

One thousand miles.....walking within without

My Jihad, by: Eric Alan Westacott / Muhammad Bin Hari



Introduction

2003 had been a difficult year, my second year of self employment. Technically speaking, I could also claim that I had taken early retirement because Switzerland is one of the few countries in the western world that allows people to draw cash from their pension fund to set up a new business or to buy residential property. I was much too poor to consider buying property in Switzerland. Early in 2001 I had decided to resign from my safe position as the life and health marketing consultant representing a global reinsurance firm, losing my pension, health and all the other fringe benefits that go with a top job. How was I going to survive without my CHF 150k salary? I lay awake many nights pondering over this same question. Sometimes, I would be ripped out of my sleep by angst, terrorising me through terrible nightmares.

In July 2001, I finally mastered up enough courage and handed in my resignation. As a member of the management team, I had a 6 month notice period to work. It would take me up to my 38th birthday, 31.12 2001. By the way, I share the day of my birth with many refugees from Afghanistan who are given a day of birth by the immigration office because where they come from, keeping such records is not very important. Many can just about remember how many years old they are!

The previous year, the great millennium, I had taken on new responsibilities in the firm and I was given the title of account manager, responsible for Turkey. All services and non core business units were being downsized and many people were being made redundant. I was glad that I had made up my own mind to leave a sinking ship. All employees are expendable, yes, even you my dear. In all honesty, I was not working much as I could feel things were not going well with the company, my clients were very concerned about rising costs, increased claims and downturn in business, new legislation and customer compensation claims. Outside the office, I was investing my time in setting up my own business.

I had already started a data management and marketing business the year before and had one client who was paying good money for research on key accounts. I contracted out the bulk of the work to my father in London.

Previously, in a recession in the UK market in the late 80`s, I was a founding team member of one of the first pan European database marketing call centre operations and was instrumental in launching the Lexmark printer for IBM in Europe, project code name Blazer. But this was not what I wanted to spend my time doing again. I really loved my work as a trainer and consultant and wished to offer my ideas and services to old and new clients I had met through the reinsurance company. I wrote a business plan, rented office space, ordered stationary, printed marketing brochures and I was able to commence my marketing and training services as from 1st January 2002, when I was released from my contract at the reinsurance firm.

With the financial backing from my pension fund and a working wife behind me, things looked good until the September 11th ! From then, I took on a different perspective of my world and felt and I knew that things had to change in my life. I could feel unrest and nervousness all around. Just the noise made from a chair being pulled back to sit on would startle people dining in a restaurant, high tension and fear ruled our lives at that time.

Despite the impact those events had on my psyche I managed to successfully book motivational talks and presentations aimed at sales managers of insurance companies in the Slovak Republic and Slovenia. Furthermore I was invited to speak at market conferences in the Czech Republic and Poland covering issues concerning market standards, ethics and money laundering. My delivery was direct and honest, too hard for most of the conservative audience. I could imagine no future and predicted a collapse of the financial services system.

I had spent the past 4 years building up those markets in the Central and Eastern European region on behalf of the reinsurance firm I had spent 8 years working with. In the global downturn, most companies were downsizing and reducing costs, it was not a good time to set up a business. I remained optimistic as I had kept in touch with many people from my old network, many senior executives in the global insurance markets. One day I was offered an attractive position by one of those in my Network. I was invited to live and work in the United Arab Emirates.

Married and living with my English wife in Switzerland, my wife established her career as head of purchasing for GM, the largest U.S. based global car manufacturer (soon to be bypassed by Toyota.) I told my wife about my career opportunity in the UAE but she would not consider leaving Zurich to follow for my new career. I would have been the regional sales director in the Middle East, representing the large American Insurance group AIG. She had already left Paris for me and now she had all her comforts and status, and argued that she did not want to move again. Who could blame her? My area would have covered some 15 Islamic countries. It was a grand opportunity, although after 11 September 2001, I had concerns about the risk from Muslim fundamentalism but the true reason not to accept the job was that I had no desire to be employed, ever again.

In long telephone discussions and email correspondence with Mr Bush, the Chairman of AIG I proposed a self employed consultancy framework contract but they eventually declined it. I'm sure that they wanted a man they had complete control over, a company man. As my grandfather would say: Anyway..... In a way I was glad they declined my proposal because I

was also uncomfortable working so close with an American company and my state of mind since my investigations in to the world trade centre attacks was, to say the least, suspicious to the official government version and explanations surrounding the events as I had been left with too many unanswered questions and doubts in my mind.

The reinsurance firm I worked for carried a large proportion of insured risk on the WTC towers, I circulated a communication to my colleagues suggesting that the capitalist system was as dead as the communist regime of Russia.

Of course I knew that men will always want to make trade and engage in business deals but there were now just too many cracks showing in a system that had matured in its cycle and like any other model, I felt that our system was now entering the decline stage. The evidence was overwhelming. Government and company failures, corruption scandals and unemployment rates gave clear signals that this western society, its capitalist foundation and its social structures with its degenerated moral standards were heading for self destruction.

Does anyone remember that many investors lost up to 80% of their investment value over a period of just a few months in the stock markets in that period? Some invested in Enron situations and lost all. Others could not go the same way and losses were hidden and covered up. It was only a few years ago. Where does that leave those who had planned to pay off their mortgages, retire or enjoy income from their savings? Their dreams turned to nightmares.

I knew the banking system would collapse as they could not hide the fact and figures much longer. Well before the events of 911, the financial press were publishing data and reports showing that the global economy was in a critical condition. Nevertheless, financial advisers were still recommending their clients to invest in equities and shares of the global money markets, they were arranging mortgages and projecting success, wealth, stability and financial security.

Of course, these salespeople, brokers and companies earn their commissions and fees either way, in bull or bear markets (up or down trends in the value of stocks or commodities). The critical factor that I believe proves my point was what I call the collapse of the fiscal foundation, the instrument or method used to secure the financial system had failed or was deliberately made to collapse. That was probably the well thought through strategy some Islamic scholar who had worked out a plan on how to bankrupt the western capitalist system, not surprising then they are labelled terrorists. Remember, under Hitler regime, the Germans called the French resistance fighters, terrorists. The Romans probably would have called Jesus a terrorist too.

One of the foundation pillars of our modern capitalist system is also to establish a minimum security level using a fiscal tool to protect against loss and the exposure of sharply fluctuating market prices. The company I worked for used the slogan: "Risk is our business". The first institution of its kind was established in London, the famous Lloyds of London. A group of wealthy individuals provided cover for the loss of the trading ships and their cargo. In today's times, nothing has changed in this principle: If a business can not insure its risk, it can not trade or survive.

A good example is Swissair who was grounded because their reinsurance partner (my employer) cancelled their insurance cover, under the clause; Stop Loss. As the risk may no

longer be covered since the new exposures of events relating to 911. Therefore, all contracts were cancelled so that the risk could be re calculated and premiums for the insured risk to be adjusted. Swissair also had huge debts and the grounding of its fleet hastened its collapse because their financial dilemmas became too transparent and they could no longer cover up their financial difficulties. (how many have the same situation today, 17.10.2020?)

The concept behind the capitalist system is a good one if we lived in a world with honest traders, politicians and business men. Now come on, how many of you reading this believe we live in such a world? All research indicates that today, people have the least trust in government and business since records began.

I was licenced as a Financial Adviser in the UK, by Zurich Financial Services, then called Allied Dunbar. My training was the best in the market and to pass my exams to become an investment consultant, they taught me how the system worked. On the second attempt, I passed the exam. This is what I know about it: To establish a transparent free market economy another pillar to secure the capitalist system was introduced. At a given date it was decided that the security for the success in the financial markets would depend on establishing a minimum value level, pegged to a given and agreed price of the stock market.

It was based on the London Stock Exchange FTSE 100 index and set at 4000 points. Of course, many were watching and anticipating what effect this new method would have on the traditional ways used in the past to safeguard the values of the financial system, that being gold. It became clear that gold was soon to be the old fashioned commodity. You may remember that this caused a plummeting down ward spiral in the gold price as institutions and governments off loaded their gold reserves.

The Swiss government dumped tons of gold at rock bottom prices. The market was flooded and the prices plummeted even deeper. With the dotcom bubble bursting and a few years later the demolition of the World Trade Towers and federal building no.7 the FTSE100 fell below 3500 points! Under the new fiscal trading instrument tool, this meant that most insurance and financial institutions were technically insolvent; they could not meet their financial commitments to cover their liabilities nor the promised returns to their investors! In my book, I conclude that the capitalist system had failed in 2001!

If we may just speculate for a minute, just think what would have been the outcome if the Swiss had kept their gold reserves and sold them in 2004? There would be no need for any Swiss person to pay tax or health insurance premiums for the next x years! Now some of you think that the Swiss are all rich. You are wrong. From records released in 2004, every 11th child is born as a liability to the welfare social services!

The sad fact is that many of the old men who had made those bad decisions to sell out on gold still hold powerful positions today. They are still making decisions and earning big salaries. Those who retired are of course living on huge pensions, in glorious luxury as millions of law abiding people are left to struggle each month to make ends meet! It is a disgrace we call capitalism and democracy.

Would you need further evidence that our world is in serious trouble? When the best example in fiscal affairs, a country like Switzerland, can not overcome the difficulties in managing its economy, we all should be drawn to this alarming fact. In addition to this, there are the worrying developments from the insurance and reinsurance statistics of natural catastrophes.

The risk assumption models made to calculate events in the past were based on what the actuaries call 'one in a hundred year events' but recently these events are happening far more frequently and are making the business of estimating, forecasting and pricing most difficult.

Let's face facts: We, the human species, have made a real mess of things down on good mother earth and our leaders can not keep up with legislation or even get the basics right. We can not self govern and that is why it is time for big change, a revolution of awakening.

I heard Edward Snowden say "hey, you can't wake someone if they are pretending to be asleep."

However, in my view, the basics are the vital things we so badly overlooked in our actions: Clean air, clean water and natural foods for all. And, peace man! Why do our governments mismanage these most simple truths and instead, divert our money into arms, weapons of mass destruction and space exploration? Their motives: Greed, power and to satisfy huge egos? Their God is: Gold, Oil and Drugs! When will YOU do something to stop supporting this madness?

My fellow earthlings, brothers and sister, you, yes YOU! This is a call for a revolution, an uprising. But please, no violence! Do not be afraid, you do not have to do anything, indeed, I am asking you to do just that: Nothing. Do not buy any more. Do not work. Do not drink sugared and flavoured water, give up smoking, drinking, give up all your addictions and live in the moment. Your consumption is supporting the governments in tax revenue and you are numbing your sensations with all that stuff you consume! Sign on the social security system and be happy to have everything you need.

Sounds very crazy and how could this possibly ever work I hear your thoughts. Like all good things, it's simple, as stated in the Bible: Just ask humbly and modestly for what it is you truly need and it will be yours. That is the very simple truth. However, those manipulating us want us to live in fear and not in trust and love so they create all the shadows and it is our choice, our free choice to look instead in to the light and turn away from evil. Please take action now, the situation is critical!

Taliban, Jew or Capitalist (Christian)? - The end of the capitalist markets? That was my heading on the invitation to my fellow colleagues for my farewell speech before leaving the global reinsurance mafia I worked for. I was involved in what was probably the largest money laundering system ever devised. I use the word mafia because this is how the bosses of the head office used to describe my bosses from the Life and Health division. I'm talking about senior director levels, the top people. This insider tip I received from a secretary who had worked for me in the past. We had kept in touch as we were lovers for many years.

The invitation was to air my views and insights to the then recent demolition of the world trade centre and I wanted to leave the company with one last and final impressive presentation. I had been arranging and planning seminars for the firm and their clients and addressed hundreds, even thousands of people worldwide. So I prepared a PowerPoint presentation for my speech and when the invitation email was complete, I clicked on the send icon.

Only a few moments later, my new boss, a very ugly little man, came running down the corridor and ordered me in to his office. He was most upset and demanded to know who else I had sent the invitation to. I had sent bcc copies to the news agencies in Switzerland. (cc stands for carbon copy. This method was used in the days when typewriters hammered each letter on to the paper. Adding a carbon coated paper behind the original produced a copy of that document. bcc is to send a blind carbon copy to people without the others on the receivers list knowing about who else was sent the copy they are reading. Fascinating that in the modern world of electric messaging we still use these old terms.)

I left my bosses office arguing that it was not his business who I invited to my leaving speech but I decided it was best to seek legal advice. I left the Life & Health offices in Adliswil and drove over to the companies Head Office building in Zurich where I knocked on the door of the firm's legal council, a friend I had made on a recent management development programme course held in the Lucerne Mountains, Bürgenstock. By the way, that is the place where the next World Economic Forum will be hosted from in Mai, 2021. Their topic: The Great Reset. Is it on this occasion, we the peasants, will be told what the new world order has planned for our future lives on this planet?

My friend the lawyer made time to hear my concerns and after I had explained the situation he assured me that I had nothing to worry about. On the way out of the building though, my swipe card badge failed, the doors locked, and alarm sounded. I was then approached by security guards, asked to surrender my ID card and then escorted out of the building. That was the end of my career. A few weeks later they sent me a good reference through with a reminder of my "Schweigepflicht" the non disclosure part in my contract. I am told not to divulge anything from my past working experience for the firm, if doing so will lead to a prison sentence. Come get me boys!

Since those days, I have made a total turnaround in my life, my outlook and attitude. I have gathered back my strength and confidence to write a few lines about what I have seen and I hope you enjoy sharing my insights. It has not been easy, in a way I have been through and recovered from what some might call a midlife crisis. Many times I felt very lonesome and my mind wondered to some very dark corners but I came back with a good understanding of the meaning, reborn.

Life, in my opinion is all about choice, I am grateful to understand what belief is and to be free to decide on what options I take. Also to be able to recognise the signs that tell me I am not on the right way. I am lucky to be living at a time and in a place where I am free to write down my memories. I have serious doubts if these notes will ever be published but I do not really care, I am my own publisher and can copy and distribute via the internet. I need to just get my story down and be free to move on with my life again.

Giving up and going away

It felt kind of strange being back in Horgen, the town where I had left my wife, a great apartment with its huge terrace overlooking the lake Zurich and many of my belongings a few months ago. The weird thing was that leaving my home and wife was not that hard, possibly because things were bad for the past 7 years and we had been arguing and fighting so much. Leaving the 1895 Bechstein piano did hurt.

Deep down though, I knew that I would find an opportunity to play again. I knew I had to go away on a journey to find myself and live out my mission in this life. Nothing would keep me trapped in this false life, I had deceived myself and others close to me too long, it was time to go.

I left Horgen, a quaint, small town on the west coast of the lake Zurich on Valentines day 2003. I moved here after marrying my wife in England in 1993. We had met in Paris and married one year later. Nine years on, having spent thousands of Swiss Francs on marriage guidance counselling I was on my way back to England to start a new life with a Hungarian girl, a Princess from one of the biggest names of the old Hungarian Austrian empire days: Sobieski. We had met in 1995 when she translated a talk I gave, addressing the Hungarian financial services market, in a large conference full of bankers and insurance people in Budapest. I was representing the world's largest life and health reinsurance company as a consultant, not bad going when I think back to the days when I was washing dishes at Edgware general hospital in North London, my first job after arriving in England after leaving school in Switzerland at the age of sweet 17.

The Princess wanted to leave Hungary where the model of the newly developing capitalist system was leaving many people with open questions and broken promises. The country and its people seem to be in a rather confused state. The rich are getting richer and building huge walls to protect their property and the poor (the humble honest folk) , often with university education and diplomas are left unemployed or working for an average wage of 300Euro per month. God only knows how the poor will survive the introduction of the Euro and the inevitable price increases that will follow.

Surprisingly though so many have new cars, of course this is arranged through debt financing and the people like in most western societies buy anything they want and pay off their debts over their working lives. Slaves to the system with no way to get out. Crime and drug abuse increasing, prisons overcrowded. Not the best place for the two little princes to be educated, so she managed to get a working permit and enter the UK as a care assistant for people with learning difficulties.

This is an important part of the UK's governments' plan to privatise the National Health Service. It offers many good aspects because it de- institutionalises those who have been locked up in the past. But there is so much waist and so much profit for those companies and their directors! In the new world, making money from the sick people should be banned and all the companies engaged in community care should be non profit making organisations! And we know that all illness is from the mind or our environment, we must focus on the cause, not treat the symptoms. Sorry for the shareholders but it is time to put things right.

After a great deal of incompetence by her new employers that meant us living in bed & breakfast accommodation in two different towns during her basic training courses, we could eventually settle in a nice house we rented in a small town, outside of York. York is a wonderful place. Such a well preserved old town, something out of a Harry Potter novel but something seemed very odd about the whole place, where were the ethnic minorities? It was strange, I never met any Africans, Indians or Pakistanis. Where were these beautiful people? Why were they not living in this area of Britain?

Anyway, the princess worked all day long, some times also on night shifts and I spent my money and time down the DIY store. I was busy in our new home, ripping out the carpets and

sanding and treated the floors to a great natural finish. Our relationship lasted 6 months. After spending half of my money I had cashed in from a 10 year life insurance policy on our new home and airplane tickets for her and her boys to fly from Budapest to Manchester, she asked me to pack my bags and go.

Great, another relationship with a women, dissolved, my 5th in 20 years. I told myself that it would be the last attempt of living with a woman.

I was asking myself the same question, over and over: What was I to do with my life next? Since leaving school, I was driven by the wish to succeed, to make it in life. To have all the materialistic symbols that represented success: A perfect wife, house, cars, motorbike, mountain bike, piano, paintings, holidays, designer clothes, office and career. But all these things had no value now, it was becoming obvious that there was something within me I needed to look for and find. Erich Fromm's book: "To have or to be"? was a great inspiration.

But where does one start this process of changing? The decision I came to was to start by unloading some baggage and I decided to get rid of all my possessions. One by one, in bags and boxes I carried things and loaded the car and drove them to charity shops and friends around Yorkshire. I sometimes wonder who the Red Cross sold the designer suits and Thai silk ties, tailored shirts and beautiful shoes to. What a bargain for the lucky buyer! One of my friends, Mark, the father of Elliott and husband (now separated) to Jillian, Jillian is a friend I made when I worked in Birmingham, back in the late '80s when I worked as a financial planning consultant for Allied Dunbar, now Zurich Financial. Mark was rather pleased to be gifted with and park my 1100 cc chopper in his garage. I gave him the bike, the leathers, Ray Ban sunglasses and even my beautiful special addition Swiss made watch. They lived close to York and I enjoy visiting them and spending time with 5 year old Elliott.

I felt a very strong urge to give my stuff away, I had had it with all these things, possessions, I had lived that life, fed my ego. I had been a good consumer, somehow I knew that I had to just let go of my things now. Elliott was happy to give Gromit, my loyal little toy doggy, a comfortable place next to his teddy. Gromit and I had travelled the world together, he was with me on every flight, in all the hotel rooms giving me comfort and company, I had to let go of all the things I once treasured.

Edwina my most precious furry cuddly elephant was given a new home with Laura, a friend of Elliott's who had spent a long time in hospital with a serious illness. Bless her and may she enjoy Edwina as much as I did.

Many English men I have met seem to share the code: Never tell the Mrs if you have a fling. Never talk about sex, only in a jesting manor, to disguise any real issues. This also creates a distant relationship to the children, as any day now, he might leave and move in with one of the girlfriends. If the Mrs will confront him with the affair and demand a divorce taking all the money and house away? Why should a man talk? How? Men are in a difficult role model, having to adjust to the sexual demands of a more active but now less attractive wife and mother. The rules of man and woman should now be rewritten and our education system should focus and adapt new learning subjects life real life issues such as relationship and communication skills, however. this is the subject of another book though.

I travelled south to Birmingham and stayed with friends in Mosely, it was like I imagined downtown Kabul (better housing and before the war). Such a contrast to York! The Moslems, the great food, the nice beards, the flowing materials, the veiled women, the shops selling all kinds of seasoning, fruit, vegetable, and clothes.

Suddenly I heard sound I was somehow familiar with but it seemed out of place, but it was the call for prayers. Having worked in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia with the world's largest Muslim population of ca 200million, I was familiar with the sound. So I found myself following the call, wondering down the street to the huge Mosque, being draw towards it as if it were God's magnet. At the huge door, I knocked, and a bearded man opened and asked: 'Can I help you'? Now then, what a question to ask me, what should I say? For a few moments we just stood there looking at each other and then I could here myself reply: I'm not sure why I am here but I think I should convert to Islam. 'do you believe in Jesus' the man replied, Yes, I said, 'please come this way'. I was lead upstairs in to the main room of the mosque and we sat down under the huge dome. He called some friends over and we sat in a circle and I was asked to introduce myself and to tell my story.

I talked and when I had finished the first man I met suggested that I should convert right here and right now. "It was time to study and follow the teachings of the Koran and join your brothers and be a member of the Muslim family. First though, I was asked why I believed in Jesus. I said, I found Jesus last year. Good he replied. Because if you did not believe in Jesus, you could not become a Muslim. Jesus was an important prophet from God to the people. Sadly, the Christians do not follow his teachings. Then he asked me to repeat three times: 'There is only one God and Muhammad was his prophet.' Done, I was a Moslem (meaning, I submit myself to God/Allah). I was named after the great prophet himself, Muhammad and asked to join my new brothers for lunch.

The next day I left Birmingham and said goodbye to my friends Trevor & Maureen. Trevor was my best man at my wedding with Susie and I felt that he was not very comfortable with the new me. Considering that I quite drink and stopped chasing the women, we had little in common. Anyway, I had a date with my mother to be in London to attend the 1st of August festivities, the Swiss National day celebrations. That year it was planned for the 25 July, so I said my goodbyes and off I drove, down to the smoke, London.

My trailer was light and I made good time. I spent a week with my mother in London and as always, spending more then 24 hours together, it was doomed to end in disaster. My Mum had concerns about parking the trailer outside her apartment, thinking that the council will charge her money or something. So I drove the trailer over to my dad's girlfriend's yard. They were not home so I just left a note for him saying he could do with it what he liked. I then settled in at my mums in her council flat, sleeping on the floor in the living room. She rented out her spare room to a foreign language student. There was friction between us every day, anything I said or she said was misunderstood and arguments developed over the most pathetic things. I try so hard not to let it happen but it seems just unavoidable.

One example was when she cooked dinner and the student did not like what she had cooked. He was not offered any other food, after the both of us had eaten our food, his was thrown in the garbage bag. In the kitchen I suggested that it may be an idea to produce a simple menu and print it for her students using the PC and printer I had set up for her. This would avoid wasting food and giving her students a choice. I was astonished by her response. Shouting, raving abuse at me, who did I think I was? Interfering with her well established methods?

She threw things around the kitchen and fled for a fag outside. On the 5th day my mum called the police to the apartment, claiming I had refused to leave. This was in an attempt to blackmail me in to looking after a student while she goes off on holiday to Adelboden in the Swiss Alps for four weeks. I refused and she told me I had to get out. I agreed that I would leave on Saturday (in two days time). It was funny in a way, when the police arrived I was writing on the PC, facing away from the door. "What seems to be the problem?" I heard a man asking and without looking I asked who may you be then, to be pulled off the street and interfere with a private family matter? He told me to turn around and then I saw two combat ready policemen taking up all the space in the door frame. I burst out laughing, explaining that mother had gone mad. I assured the cops that I had no intention of staying in her flat. They consulted with my mother and eventually left but not before mum asked a neighbour to take a photograph of them with her standing between them.

I packed and arranged to meet Hajnalka the next day in Cambridge. She took a bus down from Nottingham and I was glad to be with a friend. We caught up on our lives and enjoyed being together again.

Hajnalka was on the same training course as Princess Sobieski, also working as a care assistant for people with learning difficulties. We had kept in touch and became close friends, after she had moved to Nottingham and invited me and the Princess to a house warming party. I had just split up from the princess so I showed up by myself, wearing a kilt and leather jacket, explaining that the relationship with the princess was over. I spent some days with Hajni (short for Hajnalka) and we defined our relationship as brother and sister. She would be the sister I never had, one that loved me and one that respected me for what I am.

We travelled around middle England together, visiting her friends and making some new ones on the way. We returned to Nottingham and I helped her move to a new apartment where I spent a week living together with her. Nottingham is an interesting place and claims to have the oldest pub in England (1189A.D.): Trip to Jerusalem. Apparently, it's where King Richard 1st started out on the Third crusades against the Arabs from 1189- 1192.

Hajnalka was back working and I had time to read. After finishing Shirley McLean's book: The Camino de Santiago, a present from Hajnalka, I wondered if I might be able to enjoy similar spiritual experiences and decided that I would try walking the same holy pilgrimage in order to find myself and a new direction for my future life. A journey of 764Km from St Jean de Port in France to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. The route of St James. From my readings a year after my camino, I discovered who St James was. It is known that he was a brother of Jesus, a disciple who preached the basic truth. A summary of what he preached in the bible reads as follows:

If any of you seek wisdom, let him ask of God, resist temptation, this is how to recognise true religion.

A long way indeed, unimaginable at first, but then I had done some walking in the Swiss Army back in 1984, so I was looking forward to the trek. I mentioned to Hajnalka that I was not sure that it would change me but, I had no other plans and nothing to lose, so why not go and find out!

Later she reminded me that I said that I also added 'I could end my life when I was back if nothing had changed', so, as you can imagine, I was in a rather negative frame of mind at that time. It hurt us both, the pain of separation after so many precious moments shared together. We had a great relationship, I adopted her as my sister and loved her dearly but time had come to say goodbye.

I drove south into the city of London to meet with Jillian and Elliott. They had made a trip to London from York to see the sights. Jillian had made a reservation in the Holiday Inn hotel and our room had a great view over the Thames River and the millennium Dome project. Another example of government mismanagement that cost the tax-payers millions. We spent a couple of days doing the typical London sights, even catching a show, Chichichichi bang bang. Elliot enjoyed it and so did we, it was a great production.

Time flew by as we had fun with all these things to do. All too soon we hugged and kissed and then I departed on my journey back to Switzerland. I had to settle my affairs, close down a limited company, shut the offices, sell furniture, sign separation contracts, ect, ect. . I left London too late in the evening and missed the last ferry crossing from Dover. No problem, I treated myself to an overnight stay in the Churchill, a nice hotel with in a small single room overlooking the beach. After organising my self in the room I went for a late evening stroll and called my wife from a telephone booth to make arrangements to spend a couple of nights in the spare room, back in the apartment in Horgen. We had departed on good and friendly terms but all the niceties were suddenly gone. Our agreement we had that I could stay anytime, was broken, out of the window. She was not able to discuss the situation with me so she hung up and did not pick up the phone again. She was glad to be rid of me I guessed and I could not blame her. I understood and forgave her. She is very comfortable with her new life that I set up for her. Good job, money, nice car and beautiful furniture and apartment. But what happened to us? Was it just me changing? Why could we not sort out our problems? We made such a nice couple, were in love and it all went horribly wrong somewhere.

Walking back to the hotel, I read from sign posts on the beach front that the authorities had installed CCTV (close circuit television cameras) and, in addition, they were also recording sound to protect the safety of the public! A few days before I had read the George Orwell book (his real name was: Eric Blair): 1984. It appeared to me that George/Eric was off by just 20 years with his vision of our future. I knew I did not want to stay on this island any longer then necessary. I caught the first Speed Cat crossing over to France early the next morning.

The crossing and the drive across France to Switzerland was long but uneventful apart from the customs lady wanting to look in to the boot of my car. What good were these people doing for heavens sake? If I had been the master mind terrorist with all the plans to the world's destruction in my bag, they never looked. How could they have any security? It was just impossible to control people so closely unless we lived in new times similar to the Hitler regime. I was afraid that soon these days would be returning to this world. (According to Ed Snowden, they have!)

I had done this drive many times before. I arrived in Zurich about 21:00 and decided to book in at the most expensive hotel by the lake front in Zurich. It was fun, the smallest room cost me 380 CHF for the night so the next day I moved out to a cheaper place on the city limits, until I could make arrangements to stay with friends or family. I still could not reach my wife by phone as she refused to answer my calls.

As I took a tea and small desert out on the terrace, I was approached by a man. He greeted me friendly and introduced himself as a fellow Muslim. (I was wearing my white robe and a traditional white Muslim kufi (cap)).

He invited me over to the table where he sat with his brother. I could tell that they were very rich, very well educated and they told me they live in America. What their true mission of being there was, they would not reveal and I did not ask but felt that they had some agenda. Anyway, I told them my story. They listened patiently and rejoiced with the news that I had decided to convert to Islam. The following morning we agreed to find the local mosque and visit there for Friday prayers.

I slept well in the nice but small room. The quality of the bed and linen was superb. I went to the gym first thing in the morning. Wow, what a great place and the view! Breath taking. I could see over the old town of Zurich, the bay area of the lake and all the way down to Horgen. I ate lots of fruit from the baskets decorating the gym. That would save me buying breakfast. God knows how much they would charge to eat breakfast here!

I showered and got dressed in my white outfit and walked down the famous Bahnhofstrasse (station road) to visit my bank. My account manager was available and surprised to see me. I told him that I had returned from England to settle my affairs here, close my business, cancel the office lease and to then walk to Santiago de Compostella as a pilgrim. He was amazed as to my new looks and my plans and openly declared so. I told him about how I found Jesus and that I had converted to Islam and also the difficulties with my wife. On hearing that he suggested I transfer my money to a new account, which he arranged. We shook hands and, with a dazed expression, he wished me all the very best,

I walked back up the Bahnhofstrasse towards the lake and dropped in to my other bank where they offered an internet service for customers. I logged on and replied to and sent out some email messages. Through the window I noticed a man watching me from outside. He then came in and approached me in a very shy and apologetic manor and introduced himself as a travelling Muslim from Canada and asked if I could help him find the local mosque for Friday prayers. Yes, I said, I will be meeting two other brothers at noon and invited him to join us for the Friday prayer. I finished my work on the computer, logged off and invited my brother to walk back to the hotel just around the corner.

As we arrived my two other brothers appeared and were organising a large hotel Mercedes limousine to drive us to the mosque. I introduced my new friend and asked if it would be ok for him to join us. Of course they said and we drove off. During the drive the chauffer suddenly started to talk Arabic. The men started a discussion and then the driver stopped and turned the car around. My mind was racing and wondering what was happening until one of the men I had met last night explained. We were heading for a mosque that was not very suitable to our ways, through the driver we discovered that there is a better place to go. I was not told more detail and we drove as the two men from last night talked in Arabic together.

We arrived by a large house and many other Muslim men were making their way inside and to prepare themselves for prayer.

We arranged for the driver to pick us up in 2 hours. The mosque was a huge house with 4 floors. I guessed that there must be at least two hundred men inside. We pressed ourselves through the crowd up to the main room where the Imam was. He introduced a special guest,

a sheik from Saudi Arabia, who wore a long white robe and used a large bamboo cane to walk with. We followed the prayer of the Imam and then listened to the talk by the sheik. I of course didn't understand a word, but he was very impressive, I could tell he was a good speaker, people listen carefully to every one of his words. There was no interaction, no questions, this man was telling these people what to think or maybe even what to do. If these people unite in every city around the world, and agree to take a certain course of action, the western system could be overthrown, within hours. No army, no mighty bombs, no tanks could prevent it, we would simply be overrun.

Great, that would open up some new possibilities. I just want to see the faces of some of those idiot generals and presidents and the primitive thinking local Swiss man sitting in his seat around the "Stammtisch" (the table where the local alcoholics meet in the pub to drink, smoke and discuss world affairs). Sharia (the way to the well) law declared in Switzerland! Wow, what a great headline that would make.

In fact a few years ago we were not far from this point. If the US declared war on Al Quaida when, under conventional war fare terms, how would we know that the war was won, by the either side? As far as I understand conventional warfare terms it is when the capital city is taken and the generals and politicians agree a ceasefire. Now let me take your memory back a few years when just one individual was keeping the state of Washington, the US capital, under siege for several weeks. He shot dead 10 people and caused panic and terror in the capital. The generals did not agree ceasefire terms or surrender but can you see how it is possible for just one man to cause chaos and distraction to the empire's capital city? Just one man. Now think how many men where trained in the terrorist camps? If they were to organise themselves and repeat the same project and by strategically placing groups of men, all over the capital cities of western countries?

