speak their truth in safety and without judgment. It was not so difficult as I'd thought it might be, because we spoke from a place of real love. But it WAS emotional! Oh my goodness did we cry, all three of us. Tissue after tissue, it was nearly comical. There's no doubt Gordon and I have shared something incredible all these years. And to talk about my fears, worries and anger was such a relief. And I saw our worries were the same. I fear he will be overworked and he fears being overworked, but says he will ask for help. I worry about my finances and he worries about my finances. I expressed my anger, again, about Sheila and felt forgiveness wash over me when I saw in his eyes how truly sorry he is. I told him "Hey, we both know the biggest mistakes are the humanist kind" and smiled, as it's a line from a Michael Franti tune we love. He apologized for never granting me the baby I'd wanted. I felt terrible that the baby issue had hung between us for so many years and that I'd denied myself something so immense, then I forgave both of us. We followed the clearing ceremony with an honouring and thanking round and that was incredible! Extraordinarily easy, for there is much to be honoured - we have watched each other change and grow for a number of years. We wouldn't be who we are now without each other. It felt very pure and wonderful to recount the many reasons I loved him, and will always hold a place for him in my heart. His words to me were lovely. He's come so far. Lastly, we blessed each other, and it is an amazing thing to say to another, "I really wish you the very best in life. I bless you with love, joy, peace and hope. I bless your future relationships and hope that you find someone who makes you feel wonderful about who you are., because you are wonderful. I hope all of your dreams come true and that you live with an open heart. Blessings. A-ho."

Ila put her hand over our bound wrists, then, and blessed us both and spoke of how important this ceremony was for the greater good. "Wouldn't the energy shift on the planet if we honoured our separations as lovingly as we honour our unions?" she asked. Ceremony raises our personal vibrations and gives others, who learn by our example, permission to do the same. It maintains and raises the vibrations between Gordon and me, allowing our relationship to shift and morph in a really peaceful way. And, as individuals, we won't be carrying resentment or questions around with us in association with the relationship in silence over the duration of our lifetimes. There will be no festering of wounds. We cut the ribbon, then, sobbing together, lingered for a moment before unlatching wrists, and Ila hung the ribbon in a tree next to some tobacco ties and we wished all of the prayers and energy of the ceremony to fly free and join the collective conscience for the greater good and for the people. I am honoured to have been a co-creator and participant of the event.

Saturday, June 23, 2012, Another Cycle of Life. The closing of the Sacred Healing Fire and my 36th birthday.

June 25, 2012, Email from José.

Dear Kim: ¡Happy birthday! I hope you have pass one nice and gay day.

Do you liked Paris? Is a beautiful city for to visit.

Now you life in Guelph is better? Do you have news experiencie to life.

*I has see a nice and emotional canadien movie: Teacher Lazhar.
Next month i will go to the camping place for three weeks with my father, brothers
and sisters.
If you can send some photos i will be very happy.
I wish very good summer. I love. Tu amigo José A. V.*

June 26, 2012, My email to José.

Thank you José! Your birthday wishes mean a lot to me! Thank you for remembering...

Paris was excellent! I went to the Eiffel Tower at night, took a boat cruise on the River Seine, visited the Musee d'Orsay and the Museum of Modern Art, went to the Moulin Rouge and bought a lot of clothes! Everyone is so beautiful in Paris!

Life in Guelph is interesting...I met a wonderful man in Santiago and we've applied for a temporary visitor's visa to bring him to Canada. My roommate does not want him here, in our house, so I am looking for a new house for August 1st. It is a little stressful, but it will be nice for Akwasi (my new partner) and me to have our own place. Life begins anew!

Gordon (my ex husband) and I had a lovely separation ceremony on the Solstice, and we have made amends and are still very close. All is well.

I have decided to write my MA thesis about my experience on the Camino. I think I will be able to write fast! Then I won't have to pay for another semester's tuition in January...

I hope you have a wonderful time with your brothers and son camping, José!

I have attached a few pictures, but will send more soon.

I love you, José.

Tu amiga, Kim...besos!

The End... Or...

After reading an earlier draft of my chronology, Sue got to this point and wrote in a comment card to me, "Wait a minute, the end? But what did you get? For your birthday...the whole symbolism of a new cycle and the shift of the seasons and all that jazz? What were you gifted? It can't be as neat or tight as the message you wrote José." In response, I wrote:

June 21, 2013 You're right. It can't be that neat. It can't be that tight. How do I explain what I got? (Tears spring to my eyes). For a long time it was like I hadn't learned anything. I felt confused about my separation from Gordon. Akwasi and I broke up after I returned, once more, from Spain realizing I didn't have the energy for another relationship so soon. That was five months later. My heart was mush. I continued to write about my journey and in it I saw things about myself I didn't like...my shadow patterns, choices that I judged harshly. It was the throes of winter and it was a dark time. I slept a lot, ate too much, and felt really, really sad. I absolutely saw the shadow feelings, the longing to escape from my feelings, come out over the winter. I'd been with Akwasi so

I didn't have to face the mourning that I still had, and am still having to face due to my separation from Gordon. It's terrible. Grief is so painful. But it is the finally letting go that is the gift. The process is necessary. I'm not sure grief can be surrendered with ease. With grace, yes, but ease?...Letting go of my marriage with Gordon has been one of the hardest things I've ever done.

Chapter Three: A Transpersonal Re-Thinking of Empowerment and Liminality in the Journey of Transformation

In this chapter, while it was important initially to set aside *inner empiricism* in the collection and analysis of the data, it is a useful heuristic to further theorize and expand the cultural conversation about transpersonal peak experiences. There is not a method that exists that supports the transpersonal researcher in the study of states of being and modes of knowing that arise from connection with levels of reality beyond personal identity that are *not* through the language, methods, and standards of empiricist science. Inquiry is an approach, rather than a specific method, and recognizes the transpersonal and spiritual resources that might contribute to the inspiration and flexibility of the researcher and the research (Braud, 2004); but a fully developed research method that engages us in an act of *transpersonal functioning* beyond the subject/object duality is yet to emerge. Chapter Two recounted my inquiry into my journey on The Way, and this remembering and recounting was immersed in the transpersonal. The focus of Chapter Three is to return to theorizing, inner empiricism, as a foundation for knowing transpersonal peak experiences as the intersection of: acts of empowerment (Arai, 1997), focal practice (Arai & Pedlar, 2000), resistance (Shaw, 2001), and experiences of liminality (Cody, 2012) with transformation occurring at the flux of all of this, while infusing the confluence of these concepts with ideas from transpersonal theory and organic inquiry introduced in Chapter One.

As Raisborough and Bhatti (2007) describe, "[f]eminist analysis of leisure has successfully demonstrated that leisure spaces and experiences are sites where unequal and uneven gender relations are reproduced, maintained and resisted" (p. 460) and the Camino was no exception both in terms of social interaction and inner reproduction. However, my walk across the Camino also created the liminal space for an experience of empowerment and resistance. As Raisborough and Bhatti (2007) further state, "The separation of leisure from work has to be continually fought for and (re) negotiated...once 'my space' and 'my time' is carved out, leisure can become a source of empowered, self-determined identities with which women can resist and undermine constructions of traditional and normative femininity" (Raisborough and

Bhatti, 2007, p. 459). Women's empowerment is closely related to self-expression, self-esteem and self-determination; increased physicality; decision-making processes; the acquisition and mastery of specific skills; the organisation of 'own' time for leisure; the pleasure of defying gendered expectations about appropriate leisure pursuits (Raisborough & Bhatti, 2007, p, 461) and resistance of oppressive gender relations (p. 459). At the individual level of empowerment, there is evidence that participation is related to increased feelings of confidence and competencies in relation to psychological, social, and political power; decreased feelings of helplessness; and decreased alienation (Arai, 1997). Participation has been found to increase the individual's sense of commitment and sense of community; it has also been linked to increases in community empowerment through active engagement in "interpersonal relationships and social fabric, and the distribution of power and decision making within a community" as contributions to community (Arai & Pedlar, 1997, p. 170). This autoethnographic exploration reveals how empowerment and resistance are intertwined. As Shaw describes (2001), empowerment is an integral aspect of resistance as both a positive outcome of resistance and part of the process of resisting. Shaw (2001) further claims that empowerment is helpful in distinguishing 'resistance' from other expressions of agency. She states that acts may be those of resistance "if they function to empower individuals in disadvantaged situations" (p. 197) as empowerment involves a change in capacity or control, or an increase in both power and the ability to utilize power. Shaw (2001) expresses a need for documentation of the types of leisure activities and contexts in which resistance occurs, and specific types of oppression and constraints being challenged or resisted. This is revealed in this autoethnographic exploration.

This autoethnography reveals how this intertwining of empowerment and resistance becomes possible in a liminal space such as the Camino. Leisure can be defined as a liminal space in that the both/and of perpetuation and resistance are present and we are asked to walk in, around, and between both simultaneously. Liminal, from the Latin word *limen* for boundary or threshold, has been used in a variety of social and cultural contexts. Most have been employed to distinguish and define some transition from 'the known to the unknown', so that the liminal experience is the metaphorical crossing of some imagined spatial or temporal threshold (Nisbet in Pritchard & Morgan, 2006, p. 764). Central to the notion of

liminality is its transitory, betwixt nature, whether manifested in terms of social life, space or time, so that “[i]n this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen” (Turner, in Pritchard & Morgan, 2006, p. 764). Every day I worked on this thesis I was transported back in time to a journey I completed more than a year ago, and asked, what have I learned? And while I continued to learn from the Camino, I was also learning concurrently from experiences unfolding in the present, applying lessons learned along The Way, slipping into the future, dreaming of what it is I desire, then back on the Camino again. Liminal phases of transition can also refer to the intersubjective experience - a metaphorical conceptualization of those who are fundamentally betwixt and between two “instances of completeness” (Cody, 2012, p. 42) or “states of being” (p. 46) and this is something I can well relate to. I feel that throughout this thesis journey I have not only been existing in a liminal space in time, but that I am liminal space, that I sit at the centre of a web of feelings: guilt, self-blame and a sense of internalized oppression and failed obligations as a married woman; a need to break free of those feelings; true grief and mourning of the death of my relationship with Gordon as we knew it; excitement for where this is all taking me. Despite the potent darkness and ambiguity inherent in a threshold existence, the liminal period is proposed to represent a fruitful darkness⁸ (Turner in Cody, 2012, p. 60). The darkness –my heightened sense of personal anger, grief and shame while writing the chronology– provided a fruitful ground of self-discovery that assisted in mediating this unstable period of time (Cody, 2012). Although attempting to move forward and realize the destination of my path towards empowerment and sovereignty, the remnants of my past relationships still featured in my understanding of my current existence, lending itself to a highly liminal experience (Cody, 2012). This process of self-reflection, though, enabled me to differentiate my past self from the self I am now in the process of reconstructing during my liminal existence.

⁸ "... the metaphor of fruitful darkness encapsulates the concurrent darkness and energy, the restorative obscurity that epitomizes the liminal's experiences within the interstices of past self, self in the now and future self" (Cody, 2012, p. 66). "The conceptualization of the liminal period as a fruitful darkness or a cocoon of possibilities acknowledges the contextual conditions of liminality" (Turner in Cody, 2012, p. 55).

In this process of transformation, empowerment and resistance occurred in the context of focal practices occurring in liminal space. The communitarian notion of *focal practices* or leisure that brings people together around practices of shared meaning, framed within modernism describes focal practices as planned and engaging the participants' mind and body (Borgmann in Arai & Pedlar, 2003). In contrast, in a transpersonal framework, focal practices are differently framed as the participation of an individual consciousness, including heart, soul, body and mind in a spontaneous and passionate communal act of intention. This co-creation of intention creates space for community to form not only in consensus but also through co-existence of difference. It is not about working towards a common goal, per se, but about how individuals wish to *be* in community, how we want to be received and receive others in community. Focal practices and spaces, such as the Camino, engage the mind, body, heart and spirit, command ones presence, and have the ability to bring people together as a collective, involving all in both the means and the end of the leisure practice (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). They also have the potential to create liminal spaces and boundary conditions that can lift us out of the structures of everyday life, remove the structures that confine, marginalize, and separate people, and fuel later resistance (S. Arai, personal communication, Sept. 24, 2012). Through *being* together, rather than planning together, we allow a far greater, more collective, magical, cosmic synchronicity to be invited in where difference is valued as we engage in new interpretations of focal practice fused with spirit, done in a sacred way.

With empowerment, resistance, focal practices and liminality framing transformation, complexities of transformation can be further revealed by engaging in a spiritual expansion of Arai's (1996, 1997) four stages of empowerment—awareness, connecting and learning, mobilization, contribution—by overlaying transpersonal theory, organic inquiry, Jungian archetypes and intention. In the first stage - *awareness* - I share my experiences of coming into awareness of my intentions and body and rhythms as new information with which I explore my power. The second stage - *connection and disconnection in a process of knowing* - involves the development and letting go of relationships with others in the process of expanding my choices and opportunities. The third stage - *mobilization* - is the process of empowerment that I was actively involved in, portrayed in Chapter Two, the chronology of this

thesis. The fourth stage- *contribution to being* - is the integration of my new knowledge and skills into other aspects of my everyday life in the process of transformation.

My Journey as an Act of Mobilizing: Participatory Knowing

My chronological account in Chapter Two provides a concrete example of what Arai (1997) refers to as *mobilization/action* in a process of empowerment. It demonstrates my participation and involvement in the change I desired, leading to increased feelings of competence and self esteem. We can further reflect on Arai's (1997) mobilization stage within a frame of transpersonal theory. This assists us to understand further our ability to be a clear mirror for others and how to see others more clearly in our mutual authenticity. We allow the natural cycles of death and rebirth to unfold. We integrate multiple voices (ancestors, support circles, body, heart and soul) and embrace a multilocal way of knowing. Through mobilizing we walk participatory knowing, integrating all that we have learned through past and present stages of awareness and connection and disconnection, and allow spiritual phenomenon to guide our futures in the context of genuine transformative processes (contribution). We change the way we see our life once the subject/object duality is recognized and rejected, replaced with a multilocal, participatory vision. From this stance "targets of resistance are the ideologies which function to maintain the power of dominant or hegemonic groups" (Shaw, 2001, p. 537). With an integrated understanding of the meaning of spiritual events, we can apply that understanding to the wider ethical and social context and amplify transformative qualities in self and others.

I have been prompted to take further action by embarking on a written account of my transformation via this thesis and sharing what I have learned with others. I am writing it in such a way that it may be read, understood, and embodied by the reader to invoke a possibility of transformation. What transpersonal theorists agree on, and the premise of transpersonal theory, is that the subject/object relationship is altered, or in some cases collapsed, creating the possibility of profound experiences of connectedness when ego boundaries are diminished or absent in transpersonal states. Transpersonal theorists argue experiences are not mere feelings of union, but that, in a transpersonal state, individual

consciousness is actually connected to and participating in phenomena beyond one's usual ego boundaries. I aim to understand my journey as one that alters the subject/object relationship and acknowledges internal and external conditions which lead to the co-creation of multilocal transpersonal events.