If this were to happen, may be then, most will be aware that all those billions of tax payers money spent on defence was for the wrong hardware? Maybe then will we awaken from the lives of lies and deceit, this illusion of democracy and freedom. May be the end to our western secular society and a return to a God focused way of life would bring positive things to the people of the western nations? Time will tell. As Nostradamus predicated, camels will be drinking from the Rhine river one day. The Rhine originates and flows from Switzerland through Germany in to the North Sea. His prediction may come true due to the water shortages in Western Europe (another total mismanagement of our governments) or did he foresee that the Arabs are coming? Although I doubt they will arrive by camel.

Whatever, change will surprise many and it will not be easy for many to accept and adjust to a new way of life. Anyway, these were my thoughts and I had time to let my mind drift as the sheik was preaching to his flock. Before I got too uncomfortable sitting there on the floor with my legs crossed, the meeting was over.

Later, news reached me that after prayers in southern Iraq a huge bomb blast killed an important Muslim leader and ripped another 200 people with him to their death as they had finished their visit to the mosque. It was all spiralling out of control and getting very ugly, but things go just the way they have to play out.

It was years later that I started to understand the divide between Muslims. They, similar to Christian history, divided up in to various different sects, the two main Muslim sects being,

Sunni and Shiite. Just like the wars with the Christian reformation, Islam is also now shedding blood despite clear instructions not to from the holy Koran.

We left the mosque to find a place to eat but it was closed so we returned to the hotel where we shook hands and embraced one another saying our goodbyes after exchanging contact addresses. Oh, by the way, the head waiter who served me in the hotel that night was also a Muslim.

I packed and checked out and asked the concierge to arrange for my car to be fetched out of the garage. I drove out of the city to visit my friends to whom I tried to explain what my thoughts were and what was going on in my mind and soon I discovered that they thought that I had gone completely nuts. Muslim? Why walk across Spain? What will that do? How will it help you? When will you look for a job again? How will you earn money? Where will you live? ...and on and on." if you are giving your things away, can you transfer money to my account?" Good questions and I had few answers; I just knew that I had to go on this pilgrimage to find my own way, find myself, a new future and make new friends.

Yes, I needed to get out of this circle of friends to be with people I could identify with, people that I liked, respected and trusted. People not corrupt and greedy for money, not always too busy working, neglecting their family, addicted to drugs, alcohol, nicotine, coffee and TV. Where would I find such folk? I had no idea.

Nobody knew about the inner conflict raging in my mind at that time. I had an important choice to make. After all my experiences I had come to this pinnacle of my life. I was now going to have to make the most important choice ever, between peace or war, violence or love. I had narrowed all my choices down to these two options. I had to choose between making my way back from the camino and finding peace and good in my society or I would link up with Afghani freedom fighters and fight the Allied Forces occupying the Arab nations! This is where I stood in August 2003. That was the point in my life I had arrived to aged 40 years.

What? I know, it even feels weird to write this down now and I know it sounds mad, barking mad. So hang on just a minute, I'll explain where these options came from. I was born (according to my birth certificate) in Bern, Switzerland in 1963. I know that my Dad is English and my Mother is Swiss, so why was I so taken in with the rights and injustices concerning the Arabs in places so far away?

Well, as I said, after the events surrounding 11 September 2001, nothing in my world made sense anymore. The crap the US and UK governments and their secret services (SS!) let out had no credible value, I knew and felt it was a far way from the truth. I know when a man is lying, his tone and body language gives him away. Bush and Blair were lying each and every time I saw the news. Then, Dr. David Hutton committed suicide and the corruption and deceit entered a new level of evil, so deep that I could no longer bear it. I felt so small and so manipulated by the governments and their controlled media,

(24.7.2003 copy of the Daily Mirror. News in brief: Iraqi liberation picture. A number of readers have expressed concern that our front page picture on 9th April, showing Iraqis celebrating the liberation of Baghdad had been enhanced to depict a larger crowd than actually existed. As it was taken from TV footage, extra people were added to the image to fill

the space left by the removal of logos from the picture. In our opinion, this did not alter the clarity of truth of the picture's message but we are happy to make this clear.)

Their lies and cover-ups. I could hardly believe that I was living in this world. What had happened? I had no hope left, everywhere I looked I could see the signs of a failed or failing western society. And for what? Money and oil!

When I was employed and working out my 6 month notice period, I became obsessed with the attacks on the twin towers. Although I had no direct responsibility for the insurance claims, I made it my business to find out why the death claims of the attacks on the WTC were indeed so 'low'. I know that sounds rather morbid but, my research told me that a few weeks before the attacks, the towers had been sold to a new owner. In such financial transaction the risk is always re assessed and insurance has to be in place before the monies can be released by the banks. The company I represented took a lead share of the US \$ 7.4billion risk.

Each tower had the capacity to accommodate 25,000 people, so a potential risk of 50,000 lives. How long did it take for the N.Y. fire department to evacuate all those people in the fire drill, just a few weeks before the attacks? The NYFD informed me that it took three hours. Since the first plane hit tower A, cutting off the escape route for most people above and the time it took for both towers to collapse, there should have been many more dead. It was a Tuesday morning, past 9:15, when most people should have been at work., even though it was a Jewish holiday. I sent my questions and concerns to the CIA but in their reply email, they wrote back: no comment.

Based on that reply I felt that there was something seriously wrong somewhere. Reading reports of possible conspiracy theories from my internet sources and receiving several emails from other colleagues from around the world, I knew that things were not in order. Bin Laden, the Taliban, oil and drug money was now my research topic. The work I carried out as account manger for the Turkish market gave me further doubts about the reality we were asked to accept. And the key was the fact that the company cancelled all its risk exposure in Arabic countries.

My new boss instructed me to cancel long standing treaties at the utter dismay of the clients. Colleagues responsible for other Arab markets were also up in arms but could only follow orders from the new senior directors. Who did they get their intel from about the potential risk from the Arab world in May 2001?

At that time, my mind, energy and focus were only on these issues and the more I read about the events and background, the more I would take the viewpoint and side with the Arabs.

I read as much as I could find on the internet and from books about Islam, the Taliban (translated Taliban means student of Islam, seeker of truth) and the history of that region. Had I been sleeping for the past 10 years? Why had my education never included an insight in to Islam? I found peace and happiness reading the words of the prophet Muhammad.

In my opinion, America and England have committed serious war crimes and were acting in a way to nourish and fuel the flame of terror. Terror against a system, a system that was in desperate need of reengineering. Despite overwhelming evidence, our leaders of the free world (joke) would not admit that their system has failed. They want to just make more

money for as long as they can, they do not care about anything else! They have no morals only very perverted values. They do not represent their people and must be removed from power!

I was determined to do something, I could no longer just sit and consume the news and be so passive. I did a few things. One day I wrote emails to George W. Bush and Kofi Anan but had no reply. I felt so powerless and I knew that what was happening was so wrong! The big question then formulated itself in me: Should my role be one of violence or love? I was ready to embark on a journey that would determine if my future would be that of a terrorist fighting this corrupt system with force or if I could find another way, a way of peace and love. I hoped so much for spiritual guidance on my path, my camino, my Hajj, my pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela.

After checking out of the hotel on Zurich's city limits, I spent just over a week at my sisters, sleeping on the living room floor in her apartment in a small town close by Lucerne. One evening I arranged to see my friend and teacher Walti Fuchs, he was the only man I openly shared my inner thoughts with. He was my only friend now. We had stayed in touch over the past 27 years since leaving his classes. I could trust him. He always complimented me on how I managed to steer away from the bad things in life and make the best of my situation. He hoped that I would make the right decision also on this occasion. Our discussions were, as always very stimulating and educational. We shared very similar views about the current dilemmas facing our society. As a teacher and father he sees much need for change for our society.

After dinner I said goodbye and drove back to my sister's apartment. She is divorced, an alcoholic and nicotine addict, works in the business of selling the same to the poor lost souls visiting her bar every day and night. In previous years she had worked in a brothel-hotel in Lucerne doing the same. She is a true and loyal servant of the state, providing the government with plenty of tax revenues. I'm sure they hope she dies before 60 so that they will not have to pay out her pension money. A great matrix system, well planned and thought through in every detail.

Not many alpine tourists or fondue lovers know these facts about Switzerland: It offers a huge choice of these brothel-hotels to sex addicted men. Girls come to Switzerland from Asia and Eastern Europe and are legally permitted to stay for three months. In this time they book themselves in to one of the many licensed 'hotels', paying up to CHF 500.00 each day to the owner and make their money by meeting the punters down in the bar and taking them back to their room for sex. Depending on their skills, after 3 or 4 clients every day, they should be making profit. I am told that the average savings of one girl when she leaves to go back home is CHF 30,000.00. Good money that they use to buy a house with or start a business. Commencing a new respectable life back home, hoping to forget their secret past.

My sister had no time to listen to my views and she made an end to my staying in her apartment one day by accusing me of not doing any house work! I had bought, cooked and offered her food, cleaned the kitchen and kept the place tidy in the living room where I slept. But for sure, I did refuse to clean the bloody tampons out of the toilet my 18 year old Niece had left floating. I refused to clean her hair up from the floor, bath and sink after she had used the bathroom. What an upbringing! I am ashamed to have to disclose this about my own family members but I want to give the reader an insight to how our society truly lives behind the closed doors. Where are the happy families we see on the advertising posters? Sorry Dad

for washing our laundry in the public, please forgive me. Only a few days before, I had been asked if I wanted to live with them when they moved to a big house out in the countryside, that option seemed now no longer a possible future for me either.

I packed and left without saying goodbye and travelled to the Alps to do some pre camino training. It was dark when I left a night club in Brigg at 05:00. I went back to a friend's apartment and changed in to my jeans, picked up my leather jacket and a small rucksack containing water, nuts and dried fruit. I slipped into my leather boots, they were 19 years old. I bought them in my Swiss Army days when I completed my military school as a medic with specialist training in the Intensive Care Unit in 1984.

This is a good time to share some more army stories. In November 2001, I was called upon by the Swiss Army, to perform a 3 week training exercise. Our orders were to test our ability to cope with a large civilian catastrophe, assuming many casualties. My division, The 43rd Swiss Medical Army Corps established a fully functional hospital and for the first time in Swiss history, the Swiss military operated on civilian patients using all of the military resources, equipment and medical personnel. In our internal documents the recorded stated:

'Since the recent terrorist attacks in America and Switzerland, the 43rd Swiss Medical Army Corps successfully completed their exercises in setting up operation military hospital and operated for the first time on civilians in the testing of its emergency response capability'.

You may be wondering what terrorist attacks in Switzerland? I know but if I told you, I would have to kill you with my Swiss army knife!

“Sometimes things are true, even if you do not believe them to be.” (Unknown)

Many Swiss and for that matter, other citizens of western countries, believe that Switzerland is a neutral country. Well, that is just not so. Since the Swiss have built weapons of mass destruction in the 60s and had the capability to drop a nuclear bomb on Moscow in the 70s the Russians never respected us as neutral, nor did the Turks and other Arabic states.

In my 3 week military service I helped establish a choir and named it SMAC. Swiss Medics Army Choir.

I caught the first train at around 06:10. On the platform in the train station I met a young lady hiker and I asked her if she could recommend a suitable place for me to walk. She suggested that I get out at the foot of a mountain called Riederalp. I did and from there, I started to walk up a small path. It was cold and wet, foggy but with some patches or clearer skies with some openings to allow the sun rays from the rising sun to shine through, highlighting the wonderful nature around me like a huge search light bringing out the most amazing colours on the mountain walls. I walked and walked, taking in the clean and the fresh air. It felt good.

The weather was changing fast. Heavy cloud took away the sun rays and the temperature dropped to cold. It got darker and the drizzle turned to rain. I was now walking through the cloud, thick fog and then I was lost, suddenly no path under my feet only stone, mountain rock. No vision, no sound apart from the soft drizzle against my leather jacket. Indeed my first biker's jacket I wore to ride about on a 125cc back when I was 18.

In the distance I heard some sheep baaing and followed the sound through the dense fog, I could not see any sheep, only their droppings as I looked down to my boots. Its about as far as I could see and I wanted to keep a close eye to the ground, just in case there were any steep drops ahead of me. Soon I noticed a dark shaded area to my right and by slowly moving towards it turned out to be a pile of rocks. I sat down enjoying a rest and the peace, wondering if I would ever get off this mountain alive. My memories took me back to Birmingham where I had lived with a girlfriend and her son. On one Guy Falk's eve there had been awful fog. I remember attempting to do a three point turn with my car on a small side road where her parents lived. After the first turn, I was lost. Totally disoriented, I had to open the door to know where the ground was. It was scary. I felt so lost. The next day I called my dad and told him my experience.

"That's interesting son, when I was younger", he went on to tell me that he drove behind this other car in London's thick fog. Suddenly they stopped and for half an hour nothing moved. He was wondering what the delay was and got out of the car to take a look. He could not see much, only the car in front of him. But he noticed that he had followed the car into a drive way. The car was parked in front of a house. The owner was probably drinking tea and glad to be inside. I laughed but here I sat, on top of a mountain, alone, cold, wet and looking for some way up or down. I sat there thinking and looking around when I suddenly made out some dark long lines in the mist ahead of me. They were strange, I could not focus my eyes on them, it was weird and then slowly the lines became clearer, I could now focus and make out that they were big thick lines but they were so long, so far away, what were they? I had no idea what was happening, what I was looking at and I was wondering if something was terribly wrong with my eyes or brain. And then a window opened up, the fog and mist just went away and this is what I saw in front of me: (Google Altech Glacier)

Standing there, looking down and out over this amazing view I started shaking, I started to cry. Really booing, my tears were truly bursting out of my eyes, this view took my breath away, I was gasping for air. From dense fog to suddenly such a beautiful sight, so much for the eye to take in. I was so overwhelmed with the might, the size of that ice block winding through the valley. My mind was overloaded to deal with the vision. These sensations lasted for a few moments only and then the fog cloaked my vision again and I was stood in the thick moist mist once more. I was stunned. Had it really happened? Did I really see what I saw? Never had I seen such a wonderful sight before and now it was gone. What a revelation. Oh good lord, what a wonderful world we live in. Thank you.

The fog lifted slightly and I could now see about 10 meters distance. I started walking up the mountain, trying to find a path or trail, hoping to find some sign of human life. After a short time, I found a path and the way led me to stones plates piled on top of each other. They led up into the fog. It was a stairway to heaven, and as I climbed up, higher and higher singing an old favourite Led Zeppelin song, I was sure that I would be meeting my maker any moment soon. I was nervous but climbed higher and high up, in to the unknown. It was getting lighter and brighter and then, the fog cleared, bright warm sunshine greeted me in heaven, no, ...

I arrived at the gondola lift station. I drained, emotionally and physically. In the restaurant I ordered Röschi (a typical Swiss recipe of frying potato) with fried eggs and after drinking a hot cup of herb tea with honey I took the gondola back down to catch a train back to Brigg. There I met up with my friends again and went out to party the night away. I was no longer tired, I was high on my adventures.

Later in the morning we went back in the apartment, with the girls, I shared my experience of the previous morning. One girl said: 'If I want to cry, I just look in the mirror at 6 a.m. in the morning, I do not need to go up a stupid mountain'. We all had a good laugh and went to bed. The blonde girl Yasmin stayed with me and we talked and kissed until the day broke.

Jasmin made arrangements to get time off work and visit me in Luzern. I picked her up from the train station in Lucerne a few days later and showed her the usual sights. We walked over the famous wooden Kapell Bridge and went for lunch on the steam ship SS William Tell restaurant. Later we drove to Adelboden, my place of origin or 'Heimatsort' the Swiss call it. It's where my Swiss grandfather came from. We spent three wonderful days together, making love, laughing a lot and playing around. You remember the things you do when you're young, well she was just 23 and she made me feel 18 again.

11. September 2003

A very special date, how could we ever forget the events of two years ago? The security forces all over the world would be on their highest state of alert. Or would they? Was it all planned and known about in advance? There are many conspiracy theories out there. Just like the J.F. Kennedy assassination, we will probably never know the truth. I only know that something is not right about the circumstances and the evidence is based on the simple facts already given.

Of course all good things come to an end and so do, by the way, the bad. My girlfriend had to go back to work. We said goodbye on the platform of the train station in a town named Spiez, by the lake Thun. It was the morning of the 11th September 2003. I decided it was a good day to drive to France to start my camino to Santiago.

I was in no rush, had no deadline to get anywhere to meet any one. That was new. I slept in the car or at least I tried to. I kept waking up it was very uncomfortable. I am 1.86m or 6foot 1 inch and my little sporty 206GTi was not designed as a camper. Strong winds were blowing and shaking the car, I could see the clouds moving a fast pace in the soft moon light. In the morning I managed to slip out from the new sleeping bag and get up and back on the road at 8 a.m. Driving and more driving. Boring but I enjoyed the changing sceneries.

12 September 2003

It took me two days to drive to St Jean de Port, driving across France. I parked my car in the first car park I found at the top of the town and looked for signs that could point me to the camino trail. I did not care about my 206GTi, I had bought it with cash from my last bonus payment from the reinsurance firm. I wrote a short note saying "I am on the caminio de Santiago, not sure when I get back", and drew a heart and left the car park. I walked the narrow streets on the outer wall and found a stairway through to the village and town centre. This led me up a trail to a small narrow passage from where I suddenly I saw signs for the Camino de Santiago. A yellow shell with yellow arrows, marked the way.

The tradition is to tie a shell to your rucksack, walk the camino and throw it in to the sea on arrival in Finisterre and make a wish. You have arrived at the end of the old world.

13. September 2003

The weather had improved and the blue skies were eagerly awaiting the sun rays to warm the air. It was 19:00 when I arrived in St Jean pied de Port. I had lost a few hours in Toulouse because I suddenly became unsure if I should in fact be heading for St Jean. the town to start my camino. I had left the book in England, giving it to Jillian as a leaving present. I was now doubting my memory and looking for an internet café, driving through the busy rush hour traffic. How silly, eventually I gave up and headed back out of the city, to St Jean. I was sure it would be ok and I put my trust back in myself again.

I found the albergue (hostel) and a friendly woman told me that I could stay the night but first I had to cross the street and get the pilgrims passport from the official tourist office. I went and waited my turn. 'Name'? Some cool looking, laid back French guy shouted over to me as he unfolded a new pilgrims passport. I froze. What name should I tell him? I was so sick with my name, my identity and past that I decided, at that split second to walk the camino as a Muslim. 'Muhammad Bin Hari', I said. The man asked me to write my name. 'Where are you from?' he asked. 'London', I said. 'But where are you really from?' he insisted. I had a small beard, tanned face and wore my Muslim cap. 'North Afghanistan', I made up. 'Wow, we have never seen a Muslim here before' he said, 'can you write: Welcome, in your language on our welcome sign post please'? I wrote as-salaam alaikum (poor spelling I know) and took my new pilgrim's passport (nr. 6663) with my new identity and left the registration office. I strolled back to the car park to collect my rucksack and boots from the car. I said goodbye to my little sports car, thinking that I may never see her again. It did not matter, I gave everything else up, the car was my last material possession, apart from the clothes I wore and the few things in my little rucksack. Who knows what lay ahead of me? Only God knew.

When I returned to the pilgrim's hostel, the friendly woman closed the door in my face, announcing that there was no more room, and that the hostel was now closed. Great! I walked down the small road and as I was tying my boots up, I decided to start my camino then and there. I walked down the main road, following the steps of Napoleon and his army. At 20:00 I crossed the bridge out of the old town, as the bells from the church rang out loud and clear. It was a beautiful evening and I was on my way, on my very own camino.

It was getting dark but I was enjoying the walk up the hill without a map, without any clue where I was going to sleep. I just walked. Some time later, from a distance I heard an old diesel engine chugging closer and soon the lights of an old tractor shone brightly and lit up the road ahead of me. It was now really dark and I realised I was walking under the star lit night. The farmer driving the tractor stopped as he came level with me and asked me in French if I wanted a ride. I do not speak French but his gesturing and body language were my translator. I followed his invitation and jumped on the back of the wagon. It was loaded with a huge barrel full of red grapes, freshly harvested and ready to be pressed. I enjoyed sitting and resting for about 20 minutes as we chugged up the hill. He then stopped and I jumped off, shouting 'merci, auvre'! It was 21:30.

He had stopped by a house and I could make out people eating inside, it was some kind of a restaurant and hostel. That was good luck. I went in and asked if I could sleep there for the night. The man muttered something and I waited. He eventually returned and he beckoned me to follow him. We crossed the small road, went up and over to a big sort of stable type of a building. This was where they accommodated pilgrims. But I had left something behind and I had to go back to the restaurant to fetch it.

I had forgotten my walking stick. I was mad with myself because I had tried to drum it in to my mind never to leave it behind. It was such a good stick. It was the only item I took from the apartment when I left Horgen. As I walked down the stairs, I had made a last glance up to the entrance and noticed it in the umbrella stand. A walking stick, I thought. I'm off on a long walk, maybe it will be worth taking along. For the past 5 years it had been standing outside my front door waiting for this occasion. A client from my reinsurance days, Poomchai Lamsam, the President of Muang Thai Life in Thailand had presented it to me as a gift after the sales training I gave to his regional sales directors and managers in Bangkok. In fact, his people knew me well, I did my first ever presentation on my first business trip for the Swiss Reinsurance company, addressing their top 400 sales people at a annual award ceremony. I would do many more such events over the next four years travelling to South East Asia and working in Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Nevertheless, at that time I thought it a little strange to be given a Burmese bamboo walking stick but now, all was very clear. I retrieved the stick from the restaurant, paid the man 6 Euro and went for a shower and then to bed.

14 September 2003

Hunto to Roncevalles

My first night was rather a taste of what was ahead of me. When that group who were eating earlier came up to take their beds there was a lot of noise and even my ear plugs could not filter out the squeaky floor boards, the vibrations and later the snoring and farting. It reminded me of the days I served in the Swiss army.

I continued my walk and along the way when I was suddenly trapped by a blackberry bush, totally caught up in all its sharp thorns. It was a terrifying experience. I could not move and I called out for help to some passers by but nobody took me seriously. I then started to choke and to wretch, spitting stuff out of my mouth. I woke up trying to formulate help cries to the people but to no avail, anyway, it was all a dream, how strange. It was early, I was awake and got up before sunrise, ready to continue my journey into the unknown.

I packed and set off just as the sun rose over the hills in the distance, it was a glorious sight, the mist hanging in between the rolling hills, slowly evaporating from the warming sun rays.

Two hours later it was another picture. I could feel blisters developing on my heels. I tried walking up the hill backwards, sideways and eventually I took the boots off and walked bare foot. Later I put my sandals on. It was a great day, sunny with clouds, not too hot and nice and cool climbing up towards the top of the mountain pass at 1430 meters. I looked up noticing some dark spots flying around, at first I thought they where planes or gliders. It was spectacular; I counted 11 eagles circling the skies just above me, they were catching the up-wind turbulences. At times I was at nearly the same point as they were as they circled the mountain. I experienced with my very eyes, in their majestic presence just how large these beautiful birds are.

I walked on up, further and further towards the top. It became chilly and I unpacked my jacket and put it on to keep warm. I was now very close to the Spanish border and it was around this point that I suddenly felt sad. A deep and dark feeling just overwhelmed me about my failed marriage. Was there no hope to repair the damage? In the past I had committed

serial adultery because of my lack of feeling of being loved by my wife and the need to live out my sexual fantasies and desires. Was there any hope? I was walking with tear drops flowing over my cheeks and splashing down on to my boots and the path. I think I stopped loving my wife when I tried to understand her.

I was suddenly disturbed in my thoughts by the noise of loud motorbike engines from a distance and eventually I had to get out of the way of three groups of 7-10 motor-cross bikes racing passed me. This must have been great fun for the riders but I was very angry with this intrusion into my peace and the beauty of the nature. I could smell the stink from their engines long after the noise had disappeared.

It was a lovely walk down the mountain, wading knee deep through the crisp golden autumn leaves in the dense forest. Some of the old trees were so huge and stood majestically in the forest for hundreds of years. Just standing there, breathing, noticing the changes in the pollutants in the air and in the rain. I stopped many times to hug the bigger trees and to send messages to friends and the world, asking for peace, love and understanding.

I arrived in Roncesvalles at 14:00. siesta time, I had passed the border up on the peak of the mountain and now stood on Spanish ground and had to get used to their ways of life.

The hostel was closed, not to be opened until 16:00. I was hurting, complaining to myself about saw legs and feet. Another pilgrim advised me not to walk on, as there would be no other place to stay for the night but I ignored his advice. I did not feel like sitting down and resting, I wanted to walk the camino and walk I did! After another four hours I reached a small village called Biskarret.

On arrival, as the pilgrim had told me, I could not find a hostel only a small hotel. The lady owner wanted €25 for the night. I declined and left. After doing another scouting tour around the 4 or 5 houses in the village, I realised that the hotel was my only option so I knocked on the door a second time and offered her €15. She said €20 and we shook hands.

I nice room with a shared bath off the corridor. I took my boots off and what I saw was not a pretty sight. Four blisters, three open, with raw meat showing. In fact all my muscles were aching and I took a bath and hoped that I could continue my journey the next day if the skin had dried out over night.

15 September

Up and out at 07:00. My blisters have dried out and my muscles could take my weight and that of the few belongings I carried in the rucksack again. The camino took me through long stretches of natural paths through pristine forest and alongside a wild river but some stretches were also along a busy road. That was no good and I hoped there would not be too much of this road walking nonsense further ahead. I walked in and out of Larrasonna and arrived in the large city of Pamplona as the bells rang out 19:00 from the old church in the square.

I stopped to buy some disinfectant and a blister repair kit from a pharmacy. I eventually found the hostel in a very nice old building next to the church, but all the beds were taken. I was given a map and addresses for cheap hotels by the friendly and helpful hospitalera. I was tired and in a lot of pain and it was difficult for me to put on a friendly face to the nice girl.

Despite my aching body I had to walk back down the stairs and go find a room somewhere else in town.

On the way here I wore my sandals and one of the straps broke, I felt real despair, and frustration. I was becoming only too conscious of my own frailty. The weakest link were my feet. I also felt pain from an old army injury, my Achilles heal. A blister on my big toe was looking to become septic. My back was hurting from the rucksack and carrying my load was like carrying my sins around on my back. I had to address the sins I had committed in my life. I decided then that each and every one of them would be addressed and then I could start to repent and ask for forgiveness.

To make my bag lighter I was thinking of leaving my spare jeans and bible behind and I was also considering the option of staying in town for a few days to allow my worn body to recover.

In the bible I had read a passage where Jesus had walked out to be alone in the desert for 40 days and fasted. That morning I had thrown away the bags of nuts and dried fruits. They all contained E numbers. I had some dry crackers and walnuts left. The last time I ate any substantial food was last Friday, breakfast with Yasmin in Adelboden, I wanted to see how far I could get without eating.

Earlier I found a blue feather and a white dove feather outside a locked church. Why do they lock the churches up? Why can I not go into the house of my father?

On my walk that day, I had enjoyed the peaceful country scenery, farmer's fields, trees and bushes as far as the eye could see. The path went through several horse fields where I had to open and shut gates to get in and out. The strange thing I noticed was that the horses appeared to do their number two's only on the footpath. The fields were empty of horse manure but the gravelled foot path was plastered in horse dung! I wondered if the farmers had trained them to pooh on the camino, it would certainly save lots of effort and time in de-pooing their fields.

I went to find shelter for the night and the only room I found was in an old crumbling two star hotel, high up in the attic on the 5th floor, two blocks away from the hostel. It was an old washing room, no light and it stunk from the smelly old drains used to wash down the dirty clothes in the sinks, just like in the old days. But the price was from the current age, the age of ripping off any one in need. The old landlady robbed me of €15 for the pleasure to stay in this dump. I was too tired and hurting to argue.

16 September

I Awoke early, too tired to sleep, too much pain from my back and legs. Also the smell from the drain was making me feel sick so I got up and left. But thankfully my back pained only from carrying the rucksack and not from my previous back problems. This is what happened to me when I first experienced severe back trouble in 1999. It started on the first day of a holiday in Corsica, I reached to take the suitcases out of the boot and CRUNCH a nerve had sprung out between the two disks and I was in severe pain. The holiday ruined. On my return home I went to several specialists in Zurich. From one doctor to another, pain killing drug injections into my spine and many hours of physiotherapy.

One of the most prominent doctors greeted me in his waiting room, standing at an even worse angle than me. When he sat me down in his surgery room, I smiled and asked him: 'Just how do you think you can help me if you are not able to fix your own back?' He looked at me and returned my smile and said in a kind voice: 'Young man, I was a pilot in the Israeli air force and when my jet developed engine trouble I ejected just before the bloody thing exploded in mid air. Any pilot who ejects from a fast moving aircraft has back problems after such a violent shock to the spinal cord. Now, what is your story?'

I told him and his solution to my problem was for him to operate immediately. He said: 'you can't live your life like this, not being able to lift the shopping and enjoy sports, at your age you must be without pain and able to walk'. No, I told him there must be another solution. Well, OK then you will try physiotherapy in a place I recommend but after 3 months if there is no improvement, I will operate.' Fair enough I thought. I started the physiotherapy and one day I met Erik, an old friend with whom I had worked with at the reinsurance firm before he moved on to another division. We met in the companies' sports grounds where I had been swimming to strengthen my back muscles. I remembered that the last time I saw him, he too had suffered back problems. When I asked him how he was now, because he had just come off the tennis court, he told me that an alternative doctor, an Osteopath, had discovered that the problem was not his back but his digestion system. He said that he would try to get Stan, the Doctor to see me but would make no promises, he was a busy man.

In the meantime I tried other treatment, went to another healer who just cracked my spine, and I continued my physiotherapy. I was almost in constant pain or in fear of pain. Every move was a carefully considered action. I was getting worse. My Doctor wrote a sick note reducing my ability to attend the office for just 50%, later to 15%. One day I had an email from Erik, I could see Stan! I went and after just 5 minutes I knew that this man was trustworthy and could help me. Like Erik, Stan also came from Holland, I find these chaps very easy going and good to get along with. 'Listen', he said after a brief examination, 'I will only see you three times, if there are no improvements, save your money and go elsewhere. Try and take my advice: Change your life style. Reduce the coffee, nicotine, alcohol, do exercises, drink three liters of water every day and see me again in 4 weeks.'

He then asked me to lie down on the bed and he massaged my belly area to the left of my navel. Yes, I can feel it, he said, it needs time and a lot of work but you will get better. When I got up after the brief massage, all of the pain was gone! I was so amazed; I was in awe of him and his abilities. I was a believer. I went home and did what we discussed. Three weeks later I was feeling so well again and confident that I carried a 30kg bag of fire wood up to my apartment and the next day I lay flat on my back, hardly able to move with severe lower back pain again. The pain was agonising, and I called my doctor. He called the surgeon who promptly advised: 'We must now operate urgently. I will fix a day and time for you this week. 'NO!' I cried, and crawled out of bed and like a frail old man, all hunched up, walking bent over, I limped down to the car and drove to Stan's.

Luckily he was there and available to fit me in to his busy schedule. Once again he massaged my belly and I was relieved of the pain. He told me off for rushing the healing process and warned me that I must respect my injury. I have a Scheuermann back and a disk hernia, I had to build up my muscles around those problem areas before I start lifting weights, he warned.

Stan had just recently been to the America to see John Goldman, the author of Men are from Mars women from Venus. As I was also going through problems in my marriage at this time,

it was another testament that a happy family life appeared to be impossible to achieve as the speaker made only too clear. Stan quoted his words: 'We live on different planets, are two different species and there is no way we can communicate or negotiate and live in peace and harmony'! But I was not ready to give up my marriage at that time; I had to keep trying to make it work. My parents divorced and I wanted to make it work! Some months later, I had news that Stan and his wife separated. I knew that my time would come soon but I was busy getting my health in order and trying to change my ways.

After 3 months of not eating dairy products, a total reduction of alcohol, caffeine, tobacco and drinking three liters of water each day and doing my exercises I was indeed a changed man. One year later I was back to work full time, 20kg lighter and with a much stronger physical and mental frame. Strange how I had absolutely no appreciation from my wife, family, friends or work colleagues for these achievements and challenges I had mastered. I was becoming very aware that this life is only about doing things for yourself, no wonder the society is in such a mess. Nobody knows how to give anyone a complement or positive feedback anymore! Is it because we are all too busy trying to hide our feelings and survive yet another day of our miserable lives?