The other three phases of empowerment that follow, those of awareness, connection and disconnection in knowing, and contribution to being, are a reflection upon the chronology, the stage of mobilization/action, that explore the transformation I underwent (and continue to undergo) as I came into realization of and learn to let go of patterns that no longer served me in order to accept and allow new ways of being into my life and move into a space of trusting in the magic and mystery of the moment to manifest authentic dreams and desires that truly reflect who I am.

Reflections on Awareness

In Arai's (1997) process of empowerment the individual first develops an awareness on some level of a desire for change, a readiness to accept and develop new directions for self, and is demonstrated by an exploration of power and authority, often through drawn out expressions of anger and frustration in response to some catalyst (Arai, 1996, 1997). In my case this is absolutely true, as I found myself feeling increasingly trapped in and resentful of a relationship that no longer allowed me the freedom to grow without feeling as though I was alienating my ex-husband. I began to lash out at him verbally and psychologically and this contributed to my anger, depression, and resentment, because it did not feel good to treat him that way and I knew it was a poor reflection of who I truly was. Yet, paradoxically, I was unwilling to leave because I did not want to hurt him, yet that is exactly what I was doing. With the recognition that the relationship could no longer continue as it was, I began moving into a place of painful acceptance for what was happening and to plan new directions for myself, without Gordon, towards becoming the person I desired to be. This reshaping of the stage of awareness then must necessarily also include *disconnection* alongside connection for the desire for change also signifies a readiness to accept that a process of *letting go* of who I am now will unfold and that process will naturally include flux in

relationships with others. With change and disconnection can come fear that is directly associated with Parr's (2009) notion of experiential avoidance ⁹. Rather than explore painful thoughts, feelings, and sensations, it is easier to keep busy, to stay on the surface of our emotions and not dive too deeply into ourselves. But diving deep produces treasures, the innermost golden kind - the 'To Be in My Power' (March 6, 2012) kind and in writing that piece a direct knowing of who I want to *be* appeared and I knew the deep diving had been worth it; that I'd pulled up gold from within through the shamanic healers creative writing assignment...

To be in my power makes me feel safe enough to take risks, to trust myself, to be an agent of calm. While standing in this power I allow myself to authentically be who I really am.

The pull towards being is driven by the authentic self, the one expressed through dreams, dance, laughter, art, poetry - the voice that shone through in To Be in My Power. That piece is entirely spiritual and transpersonal, richly describing who I am capable of being with others, who I want to be with others, who I am actively practicing being with by myself and with others... *When I stand in my power my relationships with others are also authentic, warm, vibrant, well crafted, secure, and nurture feelings of equality and total acceptance.* It is the voice of how I can best contribute to the co-creation of communal intention and when I am in my power being with others becomes easy, because they recognize me in my being-ness and that is a very safe space for others to be! Arai (1997) notes that a person cannot empower someone else, rather this occurs through direct experience. Nor, however, can individuals achieve empowerment on their own apart from others and the environment. A safe society values difference and accepts people for who they are where they're at. To remove the structures that separate us in community and value difference, individuals must first learn to accept themselves. Making time for reflection and understanding our true desires, who we want to be, directly contributes to a more accepting society. Breaking from busyness to make the switch to an awareness of how we want to be leads to personal empowerment and contributes to societal empowerment. Letting go of patterns and relationships that no longer serve our authentic being is

⁹ "[T]he unwillingness to be in contact with negatively evaluated thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations and strategic attempts to alter the form, frequency, or situations that elicit these experiences" (Parr, 2009, p. 82).

empowering and an act of resistance against the norm of society's expectations of what women are supposed to do. By creating an opportunity for the reader to have her or his own direct experience of the text through embodied writing that contains detail and energy that enables the text to be experienced, I contribute to the fostering of awareness that can lead to other's recognizing and nurturing their own desire to change and sense of personal empowerment.

Awareness of intention, body and rhythms, and intuition and dreams are transpersonal ways of knowing that open and expand our ability to understand and manifest the changes we desire to see in our selves. When we are ready to accept and develop a new vision for ourselves, awareness to these transpersonal modes of knowing will assist us in our navigation of the liminal space that is personal transformation. In offering my own experience as a navigational tool for others we will now embark on an exploration of awareness into intentions and body and rhythms; revealing how I became aware of my intentions, where the shifts in my intentions occurred and instances of forgotten intentions.

Awareness of intention.

Intention is generally thought of as a person's specific purpose in performing an action or series of actions towards the end or goal that is aimed at. Intentional behavior is thoughtful, deliberate, and goal-directed (Oxford Dictionary). I propose taking up the notion of intentions in a different way in that it is not about a constant focus on the purpose of *doing* to reach a specific outcome but is, rather, a deepening process of understanding our true nature more clearly through constant reflection in order to *be* and allow the outcome to unfold as it will while being a conscious agent in its unfolding. This reshaping of intention, then, asks that I let go of planning and of old plans that still linger which are small, in order to let the 'big plan' present itself. Letting go, even of old plans that once seemed ideal, can be a painful process wracked with mourning and grieving that can sometimes cause us to forget about our intentions. This process involves a re-negotiation of resistance as a conscious backlash to the ideologies of merit and self-worth in our society, where our internal politics and societal character are based on productivity, materialism and the notion of independence.

When I read Shirley MacClaine's book all those years ago, I remember being completely inspired that a woman in her 50's was embarking on a physically and emotionally demanding spiritual journey by herself across a land unfamiliar to her. At the time, she seemed the epitome of a strong, independent woman, one willing to face her fears and challenge herself. In sharing her story, I desired to be that woman. My, my, what I've learned about independence and strength since embarking on *The Way myself!* Shaw (2001) calls us to explore conscious intent behind acts of leisure as resistance, and how that intent changes or potentially contradicts itself during the act itself. Exploring these inherent contradictions and changes in our intention is itself the space of transformation. Upon realizing that my primary intent was to travel the Camino as a strong, independent woman determined to let go of the fears I held for myself in being single, I have begun to rethink this intention and see the contradictory aspects of what I was striving for in undertaking my journey. I see that, at first, my intention was to be the ultimate atomistic woman, that the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence were seen as ideal to me, but this was thwarted by an enormous amount of pressure and self-judgment, limited my ability to be and flow, and threatened my ability to see clearly the gifts I was being granted by my support circle of pilgrims in their willingness to support me where I was at - as was demonstrated by my frustration and confusion, for instance, when I had tendonitis and took the bus seeing it, first, as cheating, or feeling dependent on José and Fiona to bridge the language gap. I got caught up in what I could and could not *do* and my claim to independence, I began to learn, was unrealistic and restrictive. Shaw (2001) warns that "to incorporate the idea of outcome as an essential component of resistance is problematic because acts that are intended as challenges to dominant power relations could potentially disempower rather than empower individuals" (p. 195). She says that this situation could occur through such instances as a failure to reach one's objective, to disengage with the activity, or as regret over one's actions, leading to a potential reaffirmation of prevailing ideologies or attitudes. And I was disempowering myself by harshly judging my 'failure' to be independent. As I read through the chronology I see my intentions began to shift, once giving myself permission to put a stop to the self imposed rules I felt came with being independent, and I began to relax and become more gentle with myself and welcome the assistance of

others. An alteration in my perception towards 'failure and regret' as opportunities to grow and learn unfolded, a movement from controlling to allowing, from doing to being. While intent may not be necessary in the act of spontaneous, unforeseen resistance (Shaw, 2001), I do believe that when we know who we want to *be* as a person, when we live life with intent to *be* (i.e. peace, safe, joy, sovereign, of service, etc) rather than *do* - that that intent then bleeds into and informs our thoughts, words and actions on a moment to moment basis.

When engaging in the co-creation of the pilgrimage experience with others, the environment and the whole body including heart, soul and mind, a spiritual experience can expand into social consciousness and increase individual sense of connectedness with community and provide a sense of harmony with some collective other. I think of fellow pilgrims and the intent with which they walked and how this connected us through a sense of belonging, a sensitivity to the whole, and a sense of purpose and direction (McDonald & Schreyer, 1991). Pilgrims like Brent, walking in gratitude to God because his son survived cancer; or Patricia walking for self care and personal reflection time. Simone from Manitoulin Island walked with an intention to speak prayers of healing to the waterways along the Camino, and Placido walked for his own healing after heartbreak. Community building "requires time, interest in others, socializing, shared faith, common vision and genuine concern for one another" (Doohan, 1990, p. 61-62) and through the sharing of our stories and the intentions with which we walked, other pilgrims and I built mutual empathy between us and were brought closer together, even if only for a short time. The act of walking is not enough to bring us together in relationship. To look out upon the Way and feel a sense of connectedness to others through our individual intentions, and to recognize those intentions as a reflection of the greater collective intent to heal, to be grateful, to contemplate, to commune with ourselves and with nature, etc... presents an opportunity to connect with community in a new way. In walking with intention pilgrims don't have to share the same goal, rather a mutual respect for our parallel walks can be fostered with the recognition we co-create the Camino experience together. We can then move into a space of allowing not only ourselves, but one another to be.

In my unfolding awareness of shifting from doing (it alone etc) into being, while analyzing my story, I see, too, that there was a deepening of my intention as my journey unfolded of letting of old plans which keep me small to come into the moment and let not only the bigger picture unfold, but also my authentic desires to come in being. That I trusted the universe loved me and supported me is declared throughout my chronology repeatedly and as my story unfolded, so to, did an authentic trust in the bigger plan that is far greater than what I'm capable of planning.

Before embarking on my journey I wrote a series of journal entries and blog posts about coming into my authentic self and I believe, now, that I was engaging in a practice of actually manifesting awareness of my intentions in a process of 'fake it 'til you make it'. But it seems now, upon reflection, that my body understood that coming into authenticity is to be in the moment more than my head I did. In developing tendonitis I was practically forced to stop and be still. After healing and releasing the injury it was my body that had alerted me to the wisdom *"that this journey has to be taken one day at a time"* (May 6, 2012). A week later I get lost with Fiona and José and a very interesting conversation takes place between my Head, Heart, Ankle and Shoulder, demonstrating a willingness to release attachment to the outcome and accept what is happening in the moment...

Heart: Ankle! Head! This really isn't helping. Please, please stop. How is your fighting serving this moment? (reason)
Shoulder: I agree with Heart. We're here now. Ankle, I'm tired, too, but attitude is everything. We might as well settle into the fact that it's happened and accept it for what it is. (acceptance)
Heart: The sun is shining, that sky is the most perfect shade of blue, and it smells good here, with the fields and flowers and animal smells mingling perfectly together...Maybe we were supposed to get sidetracked (wonder, trust) (May 13, 2012)?

This vignette between different parts of myself also demonstrates the complexity of the inner dialogue that unfolds in the process of learning to be. I practice more and more being in the moment, especially in the context of nature:

Today was the most astounding hike! Four hours of mountains, forests and natural springs, oh my! All the melting snow from the mountaintops has created miniature cascades everywhere and the path was spongy with oak leaves, moss and ferns! It was breathtaking - literally and figuratively as there was also an abundance of uphill trekking to be done! I loved every single minute of it (May 25, 2012)

As time passes I find I am attracted to and attracting others who are comfortable in their skin, following their body rhythms, present for each other, and present in the moment:

I have a wonderful evening of feasting, drinking and connecting with fellow peregrinos Carrie, Edmund, Cassandra, Camilla and Blais. With this group of pilgrims I feel accepted, enjoyed, even, for just being me. And I certainly enjoy them! This easygoing troupe just love to laugh together! They live for putting their feet up, sucking back cigarette after cigarette and drinking beers. They genuinely want to be around each other, saving beds and waiting at bars for each other. They're super chill. No big agenda. They stop when they're tired, eat when they're hungry. I feel at ease with them (June 4, 2012).

Towards the end of my journey I begin to engage in deep reflection of the men I've attracted to me and what I'm able to learn from my interactions with them:

I did a lot of thinking today about why I've met the men I have along the way - Maalik, Santo, Placido and Akwasi. What have they to show me? What have they to teach me? Each are a mirror, what are they reflecting back to me (June 8, 2012)?

Being in the moment, I discover, is a magical way to live and enthusiasm and excitement begin to be associated with living in the moment for me:

The past is the past; with every step I took over the 1000kms I walked I left bits of my old self behind. The butterfly is spreading her wings wide NOW. NOW is all that matters and I am astounded at what can be manifested in the moment (June 12, 2012)!

Having learned along The Way that I could trust in the universe to provide me with all I need, and trusting more deeply now, too, in myself, I begin to approach situations that may have once caused me a lot of discomfort in a calm and trusting manner, letting the situation unfold as it will, trusting that I will be guided and taken care of:

Considering I'm not much of a city girl, don't speak French and that it was getting late, I found myself noticing how calm I was. I had an even heart rate, wasn't sweating, didn't demonstrate any signs of anxiety...and when I really sat with it I realized it was all because I was fully aware that this was just one more test of my faith and trust in the Universe, which, as I mentioned, I have fully down pat. I give generous credit to the Camino for this, I am not so sure I would have been as accepting of this situation had I not been fresh from the trail (June 17, 2012).

Upon returning home I am actually able to change my perceptions of my past self and let go of who I was, small me, contained me, and am allowing my authentic desires to come in being:

What is it that has changed in me that the guilt is diminishing? I can't help but think that my guilt has shifted because I am learning to forgive myself...moving into a more compassionate heart space for "her". What was it really that I longed to release

about "her" before I left? An accumulated and conflicting combination of guilt and grief over losses perceived to be my fault, directly linked to a desire to release an obligated sense of responsibility for others. I wasn't looking to be rid of "her", rather I was rejecting the life of servitude, sense of obligation, and insecurity that comes with always living inauthentically that I associated with "her" and which were the source of my grief and skewed guilt (June 18, 2012).

There were instances where I navigated the slippery terrain of liminal space and slid between my intentions to *trust* where I was at and that I was well supported; and *fear* that set in when I got stuck up on the over-idealized societal notion that independence is strength and therefore sought after and idealized. I wrestled with not feeling as though I was enough and the fear of rejection and shame that comes with that sense of inadequacy in comparing myself to others who I perceive as being more independent (and therefore, better). But I was learning, and would come back to trust, in the universe and myself:

I look around and think, What am I really here for? Romance? Why? To distract myself from knowing that, eventually, I'm going to have to walk out of that albergue door alone in order to get to the next destination? Rosalia does it every day, walks alone, and always finds her way. Lots of people do it - what makes me different? What makes me think I can't do it?... Now that I've learned all that I have with dear José over our 32 days together I am ready. I just had to work it out, and that's what I'm doing, right here and now. And this, regardless of Santo, is really why I'm here. It's suddenly very clear to me (May 31, 2012).

How can it be that every other pilgrim can find the more direct route to Laxe when I cannot? I chalk it up to fate (June 3, 2012).

Liminal spaces play an important role in the manifestation of intentions, both in negotiating between being-ness and societal expectations of how one should be, *and* through the liminal space that bridges the conscious and unconscious, such as creative writing and dreams, both sleeping and waking.

Awareness of intention in dreaming (Day and Night)

"[D]reaming is the most important thing we do in life. It forms the bases of our perceptions, attitudes, emotions, motivations, and actions. It occurs all the time, at both conscious and subconscious levels: while we are working, driving our cars, preparing food, reading, watching TV - as well as during sleep. Individual dreams affect the course of our lives; collective dreams determine the futures of civilizations" (Perkins, 1994, p. 5).

Dreaming, as is expressed in the previous quote, not only comes to us in our sleep, but also fills our waking leisure time. Dreamtime is a liminal realm between the conscious and unconscious, bringing to my awareness highly revealing insights into my inner fears and desires. In this way dreams act as a form

of guidance in setting intentions that address and resolve those fears and desires and allow me to be the authentic, deeper version of myself. People differ in their ability to recall dreams, not in the act of dreaming, which we all do, and dream recall is, to a great extent, an acquired habit and can be learned. I want to quickly introduce you to the method I use to recall and record my dreams in the form of a short vignette:

I roll onto my back as I feel myself begin to awaken, my closed eyelids sensing the golden glow of the light streaming in through the window. Though groggy, I know that the act of dreaming is the strongest and longest of the night's series just before waking naturally in the morning and that I've come directly from a REM period, so I am careful not to open my eyes. If I begin thinking about the day's activities even before I open my eyes, I am likely to lose all trace of the night's dreams so I lie still with my eyes closed and simply let images flow into my mind. This is a peaceful, unpressured time and I remain relaxed just letting myself feel. Very often this is enough to allow the images of my just-ended dream to return and "[t]he tiniest fragment of the last dream can serve as a hook for the whole night's series" (Garfield, 1995, p. 205). I sigh, reexperiencing the emotions of the dream, then roll over hoping to entice additional dream recall that often comes when I move gently from my waking position and settle back into my original sleeping posture in which my dream occurred (Garfield, 1995). During the night or in the morning, once I've captured fragments of the dream, or, if I'm lucky, am able to recall an entire dream, I remain still with my eyes closed and pick up the writing pad and pen that I keep next to my bed and record the dream with eyes still closed. With my left hand I hold the journal and as I write with my right hand, my left thumb marks where I am and descends down the page while I write. I record the dream in present tense, as though it is happening in the moment, allowing the feelings associated with the dream to emerge and capture them in my writing. As I awake fully I rise and stretch and pad across the kitchen into the washroom and then drink a tall glass of water. I throw open the curtains in the kitchen to let the sun shine in, then sit down at the table with my journal. I read through my dream record sentence by sentence and pick out key words and characteristics of the people and places in my dream, then reach for my dream dictionary which is based on Jung's theories and definitions of specific symbols and their

meanings. I proceed to 'translate' my dreams by re-writing and re-constructing them replacing the key words with meanings I've deciphered for them in my dictionary. The resulting document leads to revealing and sometimes even amazing insights, especially when feelings that accompanied the dream, as well as current feelings I'm experiencing in my life are incorporated (Garfield, 1995).

When I have collected a set of my own dreams, I am in a better position to examine them and learn from them than when I have only isolated dreams (Garfield, 1995). Jung observed that when you study a series of dreams, you can find certain themes recurring. "An important personal point will be underlined by repetition; glaring omissions become apparent; later dreams comment on or interpret preceding ones" (Garfield, 1995, p. 226). By using Jung's concept of active imagination, and paying attention to my fantasies and associations came symbolic and concrete expressions of my frame of mind. Let's see what the series of dreams I had along the Camino have to say:

At the beginning of my journey I don't feel independent or confident, but I am glad to be away...*I fear the loss of my support system and the fear is trying to infiltrate the behaviours, beliefs and attitudes that protect me, mainly a sense of independence and confidence* (April 29, 2012) I'm angry at Gordon and need to work through the feelings I have towards him if I am to come into my true, vulnerable, authentic self. *My natural drives, which were depicted as Gordon in my dream before, are stalking me aggressively. My vulnerable self wants my natural drives, as driven by Gordon, to stop* (April 30, 2012). I know *I cannot fear my power* and my vulnerable self is willing to face my power, but my ego-driven self is not (April 30, 2012). I look to relationships and the body for assistance...*the changing relationship I have with my body will help* (April 30, 2012). Then old fears get triggered and I am willing to ask for help in 'touching' them. *To feel accepted now and the fear of losing those who accept me here has really triggered those old fears.* (May 5, 2012). My authentic self seeks to own my motivations. I am changing and want to express myself through intimacy...*motivating drives I used to have were reconstructed by Gordon. I am selling those reconstructed drives to my natural drives. My natural drive is friendly and wants to own my winning, refurbished motivational drives. I am secretly engaging in changing the way I feel, moving towards positive feelings and wanting to be friendly and intimate with others...* (May 11, 2012). Old shame

wants to be looked at and I don't want to deal with it. *I have a collection of memories and experiences based around foolishness, thoughtlessness and being ruled by my impulses. They are calling to me, wanting me to revisit them. I want to destroy those memories and scatter them so that they can't be re-assembled. They haunt me. I want rid of them badly* (May 23, 2012). There is a lot happening! But the strongest and most interesting theme occurring across these dreams is that of having to deal with pain, anger and shame to become more authentic.

And what about the sort of daydreams that I had while on The Way? I dreamed of living in the country surrounded by beauty, caring for frolicking children and animals, finding the perfect partner, true love. I loved the pilgrim way of life and dreamed of walking for a living - preferably in natural areas, maintaining a minimalist lifestyle, helping other women to heal and become empowered. I thought of family and friends and began to make the connection between what it meant for me to walk for others. I dreamed of a life of meaning, purpose, and service for the greater good.

Unfortunately, we in the West undervalue our dreams and view them as nonsense, or amusing, or psychologically revealing; accordingly, we forget, snigger at, or examine our dreams with passing interest or fear (Garfield, 1995). As you can see, though, by actively engaging Jung's transcendent function and unifying conscious and unconscious content (waking and sleeping dreams) this creative dreamer's greatest opportunity is my continuous opportunity to unify my personality. The relationships I desire in this life and my callings are shown to me in my waking dreams during leisure, in this case most often during a state of walking meditation. What I have to clear (i.e. grief and shame) in order to bring those visions into healthy actualization are found in my unconscious and brought to the surface in my sleeping dreams (and through body wisdom). Garfield (1995) assures me that "[a]s this positive growth cycle continues, you will function more and more as a whole, as a unit of humanity, part of which operates while awake and part while dreaming, with each supporting and promoting growth of the other part" (p. 38). I feel this to be true, as my waking and sleeping dream states, when honoured and utilized as important information, do work in tandem to guide me on my ever continuous journey of following my authentic desires. Dreams are a part of awareness of intention...and through the dream analysis process I see the deepening of and unfolding of my initial intention...to release my fear of being without Gordon and strive to reach my full

potential. My dreams show that this is, indeed, what's happening. My authentic self is wanting to be acknowledged, wanting to be in the driver's seat. My authentic drives are slowly culminating and replacing motivations based on the needs of others (Gordon). I am willing to seek the help of others and of my body to help me through this process of transformation.

Awareness of body and rhythms.

Embodied intuition

Intuition is often expressed as a 'gut feeling; or knowledge that is unexplainable - one *just knows* (Lawrence, 2012). Intuitions are described as clear and distinct perceptions into the nature of things, even as these perceptions vanish into the background of awareness when the focused, rational mind kicks in, searching for meaning. The individual often feels as though she is "tapping into a collective or unconscious source of knowing" (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 19). Intuition as "the direct perception of things as they are" allows for direct and embodied ways of knowing prior to conceptual or psychological interpretation. When we "experience the world directly, beyond the filter of conception, we *live* that world" (Hayward as quoted in Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 19, italics original). Sometimes this knowledge is just below the surface of our awareness and in order to capture the meaning of intuitive perceptions, intuitives usually learn unique - and sometimes idiosyncratic - means to navigate between the often diffuse or dreamlike states that accompany intuitions and analytical reason and reflection. To pair my intuition with body wisdom (both of which exist before our consciousness is aware these exist) and really drop into the reactions of my gut, my heart, my breath, any tensions I'm holding, and sensations I experience, etc...then writing in a stream of consciousness is my way of navigating the intuitive. With practice, I have learned to witness my intuitive perceptions and integrate them with others ways of knowing "from analytic reason and the conventional five human senses toward higher levels of understanding" (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 20). "Getting into our bodies through artistic forms of expression can be a way to get in touch with this hidden knowledge" (Lawrence, 2012, p. 9) and I can attest to this, as my most truthful accounts of expression, I feel, are found in the poems and blog posts that

I wrote directly after my separation from Gordon in 2011, while I was newly, deeply involved and immersed in my feelings and my body's reaction and processing of those feelings.

There were instances, too, where my intuition defied my logical mind, times when I couldn't yet make meaning (or sense) of something until much later, as was seen in my relationship with Akwasi. I did have this sense that all was not as it should be in the relationship. And there were signs where my brain pulled the alarm, saying "this might not be the best idea, you need to tread very carefully!" But there was something about the timing of it all, and that tarot card, and our physical chemistry, as though the universe were telling me it would be all right. I couldn't make sense of why it was all happening the way it was, but because I trusted the Universe and felt so strong and inspired by my time on the Camino, I just went for it.

"This man is a fellow warrior, following the signs, following his gut, how can I shut him down? How could I trounce on this magnificent demonstration of courage? What's the worst thing that could happen to me if I stay? This brave and sexy man and I have sex? How could that possibly be a bad thing?" (June 6, 2012).

Yes, I suffered shame and humiliation, but if I hadn't taken a risk with Akwasi, as I've said, I wouldn't know what it is to let go of someone who doesn't love me for me, for whom I am not considered enough. I needed that juxtaposition of perceptions, especially after the unconditional love Gordon had offered me for so long. In walking in the world as a newly single woman, I was exploring what is was I needed and deserved in relationship - as well as what doesn't serve me. In walking away from the relationship I was engaged in an act of resistance towards the idealized notion of femininity pushed on me by Akwasi and have opened myself to manifesting future intimate relationships based on mutual acceptance of who I am and who the other is, where we are at.

We cannot transform if we leave out our body (Barker, 2001). Focusing primarily on cognitive knowledge while ignoring what the body knows "deprives us of fully actualizing ourselves as human beings" (Lawrence, 2012, p. 10). Ferrar (2008) believes "a more embodied spiritual life can emerge today from our participatory engagement with both the energy of consciousness and the sensuous energies of the body" (p. 8) and Barker (2001) concurs stating, "we need our physical body to partner with our

spiritual body if we are ever to feel whole" (p. 70). Once one begins to be more aware of their body as a teacher, they "cannot return to their former state of unawareness" (Shapiro & Shapiro in Lawrence, 2012, p. 10). A fully embodied spirituality emerges from the creative interplay of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies in complete individuals who embrace "the fullness of human experience while remaining firmly grounded in body and earth" (Ferrar, 2008, p. 2).

In exploring bodily reactions, tensions and sensations with an intention to fully understand my experience, I find that embodied confirmation of what I am experiencing emotionally will surface in their wake.

Embodied confirmation of feelings

In the liminal space that is the body there was opportunity for anger to shift and other messages from body to arise and be heard. Knowledge is present in the body before it reaches our conscious awareness (Lawrence, 2012) and my body, long before my brain made the connection, knew that walking was a form of therapy, knew the rhythm of walking was something that it needed, that was familiar to my DNA, to my past selves...*my ancient, indigenous heart and strong, long legs beg me to walk, and walk very far. There's no doubt that once-upon-a-time I was nomadic...that I moved with the seasons, that I once hunted, gathered, traded, herded. I long for this Long Walk on a cellular level (April 14th, 2012).* The body has a voice that will not be denied for long. When we are ill or in pain, our attention is drawn to what our body already knows (Lawrence, 2012). My bout of tendonitis was a perfect example of this body knowledge. I'd been forewarned that I stored anger in the left ankle, due to the deft energetic intuition of a fellow reiki student. Within the first three days of my journey the ankle was already swelling, heating up, presenting signs of holding and distress due to me not dealing emotionally with the anger I was holding towards Gordon and Sheila. Forewarned of the ankle's tendency to hold anger, I knew that I needed to release the anger, but out of necessity I was more outwardly focused on adjusting to an entirely new rhythm - routine, place, language, people, getting from one place to another. I wasn't focusing on my anger, and so it expressed and manifested itself in physical form. Lawrence (2012) suggests that when we ignore signals from our

bodies and our emotions we may actually be engaging a protective stance to avoid confronting painful truths (p. 10). Much of feminist discourse in terms of embodied knowing focuses on problematizing and resisting the Cartesian mind/body split and reclaiming the body as a source of knowledge. Embodied knowing is a foundational and primal way of accessing knowledge and an intuitive process connected to other ways of knowing (Lawrence, 2012).

In the process of analyzing my chronology multiple instances of embodied knowing present themselves. It was my body that dislodged the stickiness of feeling stuck in relationships that no longer served me in the Firekeepers sweat using rattling, sound, vibration and rhythm, to start the process of letting go, but the 'betrayal' between my roommate and husband had caught me off guard and I was wounded, really pissed off and judgmental; hence an angry ankle. The voices of different body parts came to life through the process of embodied writing. I discovered for myself the true personalities and consistent messages of head voice and heart voice. Key words that were attributed to the voice of my head included 'anger', 'clever', 'rational', 'blame', 'stubborn', and 'certain'. Key words attributed to the voice of heart, on the other hand, included, 'acceptance', 'reason', 'wonder', 'trust', and 'empathetic'. Other body parts chime in, too, especially when they're exhausted or injured, as was demonstrated by key players like the ankles and shoulders and, sometimes, the hips and knees. I have learned that it is best to drop into the messages of the body early, to become aware of and tend to emotional issues presenting as physical manifestations of pain and suffering while the physical symptoms are small and manageable.