Back to my journey through Spain: It was a tender moment climbing into my boots after I got up that next morning and it took some time to get into a walking rhythm. Allowing the pain to settle down and the body to get used to the new and tender muscles that were now forming and shaping my whole body.

I walked out of Pamplona and enjoyed looking at the old cobbled streets and nice old buildings of the historic trading town. Many shops, squares and small alley ways, well worth spending more time in at a later date maybe.

I was wondering how my blister would hold out today with the new medication pads I had put on the previous night. Today I also became aware of my competitive thoughts concerning the other pilgrims. I felt under pressure to be at the next hostel early, in order to secure myself a bed. Furthermore I did not want to travel the camino paying for expensive hotels in every place. I started to increase my pace and would not take breaks. I passed about a dozen pilgrims and the path led me up and down hills and through pretty valleys.

In the afternoon the landscape flattened out so I stopped to change my boots and wear my sandals. Oh my dear God, what a bloody mess I saw. A serious dilemma, I had deep open bloody and infected wounds. I limped on, passing many pilgrims who had stopped to take their siesta break. It was sizzling hot and I found no trees to take shelter from the scorching sun rays. I was now very hungry and decided that I needed food soon. My pants were sliding down over my waist and my belt was no longer tight enough to hold them up. I had lost several kilos.

I arrived in Puenta La Reina at 14:00 and was glad to be there. It was a great hostel, with a modern kitchen, nice showers, WC and even an internet terminal. € 1 for 14 minutes. World wide access to knowledge and information but only for the rich! What a crying shame that people, companies only ever think about making profit in this era.

In the hostel, I patched my blisters up and limped into the town to find a restaurant, I could not find the motivation to cook and anyway the shops were all shut so I could not buy anything anyway. I was enjoying my solitude and was left undisturbed by the other pilgrims.

I was thinking that we were all walking this journey for our own private reasons and guessed that most of us wanted peace and solitude.

Earlier I had passed a couple of girls. One was taking a picture of her friend and I offered to take a picture of them both but their reaction was so unfriendly I was sorry that I had asked in the first place. It is difficult to approach people these days. See where we are in our society? No trust, suspicion of everyone and the assumption that everyone must be bad. What a pity it has come to this.

After eating a soup in the restaurant and when the siesta break was over, I went out and bought a new pair of water proof boots from a small shoe shop in the village. I found the market and bought roasted peppers, garlic and goats cheese for dinner. I was back in the eating mode. Great, I needed to put on some calories and gather my strength for the journey ahead. Back in the hostel, I took the laces out of my old boots. It was time to say goodbye to them, after 19 years together, it was hard to abandon them in the corner of the room by the bin. What a sad end for them but they had served me well and it was time for change! I was learning to leave things behind, materialistic thing. What about my negative thoughts and bad experiences? Could they be just abandoned by an old rubbish bin? That would be the thing to achieve in order to be able to look ahead and plan out a new and positive future.

17September

I had a terrible night. I felt as if I did not manage to sleep even for a minute. Although I was in bed at 21:00 after having cooked my dinner and taking a shower. However, some fool shut the window shutters and no fresh air was left to breath in a room full with 10-12 pilgrims. At 23:00 I got up and went outside to the dining room where I sat by the table and drafted a letter to send to my sister. We had left in such an awful tone, I had to try and clear the air between us. My mind was spinning with so many different thoughts. I felt as if I had taken speed.

I was wondering about a future life and considering my life as a Muslim and the options this presented me. May be I could specialise in education and training. From a rally I attended in Trafalgar square last month, it was concerned to see how the Moslems represented themselves. Very emotional young men shouting into cheap speaker systems, so most words were not understandable. This was not the way people would stop and listen to the plight of these oppressed people. It would only turn more people away from their problems, creating the opposite effect intended. I also thought about educating western women about the true beauty of Islam. I was myself amazed when I read this passage from the Koran I had found:

'Woman was made to be a mate and companion for man, of the same nature of man and therefore with the same moral and religious rights and duties and she is not to be considered a source of all evil or sin, as the Christian monks characterised her but rather as a blessing, one of the favours of Allah

When Napoleon and his armies invaded the Arab world, his researches documented so many new inventions, unknown in the west. His scribes who documented these new discoveries soon ran out of ink. Bullets were melted and filled in to slim wooden sticks to ensure these discoveries were recorded and taken back to Europe. That is how apparently how the pencil was discovered.

In more recent times it is a well know fact that most modern computer communications today are dependent on the Islamic invention discovered through the scripture known as TCP/IP.

18 September

I was awoken early as a pilgrim had risen and turned on the main lights about 05:30, how ignorant can a person be? I packed my sleeping bag, put my sandals on and started walking. I was now using special medicated pads that should heal my raw flesh and help the skin grow back over. I wondered if it would actually work. Several other pilgrims had problems with their legs or feet because I noticed many hobbling around and walking as if they were treading on eggs.

It was pitch black outside, not surprising at 06:00. I got lost because I found no yellow arrows but luckily a man just left his house to go to work, I assumed. I asked him the way to Santiago, he looked at me in absolute amazement and I think he got the impression that I had walked throughout the night. I could not speak any Spanish so I could not let him know that I slept in the local hostel last night.

Later, I came across a small church. I rested outside, ate a few nuts, washed myself by the fountain and then stepped in to the church. I walked around looking at the art work, the small paintings on the wall, telling the story of Jesus Christ. They were beautifully made, carved out of wood and also painted. This gave them a three dimensional effect that was very realistic. I stopped at the one where Jesus, his cross on his back, had collapsed and lay at the feet of a roman soldier. The strong soldier towering above him with his threatening sword was an amazing sight that froze me the spot. I could not take my eyes from that scene. And then, I heard the voice of an angel singing Hallelujah. It was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. Tears flowed freely down my cheeks, I could not see much, everything was blurred and hazy through my salty teary eyes. I moved slowly to the exit, passing singing nun and pushing my way past other pilgrims trying to escape into the daylight and the warmth of the sun, back onto the camino to Santiago. I cried as I walked. When I stopped crying, the break did not last very long and I started again as soon I thought about that image and the clear, heart piercing sound of the nun singing. I am crying again as I type these words, the emotional experience is just so touching I can't help myself. It was at that moment that I knew I was on a special mission. I had been given a clear sign. I know I have abilities like Jesus had, we all do. I know I am a son of God, God is our father, and therefore we are all his sons and daughters. We are all so very unique and special. We are all one, we are the world and we make the universe. Latter I learned that in Islam, it is fraud upon to mention God had a child, Jesus. However, when I latter spent 4 months crossing the Sahara Desert, I remember the dialogue with an old Moslem sage:

May I ask you to consider my thoughts regarding the position Islam takes on Isa/Jesus, as far as I have studied, Islam considers it not feasible that God/Allah can have or did have any offspring. That point presents a huge problem between the two cultures, looking for a way to unite in peace/harmony. If I understand your saying: elhamdulillah, or as we Swiss say: Gott sei Dank, الحمد لله you attribute all of the world's Materia to the work of Allah/God! " "Yes" he replied. So, he made the trees? Yes. He made the animals? Yes. He made the water? Yes. He made you? Slight hesitation... Yes! Oh, so maybe we can refer to God/Allah, who is our creator, as our Father? Why then is it, when Isa/Jesus did this, Islam appears to want to crucify him for doing so?!

One of my favourite passages is أنت "وحدك" نعبد وأنت "وحدك" نطلب المساعدة
You alone we worship and you alone we ask for help.

I like calligraphy so much, I used to earn my keep travelling through the Sahara region painting this on people's walls. Again, it may be controversial to the Catholics and others, as to my knowledge, they also pray to Jesus and God as if the same, they would not in Islam as Isa/Jesus is designated as one of God's/Allah's messengers. We are one, also with God so does it really matter? Why go and fight over such details? Why all the separation: to worship the wrong GODs: God, Oil and Drugs!

I arrived in Estella at 13:30 and booked into a hostel. This too was a great place with all the modern facilities. I reserved myself a bed and went to buy some bread and eggs. For lunch I had fried eggs and fresh bread, hmmm, that was great, not as good as my dad makes them though! Later I strolled through the pretty town and there were many friendly people, I smiled at many children, it felt good to be here. Later I sat and wrote some post cards. I also sent a revised version of the letter I drafted last night to my Sister. I was trying to get the point across to her that we would need to agree on some basic rules if we were to live in her new house together. We had to be clear about our roles and responsibilities. I asked her to reply her thoughts by email as I would be able to pick up mail in internet café 's in larger cities on the way to Santiago.

As I was writing my notes sitting at a table outside a café by the main road, I heard two men approaching, they were talking in Swiss German dialect. I greeted them in Bernese German and we chatted for some time. I discovered that they were Swiss lorry drivers on their way back home. They were wondering why so many walkers were on the roads and I had the opportunity to tell them about the Camino de Santiago Compostella. I wished them a safe trip home and they wished me the same. It made me wonder where my home would be. I came to the realisation that I was now a homeless person. With this discovery I didn't feel bad at all. Nothing to be ashamed of being a Nomad, in fact, I didn't care! It had been an exciting and tiring day and now the time had come to get some rest. We said "aufwiedersehen" and parted. I went back to the hostel and slid into my cosy sleeping bag.

19th September

It was another bad night for sleep. My bunk was close to the window and the old ladies outside were just sitting there and gossiping their jaws lose. Non stop. Bla bla bla, but of course in Spanish, with all the passion and temperament and high pitched voices. My earplugs were ineffective against that and later when they did go to bed around midnight, the concert of the snoring quartet started. I just could not find sleep. At 04:00 I was considering getting up and going out but I didn't. I just lay there awake, thinking about my life and my future. It looked very confusing and uncertain.

I found no sleep and at 05:30 I did get up, packed, and left the hostel to start my walking. Out on the road it was of course pitch black again and difficult to find the signs indicating the way to Santiago. The half moon shining helped me find the way through the town. About 45 minutes later, I was walking through some housing estate and noticed the light reflecting off two eyes from behind some bushes. I had read about stories of wild dogs attacking pilgrims and was ready for anything. Are you going to attack me? I called out, grabbing my Burmese walking stick tighter with both hands. Slowly I walked past the eyes as they stared back at me, following my every movement. After I passed the creature, it moved out of the shrubs and followed behind me at about 10 meters distance. Although it was a wolf looking type of a creature, I knew it was just a dog and it seemed harmless so I walked on. It must be a German

Shepard, I concluded. Every 5 minutes or so, I would turn round, stamp my feet and shoo it away shouting: Go home. Many dogs I have so far seen in Spain are very badly treated and are either in very small cages or tied to chains to protect properties like holiday homes and factories. Many dogs barked at me when I passed by them and I thought that they have a miserable life. But I did not really want to have a dog following me now.

That was not in my plan. It was my camino. When the day started breaking and the first light arrived I could study and make out more of the features of the dog that was following me. He was not a bitch as I first assumed in the dark, he was just too young to cock his leg up when he took a pee. I guessed his age between 6-12 months old. He was in a terrible condition. Skinny and his coat was dry, thick and matted, no one ever brushed this dog or patted his back.

I walked on and over the next few hours he came closer and closer and eventually on one of the longer breaks I could touch him. We had a chat. Listen I said, if you walk with me you have to obey me. Not like my wife. She had used the modern version in the wedding ceremony and had taken out the "Love and obey me" sentence. I will teach you German words. If I say "sitzt" (sit) you sit. "Fuss" (heel), you come to my heel and "platz" (down) I want you to lie down. It is for your own good! It will keep you and me out of trouble and could save an injury crossing the roads. That's all you need to do and we will get on just fine together.

He looked at me as if he understood and agreed with all my words. He had clear, loyal eyes and was that a bunch of white hair between his two eyes? I wasn't sure, he didn't allow me to look at him long enough.

Now I had to find some rope to use as a lead because when we walked through a town or city, I would need to have control over him. I also exchanged some further words with him: 'Sometime I have to tie you up at least until you listen to my commands. But you are a free dog and can go anytime if you find a nice home or a better master than me.' We walked on and 30 minutes later I found a good piece of rope in the middle of the path. I would use it as a lead in the next town and shoved it in my trouser pocket in the meantime.

Later, as we took a break and sat down by the side of the path, I thought about a name for him. What could I call my dog? I played around with the word dog and came up with the name: Tog. God in German but spelt backwards, just like dog is God spelt backwards in English. We walked and enjoyed a good day together. At 18:30 I was wondering where we would sleep for the night. Would the hostel allow a dog? I wondered.

The day from Tog's point of view:

One morning I was walking through the empty streets of a town in Spain. I am hungry and looking for food. I can't remember when I broke loose but one day my chain just snapped, and I escaped from the people who kept me tied up. I was close to starvation, this was done to make me aggressive, so I would bark at anything that moved passed the building I was tied to. Now I'm still hungry but I am happy to be free and sometimes I find some food in the rubbish people throw away.

Early this morning I approached a couple of people walking with heavy back packs on a path, they shoed me away. A short time later I noticed another man and he spotted me from

a fair distance, away even though it was dark. He has the vision, eagle eyes! He then spoke gently with a kind, friendly voice as he approached. Bla, bla, bla he said. I think he was saying: Doggy, are you lost? Will you attack me? Ha, aggression is not in my nature, only to fight and save my life or the lives of the ones I love and then I'll fight 'till the end. He walked passed me and I followed. Every now and again he would stop, turn around and talk something in his strange language, blab la bla. Maybe he was saying that I should go back home. NO WAY!

I'll follow you for a while, if you don't mind, I'll keep a fair distance away. Every few hours he would stop and rest, show me where I could drink water but he said he would not feed me. He was a vegetarian, what's that? Anyway, I can find my own food. It was hot and he would rest where there was cool shade, that was good for me. At first he kept calling me bitch, just because I can't stand and pee on one leg yet, I'm only a young doggy but in the daylight he saw I had a big wily and apologised, making a funny noise, just like one of my cousins, the laughing hyena.

On one of the breaks he looked into my eyes and talked to me again. Blab la blab la, blab la bla ... I pretended to understand every word, this guy is nice, I think I'm going to stay for a while. When we walked on, he tied a rope to my collar, great, now he really wants me to stay, I was his. Walking side by side was great. I have a master, someone to walk around with. He would say this word over and over again: "Fuss". Every few steps, "fuss" and tug on my lead. OK, that made sense, "fuss" must mean to stay close, got it. Whenever I sat down he would call over: "Sitz" and whenever I lay down, he would call: "Platz". Funny sounds, must be German. And so, the day past. I felt I was learning so much from this guy. Sometimes I would mix the words up a bit, but he was very patient and just repeated the things whenever I naturally did them. In a few days, he's going to be very pleased with me. He's easy to please, and when I do get it right, he pats me and scratches my head and ears like no one ever before, Ah, bliss. I want to get it right every time, the reward, even if it's only a few of his kind words, it's a treat for me. Thank you, Lord, for sending me this pilgrim.

We entered a village and Eirikr went to talk to some people by a big house. I was making 'platz' and 'warta' (waiting) for him to return. There was a nice black doggy with a big red cross on the glass door window. Looks like we can stay here for sure, I wonder what the words mean: Perro No.!?

Whilst Eirikr was talking to the people, they looked over to me and their eyes filled with fear, no terror. As if I had done something bad to them. They lifted and crossed their arms over their chest, their faces turned stern, their heads shacked from left to right and their eyes narrowed. Eirikr called 'fuss', I jumped up and ran over to him and followed him as he walked away from the house. I guessed that these humans did not want us to stay there.

Why do I call my master Eirikr? some of you may have been wondering. Well, it's from the old Norse language meaning Ruler. Eirikrs have a strong sense of duty and work well in responsible positions, they stick to their principles and have a spirit of adventure. Surely every five-year-old knows that! (Thank you Elliott for the key ring)

It was great to walk and I was happy to follow every footstep he took. He seemed to just know where he was going. It mattered not to me because every moment together was just amazing. I was so happy with my nose close to the ground, sniffing out all the different animals and pilgrims that had walked the path or that had crossed it. Occasionally I would find a piece of

dry bread, even the odd end of a sausage or salami a pilgrim had thrown away. We walked over and down hills, through open countryside, as far as the eye could see. He would practice those words on me every now and again and on the breaks, he would talk to me and I would listen to every word he said with great attention. It made him happy. I had my strokes and ears scratched.

The sun was getting low and we were on the top of a huge plateau, with an amazing view all around us and down over a huge valley. Eiriker started to dig a shallow grave in the soft mud behind a shrub. I was watching with interest in the 'platz' position but could not imagine what he was doing. He then lay out his rain poncho and jacket in the ditch and retrieved his feather down sleeping bag from the backpack. I got it then, he was making a bed. He then called me over and gave me a piece of salami he had in his bag and I drank water from out of his palm. What a feast. Then he took his cloths off. At that moment something happened to me and I started feeling very strange. I had a strong impulse to get closer to him, to rub myself against his body, my wily was very big and rock hard and I wanted to rub that against him too. He started to shout at me. 'Pfui!, pfui!'

That was a new word, and I had no time to learn now, I wanted to play this new game with my master, it felt great. 'PFUI', slap! I felt his hand hit my nose and I suddenly came to my senses. What had happened? Why did he stop us? Why did he slap me? I crawled away and curled up into a tight little ball, my back facing him. I started to lick myself, cleaner then ever before. I'll show him how unhappy I am! Every now and again I would take a peak over to where he lay. Sometimes our eyes would meet, and I would quickly look away again. If I could whistle, I would have. He was laid out flat on his back looking up at the stars. Bla bla bla bla, he said in a nice tone and I think he was explaining the facts of life to me. I understood some of the things he was saying: It was not meant for us to play those games; the time would come for me and him to find female partners to play with. Just before he fell asleep, I crawled over and snuggled up by his side. We slept under the clear star lit night, our first night together. Sweet dreams Eirikr, my master and ruler.

So, that was what Tog wanted to tell you, I will pick up my story again. We walked and eventually arrived in a small village called Los Arcos, it was 18:00. It was a rather shabby looking hostel, I exchanged a few words with the people, but it led to a negative response, they didn't allow dogs. So I tanked up with 'agua' (water) and we walked on. A sign post to our next destination, Logrono, indicated a distance of another 27km. We had walked 21km in the past 6hours and our path led us through open country now with no shade from the sun. It was very hot and we were fortunate to arrive in a small place with another hostel. A couple of pilgrims that passed by us earlier and had given us unfriendly looks. They were now standing in the door way. Again they took a very hostile attitude to me or Tog. I went over to talk but saw the sign on the door that dogs were not welcomed. I called Tog and we walked on. The sun was sinking deep and I knew that we would have to find a place to sleep soon. But where? There was no house or hut in sight for as far as the eye could see.

We walked up and on to a plateau and then I could not go any further. I was exhausted. Where could I sleep? I touched the soil, it was hard but underneath the top crust, it was soft sandy earth. I dug a shallow grave, laid out my poncho and jacket, unrolled my sleeping bag and looked in my bag for some food to eat. The little food I had with me consisted of two boiled eggs and some nuts. The concerning problem was that I was nearly out of water, only a few mouthfuls left in the small plastic bottle I had taken with me from Adelboden. Of course I refilled it at any given opportunity but there was no place for the last few hours. I

pored some into the palm of my hand and called Tog over. He lapped it up and wanted more. I pored out some more leaving just a few drops left for me. Then I fed him a piece of Salami I had bought him from a shop earlier. That was the moment I could have been accused of buying my dog. Although I didn't want to feed him, I had pity and felt that it was my responsibility to give him food. Already he gives me so much in return. I feel very close to him, he listens to everything I tell him and already follows my commands. Not bad for a Spanish dog I found this morning to already understand German!

He is very clever and keen to learn. But how long would he be with me? I was tired and took my clothes off to get in to my sleeping bag. Tog was suddenly very excited, tail wagging, panting and trying to nudge up close to me, too close. I said 'pfui' a German word that means lots of things but basically, don't do it. He persisted and started to climb on to me, making that thrusting movement with his hips. With a stern voice I shouted 'pfui' again and when that had no effect I slapped him over the nose. He retreated, licking his lips, tail between his legs he went 5 meters away where he curled up with his back towards me and ignored me. He was in a real huff.

Somehow I felt bad but I had to teach him the rules and the borders of behaviour between us. I got undressed and slipped in to my sleeping bag. I lay on my back and looked up in to night skies.

I talked to him, explaining a few things as I lay there gazing up into the stars. The sun had gone down some time ago and the first stars were appearing. Every now and again I would look over and sometimes I would catch him looking at me too. I was in love with him now but I was aware that we may come to the next town where his owner lives and he would be gone again. I had to keep some distance and not take the view that I own him. He is a free dog and I must love him unconditionally. Later he came closer and lay in such a way that one of his feet was touching me. Maybe he needed to feel me in case I would get up and walk away. Would he be here in the morning? Would I survive the night? I put my trust in God. My feet felt raw. I had been walking in sandals all day and every break I would massage the new boots, trying to make the leather smoother. I was very tired. The past two sleepless nights were talking their toll. Sweet dreams Tog. Thank you God for a wonderful day and for sending me a dog.

20 September 2003

My mother's birthday, mother Hari! I slept, it was windy but warm and Tog was by my side when I woke up. Awake at dawn, I heard the first pilgrim go by, he was wearing a little bell, like a sheep. I could not see him because I was behind some shrubs but I got up, dressed, packed and set off on the path again. I was thirsty and after about 5km Tog found a small stream and drunk. I did not want to risk drinking the water and decided to wait 'till I found a fountain or farm. We passed a few pilgrims and they offered Tog some biscuits. He spat them out, good I thought, you won't be getting fat then. In my haste I forgot to ask them for some water and I was rather mad with myself. How am I going to survive in the wilderness if I can't look after myself and remember to ask these basic questions? Actually it was not really that I forgot, it was my unsocial attitude. They were English but I had no interest of talking or walking with others.

I continued my walk enjoying the peace and the sun and watching Tog sniff out all around the path. I looked up and saw a young man sitting in the tall grass by the way side. He was like one of the apostles, wavy long hair, a small beard, moustache and wearing sandals. I was drawn to him and said hello. We talked and talked and it was great. We agreed to walk together. We walked and we talked. We shared our life history, and talked a lot about plants, drugs, 911, corrupt governments and the state of the world. We agreed on the solution. Peace and love.

We arrived in Logrono and the hostel was shut for siesta. We decided to find a nice spot on the river we had crossed over and do some lunch. Tim was my new friend's name. He was from Bangor, Wales. He had packed in his job there weeks ago, given his belongings away, flew to Spain on a cheap flight and started walking. His goal is to walk to Santiago and then get over to India somehow and walk there. He had a tough youth. Classified with dyslexia, he had a hard time at school and was beaten up a lot. He was on drugs and spent most of his time on the dole (unemployed).

We met a few other pilgrims, a Japanese couple, man and wife and a bearded man from Chile. They were very interested in us and Tog. Almost too friendly, so I held my distance and let Tim do much of the talking. We said goodbye and the Chilean said that we would meet again as he shook my hand very firmly and looked deep into my eyes.

Tim and I walked on to find a shop. I tied Tog outside and we took a trolley and strolled through the modern grocery store enjoying the piped music and the air-conditioning. We found good bread, Tim recommended nuts and seeds, we bought fresh tomatoes, fish in tins and cheese. What a picnic now we just needed to find the beach. We walked for a while, it was a long way in the midday sun. Eventually it became obvious that we would not find a spot by the water so we made camp in the park. We ate and talked, sharing experiences and stories.

We watched as a good looking Spanish women approached with her Dalmatian dog. Tog was up and over in a shot, sniffing and finding out all about the family history, what food he eats and how well he was kept. They got on very well and started chasing around. The lady asked me something and I indicated that my Spanish was no good so she repeated in English: Are you walking to Santiago? Yes, I replied. She walked up to Tog and lifted his paw and inspected his pads. All of them until she seemed satisfied that Tog was not in any way hurting or unfit to walk. I did not know what to say or do, so I watched Tog play with her dog. After a while it was a bit embarrassing because Tog was getting rather excited. He was trying his hardest to get on the back of the Dalmatian and engage in the doggy style sexual act the way dogs do. "No, he is not really my dog", I found myself explaining to the lady, "I just found him a few days ago. In Estella. He is a Spanish dog and he is following me everywhere. "She smiled politely and watched in amusement how her dog was keeping Tog just one thrust away from his goal. Eventually, she called her dog and they moved on and Tog came back to our camp and settled down. I was looking at him in deep thought when Tim interrupted me and said that it was probably normal for young dogs to practice their methods and test their dominance. "Yes, maybe, or I may be I have a homosexual dog, because last night he wanted to do it to me". I told Tim and we had a good laugh.

We finished our lunch and rested, talking about so many things and agreeing on each others points of view. It was a real pleasure. Many of these discussions would come back in my mind at times when Tim was far away from me. After a short doze, we packed, strapped our backpacks on and headed for the hostel. Tim wanted to check in there but I decided to move

on. We walked out of the city, back to the nature, away from the shops, the noise, the smells. Tim walked very slow, too slow for me. I wanted to walk and get to Santiago, although it was great to talk and share all these stories, I had come to walk. I said cheerio to Tim knowing that we would meet again somewhere further up the track and off I went. I walked for a long time, stopped to feed Tog some dog biscuits I had bought but I walked on and on until the sun was getting low and it was time to find a place to sleep for the night. We found a field and I used long dry grass to cushion the hard floor to sleep on, rolled out the sleeping bag, ate a bite and was ready to sleep. The stars came up and I was lying there stargazing when heavy clouds moved in. Would we be washed out tonight? I was ready to pack and go if it did. Good night Tog.

21 September 2003

No sunrise, no blue skies but at least we had a good nights rest without any rain. I packed up and walked. It was good walking and my new boots were feeling comfortable. On a narrow track we were suddenly overtaken by a blond lady on her bicycle. She looked back at Tog and I caught a glimpse of her pretty face. Just maybe we would meet up with her later. That would be nice.

We walked on up to Najera and I was singing Happy Birthday to Mum. Tog was giving me funny looks though and I stopped, before the Spanish accused me of cruelty to animals. Najera is an Arabic name that means: Between the cliffs. The town was nice but the buildings walking on route into the town were nasty looking. Derelict, run down, dark and dingy was my first impression

The cliffs would have been nice in the sun, morning or evening but as there was none, it all just looked sad and miserable. So was my impression of the hostel from the outside. It had a big PERRO NO sticker on the door. I met a friendly 71 year old Spanish pilgrim whom I met back in Estella, he spoke some German and told me that he would be continuing by car now, he was just too old to walk so far. Bless him, he was so glad to see us and was really friendly. We shook and I departed - bon camino he shouted and waved us goodbye.

I bought a chicken from the butcher shop for Tog and after just seconds, the time it took for Tog to sling it down to his gut, I remembered what happened to Ethos, my sisters Leonberger dog. He had to visit the vet with bleeding intestines. A nasty mess, luckily all went well for Tog. Later I was told that it was just the wing bones that are dangerous, the wishing bone I think. It is spring loaded and can catch in many places. If I was to feed him chicken all I need to do is to break those two bones and all should be well.

Last night I remember dreaming of my English Granddad telling me about the two world wars and how he had lived through them. I cannot remember anything else and wondered what the meaning was behind my dream. I walked on and we came through a small place and walked up to a couple of small spaniel dogs. When the owner saw Tog, he came running out of his house wielding a bottle. I called Tog over and shouted abuse at the maniac.

Later we arrived in Azofra. A small place but I could stay and sleep with Tog in a deserted house opposite the hostel. I unpacked the sleeping bag and made up a bed on an old piece of sponge or foam cushion. I then went back to the hostel to see if there was someplace to cook a warm dinner. There she was. The blonde and her boyfriend, a tall handsome Dutch fellow. Brigitte was from Munich, Germany and she was on a two week holiday. Not enough time to reach Santiago but she would come back and finish off another time. She made an effort to talk to me and cuddle Tog. Her parents owned a German Shepard and she mist him, Tog was a good substitute and a nice reminder of home. Another few pilgrims gathered around the table, a few agreed to cook a meal together and we ate well. Tog was a star, every body wanted to take his picture and I could see it was going to his head. He liked the attention and stood there looking ever so proud and good looking. No one in the group wanted to believe me that I had only found him two days ago. He was following all of my commands now as if he had lived with me since being a puppy. A clever boy. I was asked what I would do with Tog. Good question, I had no idea what to do with myself! I just wanted to walk, to be, to eat and sleep where I wanted, to be left alone just to enjoy the moments in peace. To be frank I stunk , so washed my shirt and socks at the same time as I showered. It was only my second time I had washed in seven days. My feet make a good washing machine and I enjoyed the hot water, a rare treat. My feet were healed. I was walking the first 4 hours in the morning in my boots and then swapping over in to the sandals. It seemed to be working out well. No more pain, no new blisters.

I went for a walk around the small town. The church was next door to the hostel and all the pilgrims had been invited to mass at 20:00. We walked about enjoying the warm sun rays and the nice views over the fields. I turned a bend and saw a German Shepard bitch walking with a farmer. I turned to get away, not wanting to cause any problems and the man called out something to me. Was I on private property? What should I do? I turned and walked towards him and his dog. The man was talking away as if I was his new son in- law. From his body language, I could make out that he wanted Tog to mount his dog and have babies! We sat down and watched the ceremony together. Tog was up for it but the bitch would not play along. The timing was not right for her and she ducted and dived under all his attempts. Good lad, I was proud of him for his attempts. We watched for a good 10 minutes until the bitch slid off and sat in the nearby river to hide her backside and the scent from Tog. I called Tog over to my side as the farmer talked and talked, asking all sorts of things and then he stood up, went over to a little hut and pulled out a bottle of red wine. No label. I refused of course, after all, I was a Moslem and there is no alcohol allowed if you follow the Koran and aspire to be a good Moslems.

The farmer pushed the bottle at me again and his very convincing determination persuaded me to take a sip. I am not a good Muslim. I took the sip more out of politeness and returned the bottle. He grinned and pushed it back at me, indicating with his arm moving to and from his mouth that I had to finish it. Oh well, I've done this so many times before, a few more sips would do no harm. I finished the bottle, only about 2.5 dl but my head was spinning, my heart was thumping, wow, it was strong stuff this local wine. It was the first drink I had for months and I shook his hand and wobbled back to the church. So, that is how easy it was to fall for temptation! But who did I harm? Maybe the small amounts that are ok, but the problem is not falling into the habit of more!

The bells started ringing, it was time for the service to start. I asked Tog to make "platz" and wait outside. I sat on one of the old wooden benches from where I could see Tog through the partially open door. The service started, there was music and song, I noticed from the corner

from my eye that Tog was moving, about to get up. Would he come in to the church? What would the priest do? What would the locals do to him, to me?

I remembered reading a passage in a book I had picked up in a hostel, a story about the stick St. James used. It was not just there to help support him up and down the mountains, no, it was to fight off evil dogs and wolves, animals considered to be the Devils advocates! Possibly this is the reason why so many Spanish people hate my dog?

With my hand and arm, I signalled and waved at Tog to make “platz”. To my amazement, he did. As I was sitting there listening to the priest mumbling his sermon, when I noticed the old cat we had met outside the hostel tip-toeing past Tog, around his back about 10 meters away. She slowly sneaked by, not taking an eye off him and watching his every breath, ready to take flight and run like hell. It was such a funny sight, I did well not to laugh out loud, the wine was making me blush and I was experiencing heat waves.

The service went on and on and I was very hungry, impatiently waiting for the end to come and eons later, eventually did. We went to the hostel and some of the pilgrims invited me for dinner. Brigitte and her friend were gazing in to each others eyes like newly weds and I had little interest in socialising with the others. Photos were taken and then I said goodnight and I went over to the old building to bed.

Two young Spanish men had arrived and set up their beds in the big room on the other wall from me. They were cyclists, doing the Camino by bike in 10 days. Their bikes were parked next to their beds. I introduced myself and shook hands with Hector and Fabian. Hector spoke English and we exchanged a brief life history. I had mentioned that I had lived in England and his whole demeanour changed, from open to very cold and closed. I managed to obtain his trust in him latter to hear a short, but tragic story. Hector had a girlfriend in Manchester, England and one of his other lady friend friends went to visit her from Spain hoping to find work there. Her body was found floating in a river, she was murdered, no motive known, no trace of the culprit!

I also remembered what had inspired Tim to come to Spain and walk the camino. Back in Wales, he had a dream of geese flying by, they were heading south. As he looked up and watched them fly past, one of them lost a feather, it drifted down gently and he retrieved a beautiful white feather from a small pond. He showed me a feather and told me that his dream had come true, it is how he found that feather, on his camino.