Embodied confirmation of authentic connection with others

To have a truly authentic connection with another, a spiritual, emotional and physical sense of comfort with the other must be present. José is a prominent player in my story and I could never have fathomed that we would spend 30 out of the 40 days walking together, but there was such ease and effortlessness in being with José, a sense of security, that I truly felt I'd manifested him into my life specifically for the occasion (and still do). I didn't know, at the beginning, that José was a long time pilgrim and José was far too modest to come out and say so but he radiated a confidence about the trek

that I certainly did not, (especially that first day out of Seville!) which alleviated my stress and anxiety. His presence allowed me to relax, to be in the moment. To walk with José for such a long distance was incredibly special. It took us no time to develop shared rhythm, such as our walking pace and circadian rhythms, including our sleeping patterns. *José and I keep a steady, quick pace that works for us and at the end of the day we pat each other on the back and give thanks for another beautiful day (May 17, 2012).* I never felt sexual tension or intruded on in a sexual way with José. The male gaze was everywhere in the albergues, but José played no part in that game. Not with any woman and never with me. There was no need for me to feel awkward or inferior in José's company and his body and facial language never conveyed boredom or ridicule (no eye rolling, no big sighs) in my inability to speak Spanish or keep up the pace whilst I had tendonitis. José was a safe space for me and moments were never forced - he is a man entirely comfortable with who he is, and that was a very peaceful energy to be in the presence of - *[f]or all the times we'd simply walked in a comfortable silence together...the sign of a truly healthy friendship...He helped to make me feel secure, he accepted me for who I am (May 31, 2012).* His company is very good...quiet and reflective along the Way, laughter otherwise. *Not a day goes by when I don't enjoy a good belly laugh with José (May 18, 2012).*

Then there are, of course, those instances of disconnection., riddled by tension and awkward silence. How quickly a shadow of love began to arise in our newly constructed family unit! I limped through it, mustering the integrity to balance compassion and all of the emotions associated with resentment - anger, rejection, shame, etc... . *I can tell they are somewhat resentful of my pace, José worried about getting beds, Fiona bored. I tell them it's okay to go ahead, no reason to wait, I will see them when I arrive. But, stubbornly, they stick with me and, inside, I know it is because they would never forgive themselves if something happened to me. I feel loved and burdensome, simultaneously (May 8, 2012).* After the tendonitis incident, when my ankle was healed and we reunited, something new arose, a shifting within our little Famino. Fiona and I became like dysfunctional sisters and more and more I found her edgy, sharp, on the offense and, in response I began to close, walls came up, and trust was difficult to muster. More and more I found myself biting my tongue, my opinions and thoughts sporadically and unpredictably shot down and challenged. I

felt I was not being allowed to be who I was. Perhaps when I was injured and angry I served a purpose for Fiona in some way. Upon coming into my healing and strength, things shifted between us, and I was resistant to her wanting to fix me. Our sense of dependency had shifted. And so, the distancing began, and the tension was like that of an elastic band; the gap gets wider, until something snaps, there is a twang of the heart,... *I remember the mounting tension between Fiona and I on this day. Something snappy said over vino in the plaza major. It was happening more and more frequently. We clung to our identity as a family, especially in the wake of my injury and having been separated for 3 days previously, but more and more Fiona was pulling away. She would be branching out on her own within a week, she told José and me. I had mixed feelings about it, for I loved her, but also felt the hot sting of her Leo/Scorpio temperament often (May 9, 2012).*

Embodied moments of both sexual and lovingly intimate connection, too, must be explored as a natural, spiritual aspect of being human.

"[T]he recognition of the spiritual import of physical pleasure naturally heals the historical split between sensuous love (eros) and spiritual love (agape), and this integration fosters the emergence of genuinely human love -- an unconditional love that is simultaneously embodied and spiritual" (Ferrar, 2008, p. 6).

When I sexually, intimately connect with someone, there is energetic activation in the spine that starts at my crown and shoots down the spine towards the pelvis in a surge of tingling electric light that I always envision to be pale blue. The eyes of the other, and of myself (I know, I can feel it) spark, light up. The eyes are drawn upwards to meet constantly. There is a desire to be close to the other, to want to touch the other - as were my experiences with Maalik, Santo and Placido. Physical pleasure isn't necessarily garnered through sexual intercourse. In my story physical pleasure is derived from many subtle types of intimate touch - strolling arm in arm, touching the nape of someone's neck, sitting knee to knee and elbow to elbow. Skin to skin and eye contact brings my attention to the moment, I am fully present with the other and consistently aware of the energetic resonance between the two of us, which shifts and ebbs with the presence of others or the topic of conversation. And, though I know love is something, for me, that needs to be cultivated in trust - in the moment I did love the men with whom I made these types of physical connections, certainly in a sensuous way, but also spiritually in that I understood they'd been

brought into my life for a very brief moment in time, and that we'd courageously managed to seize that moment and make the most of it within the confines of our abilities to be vulnerable together.

The kiss comes up repeatedly and I understand now that I really value the kiss as a bridge and confirmation between platonic relationship or friendship and vulnerable intimacy. The desire to kiss is the body's way of consciously showing me what I desire emotionally - to connect to another in an intimate and vulnerable way. The kiss is an important confirmation of connection, and, if you have ever been kissed very deeply and lovingly, transcends one way beyond the physical realm. The kiss becomes cosmic, infinite, magical, of breathing around one another, developing a shared rhythm of spirit that is breath, playing and dancing. But the kiss is not just a heart chakra and up experience, rather the energy of the kiss also flows downwards and infuses the rest of the body with its magical energy. Ferrar (2008) believes that in a context of embodied spiritual aspiration it becomes fundamental to rescue, in a non-narcissistic manner, the dignity and spiritual significance of physical pleasure. In the same way that pain 'contracts' the body, as was evident in my embodied sadness piece, pleasure 'relaxes' it, making it more porous to the presence and flow of both immanent and transcendent spiritual energies, such as is experienced during kissing.

Embodied connection with the environment

Natural factors greatly impact the pilgrim's journey and can feed the soul, or suck it dry. Clear weather days spent in the countryside and wandering through pueblos were met with thanks and ease. *The past two days we've stayed in sleepy little pueblos - quiet and slow paced - these are good, restful environments and I feel very calm, peaceful (May 16, 2012).* If the route was fairly flat and easily managed, daydreams crept in and consumed most of my attention, my opportunity to leave the demands and expectations of the everyday world behind and to focus on the basics of life (Heintzman, 2000). The more challenging the environment the more accomplished I felt. The days that made my heart soar most were clear weather days mixed with challenging and varied terrain. These settings kept me very present, focused on the heart-breath-body experience and marvelling at the views; experiencing a feeling of rejuvenation associated with the

richness and diversity of the natural environment (Heintzman, 2000). The harsher the weather - blazing sun, torrential downpours, and steady rain over a long period of time all included - the more difficult it was to maintain a positive outlook, and the toll on the body and spirit seemed harder. There were even times when José and I resisted the 'rules' of the more religious, repentant or just plain tough and gritty pilgrims of The Way, and hopped on a bus in part to avoid extreme conditions...*I'm very, very glad we decided to bus from Salamanca to Zamora today! The Way between those two cities is solely highway, not a scrap of shade, with consistent traffic. As I looked out the window of the bus I could feel my spirit withering with the thought of walking those two long, hot, monotonous days (May 19, 2012).*

When I reflect on my story I see that my intentions to see others as a mirror deepened to include the planet as a mirror, as well. On some occasions I could easily see my mood and personality in the moment reflected in the environment...*the grim skies above...perfectly mirrored my grey, fogged mind (May 1, 2012)* and my perceptions of the weather could be shifted, so then so could my mood and mindset. I trusted in this path and learned to tune into my body, heart and spirits in relationship with the Earth and Sky in an interdependent way. Listening to the wisdom of the body, watching the transition of the land and sky, and following their lead led me to doing what felt best, without feeling obligated to follow a set of pilgrim rules that didn't work for me.

The ever changing land under my feet, scenery, and weather created a liminal space through which I walked for 40 days, witnessing the ongoing and amazing transformation of the sky and the land and experiencing it with all of my bodies senses, heart and spirit elicited a sense of wonder and awe within me; an ability to more easily connect with the Mystery (Heintzman, 2000). I felt deeply engaged with the environment and experienced feelings of peace, oneness, strength, and awareness and attunement to the world and my place in it (Schmidt & Little, 2007) as was demonstrated in the conversation that bubbled up on April 26, 2012, in my chronology between Soul *[t]his has been perfectly choreographed. I trust this process,* Heart *aligning with the rhythm of the earth,* Earth *[f]all into rhythm...follow rhythm...feel my heartbeat and the*

rhythm of your feet and of your heart synchronize into perfect timing together. We are One... and Sky I promise nothing but that all will be perfect and you're exactly where you're meant to be.

In my intention to be, I came to be able to trust the natural world in its love and support for me:

I give thanks for this big, beautiful planet and all of the wonders it has to offer and willingly, joyously gives without a hint of holding back. The earth is a selfless entity. I have great Love and Gratitude for all of this...(May 14, 2012).

The process of awareness invokes the creation of a new vision for oneself (Arai, 1997). With the recognition of and reflection upon deepening intentions, tuning into the wisdom of the body and its rhythms, and recording and ruminating on my dreams as important dimensions of awareness and through writing and reflection, I now have a deepened sense of who I am and where I am at what my authentic desires are. However, in the moment to moment unfolding of being, relationships with others in the process of connection and disconnection and their contribution to our ongoing transformation must be explored.

Reflections on Connecting and Disconnecting in a Process of Knowing

Arai's (1997) the second stage of empowerment, that of connecting with other individuals, groups and resources, and learning new skills or information stemming from the awareness that one needs or desires change, is expanded by transpersonal theory to include disconnection together with connection in the process of knowing.

Letting go will be a part of any process of transformation and layers of detaching connected to grief and shame in order to create space for light to enter are consistent threads that run alongside and are intricately woven within strong threads of connection and support throughout these pages. We often think about letting go and connection as separate processes conceptually but really the process of letting go is lived within relationships of connection/disconnection and support/abandonment¹⁰. This challenges the idea of the 'autonomous being' in individualism and helps us to see the relevance of transpersonal theory's

Abandonment being the only word that seems to fit the feeling that is tied to those moments when we feel people have walked away, have misunderstood our experience, when we feel unseen and alone (Arai, S., personal communication, June 26, 2013).

underlying foundation of spiritual life as a participatory event. It also holds potential for the adoption of an and/both state of mind in relationship, in that *both* connection and disconnection *and* support and abandonment can be occurring simultaneously with the same person at the same time. It's exactly the precarious handling of paradox and polarity I juggled when making the decision to leave Gordon. The experience of wanting to protect Gordon and support him through our mutual transition while physically and emotionally distancing myself from him was bizarre and sent me on an emotional rollercoaster, but I held it all, and our separation ceremony was an integral part of that. Could I be his friend and the woman who left simultaneously? Yes, I could, but it's a fine line to walk, takes open and honest communication with self and other and is a slower process than simply cutting ties. And it is that line, that liminal, in-between place, where paradox, the both/and, is held - compassion *and* letting go, holding pain *and* love simultaneously, letting go of one way of being together *and* shifting into a new relationship based upon a new frequency of being - liminal spaces are the places where the potential of both/and will be birthed. They are a place of acceptance for what is without having to chose between either/or.

Shaw's (2001) notion of leisure as resistance highlights the idea that individual women have agency, while simultaneously assuming that "oppression, inequities and constraints exist, and that these are related to gender as well as to other material conditions of life" (p. 194). Constraints I resisted on my journey were related to emotional, psychological and spiritual trauma due to a separation initiated by me and residual feelings of guilt, self-blame, and self-judgment about my failure to be a loving, supporting wife to my ex-husband. Feelings I experienced because of this act were keeping me stuck and blocking my ability to experience freedom to grow and transform in my quest for personal flourishing. Once on the trail I came to realize that many women whom I love have experienced oppression and constraints in their intimate relationships that have restrained them from experiencing personal flourishing, too. Thus, my individual act of resistance has implications beyond just me and is a good example of resistance as individual as well as collective. It must be said, though, that although my feelings of guilt, self-blame and self-judgment about my failure to live up to societal expectations of being a wife were painful, they were absolutely necessary in spurring my desire to walk the Camino and, henceforth, engage in an act of

leisure as resistance leading to the creation of new and alternate personal identities and allowing me to challenge imposed conceptualizations of self (Wearing in Shaw, 2001).

Support circles, allies who expand our resource base and support our endeavours, play a strong part in this stage of empowerment (Arai, 1997). My support circle grew and shifted and I received a myriad of ongoing energetic support from My Brothers and Sisters of the Light at home (family, friends and Firekeepers) whose messages lifted my spirit and affirmed my choices; as well as concrete reassurance and support in-the-moment from the new friends I made along the way including José, Fiona, Philipp, Rosalia and Carrie; people I could laugh and forget my past with for a while, who kept me in the moment. In light of my initial intentions, stated (to let go of my relationship with Gordon as it was and to learn to be a clear mirror) and unstated (to be a strong, independent woman), my support circle helped me to see that there is more strength and freedom to be found in a state of interdependence, than there is in being independent. In the process of transformation we all need support from one another. My consciousness contributes to the collective process of knowing, and because we are mirrors for each other, this means that I must be aware of what I reflect to and expect of others, in that whatever my merit and self-worth rests on will be reflected back to others. In order to be truly supportive and safe for another, I have only to accept them for who they are, and so being who I am is what I wish to reflect. The Firekeepers are a support circle in who's company I feel very safe to be who I am. Firekeepers are able to directly engage with the Mystery and hold paradoxical emotions and thoughts in a liminal space, like that of the womb called a sweat lodge. They are very helpful for me in the process of self-discovery in that they seem to have a deep, abiding appreciation for entering what's real, and a profound understanding of the mirrors we are for each other, and they are able to help me navigate the waters of my life, of my suffering, without taking it on themselves (Barker, 2001) as can be seen in this powerful message from one of the Firekeepers:

My prayer for you (and the rest of the circle) is that your journey will open the door to another level that will be a step to knowing the limitless Mystery that we are. I cannot say how this will happen for you, since we are all part of the Mystery and to think (logically) that our journey to completeness - our unlimited Creative Authentic Self may be different as we are all in the expression of the Love that is the gift of Life. So this is my prayer for you - to find your true Light

- your completeness, your Bliss - in YOUR Way. Miiguetchi, Walk in the Light that you are! (April 21, 2012)

José, too, was involved in the development of my personal empowerment in the role of the inconspicuous, yet highly important witness. From outwardly resisting oppression and manipulation by men as in the dish-washing scenario; to the frenzied crying, screaming, releasing of anger towards Gordon and Sheila while walking; to my awkward attempt at learning a new language and culture, José was a safe space for me time and again in that he didn't react in emotionally charged ways, attempt to give advice that wasn't asked for, or judge me. *Having José beside me, in silence, going at our natural rhythm felt really good. I'm scared to be alone and not feel really good and get lost in myself with no one to listen to what's going on for me or simply hold the space around me (May 31, 2012).* Working through grief while living out an adventure in the company of friends, knowing loved ones are also supporting and encouraging me from a distance, decreased feelings of isolation and increased my feelings of self-esteem and self-concept (Arai, 1997). In the establishment of deep trust with others such as José and my dear friends, the Firekeepers, I feel grateful, appreciative, and free to depend openly on them because all of us know the importance of a mutual rhythm of give-and-take and are dependable as well as dependent (Young-Eisendrath, 2001).

Considering my relationships with men I see that my journey assisted me to reposition myself in relationship in ways I would never have foreseen and this involvement in deep personal reflection has been an immense opportunity for coming into an understanding of my ability to negotiate, reduce, or remove the power exerted over me by others (Shaw, 2001). The experience of being a female pilgrim is unique along the Via de la Plata way and all of us are under the scrutiny of the male (and often religious) gaze. In my chronology I speak of strategically, and sometimes cooperatively (i.e., the sisters from South Korea, practicing ongoing and fluxing modes of self protection through prevention, foresight, and the creation of boundaries and vantage points in some form, whether it be where and near whom I sleep, or having to raise my words and their volume in order to stop sexism in its tracks. The exertion of power over women by men on the Way is an everyday reality through words, actions and vibration. On a collective level the outcomes and repercussions of leisure as resistance are much wider and more

complex, and "would include such questions as whether new discourses, beliefs, or viewpoints have been forged, or whether dominant ideologies have been weakened" (p. 194).

Archetypal¹¹ insights arose in the context of connection when analyzing my story, and assisted me in recognizing repetitious behaviour in choosing and relating to men in intimate relationships. Throughout the chronology there are references to many different collective archetypes¹² including most prominently World Weary Woman (Barker, 2001), Mother, and Lover. In seeking to understand my patterns in intimate relationships when writing and then analyzing my story, I noticed first my need to flee the tendency to hold back and stay small, to stifle my potential for another, as is poignantly captured in this journal entry from April 24, 2012, written as I catch my flight out of Toronto:

The weight of Gordon's story and the role I've played in it are left on the ground. The guilt of leaving him after all he'd been through in his life are back in Guelph. The thought that I am causing him further pain is buried. I don't want to travel to Spain angry and tell myself over and over that it doesn't serve me, but it doesn't matter, I can't get it to go away. Fuck containment. Fuck holding back, I want to LIVE! I want to feel FREE! Having a partner and feeling responsible for their happiness is so much work! Staying small is so much work! I want to release myself from the shackles of a typical life, the societal norm, of being small...Of my past, of who I was. I want to come to accept all of it, live in the now, and not let it hurt me anymore.

This is an example of the World Weary Woman at her breaking point and we will explore in more detail how this archetype is reflected in not only me, but in the collective as a result of societal expectations of women and the misconception of notions such as independence and self-worth. As I read and re-read passages that related to my relationships with men, the pattern of being attracted to men who had scant and often sad relationships with their own mothers like Gordon and Akwasi, hit me like a brick. Gordon's mother, left single and raising two sons, was forced into full time work as well as chose to

¹¹ The substance of myths and ancient tales, archetypes are described by Jung as "definite forms in the psyche that seem to be present always and everywhere" (Myss, 2001, p. 109). Archetypes are our energy guides to our highest potential and though they are essentially neutral, they do have both light and shadow aspects. Rather than think of the shadow aspects as dark and looming, they represent the part of our being that is least familiar to our conscious mind. Jung tied archetypes to his concept of the collective unconscious, the inherited experience of the entire human race, which is distinct from the individual unconscious. Our consciousness is affected by the greater collective unconscious and ours also makes a contribution to the collective (Myss, 2001).

¹² There is also mention of the Victim and the Warrior (see And Then Some Last Minute Packing; journal entry, June 6, 2012), the Prostitute (journal entry, May 22, 2012; June 8, 2012) and overarching this entire thesis endeavour is Storyteller, who "relays wisdom and foolishness, mistakes and successes, fact and fiction on a plane that's often heightened beyond ordinary awareness, including a metaphoric level of teaching" (Myss, 2003, p. 94) and is reflected in the autoethnographic method, and Shapeshifter, who represents my ability to access many dimensions of knowing including different levels of waking conscious and dream states (Myss, 2003).

pursue further education which took her out of the home during the week when Gordon was 11. And Akwasi, who never knew his father and became an orphan at 11 came right out and stated that he was seeking a mommy-wife. I was acting as a pseudo-mother for these men and calling myself their partner! Finally, the word *lover* appears in my story repeatedly, highlighting the importance of this role in my life, my unrelenting desire for intimacy with another, my desire to be desired. These newly discovered archetypal influences caused me, at first, shame and embarrassment, for it's uncomfortable to see things about ourselves that we do not like and to come to the realization that we repeat patterns that do not serve us in our relationships with others. But it is liberating. There are obvious patterns I've been wielding in my relationships with men for a long time and I will share the insight of World Weary Woman, the Mother, and the Lover and how they have, up until this point, determined who I attract and the unfolding of my intimate relationships with men.

Letting go of possessions.

Letting go of possessions was strongly metaphoric of the inner process of letting go throughout my story. The minimalist lifestyle is indescribably freeing. To be stripped down to only the very basics and being open to receiving from the universe is a way of life I have embraced and I feel lighter, my space feels lighter, airier, open. It is very revealing to go over the concrete items that I released along their way, which were, of course, based on not just their weight, but on their usefulness. What I see is that I let go of extraneous items that were aesthetic (a dress, shoulder bag) and a prior source of physical comfort (foam mat, pillow cover, silk pajamas) and psychological reassurance (water bladder, headlamp, esoteric items). Items that soothed and cradled my ego, but in releasing these items I realized I'd never any real use for them in the first place as life didn't change at all with their disappearance. In fact, in letting go of aesthetic and comforting items, walking became easier, my body less stressed, and I even connected with myself in a deeper way, especially with the give-away of my esoteric items such as my dream journal and pendulum. Just as there is something oppressive about "the weight of possessions which have, in the final analysis, so little to do with the treasure that endures" (Barker, 2001, p. 65), so too does carrying emotional and spiritual baggage cover the lightness of our being, as was portrayed by my carrying the

immense weight of anger (like chainmail), betrayal (insoles of lead), guilt, fear, insecurity, self-loathing and sadness. I am thankful to my body's wisdom and its ability to not only alert me as to when I need to let go, but of where I need to let go, of where I store my pain and emotional burdens. In my psycho-emotional inventory I compare the likeness of the things that I did keep, or find I'd taken without even knowing, to light, airy elements and fabrics, such as a gold chain of trust, a silk chiffon scarf of magic, supple, yet durable, feather light shoes with which I can walk in the world more fluidly, and even gossamer wings of hope. This is an important insight because in the process of connection and disconnection in knowing, I can actually begin to decipher what does and does not serve me in relationship based on the weight and location of feelings in my body.

Letting go of World Weary Woman.

In our industrial society, work is regarded as that which gives real meaning to human life and is found to be closely connected to materialistic values (Parr, 2009), meaning our merit and sense of self-worth is externally sourced. World Weary Woman is a collective feminine archetype; the modern woman who, driven by materialistic values and ego, suffers deeply in her soul and has been working to earn her 'gold watch' by living a busy and disengaged, conservative life (Barker, 2001). She is a woman who exhibits a distinct complex when she senses a threat to something dear, it is hard for her to bring closure to what she values, for fear of the emptiness this might bring (Barker, 2001). This is a normal reaction for the ego, which is devastated when it loses anything because it identifies with everything in the physical world. To the egoic mind outward things are an extension of its self, and it feels a sense of loss when anything in the physical or emotional world leaves (LaRose, M, personal communication, June 6, 2013). It is, therefore, difficult for World Weary Woman to let go of relationships, even when painful. To do so seems to activate a deeper pain from which she distances herself. When it comes to suffering acute loss, the difficulty she experiences seems related to her excessive use of a busyness strategy which attempts to regain control, even though it is impossible. (Barker, 2001). It is, therefore

much easier to fill up our lives with additional activities, especially if they are touted as good for our mental and physical wellbeing, or to disengage entirely from meaningful engagements, than to accept the challenge of being at one with ourselves and our world (Parr, 2009, p. 91).

When reflecting on my story I see now that these dark, hidden aspects of World Weary Woman were secretly present in my initial intentions in preparing for The Camino. In part I was seeking to escape guilt, run from my fear of emptiness, and detach quickly and cleanly. Ha! That it could be so easy! In the beginning, I'd already come to see that I'd held onto my relationship with Gordon despite the fact that it wasn't healthy anymore and was having difficulty in managing my feelings about the separation. Despite trying to accept my feelings and acknowledge the pain I was in due to the separation, the planning of the trip kept me busy, kept me from really dealing with the breakup, only months gone by. I over packed, trying to read a future laced with my fears and, rather than deal with my emotional baggage, I just packed it up, too. I wanted to skip the pain of the present and move right into becoming. And then, like a cosmic joke, a universal test of resiliency, the betrayal of Sheila and Gordon, roommate and ex-husband, unfolded. It was as if the Universe was saying "if you really thought you could just walk away and when you return this will be all better, you're wrong, Kim. You have got to look at this, at your feelings for Gordon beyond the guilt. You will do your work. You will look at us. You want to really come into your beauty and shining? Then you have to learn to connect with your authentic self on a full time basis. And that means recognizing and dealing with pain and shame when they come up".

When World Weary Woman becomes fixed on her ambition, she loses perspective, leaving her disconnected from her feminine body wisdom and her creativity. This is a typical response to ambition driven by experiential avoidance and external materialistic values, which are directly associated with "increased levels of social avoidance, symptoms of depression, and global negative emotions; and decreased levels of positive well-being factors such as relatedness, competence, autonomy, gratitude, and the presence of meaning in life" (Parr, 2009, p. 82). These are also factors that are related to those dark places of shame and rejection that stem directly from one's inability to 'succeed' in our materialistic world, one's inability to be enough.

From a transpersonal perspective, diminished levels of positive well being factors are associated with a disruption or break of the modern person from the sacred dimensions of life and the tendency to

strongly focus on the externally motivated individual experience. Without an integrated understanding of the ethical and social meaning of our existence in the larger scheme of things the sacred and transformative qualities of our lives are diminished (Ferrer, 2000). With extreme focus on individual experience and personal merit based on materialistic values, isolation from the world occurs and the integration of heart, body, mind and spirit is undervalued and goes unfulfilled. It should come as no surprise, then, that materialistic values and experiential avoidance are directly related. The cycle is a vicious one, for materialism and experiential avoidance feed one another, and the subsequent negative well-being is therefore difficult to escape in a culture that bases its self-worth and quality of performance on quantity of work and degree of sacrifice in job performance (Parr, 2009).

A huge part of [World Weary Woman's] struggle pivots around an attitudinal shift with regard to what makes action useful and what makes it useless. Her lesson is one of discovering that busy activity which is unconnected to building intimacy with herself is the true idleness. If she is to redeem her suffering, she must learn how to meet her true self. From learning to build a friendship between her ego and true self, she can then meet others (Barker, 2001, p. 40-41).

The conditional life, with its demands to be and do what media driven society wants or expects, exhausts World Weary Woman and she knows it. Tired from disconnection from herself and others, she seeks a way of living creatively that allows her to express what awakens her heart. She is a seeker. It is this very soulful quest for further development of her personality that informs her progression. "World Weary Woman, then, by definition, is not content to live her life mechanically. She is willing to detach from who she has been, despite her fear, in order to discover who she is meant to be" (Barker, 2001, p. 28-29). This light side of World Weary Woman was coming into full expression ...*[t]he thrust, the longing of my light to shine, is real, I long to open to my true nature (December 17, 2011)*, and the final push in not only ending my marriage, but in choosing to walk The Way...*I'm travelling to Seville to start the Via de la Plata by myself in late April because it is to be a spiritual journey of healing and a path of self-discovery, especially of the barriers I harbour that keep me from authentic self love and forgiveness (February 18, 2012)*. And so it was in paradox (escape/quest) that World Weary Woman, in her dark and light aspects, partially guided me out into the world without Gordon.

Upon looking back I notice the walk didn't allow me to release my version of World Weary Woman in her entirety, as I still looked to escape my feelings for Gordon and our break up with Akwasi. However, I did come to appreciate the immense freedom from 'doing' that the Camino allowed. Santiago de Compostela may have been my final destination, but rather than focus on the outcome, I met each day with a new sense of wonder, excited to see what I would see in the ever-changing landscape of Spain. Gone was worry or pressure associated with deadlines, bills, plans and goals. There was no pressure to accomplish or achieve anything, to prove anything to anyone, and after my bought of tendonitis and coming to terms with what my body was capable of, there were no hard and fast rules to follow. Upon return World Weary Woman challenged me to recognize when I am living the conventional way, separated from myself, and then ask myself whether I am willing to resign from participation in the rat race. She asked me to consider what the true source of my self-worth is connected to. Her light aspects, too, were willing to take up the call to explore the Camino event and my role within it in a deeper way via reflection through this passionate project, which has heightened my creativity and assisted in me in understanding my true nature better.

Letting go of Mother.

In my journals I noted the following insight:

Nov 21, 2012

.... And I can't help but wonder if I'll ever find a partner that's not looking for a pseudo-mother? Why I'm drawn to men who are wounded? What does it mean to need and be needed? By repeating the pattern of mothering my partners I gain staying small. Not having to face my own potential because I justify my being on taking care of someone else. By playing the mother I think my life has meaning, that I am working in service...but I'm not. I'm holding two people back, I am enabling. I am assisting in keeping us from our opportunity for change and transformation. I am smothering. I want to let it go because I innately KNOW this, but there is something really powerful about needing to be needed. To need another is absolutely natural, this is what transpersonal theory is about. Seeing one's own self in another, empathy...interdependence, co-creation...but in romantic relationship I need to know when it doesn't serve me to serve another. I need to set boundaries. I live for service. I want and like to help others. But in order to assist others and to be safe space for them, an accepting other for them, to be compassionate, I need to take really good care of myself, too. Perhaps I've been afflicted by compassion fatigue in my relationships? Yes, likely.

I was truly surprised at the strength with which the Mother showed up again and again in my relationships with men and in my daydreams of having children and a home in the country. She, the

Mother - cherishing and nursing, helping, charitable, teaching - is not an archetype I had previously associated with, but upon further introspection and with insight into the Mother archetype, I see how her instinct to react to all that is in the process of becoming, or which is underdeveloped, in need of protection, in danger, or must be tended, cared for and assisted in another is wielded by me (Wolff in Barker, 2001).

The power of compassion and the endless capacity to forgive her children and put them before herself are essential to the Good Mother (Myss, 2001), and it is without condescension that I have supported and consolidated what is unaccomplished and in need of help in my past partners, and have provided them with a safe space for development and greater security. I see this compassionate side of the Mother displayed by me in my chronology very clearly in the paradoxical contrast between my personal journals and my public messages written around the time of the betrayal of Gordon and Sheila, which I'm privately struggling with while simultaneously keeping it from my friends and family, a secret drama going on in the background that very few actually know about. In my blogs I come back to the positive over and over again, refusing to let this news seep out. Who am I trying to protect? I asked myself. Me? - Did I want to appear better than I am? I did not want to let others know of Gordon's betrayal because I didn't want my departure to become a pity party. No 'poor Kim' before a great journey begins, instead I wanted to continue to proceed on my journey as the warrior they all believed me to be. I didn't want to come across as broken, or spiteful, or without integrity. It's true, I was embarrassed by it all. I am, after all, the one who invited Sheila into my home. I'm the one who was the bridge between her and Gordon and I felt angry with myself for not seeing it coming. I was also embarrassed for him, for acting out like he did, embarrassed for both of us. This man, who I'd loved so long, shaming me like that, at my own going away party, was something I wanted swept under the carpet. Was I protecting Gordon? Yes, I was as I didn't want to taint his reputation because no matter how awful I felt about what his actions, he was still my little boy. I was being empathetic, as well, because I knew he was in pain and being with Sheila was his way of lashing out at me...just like a child, only using very adult means of retaliation. I truly felt

that he had already suffered rejection at my doing, I didn't want to cause him further shame. Gordon is also human, capable of mistakes, able to lash out from a place of anger or hurt. It was like a big "fuck you, Kim. You get to go away and live your life while I'm here, looking after our house, our garden, and our dogs and I'm lonely and miss you and hurt so much! And you're going to leave again? Go on an adventure without me? Take that!" I believe that sub consciously Gordon just wanted me to hurt as much as he did and I understood that. I really did. And it broke my heart that he hurt so much. I couldn't retaliate by dragging down his name...he didn't deserve that, too. What he needed was compassion. Gordon wrote me on April 27, 2012, in regards to his actions at the party: *I am feeling very ashamed and guilty. I wish I could take back the hurt that I have caused you. I acted very selfish and I am truly sorry. Please forgive me.* In sensing Gordon's regret, remorse, and his shame I felt I was the only person who could alleviate that for him...and I wanted to. I wanted for both of us to be able to find forgiveness for the other. As time went on, I truly tried to find forgiveness in my heart for him, as is shown in this email I sent to Gordon...*I left very angry and hurt. You should be ashamed, I cannot understand why you did what you did when you did. It was an awful way to part. I don't know where you and I go from here, as this is new territory for us. I am trying to find forgiveness for you...you will have to give me time (May 1, 2012).* And, too, I was protecting my loved ones who love Gordon and I didn't want to see their relationship with him become riddled with drama or side taking after years of harmonious relations. I didn't want him to lose respect in their perspective because of an action that seemed so transparent to me.