With Tim I talked about finding the Holy Grail. It was so romantic to think about setting such a goal and having a quest in life to pursue. As I was digesting Hectors story, I was convinced that the Holy Grail never really existed, I was somehow sure that it was not a materialistic item made for man to ever hold. It was more to do with enlightenment and reaching the top level of self where one has gained the truth and understanding of the real reason for excising in this life.

Only with this knowledge can we step over to the other side, the ever lasting, eternal life. Until we get it right, until we stop making the same mistakes, until we turn around and repent, we are sent back again and again to get it right. In the meantime, the world we have to live in becomes more like hell every day. From one of the best movies I have seen, K-PAX

Prot : I wanna tell you something Mark, something you do not yet know, that we K-PAXians have been around long enough to have discovered. The universe will expand, then it will collapse back on itself, then will expand again. It will repeat this process forever.

If there is something I have learned already on this trip, that is that I have the will to live again! Only a few months ago my wife insisted I visit our house doctor, Dr Otth. After a few moments of listening to me he diagnosed me with the condition: "Zukunftsangst" in English this means being afraid of the future. I basically told him that I could not see the reason for my life and had trouble with wanting to go on with it. I was very lost really, but also felt quite relaxed about it. My life was just going nowhere. My wife would get up at 7:00 each morning, shower, dress, make us tea and go to work. At 21:00 she would come back home, we would eat, watch a film and go to bed. The same routine, the boring same routine. I would pretend to go to the office but in reality, I would sit and stare out of the window from the bed all morning watching the trees, the birds and later take a long bath up to lunchtime. After lunch I would watch the news from BBC, Sky, CNN from my digital satellite all afternoon. In the evening I would watch my favourite programmes like MASH, Star Trek and the Simpsons and only get dressed moments before my wife would walk through the door.

Despite my obvious depression and with the expression to take my life, it took 6 weeks before Dr April called me one morning. Ah, hello Herr Westacott, how are you? Dr Otth gave me your number and suggested that I call you to make an appointment to see you. "I am still alive, thank you. No thanks to your response time. Clearly, I do not need you, good bye." I slammed the phone receiver down and felt really good. For 6 weeks I had been given the time to kill myself. That would have been a convenient way to get rid of me, traitor to the capital system, a Muslim, the whistle blower on the corrupt, mafia controlled operations of the largest global reinsurance firm. Let him kill himself, I wonder if that was really what they hoped I would do. But hold on just one minute, was I being paranoid here? So what, my old boss from my earliest days of selling life insurance, John Hinkley used to say: "A bit of paranoia is good; it keeps you on your feet and often, a few steps ahead of your enemies"!

21 September 2003

A night full of thoughts and not only did I break my no drinking alcohol rule the past afternoon, the Spanish boys I shared the old house with were passing joints around so I completely lost my "do goody" act and got stoned with the young Spanish cyclists. We talked and laughed together in to the early hours. Being half my age, they were up and out before I was even ready to take my earplugs out. I had the longest lay in so far on my journey and was up at the late hour of 07:30.

Packed and ready to leave I saw none of the others from last night, seems they all wanted a head start and get to the next place to reserve a good bed. We walked out of the town and enjoyed the early sun rays. The walking conditions were perfect and I felt happy. Even happier when I found Tim sitting under a bush enjoying some shade. It was just before noon and very hot. Tim had also slept in the last town, outside the hostel on the bench. He told me that he had arrived late and everything was locked. Shame he did not see our light next door, we would have had a great night. We walked and talked together and from a distance I could see a couple approaching us with a dog.

They must have been locals because they were not carrying any back packs. Their dog was on a lead and I called Tog to “fuss”. He ignored me commands and continued going up to the dog. The owner was not happy about this and as Tog approached he whacked Tog on his leg with a heavy walking stick. I could here a crack and Tog’s whining from 20meters away. I ran up to Tog who came limping towards me. I sat him down and inspected the damage. The local couple and their dog walked passed me. Tim caught up and asked me if there was a major problem. Yes, there was, these Spanish people are the bloody problem! I ran up to the couple shouting at the man who had attacked Tog. He stood firm, his stick now ready to strike out again. I shouted: What is your problem? Why do you hit my dog on his leg? We are walking to Santiago, are you insane? What is your problem? He replied something in Spanish and walked away. Tog was limping for most of the way to Santo Domingo but a close inspection indicated that there appeared to be nothing broken, thank God.

We had lunch under some trees in the shade on a patch of green grass and watched as some people were disposing of a baby’s pram by a waste disposal area. Earlier, Tim had been talking about buying a little trolley on wheels for him to pull or push with his rucksack and boots. The load was getting too heavy for him. In addition to all the normal stuff pilgrims carry, he was also loaded with a machete his brother had given him and hammock! I went over to inspect the pram and pushed it back to the gras where Tim was munching some nuts. “ Here you go”, I said, how about this for a trolley, breaks work but one wheel needs fixing. He grabbed a stone and after a few whacks, the wheel held its position and we loaded up the baggage.

What a site presenting itself to the people and traffic as we walked through town and out in to the landscape again. About 8 km later we arrived in the village of Grandòn. Other pilgrims ran up to us asking if they could take pictures. After a while I went to check if Tog and I could stay in the hostel. It was a church and I was not hopeful. I went up and a man came down the stairs greeting me friendly and telling me that the dog could stay down here on some blankets. He opened a door and pulled an old woolly blanket out for Tog to lie on. What a great place and f or me it was even better. Hot water, a nice sleeping space and a huge kitchen.

I was told that a meal would be served at 20:00 and there would be a church service next door after dinner. Someone had told me that this was a monastery and I was disappointed that it was no longer serving that purpose. I think I had the secret desire to book in to a monastery and hide from the world for a few decades. The dinner was nice but not really enough for the three vegetarians. The 20isch people there were friendly but I still didn’t feel at all sociable. I exchanged a few words with Tim at the table but kept very quite and away from the others. The priest was a nice man who told a few good jokes after dinner as he puffed away at his pipe.

I washed the dishes as the rest of them went to the church. They were gone for ages and when they returned I sloped off to bed. Tog was very happy here. He had found him self his first girlfriend. A brunette Spaniel. She was great, a few years older, with enough experience to be patient and teach him a few tricks. It was great to watch them playing together outside. I took food down for Tog but he had no time, the bitch ate it up and he didn’t even care. They chased around, Tog trying to make love to her side, front, other side back leg, in fact, I never saw him actually do it at all but they did spend all night together.

22 September

Had he lost his innocence? I was eating breakfast when Tog came up the stairs to see where I was. No sign of the Spaniel. Anyway, it was time to move on. My lower left leg was hurting just above the rim of my boot. Not a good sign. Mountains were ahead of me and I dreaded having to walk up or down mountains with this problem. On the way out, I noticed that Tim's pram was gone. Maybe he had locked it away? But walking out of the town on the dirt track, I noticed wheel tracks, were those from his pram? Had someone stolen it? I was sure to meet up with Tim again sometime and I could ask him what happened. So I walked on enjoying a beautiful sunrise and the warm rays of light on my back, taking away the early freshness of the morning air.

Around lunch time I was practising commands for Tog to wait, "warta". I would tell him to "sitz" and then walk on around a bend so I was out of view and then call him. It took time and patients. At first the walking behind a bend did not work because as soon as I left his sight he would come and look for me. So I built it up over longer distances. Whenever he did get up too soon to follow me, I would really shout at him, walk him back and repeat the whole thing again and again. By the evening he could do it, even out of my sight he would wait for me to whistle or call before running to find me.

I also found a great place to do my back exercises. Since my back problems, I have to keep my muscles in shape and the best thing for me is to hang from a place and then pull my legs up to my chest (or as close as I can get). I found a children's playground with swings and I could hang from the top pole and do my 50 pull-ups.

Tog was using this opportunity to rummage through the food bag I had laid down next to my rucksack with new provisions bought from the local shop. I could not blame him, he is a scavenger and always on the hunt for food. We walked on. The scenery was very beautiful but changing. We were leaving the Rioja region behind us. I must have completed 200km by now. We were lying in a field where the corn had recently been cut so I gathered some loose strands together and made the padding for my bed. There was a nice view down on to a small village in the distance and it was very peaceful around us. The stars were coming out and it was time to sleep.

23 September

I was up early, it was dark and the sky was clouded over. We had been lucky that there was no rain. Tog was eating grass before going to sleep and he woke me up making retching noises as he was being sick. I guessed that he had to rid his stomach of the hair balls he could not digest. I packed up my few things and walked on as the dawn broke. With the heavy cloud, it took longer to light my path but we found the trail easy to follow. Mid morning we passed a couple of slow walking pilgrims, the man was limping badly. I slowed to their pace and greeted them with my buenas dias, the few Spanish words I had picked up.

They replied and soon we were exchanging some friendly words. A French man and Austrian girl. They told me they were on their honeymoon. He had tried to walk too fast and seriously injured his tendons, hence the limp. We walked past a field with cows and Tog took a respectful distance from the curious looking big creatures with dangerous looking horns.

We left the Austrian/French newly weds behind us and enjoyed a good walk. We came to the small town of Agès, a signpost directed us west to Santiago, 518km to go. I made some quick calculations and worked out that I had now walked 246km in the past 10 days, that made an average of 24.6km each day. I was happy with my achievement, considering the troubles and the pain with my feet and back. My feet had developed new blisters on the base of the heel and on a couple of toes. In addition, I had stepped on a thorn or I was bitten by an insect on my large toe, it had swollen and was rock hard and painful to touch. I removed the thorn or sting and wondered if it would get any worse.

It was a painful walk and I needed some place to rest. I was limping and trying to stay off the hard road surface. Midday I approached a small village called Atauerca, it had a huge picture of a prehistoric cave man, I was wondering what it was all about and later discovered that it was the place where they had found the oldest European man. The EU had paid out grants for a museum and established a specially protected area for education and research. I decided I could do with a rest and checked in to the hostel. I also needed a wash, my own company was getting to be unpleasant due to the smelly body odours from dirty socks, pants and shirt.

In the small but cosy hostel, I showered and washed my clothes. Later, I met a Swiss lady pilgrim and she was impressed that Tog could follow my Swiss German commands, being a Spanish dog. Her husband was rather unsocial towards me so she also withdrew. I went out feeling in the mood to eat in a restaurant. I fancied a change and a bit of comfort and luxury. I found a nice place in the village but when the owner saw Tog he shook his head, his index finger and said NO PERROS. I took my custom elsewhere. But there were no more restaurants so I returned back to the hostel. The temperature dropped down to a cool 10 degrees Celsius and a strong wind blew up from the east. It was a wake up call and I became aware that the summer was ending and that the autumn was making its first appearance.

I finished off the few food items I had in my bag and took a nap over siesta. But it was a short lived moment of rest and peace. Just when I was about to drift off in to the land of dreams. Tog's whimpering alerted me and got me up. Nothing serious, he was just missing me so I took him for a walk. On the way, I stopped for coffee in a bar and then passed a car, a large Renault Espace with a Swiss number plate from BE, Bern, my city of birth! A man, about my age opened his door and stepped out. I greeted him in Bernese Swiss German: Gruesach, was macht de a baerner so wiet awag vo daheim? In English: Hello, what is a man from Bern doing so far away from home?

He was friendly and we exchanged a few words. Thömu liked Tog and after a 20 minute exchange of bantering, he invited us to come to the museum. In the area they had found the oldest remains of an early European man, built a model town of the types of huts and tools man would have used in those times. OK, sounds good, and off we went.

We were invited to take a bus from the museum to the village but we decided to walk the short distance of about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a km. Amazing that they offer a bus ride for such a short distance, are people no longer willing to walk anywhere? It reminded me of a programme I saw once about obesity in America. A huge women was being interviewed and she rather proudly told the reporter that her family never walked anywhere, only to the car in the drive. What about your children? She was asked. We drive them to the bus stop to catch the school bus and she pointed across the road, a distance of about 50 meters where the bus stop was.

What is wrong with this picture? What have we human beings become? Hey, wake up and think! In England I noticed that many of the elderly people are given small mobile electro carts to get around with if they are unable to walk! It must be a huge cost to the health care service and detrimental to doing the health of these people any good. On another documentary I saw a patient being admitted in to a UK hospital. It was a report about the failing NHS (national health service). The woman carried at least 40 kg too much weight. Her ankle was hurting and she could not put her weight on it or walk around normally. The doctor inspected it, arranged for x-rays, massage, physiotherapy, pain killers and drugs to reduce the swelling at a cost of thousands of pounds. Why has that woman not just told to go home, rest, drink 3 liters of water each day, eat only half of the food she usually stuffs in her mouth and come back in 6 weeks if it was not any better? Total cost to the NHS: £0.00. People, are you reading this. Can you read the signs?

Anyway, back to the early man and his village. It was really well done. The huts were built in various stages of the early development of man and we were shown how they would have made fire using a wooden sticks by rubbing them together until the friction was hot enough to light the straw. We were all watching for a good 10 minutes thinking the presenter would not be able to light it. It took what seemed a much longer time and people were getting impatient. We were all wondering if he could actually do this. Eventually he was successful and smoke filled the little hut. After a rest he explained that early man's next discovery was the bow and using the bow to turn the wood made easy work of making fire. Within seconds he had a flame. He went on to explain what effects flint stone made to fire making and hunting and fighting. An important development stage of the human race, the start of the end?

I felt that learning these things may soon be beneficial to mankind again. I was sure that our civilisation would crumble soon and that the surviving humans would be back to these basic skills again. Would I be one of them?

Tog was well appreciated by most of the 15 people in our group touring the village, especially the children. Even their parents started to play with him and we all had a laugh when Tog tried picking up the (fake) prehistoric dinosaur bones lying around on the floor. I could tell that the young Spanish guide was not amused but no damage was done and he said nothing. However, it would not surprise me that on my next visit, there would be a new sign by the entrance: NO PERROS!

We were then led out to a field for the last demonstration. Bows and arrows and spears being catapulted a huge distance hitting straw bales targets, a long distance away in the field. These early men had some great tools and developed some amazing hunting techniques. I was wondering how long it took before they turned their newly found inventions on one another..

After the tour, Thömu, Tog and I walked back to the hostel, where we cooked dinner together. Pasta with tomato, onion, garlic and sardines. It was a tasty meal and we enjoyed sharing stories and jokes in to the late hours. I discovered that Thömu gave up his job as a butcher in Bern, sold all his things and bought the Espace to live in and travel around Europe, good man! We said our goodbyes and planned that we would meet again in Burgos the following day, around noon. The wind was blowing strong and it was cold, what would tomorrow bring? Only God knows and I thanked him for a wonderful day with all these wonderful moments.

I was most grateful to have these experiences. I am learning new things every day and finding the way back to myself again.

24 September

I stayed up late, writing my notes and woke up early and stated out on my walk again. The way its written in my diary sounds much better: Up late writing, up early walking. I was walking at 6:00, pitch dark and cold.

The walk was uphill in to the thick heavy clouds that were shrouding the hill top. Finding my way up on the top was not very difficult. Once on the peak, I was in thick fog but could see a huge wooden cross. I stopped and tears came up in my eyes. I felt so much but could not explain why and what it all meant. I just had to continue my journey. That was easier said then done. It was dark, cold, wet and misty and I could see no sign posts. I took out my small compass and headed west. Eventually I found a track and I felt I was on the right way. But doubts are always in the head until a familiar yellow arrow is spotted directing the pilgrims to Santiago. It took a while and we just walked on in faith and good spirits, despite the pain and bad weather. I was walking in my sandals again, I had started the day in my boots and to avoid the pain on the top of the boot, I only tied the laces below the ankle. It was still too much pain and I took them off.

As we walked through a small farmer's village, we were ambushed by 4 local dogs. They had formed a welcome committee for us and were snarling, growling and ready to fight. A big white husky dog, twice the wait of Tog lead the pack. Before he could take control and lead an attack, I charged him. Shouting swearwords, waving my Burmese walking stick I ran up and disbursed the pack. Tog stayed "fuss" and close by my side as we passed through them and walked out of the village. The dogs looked after us in bewilderment and in a barking frenzy.

I had arranged to meet Thömu around noon by the cathedral. On the way in to Burgos I had found an internet café where I logged on and retrieved mail from Walti Fuchs, my good friend and old teacher and also from Yasmin. No word from my beloved sister or niece, despite my post cards and letters asking them for support and for an open discussion about the possibility to live on a farm together when they moved in March the following year. That was Sonja's idea, she had invited me to think about it but since our falling out a few weeks ago, I guessed that she regretted asking me now. It appeared she was too cowardly to write and express her thoughts. Like many people, just stick your head in the sand and the problem, will go away, and for her it, I did go away.

I was left with the problem, nowhere to live, nowhere to go after I reach my destination, Santiago. It sometimes seamed more then likely that my decision would be to turn to terror and find some people who would teach me about making bombs. At lease I would have a place to live and identity for a while! Never have any expectation from anybody, is a good rule to follow. However, my expectations of my sister was to at least to tell me that staying on her farm would now no longer be an option for me. As expressed in my letters to her, I needed to plan a future for myself. Obviously, an answer was too much to expect from my sister.

I would be late in meeting with Thömu, when I passed the cathedral it was about 13:00. I looked but could not see him anywhere. I was also very tiered and my body was aching. Where was the hostel? I walked through the streets and asked people for directions. I was heading out of the city again. Was this right? Did I take a wrong turn? I crossed a bridge

again and found myself in a big park. I was so shattered I just had to dump my rucksack and rest. I lay under a big tree and recovered my energy and slowly emerged from my feelings of despair and hopelessness. Amazing what a short break can achieve. I looked around and suddenly saw other pilgrims heading for some wooden huts, 300 meters away! What luck, I was so close. I decided to leave Tog and my rucksack there but tied Tog to the bag so he wouldn't go off anywhere. I just took my pilgrims passport with me to check in with.

I strolled over to the huts. Good news, I saw a dog in the middle of the camp and I went to check myself in for the night. I asked if it would be OK for my dog to stay, and although not very happy with my request, he agreed to it with the condition that under no circumstances was he allowed into any of the huts. Great. I walked back into the park to the tree where I left tog. Was it here? No Tog, no rucksack. I looked around, no signs. My rucksack contained all of my belongings: Wallet, passport, boots, clothes, money and car keys. Now I stood in the park feeling that I really have nothing else left in this world, I stood there with only the clothes covering my skinny and exhausted body! I walked about aimlessly trying to reflect on what I should do, where I should start looking and after a while a pilgrim came down a path close by. Have you lost a dog he asked in English! Yes, I replied. He is way down that way rapped round a tree caught up with his lead and a rucksack! I ran in that direction and after a while I could make out Tog tied up close to a little tree. We were reunited and I was so happy to see him and my rucksack!

Burgos is a great city, so much to see and do. Huge cathedral but I had no interest of going inside. I took Tog down to the river, it was a lovely warm late summers day. Tog would not follow me in to the water. It was rather disappointing as I hoped to have lots of fun with him splashing about and chasing each other on the beach. I was wearing only my shorts and white cap.

No shoes. I was hoping to find a new pair of sandals and spent considerable time going in and out of shoe shops with no result. Tog was very good making "platz" outside each shoe shop and waiting for me to return. Many of the sales assistance and owners were amazed that he would just stay their and wait for me to return.

Over what seemed a very long time, but probably only about 20 minutes, I got him to follow me into the shallow waters of the Rio Arlanzòn. Slowly he would come out further to the middle but then turned around to find safety on the shore again. I just called him softly and told him to come "fuss" each time he broke away. I wonderer what his history had been. What experiences he had had with water in the past, if any. He didn't appear to be scared of it, it was more the unknown and a respect of the purity. Eventually he made it all the way across and we celebrated by having a good old friendly fight on the soft grass bank of the river. Thanks to a friendly butcher who gave us a big bag of meat and bones, Tog completed his day in Burgos as a very happy young homeless doggy.

I was still hoping to see Thömu in town and kept a look out for him or his car but never saw him again.

25 September

The night was restless. I had a bed close to the window and Tog was sleeping just outside. I was made to tie him up by the rather unfriendly hospitaliero who insisted on strict rules to be followed in his camp. Doors were locked at 21:00 and lights out at 22:00, he blew a whistle

and it was more like staying in a prisoner's camp. Tog did not like it at all. He kept whimpering and I had to get up again and again, about 6 times before he rested. On one occasion the door shut behind me and I was locked out. I was fortunate that another pilgrim was still awake and opened the door for me to come back in. But there was a moment I was considering to sleep next to Tog on the bench. When I did get back in to my bed, the smell of ripe old French runny cheese was so strong I could hardly find any sleep. I was wondering who in their right minds would buy cheese and take it on their camino.

I remembered that my wife had once arrived from Paris with a similar packet and although the taste was great together with bread and wine, the pong was hardly worth going through the effort. In the morning I found out that it was not the smell of cheese but from a man's pair of walking boots and socks. Since George left St Jean Pied de Port, he had not washed his socks once in the belief that he would avoid blisters. That was true but I was very unpopular and disliked by those came close to him.

In the morning we left early and in the dark. We got lost in the park and could not find any directions to get to Santiago. I had to knock on the door of a hotel and ask the porter for directions. That's the problem walking before sunset. However, when the sun did rise, it was an awesome spectacle. I walked and enjoyed the countryside and its views. The path continued and we climbed hill after hill and walked from one small village to the other.

My lower leg was causing me pain and my pace was slowed down because of it. I was walking with a limp and as this problem was not going away, I was concerned. Mid morning I passed a signpost that pointed down to a rest area and I took the opportunity to fill up with water. There was an old water pump, a grill and picnic area. I took my boots off and rested after filling my bottles with fresh water from the well.

About 30 minutes later I observed two pilgrims approaching on the same path. They stopped and read the sign and proceeded to the picnic area. We said hello and exchanged friendly words. One was from Stuttgart in Germany, the other from Australia. They walk the camino for one week each year and enjoy a walking holiday together. The German chap noticed that I kept rubbing my sore leg and he asked what the problem was. His solution was magnesium tablets suggesting that I may be suffering from a deficiency of this mineral. It made sense. He opened his first aid kit and passed a tube of soluble tablets. I took one out and returned the tube. "No, you keep them", he said. I thanked him, we talked a little about the weather and where we were planning to stay for the night and then they loaded up their back packs and off they went. People can be so nice and helpful, why is it not like this all the time?

I broke the tablet the man had given me and added it to my bottle of water and drank half. I changed in to my sandals and we hit the path again, heading west. It was a beautiful walk, through valleys, over hills, past miles of corn fields, it just went on and on in the hot sunshine. After some time, our water was running low again and I hoped we would find a well or a village soon. Then, after the next bend a small village presented its tiled roofs and its church staple to me. That was lucky. We walked in to the village and as we were approaching the big fountain in the main square, a nun suddenly appeared and welcomed me with a big smile. She put a small necklace with a medallion of Jesus over my head. I smiled back at her and gave her a kiss and thanked her. I filled up the water bottles and we walked out of the village. More golden coloured cut wheat and corn fields, miles of them. It was a nice walk, and, in the distance, I could see another village. It was mid siesta time and very hot, it was time to take a brake and eat some lunch.

When we entered the village, we noticed that a bunch or other pilgrims had similar thoughts and they had grouped around the bar in the centre of town. I was still in no mood to socialise with such a large group even though I noticed 2 or 3 very attractive looking girls in the group. I filled up my bottles at the well and walked out of the village.

Tog walked under some shade of a tree and just sat down. He wanted a break, only mad dogs and English men would be walking in this heat! I called him to follow me and promised that we would find a better spot further down the road, out of the village.

We passed a man gardening in a fenced off piece of land behind one of the houses on the edge of the village. I asked him: Una tomato por favor? Pellegrino de Santiago and smiled at him. He grunted something, I think he quoted me the price for a kg, but he toddled over to his plants and plucked a handful of green tomatoes off the big, healthy looking plants and returned to me with his arm stretched out offering the tomatoes. I offered him some coins but he waved me off and wished me bon camino!

We walked out of the village and about half a km away, found a tree by the side of the camino where we made camp and ate some lunch. The tomatoes were delicious and a few hundred meters away I noticed a big apple tree. I told Tog to stay and wait and went over to pick up some apples that had fallen to the ground. It was a little oasis.

I walked back to Tog and the tree and notice a small old man resting on his stick watching me cross the field. I wondered and half expected him to tell me off for stealing the apples but he slowly walked back down the slope in to the village.

Such a beautiful spot to relax and enjoy just being in the midst of nature, no stress, no appointments, no one to please. Man and his best friend cuddling up and enjoying life together. Just being.

I would have liked to just sleep like Tog can, he was snoring. Amazing that he can just sleep anywhere. I could not find a comfortable place to lie down. So, after a while I packed up and we started to walk again. It's also amazing that Tog can be wide awake again anytime I am making the sounds of leaving. He jumps up, stretches, shakes and is ready to walk with me. Never complaining, never demanding, never hurting, no bag, nothing needed to live out in nature!

The walk was bliss. It appears that we are really far away now from civilisation. No cars, no planes, just pure nature. I could feel the healing process, how my body had craved for these moments for such a long time. I was in a place far away from the world, no electro smog, no mobile phones, no people. I was a free man. Free to go anywhere I chose. Free to walk, to rest, to do or not do when, where and how I chose. No boss, no wife no girlfriend, just me. I was feeling very close to God, closer then ever before in my life.

The corn fields seemed never ending, there was no shade and we just walked and walked. Hours later I could make out some tall trees in the distance and as we walked closer, there was a house, but it was down another path, a few hundred meters off the camino. I decided to take a look. It turned out to be a hostel called Sambol.

I approached the entrance and told Tog to “sitz” and “warta”. I went in to the house and presented my passport to the young man sitting by the desk. Where are you from? What are you doing here? Why are you walking the camino? He bombarded me with all these questions and I just said nothing and smiled. He then whistled at Tog and I asked if dogs are allowed inside. He said no they are not, so I told him not to whistle at the dog then if he would not be allowed to come in. It was rather silly of him really. I’m not sure why he behaved in this way but we paid the fees for dinner and a bed and we left him to get his head straight again.

This was an oasis. It had its own spring and a pool, set in a huge garden of grass and big trees. The spring water was apparently healing and always a constant 11 deg Celsius. I took a swim. Or rather quick dip, I stayed in the water just long enough to wash and rub down my body before hastily climbing back out again shivering, covered in turkey pimples. (it’s n old joke from playing the game, “Pictionary”. My good old friend Trevor had to draw a goose bump and I could not make out that he was drawing a goose, the time run out and turkey pimple was the last work I shouted out. Sometimes people forget that I am half Swiss).

I washed my socks, shorts and shirt in the spring water, splashing them about in the pool and hung them in the sun and wind to dry. Then I joined the other 2 pilgrims and hospitaliero for dinner.

One of them was Spanish, from the island of Majorca , the other was American born but had lived in England most of his life, educated by the Waldorf school system (I made a note here to find out more about this method because he was so interesting) and now, aged 50 he is looking for a new life challenge, he lives in Cape Town with a wife and 3 kids. I forget his name and found no note of it in my journals but when I asked him how his marriage was after so many years he replied: “We wrestle but never fight.” I liked that a lot. The crazy hospitaliero was Belgium and had cycled down to this place to work for the season and in October he will cycle back home again. We ate well and after dinner a man arrived with 2 bottles of wine and the hospitaliero and him went off to drink them. I spent the evening talking to the American but we turned in as the light faded. It was inside this hostel, I saw the words; walking within without, and I knew that it was the best way to describe my journey so far.

I was woken by scratching noises from the door. Tog I thought and tried to ignore them. They got louder and louder and I unfasten the zip from the sleeping bag and slid out as quietly as possible as not to wake the others. I opened the door and went out to tell him to lay down and sleep. I climbed back in t bed. This process was repeated 3 times and then I just lost my patients. I twisted Togs ear so he whinged and forced him down on to the ground telling him to be quite and sleep. That kind of force was wrong, and I was terrible ashamed of my actions when I was lying back in my bed. There is a streak of unresolved anger in me that I needed to address someday I though. I

26 September

The American was up earlier then me and we said goodbye. I packed and started to walk back to the camino path but noticed that Tog was hesitant. He then stopped and just stood there. This was the moment of truth. Once again, I was facing the reality that I had something very wrong within me. Why was it that when I feel someone loves me I have to deny it and destroy it? Oh God please help me find the answer to this cancer I carry within. I had to be

firm and hard, I am so good at doing this. OK, I said to Tog, this is where our journey will end. You are a free dog and if you want to stay here fine. I am heading west. Goodbye.

He stood there and watched me walk away. I walked up to the other path and turned left. I did not look back. I knew I had just lost the best friend I ever had because of my terrible problem: fear of love.

All Tog wanted is to be with me and get to me last night. I punished him, beat him up, gave him pain in return for his love. What kind of a sick bastard had I become? Why was I like this? I'm sure many of my previous girlfriends had spent many hours wondering the same thing. Many thoughts were going through my mind and in an email I received from my Dad I remember his last words: Just because you fucked up your life..... And yes, I really had. I had lost everything, a good career, a fabulous apartment with lake view, a beautiful and loyal wife and all the things I saved for and collected throughout the world. Gone! I was walking and crying my eyes out. I had so much water in my eyes I could not see where I was walking and staggered along the path, sobbing, coughing and spitting.

Know I had nothing from keeping me from turning bad now. It mattered not why I was the way I am; I could justify myself and possibly blame my shortcomings on a difficult childhood, taking drugs and alcohol or not having a father to guide me. Who cared? It just did not matter now, I had nothing to lose. Al Quida, here I came, you have your next suicide bomber, a victim of the western capitalist model, a product of the system this society and its leaders have created. A man who now wishes to destroy as much of it as possible and create as much terror in that system as it had bestowed on him.

I had to stop to blow my nose and as I slowly recovered and gained my senses back. Standing there on the spot, frozen in space and time, under the bright stars of the milky way, I could hear the best sound I have ever heard in my life. It was the sound of padded feet and claws on the stone and gravel footpath. Tog had come back to me. As he came closer I fell to my knees and I hugged him and cuddled and kissed him. In between my passionate welcome I promised not to ever abuse him like that every again. I thanked him for giving me a second chance. I do believe everyone does.

We walked on together and I felt that I had addressed one of the most serious problems facing me in my life. Maybe one day I could return to civilisation in peace, to do good, to help others not make the same mistakes as I have made.

We walked down a long hill and at the bottom to the left of the camino stood a hostel but it was closed, open from 16:00, said a paper on the door. I could hear something round the back of the house so I told Tog to sit and wait and went to take a look. I saw a man unloading stuff from the boot of a white Toyota with a Zurich number plate: ZH 122978. Great I thought a fellow Swiss. I called over in Züri German: "Grüzi, wie gahts"? Hello, how are you? He stood still and looked at me, not smiling and returned my greeting in an arrogant French-German accent: "We are shut, there is another hostel 3km down the road." He then continued with unloading his car.

It was about 13:30 so we walked on and over a lovely bridge and found a nice spot on the river to take a siesta break. Tog's leg was not healed. After walking several hours he was limping again and I decided it was best if we stay at the place with the unfriendly Swiss chap to rest. That man the other day did really whack Tog with his stick, we are lucky that no bones were broken, we could do with a longer rest.

I was snoozing when Tog suddenly slipped back and down from the slope he was sleeping on in to the Rio Piuerga. Splash, he was $\frac{3}{4}$ covered by the water as he desperately struggled to climb back out of the river. I dived over and grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and pulled him up to dry land. And then I laughed and laughed from the bottom of my belly out loud like seldom before, he shook and splashed me wet in revenge and went off to find a safer place to put his head down, turning his back to me with a undignified expression on his face.

After a restful siesta we walked back over the old bridge and took a seat outside the hostel. After about 15 minutes the unfriendly man opened the big large heavy wooden doors. "Are you a Catholic"? He asked me. I told him that I did not think it was any of his business, but I was baptised as a baby. At that moment, I heard my name being called from the path above. It was Brigitte, the German nurse. She was with a woman I did not know. They came closer and Brigitte gave me a big smile and shook my hand before they both entered the hostel. I heard the man ask: "Where are you from?" "Germany and America", they replied. "Good, you can both stay but I'm not letting any Arabs stay here!" They both came out again. It was clear to me that they decided not to stay after hearing those words, they immediately turned around and left the building. Good for you I thought, there is justice! I knocked on the door and asked if I could at least have a stamp in my passport

"I can do that for you", he snatched my passport and stamped it and told me to get out as he shut the door on me. Was he a priest? This place was called San Nicolàs, listed as a holy church on the guide. OK, I converted to Islam but are these people allowed to treat me or any other Muslim like this? It was my first experience of racism and I did not like how it felt.

We caught up with the two ladies. They had walked ahead and as we walked over the bridge together a car approached at some speed from behind. Tog was walking in the middle of the small bridge and before I could call him over, the car actually hit Tog with his bumper on Tog's backside and shoved him several meters forwards without even trying to break or stop. I banged on the car roof, waving and shouting at the driver but as soon as Tog was out of his way he sped off.

I was introduced to Catherine, the friend Brigitte made a few days ago on the camino. Both ladies told me how upset they were over the incident in the hostel/church.

We came up to and as we walked by a large factory Tog went to stand in the yard in front of two huge and vicious German Shepard guard dogs on long chains. They were just inches away from his head, barking and trying to rip him to threads, if one of those chains broke, we would all be in serious trouble. I stepped forward, up to Tog, the ladies walking away briskly. I gently pulled him back and said: "fuss", let's get out of here. My walking stick was between him and the two dogs, I could feel the hot breath from the dogs mouths, as they barked and snatched their jaws together making that nasty sound when they bit in to thin air, inches from my legs and arms. It was a dangerous ordeal, and I was not at all scared and knew we would be all right.

We caught up with the ladies and walked in a bit of a shocked state, trying to digest the events of the past 30 minutes. So much to think about but no words to really express our emotions and feelings. We arrived in the village of Itero de la Vega and found a hostel. At first we could not get in, the door seemed locked. I noticed a window was open and as I tried to climb through, a man appeared inside. It was a young French man called Philip. The two

ladies knew him and were pleased to see him again. We managed to open the front door, it just needed a firm shove. It was one of the unmanned, no hospitaliero, hostels. Catherine told me that her and Brigitte were really looking forward to staying at the San Nicolàs place, it had such a good write up in their guides. Famous for its hospitality and service to the pilgrims. Not is the next review, I trust!

We showered and agreed to have dinner together by the little shop in the street next to the hostel. The other bar in town was shut. I asked the ladies if they had seen the weird man just wearing a thong this morning. It took a while to explain to Brigitte what a thong was. You know, a small piece of material holding the man's wily and a strap between the bum cheeks. We had a giggle. But no, they had not seen him. Me and Tog did, early in the morning before climbing a huge hill. He was standing there looking very proud of him self. I refused his kind invitation to come in to his garden and walked on. Philip was the last out of the shower and joined us. He started to ask the same question as soon as he sat down. And then he revealed that he actually took up the offer and had a cold drink with the man in his camper. It was full of porno material and after he refused sex he quickly left the place to climb the steep hill. He had another long giggle. Shared our other stories with Philip and Brigitte told me that Tim's pram had been stolen. He was very upset and decided to buy a push trolley in the next town. He did and spent €18.00 on his mobile wheels. What a site he must have been. We had a nice meal with a glass of wine and turned in for a well deserved rest.

27 September

As there was just the 4 of us staying in the little hostel, we had a great night and slept until 08:00. We slowly packed and agreed to have breakfast together in the same place and only place as last night. The weather was nice and our spirits high. The shop was a major meeting place for the locals. They popped in and out and stood around exchanging news and I'm sure a bit of gossip too. The lady owner had a cat and a dog. A strange mix between corgi and fox, I imagined. Anyway the bitch was really teasing Tog and just when he managed to get close to her she would turn very nasty. Philip agreed with me: Just like many women we had met.

Brigitte told us that she had her first dream and Catherine told us she had dreamt that Philip had 3 wives at home in France. He laughed but told us that in his life there had been three girlfriends and he ran their names passed us.

Catharine and I were the first to be packed and ready to go, so we walked off saying goodbye. We would meet up somewhere on the way again. It was pleasant walking and talking with Catherine. We shared our life stories. She had spent the past two years living in London with her husband, a successful business man running a large company. He would retire soon and then planned to return to the US and live in San Francisco. Good choice. From the things she told me, I felt that he was not giving her enough love and attention. Today, I wonder if they are still together. We shared our concerns about how George W. Bush was managing the country and the war and both agreed that he was a disaster. We walked up in to a town called Boadilla del Camino. There we found a great hostel and I decided to take a rest, stay the night and wash my clothes in their washing machine. Although I had hand washed my stuff a few times in the past two weeks, they needed some proper soap suds and a good whirl around in a metal drum to get all the stains out. It cost me about 7€ but it was worth it. Now I could be seen again amongst the people.

We sat and ordered some lunch and soon the other two, Brigitte and Philip joined us. Philip was in a walking mood and went off, back on the camino path. The Welsh man I had seen a few times on route and the last time yesterday at San Nikolas, arrived and sat on our table. Catherine was trying to explain to him why she refused to stay there but he had no understanding for their protest and could see nothing wrong with the man's behaviour. I just looked at him, unable to find words for the way I felt. What point was there trying to educate a grown man on the issues or morality? I could sense that the girls were getting angry with him and suddenly we noticed that the chap from the San Nikolas hostel just arrived and he took a table and sat down close to us. The Welsh man got up and without a word to us, joined him. May they live in peace. The girls paid, said goodbye to me and left, back on the route to Santiago. I waited for my washing to dry, played with Tog and talked to some pilgrims. An English man called Ben and two Irish girls, Anna and Sinead.

George, the German man I met in Burgos had also arrived but I tried to stay away from him and his feet but he sat next to me and we talked. I was loosening up and becoming social again. Good signs and developments, considering the injustice and discrimination I had experienced.

I figured out that we had covered about half the way to Santiago now. Great, I was feeling a lot better about life and living but still had no idea what to do after I had reached my destination. I had heard from several pilgrims that they planned to take a bus from Santiago to Finisterre by the coast and so I decided to walk there and swim in the sea and run on the beach with Tog. I was hoping the weather would be good enough because it would be close to November by the time we got there.

I had dinner with George and turned in for an early night.

28 September – Day of the cat

I woke up wondering where Tog was. I turned on my little pocket light, wriggled out of my sleeping bag and slipped my trousers over. I walked into the living room and had to suppress my laughter as I saw Tog curled up in one of the armchairs. He raised his eyes and watched me as I approached. I think he knew that he shouldn't really be sleeping on this chair but it was leather and he was not causing any damage so I left him in peace. I picked up some old magazines and then the outside door opened and Ben came in. He was freezing cold and all his things were damp. He was done with sleeping in his tent outside and had enough of that.

We exchanged a few friendly words and went to the sleeping rooms to get another few hours sleep. I was up early, awoken by the usual commotion of the early rising pilgrims. I packed and left. As usual, I was one of the first out because most other showered, had breakfast and left an hour later. We were out, walking in the dark again. Lost. No yellow arrows to be seen, no signposts, nothing. I just guess that I had arrived from the east and had to just continue on the same road heading west. Not too difficult but then when the roads merge and bend, I did lose my direction and had to get my little compass out. I followed the needle west as best as I could, sometimes walking a long way on the only road heading north, hoping there would be a left turn further down the way. It worked out well. Suddenly, lights from a car light up our way and it drove past us very fast, coming dangerously close to us and I cursed the driver for his arrogance.

About two hours later, the horizon started to light up and we walked in to another brilliant sunrise. Walking under the rail lines up the main road I noticed a dead cat in the road. I

commanded Tog to stay 'platz' and removed the corpse off the road. It was still warm, the lovely grey cat, I assumed was hit by that lunatic that passed us not long ago at such reckless speeds. What chance did this poor cat have? God dam that driver, dam all cars from this earth, take that pollution and stink with you, created from the fuel we steal and invade other countries for!

I walked on with tears in my eyes thinking about the story George told me about that French and Austrian couple I had also met on route. They had walked and been followed by a cat. They remembered Tog had followed me, so they were quite happy for a cat to be following them. They arrived in a small village and suddenly two dogs attacked their cat. It happened very fast and was over very in seconds. The cat was gone, eaten up by the dogs! As I had just finished thinking about that story, I looked up and saw the very same couple standing about 20 meters away from me, on a road heading off to the station. We did not have time to talk as they were off to catch a train to Leon. His leg had caused them too much delay and so they decided to complete the journey to Santiago by rail. We shook hands, I wished them a happy marriage and they wished us a bon camino.

Outside of the town was a little church I could see from the distance and decided it would be a nice place to stop and take my first break. For this occasion, I took my jacket off to prepare to walk in the warm sun. The morning mist was burnt away and soon it would be hot again. We were very fortunate with the weather but I was told that past Leon, the weather often gets worse and that we could expect rain some day soon. By a pretty little church I met up with Brigitte and Catharine. It felt really good to have friends on the way and meet up with them every so often. We exchanged stories and things that had happened since we last met, shared food for breakfast and walked on together.

It was a pleasant walk in the countryside and alongside a river, over flat grounds. We walked up to Philip and a German pilgrim and we were introduced to Manfred. He said that he was not feeling too well, some sort of a stomach upset. Catharine produced a small pill bottle containing herbal medicine pellets and suggested he take a few but suggested that he must not eat anything for half an hour. He took a dose and started eating cake and apple straight on top of them. "I said not to eat anything" she said to him, "but I'm hungry", he replied and we all laughed. He was a big man and looked like he had eating too much in his past years. He was 63, recently retired from a law firm. The girls and I walked on and crossed a small road and followed the yellow arrows on to another path heading west.

Suddenly I noticed a cat on the verge of the bush line to my right. A very still cat, another dead cat I thought. Brigitte and Catharine came to see what had made me stop by the side of the track. Manfred walked passed and wasn't bothered to stop. 'Cats have seven lives' he said and walked on. I always believed that they had 9. Philip appeared and joined us in the circle, looking at the little dead black cat. She lay there with her front paws tucked in under her chest, I could not believe she was dead but I noticed the dark red blood pooled in one ear and nose. It was not a good sign. I touched her and the body, it felt cold and hard as stone. She just looked so peaceful and tranquil in that position. It reminded me of one of my cats, Cher. I left her with Lynne and Richard when I moved away from Birmingham.

Cher was the reason I came back together with my first love, Karen Brogan. She was a acting head Occupational therapist at Edgware General Hospital and I was a dish washer in the canteen. One day she called me up and asked if I wanted a cat, Karen 's cat had had kittens and she was looking to find good homes for them. I drove to London and as soon as the door

opened and your eyes met, that old magic was back. A few months later I asked her father for her hand in marriage. He asked, but what about that girl and her boy you live with at the moment? Good question. When I told Lynne that I had fallen in love and would leave, she asked me about how I felt that she was carrying our child. That did change things and when I mentioned the situation to Karen, she asked how many weeks pregnant, I told her and she worked out that I must have then been betraying her. She broke off the engagement and we never spoke again. I stayed with Lynne and Richard until I met Susie in Paris and then left. The pregnancy by the way was a lie. Oh boy, painful memories!

The four of us stood around when suddenly Catharine suggested that we should make a proper circle around the cat, kneel down and hold hands. In silence the space we were in felt very peaceful and special. I was holding Catherine to my left and Brigitte to my right. Philip was kneeling opposite me. We sat there and time stood still. I can not remember any noise or distraction, as if we had gone somewhere, another place or level. I can not describe it.

I think we were all equally shocked when the cat suddenly leapt on her 4 legs, shook herself unsteadily, rocking from left to right as if any second, she would fall over. She looked at us and hissed before jumping between Philip and Brigitte into the bushes and trees. She stopped about 2 meters away, looked back, hissed again and ran in to the thick of the shrubs, out of our sight.

I couldn't really look at any of my fellow pilgrims and certainly didn't want to talk. I got up and started to walk. I walked and walked trying to take in what we had just witnessed. She was probably not dead, just half dead and would have recovered anyway, without us. But somehow I felt that something special had happened and I wondered if the others felt the same. Whatever happened there, it was something I will never forget. May be we do have these special powers, may be it is this we should be researching and practicing in our schools and colleges. In the old days long gone past, this event would have either been recorded as a miracle or we would have been burned as witches and wizards. May I suggest today we call it the power of love?

I walked on and in the next town, both hostels had that familiar sign up: No Perros! My feet were aching and I was tired, I longed for a comfortable place to stay and rest for the night. We walked on, on and on. The path was covered with larger stones making it difficult and uncomfortable to walk and Tog and I were limping. The corn fields were never ending, they just went on and on, mile after mile. The evening sun cut through the gathering clouds and lit up an area of a field just ahead of us. I decided that this would be the place for us to make camp for the night. I gathered some loose corn stems together to make a comfortable base to sleep on, lay out the sleeping bag and opened up a tin of sardines, cut up some Monchego sheep cheese and shared what I had with Tog. The sun set, tired and exhausted, I was asleep before dusk.

29 September

In the middle of the night some time, I was awoken by the sound of barking. I was very confused, in the pitch darkness of night, loud barking from close by. All the time I had known Tog, he had never barked or growled once! Now he was acting like a wild dog and I could not understand why. I could just about make out his shape in the dark of night. Between his fierce barking, he leapt forward snarling but came back to stay very close to me. I grabbed my bamboo walking stick to defend myself. We were being attacked by the demons of the

dark. I had no idea what was out there. I could here rustling noises and heavy breathing but could not make out any shapes. I did know that whatever it was, it was not friendly and dangerously close.

After what seemed too long, the noises died down and faded into the distance. Tog stood by my side for a long while to be sure that the intruders would not return. I could not really get much sleep after that incident. My hart was thumping in my chest and when I had calmed down I noticed how cold it was and how uncomfortable my bedding was. It took ages for the first light to appear. I didn't feel like walking in the dark that morning, so I lay there waiting for the day to break.

And when it did, I packed our things together at first light and we hit the path again. These stones, the surface of the road we walked on, felt very uncomfortable. Most steps I took hurting my feet and ankles. The path seemed without end. The weather was dry, but cloudy and much later we arrived at a signpost indicating another 9km to some hostel and village. We had no option but to just keep our heads down and walk. So that's what we did. I was not quite sure that our late-night visitors were, but I guessed that it was probably a pack of wild pigs. From somewhere on route, I remember hearing a story from a French woman pilgrim who had been attacked by wild pigs as she lay in her sleeping bag in a tent somewhere in the Pyrenees. She managed to escape by running to a nearby village for protection. Tog may have saved my life last night, I owe him and treasure him and love him so much now. I can not imagine being without the little darling.

After much painful walking we came up to the village but the people there at the hostel were very hostile. Was it me, was it because of Tog? I was wondering and drifting in to negative thoughts, but what did it matter? I bought some food supplies from the shop and we walked on again. We were now walking by a big road with lots of traffic. It's not nice to walk in these conditions. But like all things, change comes after time, and eventually the traffic reduced, and the road opened up into the countryside and I was quite happy to be marching on.

Further along we walked past a man who, crouching down by the side of the road, was cooking himself a meal. I thought it was a strange place to rest but greeted him with a smile and bounas dias. His reply was friendly but it didn't feel right for me to stop by his camp. So we walked on thinking that this guy seamed familiar. After a few km's down the road it came to me: Barry Sheene. The guy back there looked like his twin brother. The air was warming up, and it was time for me to find a place to have a break, take my jacket off and air my boots. We stopped by a bridge and did all the routine stuff. I was getting good at living in the wilderness and had set procedures to get through my day. I was very happy to be able to live independently and out side the norm of the comforts and safety of society. It was a great feeling of independence.

Barry, who's real name was Reiner, appeared about half an hour later. He greeted me with a smile and a buenas dias. We exchanged a few Spanish words and then found that English would be easier for us to communicate in. Reiner was German and had been travelling around Europe for the past 17 years. A real vagrant, an experienced walker and out door survivor.

We walked on together and talked about lots, shared our life stories and found much in common. We walked into a small village, Terradillos De Los Templarios and found a shop

close by the hostel where we bought food to cook. Reiner had limited funds so I bought the essentials as a treat for our first luncheon together.

We proceeded to walk out of the village and after about 1 hour found a great place to make camp close by a little stream with a functional water pump. It was siesta time and we gathered wood and lit a fire. Pasta, tuna fish and tomatoes source with peppers, garlic and onion. It was a treat and great experience to share space with a man who had been on the road for so long. He was originally from Germany but working as a child care support therapist there, he had seen just too much abuse and wickedness human nature could dish out. He fled, with nothing only his backpack, clothes and walking shoes. He stopped in many places and found some work, he spent the past 7 years on one of the Cannery islands. He was an orphan and abused by his step parents as a child. Such misery but, to meet him today, I felt he had really made it in life, he is a very knowledgeable and clever man.

We rested and afterwards packed and walked on. We walked and talked all afternoon, talking in the sights and smells of countryside, villages and churches. Reiner knew much to tell about history and was a good teacher. It was a privilege to have met him.

In the evening we had only about an hour of sun left, we arrived on a high plateau overlooking Shagùn but it was too far to reach and we were too tired to walk in to the darkness of night. We decided to make camp in the field. Heavy cloud moved across the skies and after Reiner had set up his tent, he helped me make a cover with his rain poncho in case it rained. He had invited me in to his tent but I thanked him and declined. I felt better staying out with Tog. But I was concerned about the rain. We ate a cold meal together and drunk some wine and told stories before going to bed. It had been a good day.

30. September

Woke up early, it was a cold and uncomfortable night, strong winds and rain had started just as I was climbing out from underneath the poncho. Hastily we packed our things together and threw over our ponchos to protect ourselves from the rain. The first rain in 16 days, sooner or later it had to come and here it was. Dark skies and cold air, the autumn was here.

Off we walked, not far, just about 5km but in the rain, walking was a whole new experience. My legs, arms and neck were soaking wet in a few minutes. My rain protection gear was no good and keeping eye on Tog to protect him from traffic, was severely restricted from underneath the poncho's hood. The wind made matters worse and the going harder.

Eventually we arrived cold and shivering in Shogon. We checked in to the hostel. A very friendly young lady invited Tog to sleep under the stairs and even provided warm blankets for him. We checked in upstairs where we stripped off and had hot showers. It was a great place. We also met up with Brigitte, Catharine, George, Philip and Manfred. It was a big place and many other pilgrims were booked in. Late in the evening a large group of cyclists arrived to sleep under protection of the huge dormitory roof the hostel offered.

We decided to go out and find a place to have some lunch in. It was raining and poring outside but we found a little restaurant not too far away. Tog had to wait outside where he had shelter from the rain but he would have been happier inside. I thought I would ask but the waitress told us that no Perros were allowed in a restaurant and that was final.

I introduced Reiner to my friends and we talked and share stories. It was Brigitte's last evening, she would be taking a train home tomorrow so we celebrated with a glass or two of wine and wished her well. It was sad to say goodbye but there would be many more of this to come when we arrived in Santiago as everyone would then find their way back to their lives and homes again somewhere around the globe.

01 October 2003

Whatever I tried, I just could not get off to sleep that night. Counting sheep, cows, chicken or goats, nothing worked. My earplugs were ineffective to the sound level of Manfred's loud snoring. With my sleeping bag under one arm and my drinking water bottle under the other, with the torch in my mouth, I tiptoed down the huge wooden staircase where Tog was resting. He was pleased to see me, and I pulled a mattress down from the pile and made a comfortable bed for myself next to his. At last, I enjoyed a peaceful night. Although, every so often a nicotine addict would sneak down the stairs, open the door and smoke a cigarette in the gap. I was thinking back to those days when I would have felt the urge to join him and felt pity for the man.

My thoughts drifted to my step father, Martin Winkler. He was my mothers' third husband and died of cancer. My half brother thinks that he is his father but he is not. Sorry Stefan, Martin was in prison when you were conceived. About 2 years before he died, they operated and removed his voice box. He was using an electrical device to enable him to talk but he sounded like a tin robot. It was a scary encounter to see and hear him. It was terrifying and sad to see a good man deteriorate and lose the battle to cancer. It was even more terrifying to see the true effects of the drug nicotine and its powers over the human mind.

To my utter disbelief, Martin continued smoking after his operation! He would remove the plaster from his neck, place the filter of the cigarette in the whole the surgeon had cut out and eagerly inhale the smoke down his throat in to his lungs. Watching this procedure made me want to be sick.

The Swiss government still tolerate tobacco advertising and many of the Swiss smoke. Many young children and women I see smoke. It makes such a good source to collect tax. For me this again enforces my belief that governments have no interest in the people they are elected to govern. Why do they allow this to continue? I have thought about this for some time and can only reach the conclusion that it is based on what is wrong with the whole foundation of our political system: Short term politics. They know only too well that they can receive the income from the smoking population today and by the time most of the smokers develop medical problems and need hospital treatment and become a burden to the health service, those who govern will long be retired from politics and the next generation will be left with the worries about costs for the health care. Soon their calculations will go pair shaped, as the birth rate declines and the unemployment figurers climb to record heights each year, there will soon not be enough people to fund the system. It is surly time to turn around and stop the madness.

Another plus for the government and pension fund companies is that many smokers won't make demands on their pensions at all or not for very long and this is how they balance their books and possibly their moral conscience, if they have one.

How could we shift people away from these addictive habits? May be we should print new kinds of adverts on tobacco products: Please smoke, it is good for your government and our pension fund! Could this be the slogan that would have more effect than the current ones of danger, smoking kills? All the smokers know this one but continue because they know they will die one day anyway but their mind has to block that fact out of their conscious mind otherwise we would all be going around in a state of misery and utter hopelessness. Does the government know this? I think they do, they have no interest in people stopping this addiction. They raise huge amounts of tax revenues from this source; where else would they find the cash to go to war with?

Having said this, I must draw your attention to the statistics of the death tables around the world. A large amount of my work in the past was based on these studies. The highest numbers of smokers in the population are in Japan but oddly enough their statistics indicate some of the lowest cancer rates. Maybe we could be enjoying these habits if we ate more fish and fresh vegetables and if the tobacco companies stopped adding all the poisons and chemicals to the tobacco products. I read somewhere that over 300 substances were added to flavour and help the tobacco burn better.

According to Freud, women smoke to make up for their missing penis, I shall go no further in to that theory....and anyway, back to my camino. It was morning and sun rays shun in through the windows, high up in the roof of the hostel, a converted church in Sahagùn. I was listening to the usual commotion of the early risers after being ripped out of my deep sleep by the most annoying alarm clock. I had heard it before in some previous hostel. It was the sound of an electrical rooster. How can some people set such a thing and wake all those sleeping soundly around them? How selfish can you get? This question often came up early mornings, someone had to be the first to get up and turn on the lights though, I just could not imagine doing that myself though.

I lay down at the base of the stairs and enjoyed a cuddle with Tog and watched and waved to the people as they departed. I eventually rose and packed my things together. Most of my friends had left but Reiner was sitting up at the long table sipping coffee. I joined him and thanked him again for the rayki massage he had given me last night. It was very relaxing and I felt good.

In most of the hostels they were rather strict about keeping to the rules. Pilgrims could only stay one night and had to depart before 8:00 the next morning. A cleaning lady would arrive, such as she did in this hostel, as I noticed when she was shouting about something to do with a "Perro". I had forgotten to put the mattress back up on the pile and Tog had taken the opportunity to make himself comfortable on it. She was close to shouting her head off in rage and anger and looking around for the owner. The Spanish have real passion!

I could tell from how she was shouting and waving her arms around in the air that she did not appreciate a dog sleeping on the mattresses intended for humans. Reiner, who spoke some Spanish tried to calm her down, explaining that Tog had not spent all night in that comfort but had just taken the opportunity after an oversight of his owner. He apologised and she eventually carried on with her duties and left us to finish our breakfast in piece. My clothes had more or less dried over night but still felt damp in places.

We left a short time later and found the trail, marked by the yellow arrows. It was much easier walking in day light. We crossed a bridge and the Rio Cea. Legend has it that at a time

when both Moors (Arabs) and Christians were battling for control of northern Spain a Christian force camped near Sahagùn. Before retiring for the night some of the men stuck their lances in the ground and when they woke the following morning, they found that their lances had sprouted roots, branches and leaves.

The sun had long gone and dark clouds had darkened the skies. It started to rain. We found shelter in what was once a Red Cross ambulance station on the city limits. The house was all locked up but we were out of the rain under the veranda. We had no desire to walk in the rain and get wet again so we waited and talked. We fixed broken things and discussed the wrongs of the world. Many pilgrims walked passed, some waving, some coming over to chat. After 2 hours we were getting fed up and decided that we really had to keep going and that getting wet was a part of the experience walking the camino. So, off we went.

It was not pleasant. The wind blowing rain through the flapping poncho, soon my arms and legs were wet again.

It was no fun but we continued our journey to the west. Reiner had a map and suggested we take a detour of ten minutes so that we would come to a shelter sooner than on the other route. I agreed and we headed in the new direction. We arrived in a small village but the place was shut and there was no one to ask about opening times. It was just a little shed anyway, so it would not really offer us any comforts. We walked on, through the village out the other end. From a farm house far off across a field I could see and hear two dogs barking at us. Tog was very interested as he eventually picked up the scent of a bitch. He was off. My shouting of commands were unheard in the poring rain and stormy wind gusts. Tog collided with the two dogs in the distance but it looked friendly enough. We walked on after a while. He would follow. But very soon I noticed that I was wrong, Tog had other plans. His interest in the bitch was higher than in me and I had to accept that this may be the time when our paths do part and he takes his own way again. He was a free dog and can go anytime, anywhere.

Reiner and I walked on a while and then found a small derelict cow shed. Most of the roof was intact so we had dry ground to sit on. There was some wood and straw to make a fire. Soon we had boiled water and made soup. Slowly we warmed our cold bodies and recovered from the wet weather ordeal. Every 10 minutes or so I went outside looking to see if I could see any sign of Tog but there was nothing, only rain and low cloud hanging over the fields.

The time had come. This was what I thought could happen any time on the journey to Santiago. I felt anger because I didn't have a chance to say goodbye. He was a free dog and he could decide where to spend his life. I would miss him. We stayed in that little hut for an hour and talked but still I got up every now and again to look out in the hope of seeing Tog. On one occasion I could make out a small little black dot in a field, running in our direction. Was it him? Of course it was! Tog, I yelled and started running towards him. We collided and cuddled. He was wet to the bones but looking ever so pleased with himself and I knew why.

The look of satisfaction was all over his face. He had had a good time. "Good boy Tog, I'm happy to have you back", I told him. He also warmed and dried off by the fire, panting and still extremely happy. I envied him a little. It would be nice to meet a nice girl on route and have a similar wild romance. But then I thought that I had had enough of those in my life and I was now looking for other inspirations.

We packed, dressed for rain and walked on. It was tough going through the wind and rain. Reiner had decided to walk barefoot. His leg was hurting him and it was likely he had developed an infection, his shin was swollen and red. My troubles also plagued me but I was limping less than he was but we both limped along a deserted track of road, in the middle of nowhere, our ponchos blowing around our faces and bodies in the strong gusts of wind. How far would we get in these conditions? We saw a sign directing us to a village called Calzadilla de los Hermanillos, just 6 km. We walked on, a battle of wills. I walked ahead as Reiner was now really severely limping and going at a snails pace. I had offered to carry his backpack and help out but he declined my offer. The 6km were more like 12 and as we entered the village the rain faded away and the skies cleared, there was hope of sun breaking through very soon. Our arrival in the village went unnoticed apart from a wide-eyed old man who pointed us in the direction of the hostel.

There we found Ben and a Canadian beauty and her French lover sitting at the table in the kitchen of the hostel. After hallos and introductions, we had hot showers and used the tumble dryer to dry our cloths in. What a novelty and luxury. An old women came to collect the 3€ fee from us each and later we cooked dinner and ate together. I spent some time talking with Ben, he had just resigned his job as a primary teacher in the UK to walk the world and visit places, including many Islamic states. I learnt a lot from his stories and insights. He was a really nice bloke and I hoped to do some walking with him. However, he had such long legs, I doubted I could ever keep his pace. We went out to explore the village and he bought me a glass of wine in a very messy little bar on the outskirts of the village. On the way back, the sun came out and I went in to fetch my boots and stood them in the warm evening sun rays, hoping they might dry out a little bit before sunset.

Before settling down for the night, I retrieved my boots and noticed the incoming heavy dark clouds moving slowly but surly our way. The first drops hit me before re-entering the hostel. It would be nice now to have a car ride to drive through this nasty patch of weather and difficult terrain. Would my car still be in St Jean? Mountains were ahead of us and who knows, it may be even snowing up there!

2 October

It had rained through the night, I had slept well and through the noise of the two lovers banging away in the room next door. Ben was first to get up and go. We said goodbye and I cooked eggs and fed Tog the leftovers from yesterday. Reiner took ages to get packed and leave the hostel. He was still hurting and in no condition to walk. He ignored my advice to rest for a few days and we set off in to the rain. I walked ahead and waited for him to catch up several times. On one occasion I told him that it would be best if I just walked ahead, I was getting cold walking this pace. I offered to carry his stuff and asked if I could do anything to help him. No, he replied. I walked on. After a while I lost him out of my sight when I turned to look back for him. I had to walk on. This was my walk and I wanted to get on with it. I was sure Reiner would make it to the next village, I could not help him anyway. So, I walked on.

Eventually I came to the village but walked through it without stopping. The rain had stopped and I did feel like walking, may be I would catch up with Ben.

Walking in the rain, I remembered my dreams from last night. I was in my old reinsurance company head office and a poohed in the main staircase. I was then dressed in a tuxedo and

had a long discussion with my first boss Adrian Barnard. I was telling him in great detail why his bancassurance project had helped cause the financial ruin of the company. There was no more need for client companies to use our products and services, thanks to his advice. I guess that these dreams were a sign that I finally had managed to sever my ties to the old mother company!

We walked in to Mansilla de Las Mulas, 320km from Santiago. The chap stamping my passport was rather surprised when he saw where we had stayed the previous night, had I taken the wrong route? No idea. It was a nice hostel, good kitchen, hot showers and friendly hospitalieros.

I found rice in the kitchen cupboard and cooked a good meal. After, I sat in the living room and watched as father and daughter stuck pictures in a photo album. The father had just completed the camino 2 months ago. He walked on average 60km each day. Hard to believe but that's what they said. Tog came in and sat in the armchair. They both just laughed but later he farted and I received the accusing looks of blame. It must have been the tined cat food I bought him this morning. Never again, it's so obvious that it was not doing him any good. What do they put in those products?

I went to the bedroom and I rested on my bed and probably slept for a couple of hours. I then got up to look where Tog was and found him waiting outside by the bedroom door. I heard commotion coming from the kitchen and I stuck my head around the corner to see what was going on. Loads of people were sitting around the kitchen table eating. Come on and join us a voice called over to me. I was offered a seat and the introductions started: My name is Roberta, I come from Brasil. Wow, what a beautiful young lady. She said this with a strong accent and I was mesmerized and stunned by her spirit. Urs, a Swiss man had set off from Constance 3 months ago and had arrived here today and many others, including Emilio who had cycled from Belgium and Juan from Alicante, in Spain. A really fantastic group of people that had gathered here from all over the world on this day. I ate lots and managed to only drink two glasses of wine over the whole evening. It was the latest I had stayed up since the parties in Brigg. It was the best social evening I had had in months. Although I was drinking alcohol again, I was happy that I could control my in- take.

On similar evenings in my past life, I would have consumed two bottles of wine and finished the evening off on whisky or cognac.

(Today is the 14.07.04. I am writing this after hearing a story from a friend, she is recovering after taking an overdose of tablets. Her sister called her from Scotland. Her husband, my friend's brother- in- law had been found by his children hanging. He had committed suicide after returning from a hospital where he had tried to admit himself, seeking help for his drinking problem. Hospital staff refused him the help and he went home and hung himself. Another testament for how dangerous alcohol is, stay away from the stuff, do not support your government by buying and paying the tax!

03 October 2003

I was up early as most of my friends slept off their hangovers. I dressed for rain, but my poncho had ripped, and I was not looking forward to being soaked again. I decided that I would find a good shop in Leon and buy some good kit. It was essential if I was to make my journey through these conditions. It was a pleasant walk because the rain only threatened a

few times by dropping a few showers sporadically. We arrived in Leon about midday and came to a junction where yellow arrows were pointing in opposite directions. Should we go left or right? I asked Tog. As usual he kept his knowledge to himself. I decided to stand there and wait for a while. Maybe an idea or something would inspire me. It was two elderly French pilgrims who arrived at the junction some moments later. They had a guide on them and we saw that the hostel to the right, was run by a church and the one to the left, was a municipal run by the local authorities. I thanked them for their help and decided to turn left. I thought we had better chances with Tog at a municipal than in a church run hostel.