The Devouring, Abusive, Abandoning, and Working Mother each represent different aspects of the Shadow Mother (Myss, 2001). In claiming the Mother as a personal archetype, I realized that the Shadow mother, too, must be manifested through me in some way, sometimes, so I went looking for signs of her in my chronology and found her, not necessarily exerting her power and characteristics over others, but over me! Consider the dream I had on May 11, 2012, in which *I am secretly engaging in changing the way I feel, moving towards positive feelings and wanting to be friendly and intimate with others, despite the Great Mother aspect of myself, being stern or overly watchful about how much or even if I change.* My version of the Shadow

Mother is the mother who punishes herself for not being a Perfect Mother and who resists the pull of authenticity for fear that she will let others down and fail them in some way. Lurking in the shadow of fear of failure is my fear of rejection and shame, keeping me small, keeping me objectified, keeping me from my beauty and shining.

I also learned that, although Mothers have always worked, the contemporary archetype of the Career or Working Mother reflects the crises experienced by many women who seek also to be Devoted Mothers, as I did. "Measured against the impossible mythic ideal of the Perfect Mother the Career Mom is sometimes assumed unfairly to be a mother who puts her own needs before those of the children. This is an archetypal crisis for many women" (Myss, 2001, p. 401) and this understanding resonated strongly with me, as is demonstrated in this journal entry:

Monday, May 13, 2013

The Mother. Wow. This archetype is big for me...I'd never seen it before. I thought, while I read through this chronology again and again, that I might be seeing the Rescuer...but it's the dream of having a Mother figure monitor my actions and desire to change that brought it home for me. The Mother. And I think that the crisis of the Working Mother may be what I've experienced in my marriage since I applied to go to school, to stretch myself, to seek out my strengths and potential. If, in the past, I've taken it upon myself to care for and nurture men whose personal relationships with their own mothers were cut short, in seeking to further myself, I've suffered a crisis in believing that I wasn't properly caring for my partners due to outdated standards. Perhaps my guilt was as poignant as it was because I felt I was abandoning Gordon. That word, abandon, cuts me, triggers me, brings tears to my eyes. I give thanks for this deeply meaningful insight today, because now I can really begin to work with this archetype and turn my patterns in relationship around for myself.

As is common with the Mother, I found fulfilment in my relationships with men who needed protection, help and development by endeavouring to strengthen them and offer them security (Wolff in Barker, 2001). But, sadly, in doing so, I was not so much being needed for who I was as for the function I served. Rather than nourish my own uniquely creative spirit in a way that brings it to life and sustains it, I felt cut off, estranged, and sought to fill this void by mothering orphaned men who were not mine to mother. Rather than nourishing and caring for the 'one little egg' that was mine, I turned to orphaned men because in doing so at least I felt needed (Barker, 2001, p. 125).

As I have come to know the presence of the Mother archetype in my personality, I see how the Camino and this autoethnography has helped to flourish my own creative spirit as I address the Mother within myself. The Camino gave me an excellent opportunity to learn what it is to take care of and nurture myself and come into connection with my body and my intuition. Through my walk along the Via de la Plata Way I have been given the opportunity to step into a project that explores my deepest facets and gives me a voice. I have been able to come into fuller expression and this thesis is my opportunity to nurture, to teach, to demonstrate my ability to care for others through a healthy medium. I feel I am creating something beautiful in this thesis, not just in its presentation, but in the shift that is also happening within me. This work is my inner Mother as life-giver, source of nurturing and nourishment, unconditional fountain of love, patience, devotion, caring, and unselfish acts for self (Myss, 2001). The Mother is also forgiving and forgiveness can sometimes be an extraordinary feat, in my experience; but in working with the light aspects of the Mother, perhaps it can become an easier act. I was able, after all, to find forgiveness for Gordon, as was demonstrated in our separation ceremony, and I feel very relieved by it- carrying anger and resentment is so very burdensome. I have also had the opportunity to wield the gift of forgiveness with myself through this process, for wielding the Shadow Mother. This means that my pursuit of creativity is in itself an act of resistance to my continued reproduction of mothering my partners *and* that I can release guilt associated with the Working/Abandoning Mother archetype. In my ability to resist, I have an opportunity to return to my own way of being. No longer will I replicate my inner wound of caring for others without cultivating my own dreams. No more will I abandon the new life which grows from my now-conscious suffering. No further will I continue jumping over hurdles the outer world has set and allow sheer busyness to keep me sufficiently exhausted so that I fail at my true task (Barker, 2001, p. 125) - that of exploring and knowing my authentic self.

Letting go of Shadow Lover.

The Lover Archetype includes unbridled affection for and appreciation of someone or something that influences the organization of one's life and environment. Passionate enthusiasm and/or romantic

love plays a dominant role in the overall design of one's life, self-worth, and self-esteem, which is its strongest link to the psyche (Myss, 2001). The Lover is connected to issues of self-esteem because this archetype is so strongly represented by one's physical appearance. Even if one has the Lover archetype prominently in their psyche, they may repress this pattern out of a lack of self-esteem, especially regarding their physical attractiveness. Shadow Lover manifests as an exaggerated or obsessive passion that has a destructive effect on one's physical or mental health and self-esteem (Myss, 2001).

A primary pattern that arises often in the chronology is my attraction to and receiving attention from various men I met on the trail. In leaving Gordon and putting myself *out there*, I have entered into an intense paradox in my life that show up in my multiple brief and intense intimate relationships on the Camino, one directly related to Shadow Lover and that I believe to be an epidemic for women - that of looking to others for approval, looking outside myself for love and requiring reassurance of my physical attractiveness while simultaneously striving for sovereignty and empowerment. According to Young-Eisendrath (1999), women want to be wanted, not to be loved. That is, women seek to be desirable rather than to be fully known (Young-Eisendrath, 1999, p. 1).

My brief relationship with Akwasi is a very evocative example of my desire to be desired. In his powerful approach to win my affection and attention, he made me feel quite beautiful and desired. The intensity of our lovemaking and the way he explored and seemed to appreciate my body as it was was incredible to me. As I've said many times throughout the chronology, I honestly had no idea that I was as attractive as men seemed to find me on The Way. My body esteem, once low, I see now, was in a state of transition and not stable. The bodily transformation that was occurring due to walking had me feeling very differently towards my body and much more conscious of how it moved and felt for me. I'd not been approached by any person sexually but Gordon for eleven years and to be so eagerly seduced by Akwasi surprised, scared and delighted me simultaneously. My ego became swept up in my pre-occupation of Akwasi, with his sculpted body, unique look, Ghana accent and a smile as big as the sky, and the way he made me feel about my body and sexuality - like a complete knockout. After finishing the Camino and returning to Canada from Paris, Akwasi and I remained in contact for the summer, Skyping often and

writing emails back and forth. His visa to Canada was denied due to finances and so we decided I'd travel to Santiago de Compostela again in the Fall for a romantic holiday. Our 'romantic holiday' unfolded in a way I could never have predicted:

...when I landed in Santiago I was awakened to entirely new Akwasi. This Akwasi said he loved me, but wished I would cut my hair and dye it platinum blonde. This Akwasi told me when to shower, or how to dress, that I must wear slippers in the house, that I must never be caught in a position where I may bring shame on myself or him, like not wearing a bra underneath my t-shirt when I get up to pee in the morning, just in case one of his roommates or friends see me. This Akwasi told me to pull my shoulders back, and to try specific exercises for certain areas of my body. This Akwasi thought he owned my body and could do as he pleased with it. Not that I took any of this. I retaliated. I rebutted. I rebuffed. It got into my brain anyway and suddenly I knew I would never be enough for him (November 30, 2012).

Wanting to be wanted is about finding our power in an image rather than in our own actions. This arrangement "undermines women's self-direction, self-confidence, and self-determination in that other people are expected to provide us with a sense of our own feelings of power, worth, or vitality, at the expense of our authentic development" (Young-Eisendrath, 1999, p. 2). I found this to be true, in that Akwasi had a very narrow picture of the role I would play in his life, that of wife and mother - to him and the children he so desperately wanted. He knew I wanted to continue school, but he was not actually interested in what I was studying. We didn't engage in conversations about my work or its effect on me. He really had no idea of my incredible intellectual potential or my drive to create. I was only showing him the parts of me he wanted to see - the aspects of self that were non-threatening to his ego. Again, I was objectifying myself, staying under the radar of greatness, because I wanted to be wanted. However this, in turn, caused me to feel resentful, frustrated, out of control and with no clear sense of self because I had sacrificed my real needs and desires in order to be seen in a positive light by Akwasi (Young-Eisendrath, 1999). It was a feeling that was all too familiar, and in a way, crueller than had been my experience with Gordon. The shame I felt upon being coerced into hiding my potential again in order to meet the needs of the other ate at me. I'd broken my own heart. I'd fooled myself. I wanted to blame Akwasi, but I innately knew that this had been my 'fault', that I'd chosen to close off to my personal truth. Upon returning home again, I broke up with Akwasi within two weeks. I have discovered that letting go of being the object of desire and coming into being the subject of our own desire is difficult work because so often our beliefs

about ourselves have been passed on, inherited, and perpetuated by societal expectations and stereotypes of gender empowerment. This is a pattern that is going to take consistent practice, consistent remembering.

As I began to stretch myself and understand my potential, as World Weary Woman is want to do, I walked out into the world, seeking. From the stance of the Shadow Lover, coming into my own sense of aesthetic beauty but still struggling with self-esteem issues, I was approached by Akwasi, an Orphaned Child, who made me feel desirable. I then moved into the role of the Good Mother, where I made myself indispensable to him by filling the mother gap, which didn't depend on my aesthetic beauty, and fulfilled my desire to feel needed and his need to feel unconditionally loved and taken care of. And when I couldn't be a Good Mother to Gordon or Akwasi anymore I suffered the crisis of the Working Mother, seemingly abandoning her man-children for her own selfish gains. Despite how vulnerable I am made by the awareness that these archetypes, in their shadow and light aspects, are a part of me; I now have the opportunity to unlearn these patterns and embrace and wield aspects of my true nature in new and more constructive ways. When I act according to my authentic self I make transparent my shortcomings in a way that arouses compassion. I no longer have to hide in shame or be ambiguous about my story because of guilt. In order to see myself as naked, warts and all, and not be ashamed, to acknowledge my weaknesses and know that they open me to being loved by others, I have to engage my own choices again and again (Young-Eisendrath, 1999). These are deeply ingrained relational patterns that I have been learning and engaging in for a long time! It will take my ever-increasing awareness to assist me in attracting and approaching a new kind of sexual, intimate relationship into my life. That being said, there are new intentions to be set and embodied emotions to be aware of in order to unlearn and release old patterns and allow new understandings and patterns to take root and flourish. And while we explored what it is to feel an embodied sense of connection and disconnection with others, I will now offer my insights into what it is to experience letting go of relationships that no longer serve in order to open to mystery and magic in life.

Negotiating emotion of endings and opening to mystery and magic.

'The Plan' is far bigger than us, far greater than we can imagine, in the light of universal synchronization. If we pull back and look at all the elements that came together on my journey we see The Camino itself as a finely tuned, universally crafted transpersonal participatory event with mystery and magic intricately woven into every facet of my journey. The Mystery that is universal synchronization appeared to me in many magical ways while on the Via de la Plata Way. Remember Paco, my heaven sent angel in Zafra? Or the Castille y Leon regional truck that pulled up while I prayed for someone to help José and me find our way when in doubt? Or when I just happened to find that single room in Paris? Or even meeting José, my Camino soulmate, or any of the pilgrims that touched my heart in some way, really. All of the perfect mirrors were drawn towards me, helping me see who I am and where I'm at. The Camino beckoned me; it was a journey that I was magnetized to. Hope for magic is the driver behind many of the risks I took along the way and played a part in motivating me to go to Spain, while the Mystery provided me with everything I could have possibly needed just when I needed it. Mystery and magic are woven into all of the liminal spaces that are the environment (the magic forest, the eerie monastery, the majestic mountains), my dreams, the chemistry between two people when sparks fly, and the willingness to be vulnerable.

I believe the universe conspires on my behalf, that I attract everyone I meet to me and that the other always has something to teach me. When I declare readiness for change I will attract those who will test my word. Not wanting to let go of the liminal experience of the Camino, I met and held onto Akwasi in hopes of it never ending and that's when the flow actually stopped. Things stopped being easy in the holding on and suddenly it felt as though I had another tremendous responsibility in my feelings for him. Just at that moment when I was on the precipice of change and of understanding my true desire to be sovereign, I slipped back into the comfort zone of what was familiar to me, mothering. I had one last humbling moment of trying on the old, only to find it really did not fit me anymore. And it's okay to slip up, I trust another test will come wandering around the corner so that I can try again (and again, and again, if need be) at another time, until I am able to undo old patterns, push beyond comfort, take risks in

moments of vulnerability and move into a place of authenticity. This is the way of mystery and magic, of universal synchronization. I believe setting clear intentions and coming into awareness so I can see in the other the messages and lessons that are meant for me is a key aspect to this process. Intention, in this liminal realm of developing new patterns, is highly important as a form of manifestation and resistance, of dreaming into our lives relationships that serve, rather than keep us stuck. We will know when we have found such relationships with others when we feel comfortable to *be*, when we accept living in a vulnerable way, which is truly magical. This being said, I am grateful for my relationships, always, no matter the outcome, for the other is my teacher.

Letting go is a two way process. I may be attached to someone or something; someone or something may be attached to me; or, perhaps, it is a mutual attachment. When the other has difficulty letting go, anger sometimes helps us get the job done, what needs to be said, said. Anger lends a surge of strength that protects me from the harm I am about to inflict in the moment (which will come back to haunt me another day, to be sure, but for now...). Anger can swiftly cut the ties that bind. Before catching my flight I needed anger to bolster me just to make the transition from home to Spain. The public arena (i.e. the airport) wasn't an appropriate place for me to deal with my intense sadness and feelings of betrayal and I needed anger to simply function, to level my emotions so that I could appear as 'normal'. But anger is still an illusion, hiding the pain that goes much deeper, the pain that would just tear at my heart and bring me to my knees in vulnerability if I allow it to surface; but I can't do that, I tell myself. I won't show my vulnerability to the other who I see as the cause or source of pain. The one who broke my trust, the one who rejected me. Trust is what it so often comes down to. Vulnerability is for the trusted only! No, to deal with the monster that is betrayal, one needs to be a monster and anger is armour for battle. And sometimes it even wins the war, but the pain remains. When the other won't let go, guilt surfaces because there is feeling of abandoning the other. Leaving another against their will is a horrible feeling, like pushing away a small child clinging to their mothers robes crying "don't leave me mommy! Who will take care of me?" The other perceives that their life won't be as happy and secure as it could be if I stayed. It is a tremendous responsibility to be the source of another's happiness and security and to lay

that burden down can feel like leaving behind a limb. However, as Burt (the telephone counsellor, remember him?) had explained to me, guilt is an emotion that is associated with consciously doing something that is morally or ethically questionable or that purposely hurts another. With past lessons learned in my relationship with Gordon, it is now my responsibility to discern when guilt is actually a misinterpreted sense of grief and take the time to mourn and release.

Humans, in our depth and breadth, are mysterious beings. I am continuously learning about myself and the mystery of the men I met along The Way pulls me to want to know about the other because they are a reflection of myself in some way. In understanding, or exploring the depth and mystery of oneself, the depth and mystery of the other becomes a draw. I like to explore with all of my senses, including the psychic, energetic realms and resonance in vibration is a magical embodied reaction. With the charge of lightening-like energy that rushes down my spine comes, too, a sense that there is magic at work. That the Mystery has choreographed this event for some reason. It feels like fate at work. In this instance, to miss my chance at deepened connection, to fail to respond vulnerably to the magic felt, is unacceptable. No What if's. Into the mystery I go, no sense of where I'll end up. All I know is that if I don't do it, I'll never know if the magic was awaiting me or not. Better to get hurt and take the time to get over it, rather than hold a feeling of doubt and regret about it for who knows how long.

With an awareness of the archetypes I wield in relationships, in their light and shadow aspects, I see patterns I need to let go of and am better able to navigate the dynamic process of connection and disconnection in relationships. Mystery and magic help me to naturally and spontaneously participate in the deeper, sacred dimensions of life. The knowing of my archetypes and trust in the mystery and magic of universal synergy help me to integrate other into the identity of self, fostering acceptance of self and other. With this knowing I have an opportunity to participate in the co-creation of transpersonal phenomena more harmoniously in my day to day life in a genuinely transformative process, which brings us into Arai's final stage of the cycle of empowerment, contribution.

Reflections on Contribution to Being

The final stage of empowerment, that of *contribution*, is described by Arai (1997) as the integration of the skills, knowledge and resources acquired in the previous stages into everyday life. In a transpersonal framework, manoeuvring through the liminal realms of vigilant awareness through intention and body wisdom, connecting and disconnecting with and from others, and mobilizing to change, then engaging in meaningful reflection of those stages allows us to walk more authentically in the world in this final stage of contribution. To integrate the attributes of awareness and knowing that we have explored up until now with all that I learned while on The Camino and in the process of writing this paper, the stage of contribution in a transpersonal framework, I see, is actually about moving into a state of reflection and being, rather than planning and doing. Reflecting on the prior stages of empowerment in order to move into contribution to being helps to move me beyond the limits of the prevalent understanding of transpersonal and spiritual phenomena in terms of individual inner experience and opens me to the divine choreography of life that embraces a multilocal way of knowing which strongly supports the experience of feeling like one belongs and is accepted and able to contribute to community, as is associated with this stage of empowerment (Arai, 1997). It is a movement into wider social and cultural concerns and embracing spiritual pluralism, acknowledging that we each have our own unique way of being, for when we make the effort to peer beyond what we already know, our appreciation of the richness of our spiritual path will open us to a more diverse, compassionate, multifaceted route steeped in magic and mystery. At the heart of feminist liminality, the space between the perpetuation and resistance of dominant ways of being and living based on the dominant societal expectations of gendered roles, is the death of old patterns, plans, and ways of doing in order to deepen intimacy with self and others through being. Knowing self makes us naturally want to explore the depths of our relationships with others and to attract others who are willing to explore their depths as well. The act of connecting deeply is vulnerable, yet empowering, because both individuals feel safe to be who they are, opening a sacred space of allowing authentic being in relationship.

Moving from a state of doing into a state of being in reflection is a transformational shift. In coming into being I have learned that there are certain nuances of difference between ego driven doing and authentic being that must be explored in order to continuously discern between the two that include the cycles of death and rebirth, the roles of risk and vulnerability, and the contrasting pull between illusion and authenticity and of illusion and dreamtime. All of these themes are interconnected, overlapping and influence and change each other. They couldn't exist without each other, replicating the organic, cyclical nature of empowerment itself.

Understanding death and rebirth in transformation.

I began to note that loss is not the end, but has the capacity to transform. In the hole suffering brings, an opening is made, not unlike a well. Such a place within World Weary Woman's psyche is nothing less than a birthing passageway: through death comes life anew (Barker, 2001, p. 20).

I was completely aware of my drive to transform from the beginning, in making the decision to leave Gordon, and in the planning of and preparation for my journey. In my poem, 'The Light' (Dec 11, 2011) I write of the angst of not being able to contain my potential and of having to leave another behind in the understanding that transformation is occurring in me and I want it to unfold. The immense sadness enmeshed with the longing to shine is a space I clearly recognize as liminal...*[s]ifting ground crumbles structures*. In Pre-Camino Jitters, I aim for my walk *to be a spiritual journey of healing and a path of self-discovery, especially of the barriers I harbour that keep me from authentic self love and forgiveness* (Feb 18, 2012). I am ready to die to one way of being and knowing and to be born anew. I also suspect that the path to self-discovery may be made easier with the help of others, a suspicion that independence is not all it's about on the path to sovereignty...*do I want to cover that distance day after day almost completely alone for 6 or 7 weeks? In a country where I'll have only a minimal grasp of the language and, therefore, be at risk of feeling alone even when surrounded by the local people? Is this going to be healthy for me? Am I capable of total independence, or even desire that?* (Feb 18, 2012)

Notice the anxious, buzzing, hurried tone of Pre-Camino Jitters... *I need to write myself down* compared to To Be In My Power (March 6, 2012) which feels very grounded, calm and radiates grace, has an overall air of allowance, response-ability, approachability, accessibility, as well as a perceptible

but malleable boundary in place that claims and protects my space. Notice, too that Pre Camino Jitters is written around a future event while To Be In My Power is written in the present tense. The ego is never in the present moment of here and now, but always in the future or the past. To move consciousness in the present moment is experienced as death to the egoic mind so it fights it and always will. I see now that self doubt in the face of transformation signifies the ego's fear of death. Fear lives in the egoic mind. If I allow my intuition and heart to guide me, what does the ego's role become? It doesn't want to die. "If you fight the ego it will always win. The only way to overcome the ego is through quiet observation without a need to change a thing" (M. LaRose, personal communication, June 6, 2013). I cherish To Be In My Power as very special soul-speak to reflect upon; it is a strong prayer of manifestation for me and how I want to feel all the time. However, I also give thanks to the my bout of self doubt in the initial passage, for it was that egoic insight captured by way of creative writing and gleaned through reflection that alerted me to my fears in a clear way and is the reason I was able to work through it with the shamanic healer. My creativity, my writing, is a liminal state where I oft find clues and sometimes even have the odd revelation about who I really am, what my purpose is, and how much I am truly loved by the universe. It is a place for manifesting dreams and giving thanks for prayers already manifested. Creative expression gives me a channel through which I can more easily access and contribute to the collective conscious, co-creating in an aware, committed and meaningful way.

Upon returning home and re-connecting with family and friends it became obvious that I had made a major shift from self-doubt and fear into a sense that all things are possible. I felt connected to everything, yet simultaneously disconnected from everything. It's the strangest sensation, to feel a part of the Mystery, to know that you're truly one with everything, provided with everything you ask for, and that anything is possible if you have hope in magic, the courage to take risks and trust in the moment -- and not have other people be in that head/heart/soul space. You know you're connected to the other, but others aren't there, or have been there and forgotten, and so there's this sense of being disconnected from others because they don't know what you know. It becomes up to me and my ability to respond in each moment to be able to continue to live feeling connected and engaged with the Mystery. My exchange with Bruce,

my roommate, was a really good example of this. I could completely relate to what he was experiencing, my empathy and life experience made that information accessible to me; but I was asking him to stretch to meet me where I was at, too, perhaps unfairly. I don't know. On the Camino a sense of all things possible is alive and palpable. It's difficult to come back to a society that is disconnected from itself and fearful, driven by materialistic values and engaging actively in experiential avoidance. And it's admittedly difficult to maintain a mindset of "all things possible" once re-immersed in it. But it *is* possible, the memory is there to resort to, when you can remember to resort to it. Again, when learning new patterns we have to practice knowing the new things that we know over and over and over and over....

The act of sex was an occasion of both death and rebirth, of transformation, for me on The Way. I'm not convinced that it was coincidence that brought the acknowledgement of holding anger, needing to stop and rest my ankle, and engaging in sex with Maalik together. My body demanded I release Gordon, who was still holding on to me. There could be no more attachment, no more anger, and I needed to not only mentally and emotionally surrender, I needed bodily release. With Maalik there was no issue of attachment, and he was sexy and thought I was sexy too. Our connection was playful, sexual, and Zafra became a threshold space for us, with no one we knew around to bear witness to our affair, not approved of by my friends, so secret. And the night did reveal itself in magical ways while winding our way arm in arm through the narrow, cobbled streets of Zafra, singing to the pale white moon in our harmonious alto and baritone. Street performers captivated the crowd with their antics and acrobatics. Wine flushed our cheeks and warmed us against the night air. With the act of communicating with Maalik exactly what both of us expected from this relationship I was practicing the setting of boundaries, while attempting to energetically break ties with the others. It was a well-choreographed occasion for which I am thankful.

Embracing risk and vulnerability in transformation.

Tuesday, July 2nd, 2013

Into the starry bowl I gaze, into the mystery.

Love. Love is what I am, I see, because it's reflected back to me.

To be love is to be vulnerable you say? A safe space for all to come and play?

Well it's not a secret, no, I'd rather shout...being vulnerable? I know what that's about!

It's a magical potion, a spell from the Heart, a form of chemistry!

Hope of magic, courage to risk, trust in the moment...

this is my path to vulnerability.

The dedication I have to following my curiosity is poignant in my story as a peregrina. Many questions guide me as clues towards my authentic self along the route, but I think 'What if?' is particularly prominent. What if? is a question that I perceive as a double edged sword. In my story I see that it has the potential to take me out of the present, into the future and eat at my self-confidence causing self-doubt... *And what if I injure myself out there alone? What if I run out of water and fall ill due to dehydration? What if I feel threatened by a man? So many "what ifs."* (Feb. 18, 2012). On the other hand, when What if? is dealt with in the moment, in relationships, there is empowerment in going for what I want without fear of rejection and sharing my feelings without shame, as I did with Santo when I found him at the restaurant after departing from José... *Thank-you Great Spirit, for helping me to manifest my dreams! I found Santo! It was a bit of a hunt, and took me places I wouldn't have otherwise gone, but it was worth it!* (June 1, 2012). My willingness to tell him that I had come to Santiago in part to seek him out empowered me and made him feel special, a graceful reception of my vulnerability, which I enjoyed and felt good about, so empowered me further. The first kiss between two people is, itself, a What if? and there is an element of risk and vulnerability in the act, as it was between Santo and me. This kiss changes everything in a felt energetic way and it's somewhat uni-dimensional in that, once you cross the bridge over the liminal realm between platonic and intimate, it's a tough one to cross back over. The kiss, then, is also a liminal realm where the truth about the energetic resonance between two people will be revealed, the undoable transition from platonic to intimate relations made, or not.

One of my most vulnerable moments in my story was my email to Placido, the man I walked into Santiago de Compostela with. I knew the moment we parted that I was not comfortable with the energy that was left between us. Something had turned, a break in resonance. And I knew that was not the true nature between us, that intuitively our vibrations had held something high, a respect, a

curiosity, a shared empathy; there had been small, but perceptible openings between us over a few short days and the break was unsettling. I knew that evening that I would write the message that I did to him, I wanted to repair the fracture immediately. I felt it was worth the effort, that the brief connection we had was valuable and needed to be honoured. And even if he never replied, the compassion in the words themselves, I knew, would shift something in our energetic frequency, even from a distance. And I was gifted, again, with a compassionate response...*Thank you for all the beautiful words you sent in your mail (June 11, 2012)*. I end my email to Placido with the following sentiment: *Be well. Take good care of your heart. Fear not vulnerability, for it will bring magic into your life (June 6, 2012)* and I want to honour the connection between magic and vulnerability as I understand it. Vulnerability and the magical guidance it provides to get to the heart of the matter can only enhance all relationships, with others and self. When fear is allowed to fall to the wayside, even for a moment, and truths are communicated, the energetic bridges that can be built between myself and another is incredible. To let fear go is vulnerable, courageous, and makes way for magic to flood in. It goes beyond a physical connection with another. It touches the heart, it stirs memories in the soul. It lays it out simply: This is who I am. Can you accept me for who I am? It is a powerful act in that it is actually a momentary handing over of my power to another and it is based on trust because, when they have my power, my heart, in their hands, they can wield it in any way they want. What will you do with my power, my heart? And this is what makes vulnerability terrifying - the risk that the other might be so scared of having my heart in their hands, that they reject it. And there you have it. Either my heart is on the ground, or they're handing it back to me. Both hurt. A lot. That's the risk that comes with being vulnerable. And rejection's a bitch because it often causes me to think there's something wrong with me, then shame sets in because suddenly I am not good enough, will I ever be enough? and I find myself spiralling into self-deprecating madness. AHHHH. Stop.

The reason being vulnerable is worth risk is the polar side of the rejection situation. Magic. The dream, not illusion, the dream coming into manifestation, certainly never the way we expect it

to, is magical! And what drives our capacity to pursue Magic? Hope. *The hope for Magic provides the courage we muster to risk being vulnerable.* Because the flip side of my heart being on the floor is that the other is able to hold my power, my heart, even for a moment, with grace and appreciation of the gift they've been offered. Being seen and accepted for just who I am, where I am at is worth the risk of rejection. Every time. Magic and a heightened sense of empowerment will live in that space between people who accept each other. In this way, empowerment is gained because of the acceptance of the other. That being said, if I am not loved for who I am, where I am at, by another, than it is up to me to do it for myself and not subject myself to the "Am I enough?" game, to let the relationship go, as I had to do with Akwasi. In this way, empowerment, is sourced from both within and without. And this is important because as a mirror for others *when I sit in the space of I Am Enough I am assured that those that I attract to myself will innately understand they are enough.* When together, then, we can bolster and nurture our mutual enoughness, creating a spiritual connection of acceptance between us that has the potential to grow to invite others into that circle of being; the potential to create a transpersonal event based on spiritual pluralism, the multiplicity of our authentic selves. Accepting myself for who I am where I am at, then, becomes an act of resistance to the relentless pursuit of *doing* in order to *become*.