We walked and walked through the streets of this large and busy city. Taking in the noise and pollution, the aggression and road rage. My feet and legs hurt from walking on the hard surface and the hostel was difficult to find. I asked several people for directions and was lost several times. After an hour of this, we stood by the entrance of a modern looking tower block with a pilgrim's hostel sign. Another sign, with a black dog, greeted us on the big door.

"Sitz", I told Tog and pushed the door open and climbed up the many stairs. At the top I found a lady who was sitting behind a glass screen in the administration office. I knocked on the glass, trying to form a smile on my tired face. She ignored me. I tried again, a bigger smile this time. She looked up but pointed to her watch, with a deep frown on her face. Siesta time! I had to try: "I'm so sorry, I will come back later but I need to know if I could stay here with my dog? Please?" "Dog? Perro? Perro! NO PERRO!"

She shouted at me and that was final. I was now losing my sense of humour, I thought I had found again with those nice people from last night. How much of this could I take? I slowly climbed back down the many steps to fetch Tog. We had to now try our luck at the church run hostel on the other side of town! It was called Convento Santa Maria. My hopes were low, my spirits even lower and my legs and feet now really hurting. I limped all the way back the first crossing to follow the yellow arrows to the right on the way to the Convent.

Expectations, be careful, things mostly turn out another way. It was so, at the convent. They were so very nice to Tog and myself! I could check in and Tog was given a place under cover. It was much better than I could have hoped for. I tied Tog to a bench and went for a shower. Only tepid semi warm water, not warm enough for me to heat my cold bones up with and help my aching body recover, however, it got the dust and grime off. I then lay on my bed and crawled in to my sleeping bag. This was where I would warm myself up!

I was just about dozing off when I heard Tog whimpering outside. He was missing me. Poor fellow, still so very insecure, or wanting my company. I unzipped the bag, slipped in to the sandals and went out to calm him. This process was repeated 4 times and then I gave up trying to rest. I dressed and we went out to explore Leon. As it was still siesta time, the shops were shut so we just window shopped. We found a nice café and had a chocolate bake and coffee.

Once the shops opened, we walked back to those I had noted and bought a light gas cooker, rucksack, GoreTex jacket, trousers, modern compass watch, spade, socks, gloves, pan and a poncho. I felt it was now safe to cross the mountains and survive the weather conditions. I spent €1000 but it was a comfort to have these things. I was now independent and could cook my own food and make tea anywhere, anytime at little cost. The extra wait of the cooker and gas bottle was minimal. The spade was a total waste of money but looked good hanging from my belt. The gloves were great. Water proof and double lined. Let there be snow.

We made it back to the convent just in time for the service. I had been shopping all afternoon! The nuns gathered in a old part of the church and sat in wooden chairs at the front. What was it that made me cry hearing these angels singing? I was overcome with deep emotions and had no explanation why. It was just so beautiful to hear and to watch. After, I returned to Tog and we went out to look for a place for dinner. We did a couple of rounds through the old part of town but found nothing suitable we fancied. Everything too posh or too expensive. We ended back close to the convent and found a small bar that offered a special menu for pilgrims for only €4.

Inside I asked if I could sit with a fellow, I thought may also be a pilgrim and sat with Paul, a 69-year-old Swiss man who walked from Berne. He had been travelling two months. The last few km's he had problems walking bare foot as the recent rain and water had severely softened his feet and made them very sore and painful. We enjoyed a very nice conversation and were later joined by Juan. We enjoyed a glass of wine together and then had to turn back to the convent before they locked the doors at 22:00.

The pretty girl who had checked us in approached me and suggested it was probably best if I took Tog inside and slept in the small office room. What an angel! I could have hugged and kissed her. I should have, but I have become much too shy to do stuff like that these days.

It was great to have my own room together with Tog. I unpacked the small rucksack and wrote a note, giving my brief history and donating it to a needy pilgrim. I packed the rucksack with all my stuff including the things I had bought that afternoon. There were practical pockets on the outside of the rucksack for the cooker, gas canister and poncho. It was designed that the weight would be distributed better between my back and hips. I was looking forward to walking with it in the morning.

4 10 2003

Up at 6:00, out after a bite of breakfast in to the cold. It was only 10 deg. with stars twinkling in the skies. Could be a nice day ahead. Leon is a large city and it took about 1h 30m to be walking in the open countryside again. It always felt very good to leave the grey buildings, pollution and masses of people behind to replace them with natural mother nature. Soon, the sun was shining, and we were happy to be walking our way. In an open field, Tog started to show signs of wanting to play. He also started running around as if he had never done this before in his life. Stalking me, going down on his front legs and dodging me with swinging left to right movements. It may have been his first time playing like this! It was a pleasure to watch and made me wonder just what kind of life he had before we met.

We entered a small village and I found a child's play frame with swings, this was suitable to hang from and do my pull ups to strengthen my back muscles. I had taken a route that was longer to walk, but it avoided the main road as recommended by Juan. It was his birthday today and he invited people to the hostel in Villar de Mazarife to celebrate with him. We arrived there around midday and I set up my camp up on the first floor outside on the veranda with a view to the sky. I took a hot shower and Juan cooked lunch. Two other pilgrims arrived. The first, a young blond man named Lasse, from Estonia. I had seen him on route before somewhere, he walked with two rucksacks, one on the front, the other in the normal place, on his back, he wore running shoes. We only said hello then and wished each other a nice day. But now, we had the time and felt like talking more. The other was a woman from France, She-Wolf was her name. She had left her husband in Paris and moved to a small

village in the French Alps to retire, she was 60 years young. Later she would tell me that for her, I was the image of St Jakob. I was not sure what to say then and I still am left with a big question mark about how to take that statement, may be it is hard for me to accept compliments.

In the course of the afternoon, more and more pilgrims would arrive. I was wondering how Juan had arranged this. Was he so well connected? A multitude of bearded young men took up beds in the hostel. Only one woman, a young lady named Anna Marie was amongst them. They were Basques and very friendly. A cyclist from Holland arrived, Rick. He was cool and had been travelling through Europe for several years! Another blond Estonian arrived, a beautiful young lady called Janaka. I went to buy some food and we cooked dinner. The kitchen was bursting full of young people celebrating Juan's birthday, each drinking from a bottle of red wine. A few joints were also making the rounds, it was a great party. I kept looking at the one bearded guy, he looked so familiar and later he came over to me and asked me if I remembered who he was. I was embarrassed that I could not recall and so he reminded me about the short meeting we had in Logrono. "I told you we would meet again" he said with a knowing smile on his face. I can not remember his name but translated it meant: He who can change minds. He was from Chile. I felt very drawn to this man as if he were especially important.

I also felt that the other men were his followers, and my mind plotted some story about Basque independence fighters tracking the camino, scouting for recruits, looking out for talent and people with similar views. I think if I had been asked, I would have signed up and joined them, then and there.

We partied until early into the morning singing familiar pop songs. I heard many Spanish songs that were very moving but throughout the night, I kept to my maximum of two glasses of wine. I drank lots of water instead, it is possible. Around 3:00 a poor pilgrim knocked on the kitchen door and asked us to calm down. There were some older folk who were trying to sleep next door. The main body of party animals then went out and walked the streets. A handful, including me and a couple of ladies, stayed and talked in the kitchen. We shared stories, I told them my views and experiences. About world peace and how we could achieve it. It was a special time, at last I could talk about what I knew, to total strangers and they wanted to hear more, asking lots of questions, wanting the details. It did me good to get it out of my system. I was visibly shaking inside when I was talking and it drained my energy.

When the drunken party animals arrived back it was time for me to go to bed. I slipped in to my sleeping bag and Tog cuddled up close by my side to share my warmth. I looked up and out in to the starlit night skies. It was so clear, the universe lay open in front of me. So many thoughts were crossing through my mind. I felt somehow so special and the people I was meeting were indeed so very special too. We were all going through a very special experience together, as one. It was such a great feeling to be here right now.

I was thinking about a visit to a church that morning, to my surprise it was actually open. In the church, they had replaced the traditional candles and installed a box to slide a 1€ coin in to. This would then light up one of the electric candles in the box and the donor would enjoy the glow of a dimly lit reddish light for a while.

In the bible I recalled a story of Jesus loosing his temper when he walked in to a temple and saw the money traders and people engaging business deals. I so wanted to smash that box in

to little pieces! I felt real anger! I was laying there looking up in to the stars, I was actually seeing myself doing it. At that moment, a shooting star streaked past and lit up the night in a flash. It went on for seconds and covered a 4th of my view of the sky above me. It was amazing. What timing. Was it a sign? It was a clear sign but to do what? What must I do? With this question tormenting me, I must have fallen asleep.

I woke up by loud noise. It sounded as if 100 people were running through the outskirts of the village, laughing, shouting, and singing. There were musical instruments, dogs barking. A big commotion. I should have got up to go and investigate what was happening but I was too tired, it was still pitch dark and I went back to sleep.

5. 10.2003, Sunday

I lay in my bed until 09:30. How lazy can I be? But it was Sunday, a day of rest and peace. I made tea, ate some left over bread with honey, packed and said good bye to the few friends that had made it up so early. I was told that Juan had a bad night and was sick. The effects of an alcohol overdose and blood poisoning. I'm happy not to experience that hung over feeling any more, I know what it was like, I had lived through many, too many!

We walked on, straight on. This must have been the straightest and longest road on the journey. It just went on in a perfect line for as far as the eye could see. In a way it was not good for walking, because I could not make out my progress, I could not feel that we were actually getting or going anywhere! Nevertheless, of course even this changed eventually and we stopped for a bite of lunch on a hill looking down on Hospital Orbigo.

Before entering the town, we walked over a long stone bridge across more land then water but I guessed that the floods here could be severe when the melting snow come down from the mountains, visible in the distance. Soon we would be climbing over them.

There was a farmers market bustling with traders on the other side of the bridge and I went to have a closer look. The farmers were selling huge bags of onions, peppers and garlic. I tried to buy single pieces but I was waved away and laughed at. I approached several farmers but non of them was willing to sell me such small quantities. What was a pilgrim to do with 50kg of potatoes on his back?

I walked on into the town and found the entrance to a beautiful hostel. The layout of the house was similar to the one from yesterday, but this place was in much better condition and had a fountain, mosaic art decorations on the walls and very nice music playing in the forecourt. I looked around as Tog made "platz" in the shade. No one was about so I took my time and nosed about the place. In a corner I found a box full of things the pilgrims had left. People could help them selves to any item they needed. I found a brush I could use for Tog and a reflecting waistcoat that could be used for when walking in the dark to warn motorist of our presence. As I headed back to Tog, a small, well dressed fat man waddled in to the courtyard smoking a big smelly cigar.

PERRO? BLA; BLA; BLA; NO PERRO! He shouted at Tog and tried to shoo him outside into the main road! SENIOR, I shouted, perro tranquilia, no proplema. It did no good. This man went ballistic, he shouted and kicked out at Tog until I blocked his way, standing very close to him and looking down in to his ugly fat face. I could see a big cross with Jesus nailed to it, hanging from a silver necklace. How typical of Christian behaviour, I thought but said:

“Senior, perro no problema”, my words were said in a slow and with a cool as a cucumber delivery. If he had made another move at Tog, I would have stopped him. He retreated from me, ranting and raving and throwing his arms up in the air. I could hear him threatening to call the police. I went over to my rucksack, packed the things I had found in the box, went to the table that had a bowl with fruit on and took a few apples and then I called Tog to come “fuss”. We walked out and away from that place in utter disgust. I felt like ripping that cross from his fat neck, I was so angry.

We walked out of town and soon found the tranquillity of the countryside. It had its usual calming effect and our troubles were left behind. This was much better than anything else. We had peace and were enjoying the nature. When would I learn not to react so bad tempered to situations with people like that? I had to find a way to not get so mad, I wanted so much to be able to control myself and to reason with people that acted like the fat man. It was not easy, not speaking the language was one thing and breaking their animal abuse culture was another. The main thing was not to lose my temper and strike out at these people.

I had never been a violent person but of course I could easily get into a situation when I am defending my dog, I could hurt a fellow human being.

That would cause serious trouble and I could not allow that to develop, I just wish I could take things calmer with more ease to be able to accept that all these encounters are given to me as a learning experience. Not being able to stay in this or any other hostel is meant to be that I would learn to behave in a proper manor and also to judge when to walk away when conditions are not right. There are many nice people to find everywhere. I had to learn to let go, trust in God and not swim against the tide of events. Easier said than done, but if I keep reminding myself and keep this thought, maybe I could eventually control myself and emotions better. It was a test. I had to take it.

These were my thoughts as I walked. It was good to understand and clearly know what to do but somehow, I was never able to accept these basic truths when it was most needed to do so. I was caught up in the heat of passion and my emotions took control of my senses. If I could master this part of my life, I knew I could achieve almost anything and be in total control of my life. Why did I always fail? Was it something from my past effecting my present abilities? Possibly. I had no other option as to walk on, in the hope of finding the answers.

(20.7.2004. I have just written the above events this morning. I returned back to my desk to continue the story writing, but I thought it would be important to mention what happened earlier. As we passed two elderly ladies, one of them called out behind me that I should not kick her dog. I stopped and turned and walked back to her. “Did you say I had kicked your dog?” “Yes,” she replied, I then told her “you must be possessed by the devil or mad. God forgive you for your false accusations, I never kicked your dog you must be insane. Why should I kick your dog?” “You did”, she insisted and walked away. I felt so stupid. Once again, instead of being able to talk in a calm manor and try to settle, what may have been a misunderstanding, I shouted and lost my temper. Of course, that could be excused as a reaction to the injustice of being wrongly accused, but to explain and share my inner conflicts with my readers I have to let you know that even today, I am struggling to control my temper in order to settle disputes and problems.

I have just talked to Hajnalka who witnessed the whole thing, and she said that it is may be “trying to be in control of something I can never be in control of”. I also thought that God

may also be showing me, I am only a weak human being, here to repeat the same mistakes again and again until I get things right.)

The K-PAX text would also be appropriate here!

The camino took us through breath taking countryside, open fields, forest and hills. The weather was perfect, not too hot, with cloudy intervals to cool down in. After climbing up several steep hills and walking through dense forest, I was looking out for a place to sleep. Further along, the forest opened out and I found good soft ground to make camp.

There was lots of storm-wood to support a fire. The sun was setting and it was getting rather cool. The autumn was here. I erected the poncho over the sleeping bag, just in case we had showers during the night. I shared my food with Tog and we cuddled up together, I was staring in to the fire until I was too tired to keep my eyes open and I drifted peacefully in to the unconscious dream lands.

6 October

I was taking a bath in a tub full of ice cubes. It was very cold. Why did I get in the bath in the first place? How did I get here? Was this really happening? My eyes opened and I knew that it was a dream, and I was freezing cold! The poncho had collapsed on to my sleeping bag under the weight of the condensation that had turned to ice. The first night of below freezing temperature, the condensation had frozen and caused the poncho to slide down the sticks I had tied it to, at the end of my sleeping bag. Through the warmth of my body, the ice melted, and my sleeping bag became wet. When feathers get wet, they can not protect against the cold, I was wet and very cold.

It was about 03:00 and I had no other option as to start packing my stuff together. It was not easy, I was so cold, I could hardly move my fingers, most things exposed to the air had an icy cover, I was shaking and shivering all over. It took me what seemed forever, to pack my stuff together and get moving. I had to walk as fast as possible to give my body a chance to warm up. My new jumper and gloves were worth their weight in gold. I soon warmed up though and started to enjoy this early morning walk. The sun was now shining on the other side of earth and the moon was reflecting her rays back through our clear skies, lighting up our path.

We came to crossings in the road and I could easily make out the arrows directing us to Santiago. In this light, they lost their yellow colour, but the shape was given. It reminded me of the FedEx logo. Can you see the arrow between the E and x? Not many people see it but it has always been there. (Sisters from the church told me that the founder of FedEx had the idea as part of his final assignment for his business management course. He was given a 3 and nearly failed the course because his peers thought his idea was impossible) How many more things do we look at each and every day of our lives without taking in or being conscious of what we are actually looking at? How many ideas have you had, and people have told you, that they are impossible to realise? Why are we, and our institutions, conditioning us to mediocrity?

www.forestevents/tracking.html

We arrived in Astorga at 05:00. It was like walking into a ghost town. There was no sign of life. We walked up to the main square where I boiled a soup and warmed up, over the little gas cooker. After the warming soup, still not any signs of life. It was no good staying here, I decided to walk on. It was harder than I thought, I must have lost an hour walking around the centre trying to find the yellow arrows directing me on to the right path. I was just walking in circles, most annoying having to waste my energy like this. The sign posting was just dreadful. Eventually, I walked into the reception of a hotel and asked for directions to Santiago. My plan was to get to Rabanal and have a good rest there before climbing up through the next mountain chain.

We walked on and later when the day broke I felt the warm rays of the rising sun cheering me on. Later I met up with familiar faces, friends I had made further back on route. We stopped and chatted and exchanged stories and plans for the next stage. Rabanal seemed to be the destination of most of my friends and we marched on.

It was a pleasant walk and last night's cold spell, seemed a distant dream away. However, I had to face facts, it could get very cold and I was not really kitted out for outdoor survival in these conditions.

At siesta time, we arrived in Rabanal. None of the three hostels in the village would allow Tog to stay, we were made as welcome as two lepers trying to check in at the Ritz in Bombay. (I had stayed in the Ritz in Bombay on a business trip, it was a shabby, cockroach infested dump of a place!) That's great, there will be much better things ahead of us, I tried to keep a positive frame of mind. So, despite our hunger, hurting legs, feet and tiredness, we moved on. I wanted to get over the 1500m high mountain before dark. I felt that under no circumstances could I survive a night outside at that altitude.

Rick, the Dutch cyclist was also heading that way, suggested I could sleep with him in his tent, if there was no place on the mountain. That was a friendly offer, and I thanked him before saying my goodbyes to my friends.

The walking felt good and the scenery was a treat for sore and tired eyes. Wonderful Mother Nature, her rolling hills, and the mountains. I would soon be climbing up and over there, to see others, higher ones that already carried snow on their caps. Despite my aches and pains, I was enjoying and spending precious moments with Tog. In the hills leading up to the mountains, I was playing hide and seek from the few passing motorists. Whenever I heard an engine, we would run or duck down for cover. I would tell Tog to "warte" and then crawl on, I then would call him to "fuss". We would run together through open stretches of grass, tumble and skirmish around on the soft thick warm carpet of grass together. This went on for much of our afternoon. It was such joy, I really had no problems, I was a free man playing with this most magnificent animal that had chosen me as his companion.

We made a great team and slowly but surely, we climbed the 1500m and arrived around 18:30 in Manjarin. This place could have been in one of the scenes out the movie Mad Max. A small collection of wooden huts, nailed together with broken down and rusty old cars scattered in between. Geese, chicken and ponies walking around the grounds. Of course, only the dogs were tied up, or locked in small cages. I spotted Rick sitting on a wooden bench. He was talking to a good looking, light haired woman. When I got to them, I was introduced to Anthia. A dark-haired woman appeared from inside the wooden shed and came out holding a sleepy young blonde-haired baby over her shoulder. I said hello and asked how old the lovely

girl is. The mother, a dark skinned pretty Spanish 32-year-old, replied in perfect English that it was her son was 2 years old. I looked at the kid and could not take my eyes off him, he was such an angel. His name was Tierra (Earth) and the mother was Proteger (Protect).

I went over to what I assumed to be the main house where I was met by the hospitaliero, Jose. "Greetings Pellegrino", he called out, "wow, a Muslim, so good to have you with us on such a special day. Did you hear, yesterday Israel attacked and bombed Syria!" My God I thought, I didn't want to hear this news, I had not heard or read any news for many weeks now and now I hear that probably war broke out and soon, we would all perish. Well, I was in a good place and ready to face my final judgement.

Of course it never came to that, instead it turned out to be one of the best nights of my life. For me anyway, because Tog was banished to the dirty sheep shed, littered in sheep droppings and damp from the stale urine. I had no other option though, the owner, Thomas was adamant, that dogs had no place in the house. His dogs were all tied up or locked up day and night and I had to be grateful to have the shelter for me and Tog that night. The sun set, it became very cold, I was glad to be in doors.

In side the wooden hut, I met Nick from England, the husband of Anthia, she was an Australian. Both spent their married life travelling and walking the world together. Inside the wooden house, I was told by Jose to make my bed up in the loft, so I unpacked my sleeping bag out of the rucksack and climbed the ladder up to the loft. Suddenly, Thomas called me down and told me to sleep in the main room, under the huge painting of the Knights. The picture showed the occasion, capturing a scene of the Templar Knights entering Jerusalem.

On a wooden post in the room I noticed a hand written sign, it was in Spanish and read:

Donde hay fe hay amor
Donde hay amor hay paz
Donde hay paz esta dios
Y Donde esta dios
No falta nada

Anitha translated it in to English for me:

Where there is faith there is love
Where there is love there is peace
Where there is peace there is God
Where there is God you need nothing

I'm sure that the capitalist governments would ban these words and imprison anyone who dared preach this basic truth. It is all we need to hold in our belief system to live a full and satisfied life in abundance. However, people have been turned into consumers, they must have lots of needs, they must keep on buying and spending, working, drinking and smoking so we, the government can live. You are feed the system.

More people arrived in the Templars hostel at dusk, just before dinner, a man young man from Israel, Ariel. A tall man with piercing blue eyes and long blond hair with a beard, Pascal Von Zorn. A living relative to a Templar Knight, he was with Janaka, the pretty blond girl from Estonia. A bunch of the young bearded Basque men with a man they called: He who can

change minds. We shared a nice meal together and I talked with many of the people that evening.

I engaged into very deep discussions with Pascal about the Templar Knights and their history. It was an order established to protect the holy routes to and from Jerusalem, to safeguard the passage of the pilgrims and ensure a peaceful journey. The knights would be selected only from royal households, princes and noblemen only. To enlist, they would give their wealth to the order and over time, the order grew to such a powerful force, the Pope, the French and the Spanish kings felt threatened. They agreed that the order had to be destroyed. Friday 13th was the chosen day to attack all knight strongholds and murder them all, with the excuse, that they worship the devil!

I am told that word got out and the leaders of the order probably sacrificed many of their brave knights to the slaughter, knowing that the might of Rome, Spain and France could not be stood up against. The order would survive but would never be known about again openly.

At one point that evening, Janaka came to me and told me that she had discovered God today. She went on to tell me the details and I cried as I stood there, glued to the spot listening to every word of her experience. After that very moving experience, Ariel asked me about my story and about how I became a Muslim. I told him that first I became a Christian, after discovering Jesus Christ on a day when I was playing my piano. I was swept away in a trance. All of a sudden, I could play any tune I wanted to, without looking, without thinking what keys to touch. Blinded with tears and my eyes closed, I could play any tune, any song that came to my mind. I was so happy, I cried so hard, tear drops flowed out from my eyes, splashing down on the ivory piano keys and soaking my shirt. Rivers of tears kept pouring out of my eyes and suddenly there was silence. I looked to find myself several meters away from the piano, standing on the edge of my fireplace. My back was pinned to the picture of Jerusalem I had bought when I worked there, on one of my business trips. My arms were stretched out, as if I was nailed to a cross. I have no idea how long I stood there for, but I sort of woke up from a dream and looked about the room. My arms were hurting from holding them up, so I let them drop and stepped down from the fireplace. I fell to my knees and it was as if God was in the very same room with me. I could not look up and stayed in that position for what seemed to be hours.

I went on to tell Ariel that after the events of 911, there were too many cracks appearing in our western society and that I had to turn away from the path I had taken in the failed western society and turned to the Koran for guidance, as did the prophet Muhammad half a century after the death of Jesus Christ. Muhammad turned away from Jerusalem, because so many people were not living the life Jesus had suggested they live.

I have come to believe that it is time to turn around and start again by following a few simple basic principles, one that everything that the human being has, is thanks to God and we should honour and respect the commandments and the teachings of the prophets.

Ariel had listened patiently to my story and when I had finished, he said: "If this is true, can I be your manager? We can publish a book and you can write songs, we will make a fortune"! I looked and smiled at him, I think I said, yes, let's do that. But in my mind, I was thinking: Typical Jew, wanting to make money out of any opportunity! When will they learn that we can not eat money? Very soon, the resources of the world will be poisoned and most life forms extinct. Did Hitler know about this? Why can I not buy a copy of his book: Mein

Kampf? Who is it, that tells me, that we live in a free society? Let him eat his freedom chips and choke on his FatMac!

A pilgrim told me somewhere on route, the most important lesson he learnt from his university history professor, was that we should be careful because it is always the winning side that writes the history books! It took me some time to understand the meaning and potential problematic of these words. What the hell can we believe today?

In no way do I want to encourage any racism with my remarks. I am stating facts from personal encounters and have the right to my conclusions I make. If you feel offended please close the book now and enjoy the rest of your life without the rest of my discoveries.

7 October 2003

It was a late night for us all. I enjoyed sleeping in the main room under the huge picture of the knights. It was a real honour for me, but I did not know why. Why me? I didn't even talk to Thomas, but out of the 15 pilgrims there that night, why had I been the chosen one to sleep in this room? Whatever the reason, I lay awake and looking at the knight in the candle light. It was warm, there was plenty of wood burning in the fire. I got up after hearing Tog whimpering. Poor thing, he must be getting through his worst night ever. I took my sleeping bag out and tried to sleep close by his side. It was too cold, I could not shut an eye! I gave up and went back into the warm cabin.

I was up early and ready to depart before most were awake. I spent time with Protect and Earth over breakfast and to my amazement, she did not actually live here. She was just helping out and would be moving on in a few days time. Earth and I played with Tog. I was amazed just how gentle Tog can be. He made sure that the little human was not pushed aside and he allowed pulling and tugging of all his parts without any aggressive behaviour. We laughed as Tog took Earth for a walk, despite all Earths counter wait against the lead, he had no chance at around 24 months and less than half of that in weight.

I hoped to meet them again somewhere on the route but they were travelling by bicycle and it would be unlikely. I gave Earth a toy duck I had found on route and hugged Protect goodbye. As we walked away from the dear place on top of the mountain, Earth was running after us shouting bon camino, bon camino and crying. After the first bend I had to stop and dry my eyes. I was walking with tears rolling down my face and they were now blurring my vision. We walked on and soon his little voice faded away. I bit my teeth together, what could I do? Go back, marry his mother? Buy a bicycle and ride with them? It was not meant to be, I had to move forward and find my own way. Just walk, I said to myself, walk!

About a km later I realised that I had left my bamboo walking stick behind. I was so happy to turn and head back. I met several people coming my way who were surprised to see me walking this way so I had to stop and explain each time. Eventually I arrived and Earth, Tog and I had a great reunion. Who would have thought it would have been so soon! I explained

that I had just come for my stick and I thought I could detect a moment of sadness in both him and his mother. She said that he never really noticed when we left in the first place! She must have heard his shouts and cries just the way I did. Anyway, we left again and this time it was rather quiet and very different then before. I was happy to have my stick and eagles feather back, the walk could continue!

This part of the country was so very beautiful. I was looking at rolling hills, forest and a grand panorama over the mountains. The weather was sunny and not too warm, just perfect to walk. So we walked. The path soon started to descend, down the mountain and mid-morning, I had met up with the Basque group in a small village, where we stopped for tea. I walked on with them and Anna Marie told me that they would be running down hill. It was the best way to not get tiered knees. They went ahead and I soon lost them from my sight. Later I did try to run down a few steep sections and found that it was actually quite good. The problem was that my feet were not used to the new pressure spots and I could feel friction and new blisters developing. My knees were less tiered thought!

Around siesta time we, arrived in a very nice old town at the base of the mountain called Molinaseca. Here I met up with many of my travelling friends. There was a small dammed river and Anna Maria went for a swim in the deep end. It was too cold for me and I didn't want to get wet. I cooked eggs by the beach and snoozed for an hour. We then walked on. I spent much of that stretch of the route walking with Nick and Anthia. They were such a nice couple and we got on so well together. I could not detect any animosity between them and hoped for the day to find a partner, to live together in peace and share common interests like walking and discovering the unknown. Was it impossible for me? In my life, I have met so many women and lived with the ones I thought I could make a good life with, but it just did not ever work out for me. What was I doing wrong? Maybe I must find the meaning of true love.

Eventually, the 4 of us walked into the city of Ponferada. This was famous for its well preserved Templar Knight castle. We arrived at a huge hostel and just as I was preparing for Tog to hide outside for me to go and negotiate a bed for the night, a hospitalero named Pascal stepped out of the entrance gate. He greeted us all with a big warm smile and gave Tog lots of attention. This was a good sign and I was sure we could stay the night. We could indeed. I was shown downstairs to the overflow area where we had the whole cellar to ourselves! I was too tired to go out and visit the castle. The party of people that returned an hour later, very disappointed because the castle was shut. In the meantime, Pascal was feeding Tog meat and kept showing up with other goodies to eat for us. We talked and I discovered that Pascal did the route himself 2 years ago and he too found a dog on route. He took him back home to France. We exchanged email addresses and I promised to write to him when I got to Finisterre. He suggested that there may be a way for him to collect my car and drive to meet me somewhere. It was a good idea. I had to work out something. Would my car still be there? Sometimes, I was wondering about how large the fine would be. The police had probably towed it away by now and sold it at auction. What could I do? Nothing, no point in worrying about it then!

I was invited to dinner by Ariel, Juan and a few others. They cooked pasta and made a grand salad. We enjoyed a nice evening together with many other pilgrims sitting at the large tables and sharing the good facilities this huge hostel offered.

Later on, I walked Tog in the grounds and noticed a sign to Santiago, it was only another 202km to go. (Funny, imagine if you had to go for a 202km walk tomorrow). That was nothing, probably less than 10 days away at my rate. Was I ready to get there? What would happen when I did? Would I have a life changing experience and suddenly know what to do with my life? Already I was thinking that the end was here too soon. I was not ready but luckily, I had decided to walk to the coast anyway, so if nothing earth shattering would happen in Santiago, I would have another few days' time. But what if...? I had to put my thoughts to sleep, with the rest of my body. It was time to rest. We went to our loggings, Tog lay on a bed next to me and we slept like kings.

08 October 2003

Up and out early. I promised Pascal not to draw much attention to the fact that we were staying in that huge room in the cellar. We said our goodbyes and I told him that I would think about his offer and write an email.

We walked out and on to the busy streets of Ponferrada and soon picked up the camino de Santiago. We walked through the town and saw the nice castle and all the shops displaying the sign of the Templar Knights. This must have been an important stronghold for the knights several centuries ago. I had to find out more about this order. (Ever since I have returned I am finding this task most difficult, it appears that the governments and religious leaders still want to hide the truth). Where do you live? In a free society? WAKE UP! On the way out of the town, walking on a nice path alongside the Rio Sil, I found a good site to exercise my back muscles. A children climbing frame was just high enough for me to grab hold of and lift my wait up in to the air. 3 times 15 knee pull-ups is what I managed. Not bad with my heavy boots on but of course without the rucksack.

We walked on and out of the town, enjoying the sights and smells of late summer, there was still plenty of sun and warmth to enjoy and so we did. We walked into a village named Cacabelos. It too had dammed its small Rio Cúa. It was where I decided that Tog would learn to swim. As usual, what we planned for, can turn out rather differently. We went down to the river bank and I took off my rucksack, shirt and boots. I rolled my trousers up to above my knees and waded into the water. Not warm but as I was not planning to dip in deep anyway, it did not concern me. I called Tog over but he was very reluctant. Again, I was plagued with the thought, what had happened to him is the past? Maybe they tried to drown him? He didn't actually show much fear of the water, but it seemed that he just respected the purity of it.

Anyway, he came in and covered his toes before turning and heading back to dry ground. Right, I had to use a firmer approach. I went and fetched his lead (string) I tied it to his collar and pulled him along my side in to the water. "Fuss" and tugged him against his will, deeper and deeper out in to the river. As we arrived at the critical point where his feet found no hold, he twisted, found a grip and pushed hard, and pushed off hard, back towards the shore. I was not expecting this sudden turn and the g-force span me off to the opposite direction. I lost my foot hold and ... splash, down I went. It was a shock, I was gasping for air as I emerged from the cold river. I could hear laughter from the shore. A group of curious locals and a few pilgrims were enjoying the siesta water side entertainment provided for free, with courtesy from Muhammad bin Hari, Pilger 6663 and Tog the dog.

It took a time to recover and find my breath again after the cold dip. I then joined them and laughed about the incident. It was rather hysterical. Tog was lying on the rived bed waiting

for me to return. I emptied the contents of my pockets out on to the grass and let the sun do the drying. My wallet, passport, money and tissues, all took a good soaking. I was determined that Tog should overcome his reluctance and I was sure that he would need to be able to cross water sometime in the future. For unknown reasons to me then, I somehow knew I could not afford to have him not able to cross a river. I called him over and talked softly in to his ear.

This is what Tog was thinking:

Well, it has been a fun filled few weeks with Eirikr. We've not found many places where we could sleep in comfortable beds but as long as I am close to him, I'm easy. That place we stayed on in the mountains was a dive, even that place in Bombay sounded better! I did try to voice my concerns, but I was tied up and locked in the hut. Every now and again Eirikr would visit me and give me a lot of cuddles and talk sweet bla bla's in my ear but still, I had to put up with that treatment 'till the early hours of the morning when he came and released me. I thought we could get a few hours lying down next to each other but no, he got up just when I was enjoying a deep REM sleep and left for the hut again. At least I could stay outside and didn't have to sleep in that sheep stink again. I know they call me a German Sheep dog but I'm sure there is some Geneva Convention that states, I do not have to smell like one! Pooh!

Up to today, I've avoided going into that pure clear stuff and prefer only to drink it to take away my thirst. Now Eirikr wants me to swim through it! Well, I will not make any promises but if he really insists, I will try. Nope, changed my mind, I'm heading back to the shore. Now he's getting the lead out. OK then, let us try again. Off we go together, it feels rather refreshing on my feet and legs. Oh, a bit chilly around the belly and waistline! Oh no, where is the ground gone? I will drown, quick, back to safety. I made a u-turn and pushed off, finding the floor under my feet again. As I trotted back to shore, I heard a huge splash, Eirikr can swim! I am glad I could show him something, I've never seen him do before! Lots of cuddles and ear scratching coming up for me then. No? Maybe later, for now he's emptying his pockets. Now he's coming up to me and looking deep into my eyes. He should know by now, that I do not like that. Bla bla blab la. Sounds good. Patting my head, scratching my ears. Keep going sailor, more, more. "Fuss", I jump up and followed close by his side. Back towards the water. I test his will by holding back a bit, a short tug on the rope and I know, he means business. I think he wants us both to do it together now, he has tested the temperature and made sure its safe. OK. Let's go!

We walked out to the deep end. My feet lost the ground below, but I heard soft and reassuring words from Eirikr. I was going to be fine. He was doing well himself, paddling just as I was. WE CAN BOTH SWIM! Hura!

... and that is how I taught Eirikr to Swim.

And that is how I taught Tog to swim. He was fine, but still a bit unsure of losing the ground from below his feet. He didn't stay long and after a few doggy paddles, we headed back to the shore. I was happy that we had overcome his water shyness, maybe one day, we would need to cross deep water and he would be confident to follow me.

We took a siesta break on the river bank and dried off. Nick and Aritha had sat down by the river and were eating grapes. We went over and said hello. "we watched the show before" they said, Tog taught you how to swim then?" We laughed and walked on together. It was a

great walk. We were back in the wine grape regions and the hills and views were stunning. It was hot. Too hot for Tog, so Nick and Anthia went ahead as we took many breaks, as not to overheat my furry friend. We were in no rush. Last night, Juan had suggested we meet in Villafranca, in the private hostel. He was sure that Tog would be welcomed there. We had plenty of time and arrived early evening. On route, we met a German man, Hartmut who offered me his hammock, after hearing the difficulties we were having staying in some hostels and from other pilgrims. Amazing how news travels on the camino. A man I never met before, knows of our problems and just like that, offers us his bed, to keep! I thanked him but kindly refused, explaining that I prefer to sleep close to Tog as we need each others warmth if we are stranded out side again. He was happy with that and we said “aufwiedersehen”.

I found the hostel Juan mentioned called Jato or Ave Fenix, passed the municipal hostel on the left, after the church. He assured me that it would be dog friendly and it was. The lady showed me where Tog could sleep, it was just outside from the room where I was allocated a my bed, perfect! She went on about something else. Please remember that I still do not speak Spanish but I just listened nodded and raised my eyebrows at the moment I could hear her high points and when she started laughing, I laughed too. It was very funny, whatever she had said. Just then, I heard a familiar laughter from within the room. I stepped in and took a closer look, it was Roberta! It was so great to see her again! My name is Roberta, I came from Brazil was laughing her pretty head off. “You told me you can not speak Spanish” she waved her finger at me. “I can’t” I tried to assure her, “please tell me what she just told me”, I pleaded. Roberta looked deep in to my eyes. I felt like grabbing hold of her and kissing her lips, pushing my tongue down her throat and making love for the rest of the week.

Instead, I smiled back at her and waited for the translation. She told me that the owner lady used to live in Madrid and in her student days, a few of her friends would meet and plan raids on dog containment centres, where they put to sleep any stray dogs caught roaming the streets of the metropolis. She and her friends would break into the centres and free the dogs into the streets of the city. It would cause chaos in the morning rush hour traffic. Now I really could laugh out loud, what a great woman. Seeing her now, in her late 60s, who would have thought she would be such a rebel? Just goes to show that we are all so very special and it’s a mistake to make any assumptions about people we meet.

I asked if Roberta would join me for dinner. Nope, already booked. Silly me. Men half my age were falling over themselves to get this one. What chance did I have? Not that I was trying to seduce her in any way.

So, me and Tog went to explore the village. Very, very nice. Lots of tiled roofs, small passages and a pretty square. In pasaga del Carmen, we passed a little garden where a cat was suckling her baby kittens. When she saw Tog, she leapt up and went on the attack. I called Tog to “fuss” and we gently passed by their little garden. I was very impressed how such a small animal will find the courage to stand up and face such a huge opponent. Of course, if Tog was any other mad Spanish dog, the cat would have little chance to survive his attack but she would not go down without a fight, probably costing the dog an eye or a bleeding nose. Tog has no interest to do any damage. He would want to make friends and gently play with any animal he encounters. Of course, most do not know this and will go on the defensive. It’s amazing how this small mother stood up to protect those she loves the most, her kittens.

“It’s not as far as you think, just follow the yellow arrows. It all comes down to nothing, do you think she loves you? In your wildest dreams!” This is the song Tom was singing and playing his uquale, a small guitar like instrument. Tom is from the US and has been travelling the camino for the past month, on his way to Santiago. A rather lonely figure, playing his instrument, so I thought we would go and say hello.

We had dinner together and sat with the many other pilgrims on the long wooden table in the dining room of the hostel. The dinner was rather dull, without imagination and the old lady seemed to be having a domestic argument with her husband. The soup was bland and the eggs with no spices, not even salt or pepper. Eventually, some appeared on the table and despite the circumstances, it was nevertheless a welcomed meal. After dinner I wrote letters to Yasmin, Carmen, Mum and Dad and was joined by Roberta. We engaged in a deep discussion but before long, Tom appeared and lightened the evening up with song and music. He was a very good artist but his lyrics could be very offensive. One night he was booed off a stage where any artist can appear for a ten minute slot! I forget what he sang but remember that my eyebrows rose as he gave me the intro.

We went to bed late and slept well.

09 October 2003

Up early and out, after a quick cup of tea. Not many were up and I was on my way. I posted the letters in the village and tried to find my way out by following the yellow arrows. I missed a vital one and walked the wrong way for half an hour before turning around and doubling back. By this time, those who left at a more reasonable time were just crossing the turn off I had missed and we exchanged our greetings. I met up with Manfred, the German lawyer man again. We came to another crossing where we had the option to walk over a mountain or along side the main N6 highway. We decided to take the scenic route. It was breath taking beautiful. The sun was just making its appearance through the valley and burning away the fog. Patches of blue sky grew larger and larger. We felt warmer and warmer as the sun rays pierced through the fog and hit us on our steep climb up the mountain. We were now high up above the valley and enjoyed wonderful views and beautiful scenery. Our path took us through forests of chestnut trees and we witnessed the local farmers collecting and picking the fruit up and loading the sacks on beautiful big and hairy eared donkeys. It was reminiscent to scene out of an old movie. What a privilege it was to watch them in their simple but important work of making an honest living. The sack with 30kg sells for 6€ in Spain. In Switzerland the price of 100g is about 3€. How can this be justified? Who is making all the profit? Is there another, yet another mafia we could expose here?

Anyway, we walked on and soon we met up with our friends, Juan, Roberta, Tom and a couple of English girls who thought I was a weirdo and decided not to talk to me. Tom and I walked ahead and found a great place by a river to have lunch. I cooked. Eventually the others worked passed but declined our offer to join our little camp. Their loss. Tom said that this had been his best meal in Spain so far! I was well pleased. I had cooked pasta with tuna fish, garlic, red onion and black pepper. We chatted and enjoyed each others company. So much to share, so many stories, I was really happy to be where I was but the nagging thought was there with me: What would happen in Santiago, would I be given any divine signs as to what my future holds?

We packed and went on. Tom was faster and due to the hot sun, I took more breaks to allow Tog to cool down. I was not going to risk a heatstroke. He often panted so heavily; I was afraid that he would start to hyperventilate. Just in case, I had a plastic bag ready for the occasion. He would just lay down in the shade under a tree when he had enough. That was what I was now looking out for, a place to stop and take a long break. It was great countryside to walk through and I was feeling very happy.

Early evening, we walked up a very steep hill into a village called La Faba. The hostel was very modern and SheWolf had also checked in. Dogs were welcomed, so Tog and I also stayed. After a hot shower, ahh, luxury, I felt great and ready to go out on the town. She Wolf and I walked into the village. Marcel's massages and vegetarian food a sign directed us to a shabby looking barn with a little table and chairs outside. We sat and helped our selves to tea and nuts on the tray. Suddenly, a man on horseback appeared from around the corner. He jumped off and greeted us. Marcel was a German who dropped out of society some 20 years ago. He lived in different parts of Spain for many years, and has recently purchased this property. He intends to do it up and offer pilgrims a nice welcome. We ordered some dinner and he leapt up and went over to his garden, pulled out some vegetables, came back over to our table and cut them up and wished us "bon appetito". The wine was good and SheWolf bought a bottle for the three of us to enjoy together. I was cold, the sun had long gone down and I was ready for bed. We said goodbye. SheWolf had asked for a massage but Marcelo was not in the mood. My impression was, SheWolf was not the young, 20-year-old model type. Anyway, we walked back to the hostel and found a peaceful night's sleep.

10.10.03

I was up once in the night to go for a pee and to give Tog a cuddle. He was as good as gold sleeping out on the porch. I was toying with the idea of walking on but decided to go back and get some more sleep. I had this weird dream. I was in the US military taking part in a parade. I felt very proud to be a soldier. I was very close to the General and President. It was so emotional I woke up close to tears! Analyse that for me please!

For breakfast, Tog had two eggs and I set off on an empty tummy. I was still hungry from last night. Those few veggies never really filled my belly, and I had been walking very hard all day. The walk up the mountain was spectacular. The views over the hills and mountains as the sun was rising were really something special. I counted up to 8 layers or valleys. I mean, the hills that pile up in front of each other with the mist making them even more visible at this time of the day.

I was alone with Tog in all this nature without any distractions. It was only 4km up to the 1250m peak where the village O Cebreiro was. We arrived there just as many of our friends were getting up. We walked passed one hotel and Nick and Anthea just opened their balcony door to look out on to the stunning views. Good morning, bon camino, I said, and we walked on. This part of the route was dreadful because the Spanish could not be bothered to cut a path through the fields or forest. It meant that all pilgrims had to walk on the busy national road. Fast cars and big trucks were a terrifying and a life-threatening menace. This was not the only stretch we had to walk on busy roads without any protection, it was sad and demotivating how many hours we had to endure this stress! It was surely a question of time until a terrible accident will cost the life of a pilgrim! PLEASE DO SOMETHING YOU OFFICIALS!

It was a hard walk because of the road. All good and bad things come to an end though and eventually, we were off the road, walking through trees and grass again. It was hot and we had to stop and rest along the way. We walked up to a small village and were greeted by a pack of angry snoring dogs. Tog was attacked by the biggest one and I charged into the pack of smaller ones. Shouting Swiss German swear words, stamping my feet and striking out at them with my bamboo walking stick. Tog was nipped on his hind leg but nothing serious. We managed to get past the dogs and continue our way.

Just before Triacastela we walked through a small village or perhaps it was just a few farm houses grouped together and there were huge chestnut trees, the trunks over 2.5 meters wide! They were amazing and I wondered just how many years they had been watching the pilgrims pass by their routes. If they could tell stories, we would be enjoying amazing insights into the history of this region. Just imagine how many pilgrims have past them, rested up against their trunks, enjoyed the shade of their leaves, picked up the chestnuts ect, ect... may be a topic for a another book one day? The title could be: The stories of a chestnut tree on the camino to Santiago. I noticed one of the little houses was for sale. For the first time I was thinking about a possible future again! I was imagining what it would be like to buy a place out here, make it up and live on the pilgrims route. Meet all the people going by, offering them food and accommodation and treating them with respect and making them welcome. Maybe I will one day, who knows.

As we walked into the town of Triacastela, we encountered more barking dogs. Here, in this region, the German Shepard dog appeared to be the favourite breed to use as a guard dog. We walked up to a bar and saw familiar faces sitting in the shade. I told Tog to make "platz" outside and I went in to say hello. Tog did not wait, and I forgot to tell him "warte". So he also come in to say hello to our friends. The bar tender did his nut. PERRO,NO he screamed and rushed over, shoing Tog outside. What was the matter with these idiots? What was there problem? I could not relate to them. I think the Spanish need to address this issue soon because one day, they are going to regret if, they do not change their attitude towards animals.

I pulled him out of the bar, put my rucksack on and continued our walk. I was tired and stopped in the next bar, a short walk away and ordered tea with honey. We had walked 30km already today but I didn't want to stay here. It didn't feel good. We left and as we walked out of the town, we were suddenly attacked by two dogs. They ran up towards us showing their teeth, growling, and barking. Come on then you bastards, I'm in the mood to fight, come on then I shouted, as I charged towards them swinging my stick!

They didn't stand their ground for very long. I was too crazy for them. Further on, I found a butcher's shop and asked for some dog food. The guy gave me a huge bag of meat and bones! It was a lot to carry but kept Tog happy for the next two days.

I watched him as he chewed up his supper and crunched up a huge bone in the matter of a few minutes and he looked around for more. There was a big fat dog in Tog, just waiting to be released! I have to be careful, not to fall into the trap so many owners do and over feed him. A fat dog reflects the lack of respect the owner has for the animal. I know that some dogs are very fussy eaters, all my sister's dogs were. Her latest dog, Churchill, has a bowl of food he nibbles a few times in the day. Tog would never leave a crumb in his bowl and I'm sure, given the chance, he would eat so much he would be sick if left him to his own will.

Chrurchil

We walked along the path, the scenery was great. The nature perfect, we watched an old shepherd pass by, herding a large flock of sheep. He came over to me and we chatted, well he chatted, he had few teeth left but a huge friendly smile. His face was weather beaten, he had spent his life out side in the sun, wind and rain. I wished I had a camera with me. I listened, nodded, laughed and he moved on again. So did we. Climbing up hills, walking through forests, fields and passing by farms with their mad dogs barking at us. It was good walking but I was tiered and I was feeling warn down. My throat was feeling strange and I knew I was going down with something. I tied my scarf around my neck, in an attempt to keep my throat warm. We walked through a wonderful sun set, the colours were just amazing and as it got darker, I was worried about where to find shelter. The nights were too cold to sleep out side now. We had no choice but to keep on moving. Step after step, hill after hill, bend after bend.

It was now dark as we staggered down a very steep path littered with leaves and hidden branches, blown down in past storms. We cleared the forest and on to a main road. Further along, the road I made out a sign that indicated a hostel up ahead. We were saved! That was good luck, I doubt I could have gone on any further.

I made Tog "sitz" and "warte" outside and I went in to investigate. No hospitalero. Good. I went upstairs. Two middle aged lady pilgrims were lying on their beds chatting. They went still as I entered and I said good evening. They were German and they welcomed me. I could hardly walk now. Pain was shooting through my legs and my feet were throbbing. On top of that, I was now coughing and felt very miserable and weak. I took a bed in the corner furthest away from the ladies.

After I unpacked my stuff, I went down stairs to get Tog. In the meantime a woman arrived, the hospitalero. PERRO! NO PERRO!!, she cried. I begged, asking if he could sleep in the entrance. NO. He had to stay out side. OK, I signed in and waited 'till she was gone. It was dark and surly she would not come back. Could I risk smuggling Tog upstairs? What would happen if I was caught? I had to try, I needed to rest and sleep now, I was close to a physical breakdown.

I called Tog to come in and we climbed the stairs and entered the room. I told the ladies not to worry about my dog, he is friendly and will not disturb them. They watched us with wide open eyes as we walked past. I made a bed up for him next to mine and concealed it with my poncho, just in case the hospitalero would come and check. Tog was happy curled up and slept. I was ill, but hungry. I left Tog to sleep and went to cook some rice. It was the worst meal I made and most stuck to the pot. I ate some and decided to feed the rest to the birds. I opened the window and shook the pot trying to shake out the sticky contents down on to the lawn in the back garden. Snap. I was left holding just a small part of the handle in my fingers. The pan and the rest of its contents crashed down to the garden, lost in the darkness of night. That saved time washing up. I decided to go to bed.

11 October 2003

It was a restless night. I was too hot, a fever broke out. I sweated and was soaking wet. In the morning, one of the ladies found me in this state on her way to the bathroom, she gave me vitamin C tablets. She probably saved me from developing further complications. I was not well and every muscle in my body was aching. Could I go on like this? What makes a man, a

man? How many roads does it take for a man to walk down, before he can be called a man? What was I proving? Why was I walking? Who cares?

I had never even thought of giving up my walk but now, I was confronted with these questions, especially as my body was drained and in need of rest and some good food.

It was not that bad though. Tog was with me and he really kept my focus on getting up and out, back on to the camino. I had to, despite my condition. He needed a walk, I was the one who had the responsibility. That was my mind set and it can move mountains. I packed and retrieved the pan from the back garden. It turned out to be better with the short handle, as it packed away better into my rucksack. There is a reason for everything.

During the walking, everything seemed to be hazy, I was badly bunged up in the head, as if looking and hearing through a haze of clouds. I was developing an infection, coughing up yellow phlegm. My throat was very raw, and I knew that these were not good signs. I must reach Santiago, I must walk on.

In addition to those problems, I had counted 4 new blisters before slipping in to my socks and boots this morning. They were from running down hill yesterday and the day before. I calculated we had walked 38km yesterday, no wonder I was in a mess. If I was not careful, I would not make it to my destination, I had to listen to my body and slow down.

I left the hostel and was walking in a kind of trance. Through pretty villages, across roads, hills, past farm houses, and after 26 km we arrived in Portmarin. Just as we arrived, the heavens opened and it started to rain. Monsoon like conditions. The paths were converted to streams and I was nearly blown off my feet by the gusts of wind. Weak and weary, we arrived at a hostel. All thanks to God, there was no problem with Tog, he could stay in the reception area where people had hung up their wet clothes to drip dry and I found a bed close to the exit and collapsed. I slept immediately and awoke from the noise of other pilgrims shuffling around my bed side. I got up and limped out to see if Tog was still there. Another dog had joined him. He was fine. It was still raining. I was hungry and took Tog to look for a bar to eat a small snack.

I met a few people who were familiar to me. Walking the marathon distances the last few days, meant I had a new group of pilgrims around me. There was one lady, I had met weeks back. She had appeared from behind us and started making friendly conversation. I told her that I originally planned to walk the camino in silence and soon after those words she walked on and away from us. It was only a while afterwards; I became aware of my statement and felt a little bit guilty that she felt that she had to leave me alone. I sat with her and her friend, a German man Hermen Jansen and we exchanged a brief history of our backgrounds and experiences on the camino to date. I was too tired though to keep this up for very long, so I excused myself and went to bed. Of course Tog is not mentioned here very much but he is always by my side and I am always taking care of him, even if I fail to mention him very often.

12.10.03

I had been eating garlic and vitamin C tablets, so I was sleeping through the night, but getting up in the morning was tough. Everything ached and walking was murder. The first steps were like walking on razorblades, just like many weeks ago, after the first few days of walking and developing blisters but somehow, it seemed to be even worse now. The new blisters were in

new parts of my feet and I had to go through the same healing process again, it would take time.

It had rained all night and was still raining as we left the shelter at 08:30. I was walking like a zombie. After a while, the condensation and sweat soaked my entire body from the inside, the rain ensured a good soaking from the outside. We were both dripping wet, through and through. The wind blew me all over the place, as it caught the poncho like a sail and carried me away, off my desired direction as I staggered and zigzagged at various angles, along the path. Tog too was having trouble walking in a straight line. He must have thought, this guy is out of his mind, taking him for a walk in these conditions. Maybe I was. But somehow, I just had to keep going. There was no stopping.

This reminded me of a story about two male dyslexia sufferers on a skiing holiday. They were standing on the top of this downhill run, covered in fresh powder snow. The one man turned to the other and said, let's zagzig down this hill, you go first and I will follow. No, no, no, said his friend, its not zagzig, it's zigzag. They argued for a few moments until the second chap said: Look, let's just get down this slope and when we arrive at the bottom, we can ask the first man we meet, what we just did, ok? They agreed and promptly shot off down the hill doing whatever, zag zig or zig zaging. As agreed, as soon as they arrived in the valley at the bottom of the slope, they approached a man. Excuse me, one of the men asked, would you please help us? Did we just zigzag or zagzig down this slope? The man replied, I'm sorry, I could not tell you, I'm a tobogganist. Oh, the skier replied, can I have a packet of Marlboro and a box of matches then please?

Despite the conditions I faced, humour came as a life saver. I remembered my friend Trevor and funny situations we had encountered. My Dad and his jokes and the wonderful holidays we had enjoyed together. I placed one foot in front of the other and somehow, I knew that we would be arriving in the next place sooner or later. The signposts directing us to Santiago were now showing the distance by counting down the km's left to walk. I could hardly focus on the small writing and my vision was blurred by the rain, condensation and sweat running down my face. We walked on. What made things worse, was the gaps from where there was no wind shelter from bushes, trees, or stone walls. I would be walking in a straight line, when suddenly, a gap in the wall or hedge would open up, the wind just pushed me over to the other side of the road. It was amazing how much power the wind has. If a car had been passing, I would surely be dead! There were no cars out in this weather, and walking was not a struggle, it was a fight and it totally drained my already weak body. Was I just not meant to get to Santiago? Well, I would die trying and so I walked on, step after step after step.

Sometime later, the rain turned to drizzle, the clouds became lighter and the winds died down. We walked over a hill and down into a village. A big black dog was waiting for us in the middle of the road. I tightened my grip on the walking stick and watched him closely. He licked his lips and wagged his tail. Good signs and we could approach I knew there would be no danger. Tog and this fellow hit it off together. It was like an old school reunion of two best friends after 20 years.

They sniffed around, chased each other and played about. Tog stalking him and then the other dog trying to provoke Tog into chasing him. It was amusing to watch. After a good 10 minutes I called Tog so that we can walk on. He ignored me. I walked on a stretch but waited where he could still see me. I called again. Whistled. Nothing, he was far too happy playing

with the black dog. They were having so much fun together and I waited, I called, I waited. Come on Tog. No? OK, I had had enough. I lost my patients.

I'm going on without you then! I walked through the quaint village and stopped by a bar. I offloaded my rucksack after taking off the poncho and hung it up to drip dry. Inside the bar, I could see Ben and some other pilgrims drinking coffee. I ordered a hot chocolate and warmed my hands and stiff fingers on the mug. Tog is playing with some dog I explained to Ben. He does not want to come back to me at the moment. A short time later, it was time for the pilgrims to move on, so they packed and went outside to help each other button their ponchos up. It was not an easy task to do by your self. If you didn't do it properly the rain would soak you and worse, the rucksack and its contents.

They walked away and I was left alone. It had been close to an hour now, so I went back to look for Tog. There was no sign of him, or the black dog anywhere. This is it then. This is where he wants to stay. It's a great place for him and he has found a best friend. I returned back to the bar, packed, put my rucksack on, slid the poncho over and walked off. It was a lonely walk up a steep road. I kept looking back but saw nothing. I was listening out for his familiar sounds from his foot pads and nails but all was quite. I walked on.

I was spitting a lot. Maybe he would come looking for me and by following my scent, he would find and catch up with me further down the road. Oh well, we had a great time, I would at least be able to now get into the hostels and rest in peace and catch up with some sleep! I walked on but the further I went, the worse I was feeling. I missed Tog so much. What if the owners of the other dog shooed him away and he didn't find me? I spat ever second step now. After about 30 minutes I came up to a big road and the yellow arrow indicated to cross over and follow the path on the other side. I did and after about 1 km, I stopped. What if Tog followed me, came to this crossing and walked in to a truck or car? I could not bear the thought for another minute. I removed the poncho, slipped the rucksack off and ran back to the village. Past the bar, back to the place where I had last seen the two playing together. The road was empty, some pilgrims came my way and I greeted them and asked if they had seen two dogs. No. I could not see any either and turned to walk back to the bar. I ordered another hot chocolate and afterwards, went out and back to the place again where I last saw the two. I looked to the left and in the far distance, about 1km away I could see two objects running after each other, one black and the other was Tog, there could be no mistake. I took my fog whistle out of my Swiss army belt holder and blew. Why I didn't think of this before, I don't know. I had been giving Tog some lessons a few day ago when he was waiting and I walked ahead of him, I blew into the whistle and called him to "fuss".

After blowing a couple of times, I could tell that I had Togs attention. They both came running in my direction. What would I do? Would I tie him to my rope and pull him away from this place? I remembered that we had an agreement about both of us being free to come or go, anytime we liked. Tog came bouncing up to me and was covered in spit and sweat. He had the biggest grin on his face I have ever seen. He would be happy here, I could not ask him to leave. What could I offer him? I was sick, homeless, without a future. He had a new friend. I patted him as a goodbye gesture, and waked away. Both dogs followed me. No, that was not the plan, please. But the black dog followed Tog and Tog followed me. We arrived at the bar. The owner came out and shouted at the black dog. He immediately went away from us and followed the man into the bar. I walked away wondering what Tog would do. He followed me and we walked on around a bend where we faced 4 dogs. I called Tog to fuss but he didn't react fast enough. As I was defending myself against one of the dogs that attacked

me, Tog tried to run for it. Big mistake Tog. One of the dogs, with a nasty looking eye went for him and nipped him in his hind leg. By the time I got to him, it was all over, the dogs had scattered, and Tog was limping up the hill. I inspected the damage, but there was no serious wound.

We walked back up the hill, my blister hurting, my throat saw, my temperature high with tears in my eyes. I had my friend back. I was so very happy.

We arrived to find my rucksack still there and we continued the camino to Santiago. The countdown was like a replay of my life and I was thinking what I was doing in those years: 84, army service, 83 living with my first love, Karen Brogan in north London, and lots more. Eventually 63, my year of birth, 60 a village called Casanova. We had found a hostel. I was desperately in need to rest but first, there was the fight about No Perros. OK, he would sleep outside. Why did I not think of this trick weeks ago? When the hospitalerios went to bed, I came down and smuggled Tog upstairs. He took a bed next to me. Good night my good friend.

13 October 2003

Its been one month since I departed the town of St. Jean Pier de Port in France. I have walked over 700 km, 600 with my best friend Tog, the dog. The hospitaliero lady turned out not to be so hostile and she allowed Tog to sleep inside. During the night. I had come downstairs and found another snoring body sleeping in the main living room. I went back to my bed after a quick cuddle with Tog. I put my ear plugs in and slept until late the following morning.

I shared the hostel Casanova with two young Swiss men, who probably had just completed their national service, because they were kitted out with all the standard Swiss army hardware. A pretty Mexican young lady, who complemented me last night on looking very calm and peaceful. A middle aged lady from the USA, California, Main where Client Eastwood was Mayor. She was very nice. She was travelling with an elderly Spanish man. There was also a French man from Paris amongst the group. He had walked 1400km but his foot was in such a bad condition, he could not continue his journey. He called far a taxi and went to hospital for treatment. What a pity, he was only a few days away from Santiago. He was very unhappy that his body failed him.

Tog and I set off out again just past 09:00, the warm sun rays were vaporising the fog and the smells from the heather and trees was a treat to breathe.

My feet were feeling better, they had been very saw last night and I was walking around very carefully. I slipped into my boots and the pain was bearable enough to walk a normal pace. Most pain came from the two blisters on top of my right big toe.

We passed a sign post indicating 45 km to Santiago and then entered a small town called Boente. It was cut in half by a busy main road. We walked up to a small church where a priest stood, he saw us and waved me over and invited me to sign the visitors book in the church.

We shook hands and he gave me a card with the image of St James. Santiago Apostle, was written underneath. Did that mean St James was an Apostle? One day I would find out. We walked on.

I was enjoying the walk. The conditions were just perfect, and I felt good about me and the world again. We stopped to take breaks roughly every 5 km. As we walked in the nice sun shine, I noticed a man approaching us. He appeared nervous and I guessed it was because of Tog. He looked like a farmer and I was right. Behind him, I could see sheep with lambs approaching. He was a Shepard. I called out to him: Perro Tranquil and made Tog "sitz" by my side. The heard passed us by and the Shepard gave us a warm smile. We continued our journey and as we walked past a field, a young fowl came pouncing over and took an almost magical liking to Tog. He could not take his eyes of him and showed his delight and friendship by chasing up and down the field, coming over and making all the friendly and warm noises these beautiful creatures know how to. We walked on and before we knew it, we suddenly arrived in Arzua.

The hostel was very modern with great facilities. The sign hanging up outside, on the main door, No Perros! I made Tog "sitz" and "wart" outside as I went in to check it out. The hospitalero was away and had left a young German pilgrim lady in charge temporarily. She was not sure if Tog could stay but told us to find a place and wait until the other lady returned. We did. I washed my clothes and took a shower.

It was ten o'clock when I saw the French guy again, Amaury Legrand. I was please to see him again and curious to how he was. The doctor had ordered him 2 days of rest, so there would be no walking. He would take the bus to Santiago. He took it well and accepted his fate. We cooked dinner and ate together. The lady hospitalero turned up and was not very happy to see Tog. She made lots of noises and waved her arms about in the air but eventually, she agreed that he could sleep behind the building, in the back garden away from any pilgrims. I get it now, if I just let them act their little drama out, they will eventually let me do whatever I want.

14 October 2003

It was a peaceful night and I slept well, with my ear plugs firmly in place to shut out the human noises from my fellow pilgrims. I was up late and eat breakfast. Most people had left, it was past 9:00. I was not feeling well, my whole system was blocked up and I suffered terrible constipation. It was a real bad experience. Was this what it was like giving birth? I would never know. (Amazing, my daughter Aglaja was born on this day in 2007!) Anyway, eventually, somehow, without being too detailed about it, I managed to find relief. What was it that I had eaten? Maybe the cake the French man offered as desert? Probably too many "e" numbers and preservatives. Whatever it was, it was not good for my system. I had to find and cook more greens. It is not easy travelling and finding all the healthy things the body needs to keep healthy.

We enjoyed a nice walk and managed about 28km. We are about 10 km away from Santiago, the desired goal of the journey. But I am not ready to finish my camino. Unless a miracle happens tonight, I will keep on walking to the coast and then what? Who knows? God. I was sure that it was all planned out for me and that I had to just keep going. I would know when the time has come.

I bought some things in a small town shop. I wanted just a few eggs but the lady wanted to sell me the whole tray of 12 eggs. I'm a pilgrim on my way to Sanitago, what am I going to do with 12 eggs you clown? I was not amused with these Spanish people, some are really testing my patients now. I bought some carrots and onion to make a pasta dish with. I found a river on the outskirts of town and decided it was a good place to camp. I erected the poncho to make a roof and started to cook dinner. The gas ran out half way through but the water was boiling enough to just about cook the pasta. I didn't mind eating the carrots hard. Tog was not feeling too good. He suffered from the opposite to me. He had the trots. He lay asleep next to me but he would get up and discreetly walk away to do his business and then return to sleep some more. What a great dog. What ever would I do without him? What would I do with him in my life? I had no idea what my life would be tomorrow or the day after. It did not matter anyway. Only the moment is important, right?