I must acknowledge, too, the environment and its role in risk and vulnerability. In good weather the more challenging the terrain, the more liberated I felt. When I am alone or a part of a dyad in nature with no assistance nearby, and find myself in a setting of increased risk (and therefore vulnerable), such as manoeuvring steep and slippery inclines or declines, or crossing rocky, swift flowing rivers, my senses become fully alive and heightened. My whole body becomes aware, mind sharp, intuition keen. There is a body, mind, spirit, and relational integration that occurs and I am in the moment, knowing where my foot will land next, supporting the knee at this angle, shifting the weight of my pack to maintain balance...and I trust myself, my whole self, and I trust the earth to hold me. It becomes play between me and the energy of place in a very present way that heightens my senses and permits me to soar! There is also vulnerability involved in situations of risk when I am

nearing exhaustion and the terrain is still demanding my full attention, as well. To acknowledge my limitations and know when to stop, when to rest, when to stop pushing is, in essence, surrendering myself to what is and saying, I'm uncertain of my ability to do this right now, and that is a vulnerable stance to take with self and others. To admit that I am incapable of something in the moment, though, is freeing. It moves me beyond the societal expectation of pushing and achieving in order to be seen as independent and worthy of acceptance. When I become comfortable with my strengths and limitations and accept myself for who I am, I see that the environment does not hold those societal constraints over me and so, in our mutual interdependence, I have nothing to prove.

Discerning illusion and authenticity in transformation.

This piece and its relevance to women and how we come to know something is very important because women have so long be manipulated and lead by patriarchal views and opinions of femininity! I believe we have to learn to trust ourselves, our body wisdom, our intuition, our dreams, and our ability to manifest to guide us. In our skewed perceptions of wanting to be desired we have allowed our intuitive knowing to take a back seat to the illusion of what it is we think we want (to be wanted), rather than following our hearts true desire.

My body, intuition, and dreams know illusion from authenticity...though I think both can shift, that the liminal space between the two is slippery terrain. In retrospect, I didn't feel the spark of attraction between Akwasi and me like I felt it between Santo and me, or Placido and me. I knew my relationship with Maalik was mostly sexual, the boundaries were pretty clear and there would be no continuation of a relationship once we parted... no illusion of an authentic, romantic relationship. I had no inclination of what was to unfold with Akwasi. I felt a more friendly vibe with Akwasi, like he just needed someone to talk to and I could provide him with an interested and empathetic ear. I felt he was attractive, but there was no precognition of romance there for me, his sudden advance a complete surprise, forced, an assertive move into my space without permission, without checking in. I never trusted that the attraction Akwasi seemed to have for me was truly authentic. I had no doubt, though, with Santo and Placido. My

heart would jump when my eyes met theirs. I knew they were scared, but there was no doubt they found me attractive and interesting. It was the fear that made it real. How? Because if you can imagine love coming to you, you can also imagine it moving away from you. If you can gain love from another, you can also lose it....and that's a very real possibility on the Camino, where everyone eventually leaves to go back to where they came from. And the fear becomes amplified when you know what it is, how painful it is, to lose or let go of someone you loved, especially when that pain was experienced only months before, as was my experience, and Placido's, too. That's what made the situation with Akwasi particularly surreal...I hadn't a clue that I should have been afraid and then, all of a sudden, I was! Very scared! I felt the situation had opened up into something beyond my control. My body hadn't picked up on his feelings for me, my intuition hadn't picked up on them, something was off. I didn't trust Akwasi's intentions. I knew his declaration was an illusion, in my heart. Coming off of my Camino high, though, I was hopeful for magic, I was courageous and willing to take a risk, I was willing to say yes and figure the rest out later, and I really wanted the illusion of Akwasi to be my storybook ending. When I really reach in my heart I see I didn't want the magic of the Camino to end. What won me over was my ego's desire (Akwasi objectified as a sex symbol, a prized possession) and my inner Mother's need to be needed. Because I felt anything was possible, I also felt a bit like a warrior, so was prepared to do just about anything to work through it. I was in a vulnerable, liminal place. And in the back of mind...What if?

Discerning illusion and dreamtime in transformation.

"How do you distinguish between fantasies and dreams?" He gave me that grin I had become accustomed to. "You know the difference. We all do - deep in here." He patted his chest. "Fantasies can affect us strongly, but we don't want them to come true - we just want to experience them vicariously. Dreams work to change our lives. We convince ourselves that we can't discriminate, all the while knowing perfectly well that we can. Did I really want to make love with that woman? Yes, but not just that. What I wanted was to live with her, to marry her. My problem was I didn't give that dream the energy it deserved. Once she married another, I should have been content with the fantasies and recognized them for what they were. You see, because we are all branches of the same tree, we vibrate to each other's dreams. By giving our dreams energy we empower them to happen, and the next thing we know - poof, there we are." (Perkins, 1994, p. 99).

The difference between illusion and dreamtime is that illusion is linked to escapism, a facade and distraction while dreamtime is an active form of manifesting our heart's true desire. Illusion is linked to

ego and there is already a strong attachment to what will be, to the future outcome; while dreamtime is soul speak, the revealing of true desire motivated by that which serves the greater good. My relationship with Akwasi is the perfect example of illusion, in that I wanted to remain distracted from my pain due to my separation from Gordon *and* I became attached to the outcome of the relationship, rather than the process. Attaching myself to Akwasi wasn't about change at all - it was about remaining exactly the same, resorting to what I knew and was comfortable with, entangled in the shadow aspects of Mother and Lover archetypes. Self care is intricately connected to the concepts of illusion and dreamtime, including recognizing and accepting our shadow characteristics. The more I look after my holistic well being and practice awareness, the less I resort to the illusion and instead, am more likely to look to myself, to my heart and soul, where dreams are given a true voice, for the answers, for guidance. If I allow myself to come face to face with and acknowledge the shadow, I am then situated to assist others in looking at their shadow selves and in giving others permission to heal and manifest new patterns. I also become more accepting of the shadow side of others and empathy and acceptance are more easily expressed. Others become a mirror in this process and I look to them for clues about where I am at and what I am manifesting in my life. Who walks beside me? What is their vibration like? What are they mirroring for me? In hindsight I see that in acknowledging the mirror that was Placido was actually where I was at and that he wasn't ready for a relationship...*[h]e wants to heal, he's here on a mission, like me, to chew on what happened and find his place in the world as a single person again after years of being someone else's other half and they yours (June 8, 2012)*, was a missed opportunity to ask myself, then, "Am I ready for a relationship?"

There is not only difference in the way illusion and dreamtime are expressed, there is also a tremendous difference in how illusion and dreams manifest. Illusion says pay attention to me! You want me, come and get me! Chase me! There is a quickening, a sense of forcing, of pushing, rather than flowing. Urgency and illusion are related, and this was apparent, too, with Akwasi. I did 'jump in with both feet' (June 8, 2012) and we started the paperwork process for his visa immediately, rather than cultivating intimacy based on trust. Dreaming, on the other hand, is more a patient practice. There is no need to rush, it unfolds in its own time, in synch with mine, naturally. Illusion comes with a price and is

not simple. Dreams unfold with ease, seemingly supported by the universe and, while I still have to do the walking, signs always appear to give me direction when I walk in awareness.

When I have established that what I want is a dream and not an illusion then I have learned, as Perkins (1994) encourages, to give the dream energy to manifest into reality:

Constantly bring your dream out into the light of day. Think about it, meditate and journey on it. Talk about it with everyone you meet. Shout it out. Share it with the Earth, the sky, the clouds, the sun and moon, and with all the plants, animals, and minerals of the Earth. Give it voice and song! If people tell you it is a foolish or impossible dream," he continued, "immediately correct them. Reverse their negativity by insisting that it is a dream that must and will happen. Never allow anyone to take the energy your of your dream by weighing it down with negativity or doubt...[E]nter [the dream] with all your senses, a world after your dream has come true. Experience that world over and over - a hundred times a day. Feel it, see it, hear, taste, and smell it. Understand with every part of your existence the wonders and pleasures of your dream fulfilled...Direct your energies, your incredible power, toward positive dreams, ones that bring true prosperity to you and Pachamama....the world is as you dream it. I will only add that you must work on it (p. 105-106).

Conclusions

As was seen in the unfolding of this thesis project, the story (indeed, life) and the method are reflective of one another. This autoethnography of my journey across *The Way*, framed within transpersonal theory and informed by organic inquiry unfolds in the same cyclical way as the six orphic moments as described by Romanyshyn (2007). We are first claimed, taken passionately with something or someone. We lose ourselves in it or them as an inevitable aspect of love and are changed. We engage in the experience with our whole bodies - heart and guts, included. Then, suddenly, everything collapses, we are no longer in control, we have to follow the signs and change our perception of self from one that is in charge to an act of service and simply follow the signs. We have bouts of doubt, lose our faith, we fall apart and feel ashamed for not being good enough. We try to cover our shame to protect ourselves, then muster the courage to be vulnerable, and allow ourselves to mourn and, again, are transformed. And then it or they are gone. And we realize they were never meant to be held onto, never really ours, but a part of something much greater, something we are in service to. And so, we let it or them go and we give thanks for all of it.

There are other similarities between the story and the method, as well. For instance, in the work all of the themes overlap and merge into one another, there are myriad of elements at work in tandem and manoeuvring through them, attempting to tease them apart, is impossible. The written word, too, cannot capture all of the nuances of manoeuvring through one's intuition, body language, universal guideposts, the influence of others, etc...but being present in life and in the work at least makes the process a little easier. As in life, one cannot predict what will happen or what will be revealed in spiritual inquiry. The work is bigger than me and must be allowed to reveal itself step by step, it cannot be planned - just like life. However, the work has come through me and so I am certainly enough to bring it into fruition the best way that I can - just like life.

In order to be spiritually and psychologically mature, we have to take responsibility for ourselves, and become accountable for our thoughts, intentions and actions. In letting go of World Weary Wo(Man) as a collective archetype, we release the relentless pursuit of busyness and productivity based on materialistic, ego-driven values on which we place our merit and self worth. In Western society one can never be enough and this is our primary source of shame. There is always something more to acquire, achieve, *do* - it's tiring to live up to all of society's expectations and normalcy. Our need to be indispensable leaves us exhausted and unsatisfied. Instead I seek a simpler, less industrious reflection in the mirror. I want a fuller relationship with life, to more deeply relate to myself and others.

I want to be enough as I am.

Meaningful work and productivity are not the same thing. Productivity and busyness keep us fueling an insane system of mediocrity that keeps us disconnected from ourselves. Plans based around societal expectations become a container that restrain us and keep us all small. They keep us in line with the norm as a form of collective control which is comfortable and predictable. It becomes the societal expectation that you will remain small, that you should want to do what everyone else is doing and not stray too far for fear of rejection. When planning revolves around the future that we have become set on, there's no room for expansion, opportunities are missed. The expenditure of energy we put into planning for a future that doesn't exist, and generally isn't as grand as it could be, puts limitations on the future. If

we can shift from living for the future and be present, then life becomes less about *what we do* more about *how we live*.

I know who I want to *be* in my life. I want to be safe and receptive for others and myself... present, joyful, compassionate, open, loving, living in a sacred way and that is very different from *doing*. When we allow the moment to guide us our energy is freed up, we become open to opportunity, we take risks guided by a vulnerable and courageous heart. To be present is freeing. I don't have to worry about becoming more, better, stronger, sexier, smarter, enlightened! To continuously ask ourselves and others to be more and to risk rejection if more is not achieved is not compassionate, it's not the Way. When we are driven by our complexes or jettison our desires by projecting them onto others then we are not living consciously by our intentions. To know our own intentions and desires we must stop experiential avoidance and gain knowledge of our complexes. In recognizing how we specifically create suffering in ourselves and others through our patterns we can unlearn them. We are then making conscious choices, rather than acting out of habit.

When we learn to accept ourselves for who we are where we are at knowing change is inevitable and a matter of readiness, there is a sense of allowing that unfolds that is associated with calm, of not being busy, but instead of letting things happen. Leisure, then, becomes a "mental and spiritual attitude, an attitude of mind, a condition of the soul and contrary to the ideal of work as activity, toil, and a social function (Pieper, 1952, p. 40). Leisure becomes a liminal space and time within which we are "open to experience and knowledge that comes to us effortlessly" (Parr, 2009, p. 84), allowing one to merge with "the whole of creation" (Pieper, 1952, p. 41). True leisure, then, is possible to those who consent to their own true nature and peacefully coexist with the universe, available to those who are free and easy with themselves, open to everything, and willing to let themselves go (Pieper, 1952). Ultimately, to know true leisure is fundamental in our search for wholeness and critical to what it means to be human (Parr, 2009; Pieper, 1952).

The growing resistance to overwork and time poverty will be guided by a movement of voluntary simplicity with a stronger focus on leisure, culture and work reduction (Shaw, 2007). Authentic self is

nourished through taking up the call to know ourselves and becoming aware of how we're interacting with others and how we allow others to be. When I am being with intention guided by heart, soul, mind and body, I know what meaningful work is and work on self is deserved, necessary, and an important act of resistance against the dominant and controlling ego-driven, materialistic society; and because resistance is inherently collective, my individual act of resistance, then, also has implications for others. *When I come into acceptance of myself, I can be accepting of others and with the awareness that I am a mirror, in my acceptance of self and others, I am teaching others how to be accepting.*

It is necessary to envision a society that grants each of us our individual dignity but does not allow us to lose sight of our connection to each other (Arai & Pedlar, 2003, p. 196). When we do our meaningful work, we open a liminal space that allows others to balance their agency through challenging social and cultural impositions or constraints (Shaw, 2007). The perception of community as a space that works to remove barriers inherently implies that its members will be accepting of difference, enhancing freedom of choice and personal control. When community is in a state of being rather than doing, barriers fall to the wayside because we are no longer trying to prove our worth or merit to others. Focal practices are perceived as a form of communal intention, a co-created transpersonal event where internal and external factors in people, places and groups spontaneously, magically, come together in a creative, spiritual energetic frequency that heightens the vibration of everyone and everything involved in the moment. Focal practices, then, become a site of resistance where the personal is closely tied to the political.

To be adaptable to change and transformation is to vulnerable. *Being is radically vulnerable* in that it is about making choices on a moment to moment basis, and so trusting what *is*, rather than siphoning energy off into trying to control what *could be*. Being allows us to expand beyond personal, societal and cultural boundaries and norms, while our *awareness in being* allows us to do so without suffering rejection and shame because with an awareness of being comes the knowing that

I am enough.

When we *be* in a transpersonal, spiritual way, guided by our hearts and our guts, our dreams and universal synchronization, symbols and guideposts, the journey is infused with the anticipation and magic of being immersed and involved in the universally choreographed unfolding of the Mystery.

We cannot empower others but we can offer our own experience as a navigational tool. It is my hope that the journey that unfolded for me has the power to influence others in their contemplation of personal empowerment, resistance, spirituality and transformation through the creation of discourse based on newly formed beliefs and viewpoints gained from my story of the universally synchronized, co-created participatory event that was the Camino.

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