At last I am able to live for the moment and not be wanting anything. Maybe I had reached the end of my journey? Tomorrow, God willing, we shall arrive in Santiago but I already decided that I want to walk to the sea, to Finisterre, the end of the old world.

15 October 2003, Santiago de Compestella

We slept under the puncho under clear blue skies. It was not a comfortable nights sleep on the routs of the tree, lots of turning and twisting trying to find a soft place to lay. The morning brought the due and the damp to the sleeping bag but not our spirits. We packed and walked on, heading for the large city. We passed the huge camp of Monte de Gozo. It had the looks and the feeling of a concentration camp; I was glad we hadn't tried to reach here last night. We walked on down into the city. It was not a nice walk entering the city from the industrial side, walking through the busy roads with all the associated noise and pollution. I felt my spirits leave me. I felt no warmth at all of having achieved my goal, Santiago. It was an anti climax, even though I didn't have big expectations, maybe I was hoping for a miracle to happen but it never came. Just another city with all the commercial activities and bad smells and hard roads to walk.

We arrived in the old town at 10:40. I spent over an hour looking for a shop that would sell Coleman gas for my cooker. Just as I was about to give up, I found this great outdoor survival shop, guns, tents the works. It was run by two very dark heard and bearded fellows. I was sure that they were Basque freedom fighters. I bought two cans and looked at some tents. I was considering buying a tent to have more freedom, not to be so dependent on finding shelter. I also felt that the weather was changing and knew that there would not be so many hostels on the way to Finisterre. I found a butcher who gave me a large bag full of bones for Tog.

Close to the cathedral, I met Amaury. His leg was better and he was in good spirits. I also met George (smelly feet) who was pleased to inform me, he had now washed his feet and bought new socks. Nick and wife, Ben and Tim and some of the other Spanish men I met on route. It

was like a reunion party. That felt nice. People pleased to see us, hugging, congratulating each other for the achievement. Most were planning to take a bus to Finisterre. I would walk.

A dinner was planned for 19:30. I had to find somewhere to sleep, so the search began. I woman approached me and offered me a room for €20. I accepted, there was a bed for Tog too. Later, we went out to find the restaurant with our friends but despite my efforts, I could not find them so we turned in to have an early night. I had enjoyed a good lunch with Amaury And was not hungry. Although I had passed a Pizza restaurant. I asked Tog to “sitz” and “warta” outside. They didn’t allow us in, not even to site out in the back on the terrace. No Perros! When I came back out, two policemen were standing menacing over Tog. One of the noticed me approaching and indicated, I should have tied him on a lead. I took my string from my pocket and called him over to be tied up. I said adios to the cops and walked passed them. I would have to keep Tog tied to me know, there were many cops patrolling the streets, looking for work and there were also many owners walking their dogs on leads. It was best for both of us but I needed to buy a proper lead and collar for my dog. I also wanted to find a vet and get Tog checked over. Maybe get a document for him.

I was here in Santiago. It was hard to realise, my own achievement. Every day for the past 32 days I had been pushing on, following the signs, asking for directions to this place. Now I was actually here, what had I achieved? What did I discover on my camino? I discovered faith. Faith, knowledge that there is God. That everything has two sides, that I am presented with choices and I am free to chose what way to take. It is only my responsibility. I have been able to rely on myself. No one else. I have good and bad in me. I can always choose between what I am, what I want to be and how I want to project myself.

I must be patient and understanding towards my and other people’s ignorance, I must try to explain and educate those willing to show an open mind. I must understand from where they come from and know that they are searching the same as I am. We are all on a camino, a path of life. We are all one. We are acting on behalf of God, the creator of the universe, living his/her life, giving him/her and ourselves many experiences through our creations and actions.

Later, I went to the square but found no one there I knew. I did however find an internet café from where I sent off some messages to family and friends. It felt good to tell them I had arrived here. It was an achievement. I was disappointed but not surprised to have still had no news from my sister or her daughter, my family.

As I left the net café, it started to rain. It looked like we would be staying her for a couple of days. The friendly waiter from the café across the road from my room, gave Tog some fried chicken. We sat and watched the world go by. Inside the café stood a grand piano but I lacked the nerve to ask if I could play. We returned to the interesting mountaineers’ shop. I had decided to buy a tent. It was a great home, slept 3 and had a reception area to keep the bags dry. It weighed 3.5kg and I had to manage the load somehow, probably by walking less and taking more breaks. I had heard about the lack of hostels on the way to Finisterre and even that there was hardly any in the small fisherman’s village. I would need the tent. I had to carry the extra load. I also heard that for the first 30km of the way to Finisterre, it was all walking on hard road surface. I should see if we could take a bus like so many other pilgrims plan.

We walked back to the “hotel” in the old town. Many people greeted us, some even calling us by name. Most I could not remember. We hade met, were passed, and overtaken by so many

people. I guess it was easier for them to remember a Muslim man walking with his dog. They were happy and congratulated us for making it to Santiago. Little did they know, how empty I felt about being here. Maybe one day I would be the terrorist that would be blowing these people up into little pieces.

I walked up to the hotel and heard my name being shouted from one of the balconies from a hotel next door. An English couple greeted us in great cheer. Where had we met? I was wondering. They seemed vaguely familiar, but I could not place them. I waved back and smiled. A man approached me and invited me for coffee. He was from Canada, we sat chatting for a while. He shared his experiences with me. Something about that everything has a reason, nothing is coincidence. His girlfriend had said goodbye to him in Canada and told him to look out for the butterflies. It was a very revealing and an emotional moment when he realised the beauty of life and the simple but important things like the butterfly.

Toni, the friendly African waiter from Ghana gave Tog some food from the kitchen. Beautiful university student females approached Tog and gave him lots of attention. I wish.... I was looking forward to staying here a full day tomorrow. There was a big park to explore with huge trees, lots of little shops and alley ways to get lost in.

Earlier, I went by the pilgrim's house where I was given the official certificate for having walked the camino. They refused to make one out for Tog. I was not impressed.

We went to bed but I was concerned about Tog, he was breathing very heavily and I was wondering if something was wrong. The room was small, smelly and noisy. Even the earplugs could not keep the noise out from the loud guests from a restaurant our room backed on to. The kitchens must have also been just underneath as the smells of cooking traced up through our chamber. Another pilgrims nightmare and rip-off.

16th October 2004

We were up early and went out for a walk. Later I found the tourist information office and asked for an address of a local vets. This must have been one of their more unusual requests and we received a great deal of attention from the staff in the nicely furnished and modern bureau. We were given a map and an address and off we went. Soon we found a professional looking reception room in the vets office. The vet came out and greeted us after a short wait and although he spoke no English, he could make out the situation based on my very few Spanish words and lots of body language.

He inspected Tog thoroughly, gave him some de-worming pills, the rabies jab and injected a chip in the skin at the back of his neck. It contained digital data that could be scanned by police and other vets all over the world. I was wondering how long it would be before humans have the same implants injected in to us. He asked for a date of birth. I had no clue and he guessed Tog to be about 3.5 years old, I thought the best date to give him would be the day we found each other. 19th Sept. 2000.

Including de-worming pills, new collar and lead the whole visit cost only 116.00. A bargain, the vet even gave us 6 bags of dried dog food and some chewies. He was a very nice man and made up for all those other nasty Spanish dog haters we had encountered on our travels.

We headed back to the old town and I sat outside a café drinking hot chocolate. We were in Rue do Franko, a very busy street with so many people going about their business. So many faces, shapes and sizes. The first pilgrims arrived with their backpacks and walking sticks. They looked around with big eyes, taking in the sights of this nice city. That satisfied and proud look and step, a spring in their walk, congratulations, what an achievement!

It's my first day in over a month that I do not walk west with my backpack, heading for this city. It felt great just relaxing, taking time to sit and watch all the going ons.

I'm glad not to have had dinner with the crowd from yesterday, I would have drunk too much wine, the food was not good and it cost a lot. I had met George and he filled me in on what happened last night. Tog and I were missed.

I said goodbye to George and we went to the park and played. The weather was great, the sun was beaming through the leaves of the huge trees. Later, we met with Nick and his wife who were resting in the shade. We shared some food and talked for a while. They are such a nice couple. I hope that one day, I will meet a girl and get on so well.

I headed back to the old town, it was time to check out of the hotel. On the way, I heard my name called out. A middle-aged man called over and I vaguely remembered passing him a few times on route. He was delighted to see us and gave Tog a friendly pat. He was very happy to see us and told me that I was an inspiration to him on his camino, the way I looked after and got along with Tog. He would be taking a train from here to Madrid where he would fly back home to Canada. We said our farewells and I went up to the room to rest.

Later I tried again to find the restaurant where a few pilgrims I had befriended arranged to eat dinner together. Once again, I failed to find it. It was obviously not meant to be. Instead, I found a small fish restaurant and ate outside with the permission of the owner, to keep Tog by my side.

I wrote some post cards, drank a coffee and headed back to the hotel. I put Tog to bed and went down to have a bit of time to myself. I sat in the café Casino opposite the hotel and ordered ice cream desert. I couldn't find the courage to play the piano, I felt too insecure and was worried that I would make a fool out of myself not having practiced for so long.

Tony had some time, so we engaged in conversation comparing Christianity and Islam. It was a good conversation and we agreed that both religions had both good and bad followers, that any religion was a path to find God but for many, they would never realise the simple truth in this lifetime. Shortly after, we shook hands and said goodbye. I had to get some sleep tonight, in the morning, we would be continuing our camino to the end of the old world.

17th October 2003

I left the city at 9:00. It had been another bad night for sleep. I had fever symptoms, bad dreams and a wet, soaked through sleeping bag when I woke up at 8:30. I took the last gram of vitamin C tablet the German lady had so kindly given me and packed my stuff together. The rucksack with the tent was enormous and weighed heavy on my shoulders. Just how far would I get? I was not feeling too good and with this extra load, I felt unsure about being able to reach the end of the old world. Nevertheless we walked out on to the streets and found the

yellow arrows guiding us to the camino to the west coast. We walked out of the city and into forest.

It was a great feeling being back on the camino again, away from the people, noise and pollution. We walked through small villages and I had to rest every 30 minutes, due to the extra load of tent and food. I was wondering just how heavy the load was and guessed it to weigh between 12 -15kg.

I stopped for lunch in a field by a large watering well for cattle. There was a chestnut tree providing pleasant shade. I cooked pasta and broccoli and slept for about an hour, then packed and walked on.

We walked over a quaint little old bridge, crossing a wide river below us. Then I noticed I had left Tog's lead lying on the ground where we had lunch. For some reason I had unclipped it from the rucksack and forgotten to clip it back. I was annoyed with myself, I even considered to leave it behind, but then I did the only right thing and took my rucksack off, laid it down by the road side and headed back, about 1,5 km. On the way, we met another couple with a dog walking the camino. They did not seem friendly, so we didn't stop and talk. I found the lead lying in the grass and turned back. It was so nice to walk without the weight. I wanted to not ever put on the rucksack again, it was such a pain. But then it had all my earthy possessions and belongings in it. Could I live without changing clothes, foot ware, towel, toothbrush, cooking stuff and rain protection? Tent? We arrived back at the rucksack, I swung it over my back, slid my arms through the straps and walked on. It was fun for as long as it lasted but now, I had to pay the price for my selfish needs. Carry the pack and stop moaning, I told myself. We walked the distance of 22km and came to a hostel. James, a guy from N. Ireland, was there with a tummy bug. A lady pilgrim was attending to his needs. We got talking and he gave me a list of addresses where I could stay and do voluntary work in return for food and accommodation. Sounded great and I took the list to study in more detail at some other time. His lady friend had gone out to buy some food and on her way past the church, she was attacked and bitten in the leg by a dog. She needed some medical treatment and went off to find the hospital. Pascal and Janaca showed up later and we cooked and ate together. After dinner, we planned the next days route. The next hostel lay about 30km away. It may be too far for me to make it, with my heavy load I said. We could be spending the first night in our tent.

18th October 2003

We managed to avoid meeting the hospitaliero. He came in late and I had already sneaked Tog up the metal stairs and made a bed for him at the back of the room, hiding him behind my stretched-out poncho. We departed unnoticed early in the morning and made our way following the yellow arrows through the village, out into the nice forest terrain. It was a good walk but going up hill was a struggle with all the weight. My legs and back were hurting, not serious pain, not disabling pain but the pain you get from developing new muscle tissue. I had to rest more. Stop and take in the nature, listen to the birds, feel the breeze on my face. Dark clouds blew over the light blue skies and I was wondering where I would find shelter to change in to my rain gear. We were walking on a main road. It went on for ages. There seemed no end walking on this road, one bend followed the other, over one hill, then the next. No sign of any shelter, no village, house, farm, or barn. Open space, dark skies. The first drops started to fall out from the skies above us. I picked up the pace. It was a question of minutes, before the heavens would open up and soak the earth with life giving water. Water

that I had no desire to be walking through. Maybe behind this next bend? Yes, the road curved downhill and on the left stood a house. We came closer and I noticed it was abandoned. I through down the rucksack to take a much-needed break. We had walked about 15km and I was very tired. For the past few kms, I had increased the pace and now I felt I had drained a lot of my energy.

After a few moments of rest, I had to get up to collect firewood. It was chilly, the temperature was dropping rapidly and the few drops were now developing to a proper dawn poor of rain. I made a fire under a big old pine tree. I was sure that it was tall and bushy enough to fend the rain off and keep us dry at the bottom. I inspected the house. All doors and windows were locked and shut except for the garage and pig sty. If the rain would persist, we had options. I heated some water and made a pasta dish. We sat there eating and shivering as the weather conditions deteriorated. The wind picked up and the rain was now similar to that of the monsoon rains, I had witnessed many times, in the tropics of the far east. I remembered the one time, having just arrived by airplane in Singapore, a heavy downpour come over my taxi, driving from the airport to the hotel. It was so fierce, the driver had to stop on the hard shoulder of the highway because there was zero vision. It was as if we had been struck by a tidal wave. As if driving into a solid wall of water was as the water collided with the wind screen. I could just about make out the shapes of the palm trees bending like rubber toys in the fierce wind.

It was not that bad here in Spain, but in a way, much worse. It was cold and it just didn't stop. It went on and on. We sat there and eventually the rain started to drip through the branches of the tree above us. Tog had to move first. Then me, then I had to move the fire. Then Tog heard something. He looked alert up in the direction of the road we had come from. Someone was approaching. Poor bastards I thought, imagine being out in this. It was Pascal. His poncho was shred to pieces. He had tied plastic bags to his feet and walked in shorts. He was absolutely soaked through to the bones. He was in good spirits though and appreciated warming up by the fire. We talked of a while and then I asked him where Janaca was. She soon appeared from the same place, looking just as wrecked and wind torn as Pascal. I told them that there was a dry place in the garage or pig sty to stay in for the rest of the day, or even night and that I would not be walking on in these conditions.

For some reason they decided to take there chances and walk on. It was the last time I ever saw them.

The rain eventually leaked through and the tree could provide shelter no longer. I moved the glowing base of the fire into the garage. The ground was damp but I found a wooden crate to sit on. The problem, of course, was the smoke and the lack of light in the confined space of the garage. In any event, it was dry and a place to rest. I had to decide where to sleep later and opted for the pig sty, it was dry and oddly enough very clean. I doubt it had ever been actually used. I would move the wooden pallet into the pig sty and sleep on it at an angle in the middle of the square to maximise the length.

The theory was good, in practice a nightmare. I spent the day writing letters and drawing. The rain never let up. It rained continually, hard and relentlessly. I was thinking about my friends who had walked on in these conditions, I hoped they found shelter, it was getting dark. I started making my bed up in the pig sty. We were now smoky flavoured, well done, through to the skin, everything reeked of smoke.

Setting up camp in the pig sty gave us clean but cold air. It was a concrete building and the drain from the roof of the main building was broken off and all the water from the large roof area fell on the tin roof of the pig sty. Especially in more violent downpours, the noise was deafening. No way would I be getting much sleep. And so it was. One of the worst nights on record. Trying to sleep in the confined space, on the wooden palette, was most uncomfortable. As soon as I found a spot and felt myself drifting off to deeper sleep, the rain would increase and splash down on the tin roof. It was a terrible nightmare, that didn't want to end. I lay awake in the dark listening to the deep and peaceful breath of Tog. He was amazing. He has just no problems, sleeping, walking or with choice of clothes. A perfect being. All he needed was food, I was happy to serve him.

19th October 2003

At last I slept and awoke at 8:30. I packed and got out of the pig sty feeling as I hadn't slept much at all. The skies were still dark, so I dressed for rain. We walked down a path not far from the house and found a biscuit and bracelet laying on the ground. I was sure it belonged to Janaca. She must have tried to eat a biscuit in the rain yesterday, got caught on her poncho and slipped her bracelet off. I picked it up and slid it on to my arm. I was hoping to give it to her in Finisterre. Tog ate what was left of the biscuit. We walked in to a village and I found a bar where I ordered hot milk and cacao. It was a very welcomed drink that warmed my whole spirit and reached deep into the coldest parts of my aching body. What a journey. Would anyone believe these adventures I'm having? I didn't care, I was living them and that's all that matters.

We walked on. The landscape was very pretty. In the distance, I saw a lake and mountains behind it. The rain I had been expecting came but it was over in no time and soon the skies cleared and I stopped to take off my rain gear and store it away in the rucksack.

At 15:30 we arrived at the hostel. It opened at 17:00. Appears that the closer we are to the coast, the longer the siesta time lasts. Good for them. I went to inspect the gardens and found a large soap by the washing basin. That would come in handy. I washed my socks and shirt and hung them up in the sun. I also unfolded my poncho and let that dry out.

I was hungry, we had not passed any shops in the last 2 days, it was fortunate for Tog, that we still had some of the dry dog food in the sealed bags the vet had given us back in Santiago.

Waiting for the things to dry, I sat in the sun enjoying the piece and silence of the moment. Nothing lasts forever, after a short time some French and German pilgrims arrived.

I booked myself in and I hade up my bed in the barn, away from the pilgrims I could sleep with Tog there and would not be disturbed by the snoring and farting of the other pilgrims.

Later, I strolled out of the little village and found a bar. I had a coffee and cognac. Well, I treated myself, once in a while felt the right thing to do, the danger of course is that it turns in to a uncontrolled habit.

Lots more people had arrived in the hostel, familiar faces: Earth and Protect, Tom, Roberta, and the man who walked from Bern. Also that gorgeous Canadian girl with her French lover. They were still snogging and cuddling every moment. It was nice to see them and yes, I felt envy. I wanted to be in love and be so close to a woman again. It was surly the best thing in life. Maybe one day in my future.

The hospitalero cooked a nice soup but unfortunately mixed it with dead animals, something I just could not eat. I went and cooked myself some pasta and vegetables. We had a nice evening sitting and talking around the large table.

20 October 2003

Tog was up early, being sick by the door. It was the bones he couldn't digest. It was best for him to throw them up this way, rather than get them stuck in his bowls. He is the most amazing and perfect being. The more I observe him, the more I am convinced about his superiority over any other being that I have met in my time on this planet.

Last night I had a lengthy conversation with Protect. She is an amazing woman, her looks reminded me of Manuela, my secretary from the reinsurance days. I was in no position to do much about it though. I was nothing, had nothing, didn't know where I was going, I could not even entertain the idea of engaging in a relationship with a woman, let alone one with such a beautiful child. I could not make that commitment, not now anyway. So, I kept at a safe distance and didn't allow for any closer contact to develop between us. That was one of the very rare moments in my life where I have used the power of my will to override my bodily desires and basic instincts. Congratulations, pat on the back, sleep well.

We were out on the road at 8:30. It was dark. Had the summer time ended? Why was it dark at 8:30? We walked in the wrong direction and a farmer waved us over towards the path to Finisterre. It was drizzling and I was dressed for rain. It never really came, just drizzled. A few hours later, the sun came out and I stopped to pack the rain stuff away. The path took us up hills, across fields and I kept looking hopefully for a view out on to the sea. That present was not to be given for some time to come. And then, when I was not looking for it, I noticed the slightly different blue on the horizon. We passed a signpost, 20km to Finisterre. That's a long way I thought and continued.

At 13:30 we arrived in town. I thought it was Finisterre but that would have been impossible. We were actually in a town called Cee. I stopped and shopped at a store. A local man guided us to the hostel. In fact, it was the municipal. It was in the cellar of an old government building, a bunker. I took a mattress, stored the backpack, took a shower and went to explore the town. I found an internet café where I discovered we were not actually in Finisterre. Oh well, tomorrow we have just another 12 km to walk then, a nice morning stroll. I would relax here, gather my strength and walk to the end of the old world and arrive with refreshed and in good spirits.

I went to the beach and looked for shells. On the way back, I heard music from a large white building. We went in and up some stairs. One of the doors was wide open and I could see a piano standing in the end of the room with a chair. It was waiting to be played. I shut the door and told Tog to make "platz". I was a long time ago I had sat and played on a piano. Memories flooded back into my mind. I touched the keys gently and played the first sound. It felt wonderful, the sound the feeling of the keys, the tunes I had composed were still all there, although my fingers were out of practice, I was playing my tunes and it felt fantastic.

I left the place about an hour later with a spring in my step and a lightness, as if I was floating. I assumed it must have been the local music school. I felt great. Further down the

main road, I found a butcher's shop with a friendly butcher who gave us a big bag of goodies with big cuts of meat and large bones. Tog was a happy dog today also.

Later, I met up with familiar friends and arranged to have dinner. We found a pizza place. Tom, Roberta, Protect, Earth and myself dined and had a fun evening together. I felt a lot going on between Protect and myself but I kept a huge distance. I was not ready for this.

On the way back to the municipal, I went over to the bus depot. Several drivers were standing around and talking. I asked them if Tog would be allowed to get on the bus. This question was met with immediate outrage; NO PERRO! Although one man waved me over to his bus where we could not be seen. He pointed to the luggage compartment and indicated that Tog could go in the hold. I shook my head and walked over to the municipal bunker and went to bed. It was clear that we would not be taking a bus anywhere from here.

21/22.October 2003

The following morning I packed and set off at the same time as Tom. We walked out of the seaside town together, looking for the yellow arrow signs, directing us to Finisterre. We didn't get very far before we felt completely lost on the outskirts of town. We asked several locals for directions who were happy to oblige.

A few kms down the path, Tom asked me if I would keep an eye on him and stop him if he did anything unusual or dangerous. He had decided to eat magic mushrooms he had saved up for this final stage of arriving at the end of the old world. The problem was, he walked faster than I did and soon I fell behind climbing up a steep hill through the forest and I lost him out of my sight.

It was a glorious day but there was a cool bite in the air, I kept my jacket zipped up. My thoughts were preoccupied with what would happen when we arrived in Finisterre. Would there be this emptiness, the feeling of not knowing what to do next? Tom had travelled to many Arabic states and from the discussion we had, he was clear that there was no way that Tog would be welcomed in any Islamic states. I had also met several Americans on my journey, they were all good people, how could I take the orders from Islamic fundamentalists that all Americans who pay tax, and therefore support their governments, are to be considered infidels and are a legitimate target to be killed? I thought that some behind the US government were very evil and believe that the only way to change the system, is to stop funding it by refusing to pay tax.

But let's consider how difficult this is! Of course, we will not be able to avoid the VAT and tax on petrol, you can give up all the things you are now doing and change your ways so radically to opt out of the system, but that kind of life is not easy. Question is, what are you prepared to do for peace on Earth? What action are you taking to reduce your energy consumption, reduce pollution, save water? Please ask yourself this questions: What can I do?

Lots of open questions and I hope to find the answers soon. The most important step is to be asking the right questions, this leads us to discoveries and solutions to our problems. I like the idea and concepts behind the Thrive movement, so do take some time and watch the movies if you are open for change.

Many people though, are truly locked into the system, the government has total control of the matrix, through debt, starting from student loans, to mortgages. People are manipulated and brainwashed to believe there are no alternatives, but you can get out of that, it's just the will to do so. If your single. Problems grow when you have responsibilities such as family, career and ego. Therefore, it seems rather hopeless to rely on the masses to take action. Only a few people can see through the tangled web of deceit and will be willing to take action towards changing and begin with their own way of life, in the hope to lead by example and to influence others to change their ways.

If I take the route of a terrorist, I would be facing many good people, who are not strong enough to go take the necessarily steps to change. Are they to be blamed? They may be guilty of indecisiveness and inaction but they do surly not deserve to be ruthlessly targeted, violently attacked or even murdered for their procrastination. I could not be involved in such tactics and have a profound belief that there must be a peaceful solution to turn what is wrong in to what is right, no matter how bad the odds look. Good will prevail.

We walked out of the forest, down a hill from where I was presented with the most spectacular view of the Atlantic Ocean. At the bottom of the hill, we stepped out on to a main road. We followed this road along the coast and further on, I noticed a path going off down to the beach. We followed this small path to the most beautiful beach. We walked on to the sand and towards the clear blue water when, from the corner of my eye, I spotted some movement on the high cliffs in the distance, it was Tom climbing. I un-strapped and laid my rucksack down on the sand and wondered over to the other side of the beach where Tom was climbing down the cliff, to the beach.

On the way over, I chased Tog and we played up to where Tom was climbing. By the time we got to the other side of the beach where Tom was, he had made his full decent and I asked if he was feeling OK. He was but seemed a bit distant and strange. I made sure he didn't need any help and returned to the rucksack where I unpacked my gas and cooker and fried a couple of eggs for breakfast. It was still chilly and the mid morning sun rays were only slowly warming up the air. It was certainly too cold to take a swim in the ocean. I boiled water and made tea. Tog and I sat on the beach together watching the clouds and seagulls fly by. We were alone and only a couple of hours away from the end of the old world. What would the new world look like for us? Very soon, I would have to be making up my mind as to what direction we would be heading. I realised I could not wait for a miracle. I had seen enough miracles, all around me there was proof enough that God lived, that I had a role to play in my life. I just had to find my way.

I packed and walked on. Rather too much road walking for my taste but just when my back and legs began feeling pain, I saw a secluded beach, off the road, down a steep path. It would be difficult to climb back up from there if we ventured down. But it was so pretty, I had to go and take a closer look. Opposite, across the see I could see a town in the distance of about 3 km away. It had to be Finisterre and it was in our sights but I was in no rush to get there, it was about 13:30 and we had plenty of time. I had not seen any more signs of Tom or in fact any other pilgrims. We were totally alone.

We climbed down, treading some very strange green pebbly stones to get to the small beach. They were for sure not natural stones. Maybe the green stones were dumped here and spread on the path by some company who did not want to pay the high price of disposing of toxic waste properly. But the beach was just perfect, a paradise just for me and my dog to play on. I

dumped my rucksack, stripped off all my clothes and ran along the beach screaming with joy, as, God had made me.

Naked running and rejoicing for having achieved my goal, I had walked across northern Spain, I walk over an area I could see on a world map, I felt so good and happy to be here at that moment. I tried to get Tog to enter the water with me, but he only came in up to his belly and then made a swift retreat. I didn't want to force him. I took a swim over to the cliffs and around the big rock. Tog lost me out of his sight and started whimpering. I called him but he would not come and swim to look for me. Maybe if I stayed some time longer? Around the bend of the bay, I saw another beach, surrounded by steep cliffs. It was only accessible by this way from the sea. What a perfect hideaway this would make. The only thing missing of course was fresh water. I returned to our beach and Tog was pleased to greet me back. We played some more and I threw sticks and he fetched them and played tug of war to try and keep hold of them. It was good fun and very special moments of my life I shall not forget.

When the wind increased and the air cooled down, it was time to depart for the last few kms that separates us from our final destination, Finisterre, the end of the old world! We climbed the steep green pebbled path back up to the main road. Still no sign of any other human beings. We walked and followed the road until a sign indicated to take a foot path along side the coast, along the beach. A huge beach, empty of any people. What a great place to come on a holiday I thought. At 15:30 we arrived in the town of Finisterre. The hostel was shut for Siesta until 17:00, so I sat down in a bar and ordered a beer and sandwich to celebrate my arrival.

Not much later, Roberta appeared, and we had another beer together. Another few moments later Tom showed up, he was OK. Then Protect and Earth appeared. We drank more beer and shared stories from our epic journeys across the republic of Spain.

At 17:00, when the hostel opened, we strolled over and checked in. It was a great place with all the facilities. I was given a very nice certificate but not for Tog.

There was a haggard looking old dog who had greeted us outside the hostel, he had cuts, torn ear, scared back and was pretty old and looked very street wise. Whilst I was registering, the hospitalero received a telephone call asking if some one had found a stray dog. My heart stopped. Had Tog's owner calculated that we may have arrived here on this very day and now he was claiming his dog back? I spoke up saying I had seen an old dog outside but the lady told me that this dog belonged to the hostel. I then explained that I had found Tog over a month before and she said that it was a more recent loss, it would not be Tog's owner. I was relieved to hear this but still, shaken and in a state of shock. I just could not imagine having to give him back to the previous owner, in fact I would not have done so. I had found him, he was unregistered, I had paid for his inoculations and electronic tagging, he was my dog now!

Time was going by and the sun was sinking low. I wanted to be by the sea, up by the lighthouse at the furthest point west, the true end of the old world. The lighthouse stood on cliffs overlooking the Atlantic Ocean 5 km out of town. Most of the way was up hill. I set out on the last stretch of my camino, to the end of the old world.

At first I was walking amongst several pilgrims I knew but I soon I picked up my pace and lead the way ahead. I needed to be alone on this last part the way.

After about an hour I arrived on the peak and saw the huge lighthouse. Tog went sniffing out close to the cliff edge and I was afraid he might lose his footing and fall. I called him to “fuss”.

We found a nice spot of grass to sit on and waited for the sun to set. It was not a perfect sunset, clouds had spoiled the view of the red ball slowly sinking on to the water but nevertheless, it was spectacular. A few friends had sat by close to me and I could hear a party developing not far away. Urs, the Swiss guy had invited a few lady friends to join him for Swiss wine and cheese. He had walked all the way from Switzerland carrying that staff.

I sat close to a pilgrim I didn't know, and Tom approached her after climbing back up the cliff. He went down there thinking he would have a better view but couldn't get a comfortable seating position down on the jagged rocks. He asked the girl if he could have a kiss on this special occasion. She obliged politely and gave him a peck on the cheek. I was here for other reasons. What was I going to be doing next? Where would I be heading tomorrow? At that moment I got up and cleared my throat, a few of the pilgrims turned and looked up at me.

I spoke the following words: I have walked a long way. Now I have arrived at the end of the old world, I have to make a decision as to how to plan my new life, in the new world. Everything has changed. Before starting out on this journey, I had two options. At the end of my walk I would decide between being bad or good. Fighting the system with force or trying to change the system in peace and with love. It is my decision to go back in peace, to find a loving path and start a new world with the belief in God and the good in mankind. I wish to write a book and work with children.

It all just came out that way and when I finished, I sat down looking out over the ocean. The girl who kissed Tom came over and gave me a hug and others patted me on the back. We all shook hands and someone took some photos.

The light faded and it got very chilly. It was time to get back, down off this cliff and cook some dinner. The wind was now really blowing a gale and I was so cold, I decided to run down the hill to keep warm. Soon we were back in town where I found a fish monger who sold me a couple of pieces of fresh Pseodilla and Calamar. I found my back to the hostel and started cooking a meal with Tom and the girl. He admitted that cooking was not his strong point, so I cooked and asked him to play Bob Dylan songs on his uquale, whilst I knocked up my masterpiece. I was singing along to 'Down you masters of war.' It was one of the best fish dishes I have ever cooked.

There was some misunderstanding as to how long we could stay up before the hospitalero looked the doors to the kitchen and living room. She had said we had to be finished cooking in 40 minutes but that also meant eating it to. Now that was just not going to be possible and on this very rare occasion the hospitalero made an exception to the rule and locked up an hour later.

It was pathetic that grown adults were told when to go to bed, especially on the last night and in the last town on the journey to the end of the old world, the end of the camino de Santiago de Compostela.

End of book 1, Book 2, the journey home (in production)