



## Everything We Need: Poems from El Camino

**Laura Foley**

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*Everything We Need is a subtle poetry collection that makes an art of noticing the small things.*

Laura Foley finds strength and fulfillment on the Camino de Santiago in her quiet poetry collection *Everything We Need*.

There is a musicality to the poems of this collection. Whether focusing on the journey itself and the experience of walking, or the quietude of resting in one of the cathedrals along the way, the collection takes notice of the sounds created by particular words. This awareness is used to humorous effect in “In Sync,” a poem about churros and shared thoughts: the “ch” sound repeats in the words *churro*, *churrería*, and *chocolate*, while the assonance created by the phrase “crinkled crispiness” evokes the crunch of the sweet dough treat. In contrast, the poem “A table on the grass, Nájera” moves with the intonation of a kyrie, giving thanks for body, mind, soul, food, and nature:

*Thanks be for this place of rest,  
mid-way through our trek,  
this table placed on grass,  
café with river view, parade passing,  
drums and lively song  
above the muddy, rain-fed waters.*

*Thanks be for a week of climbing Pyrenees,  
striding safely through lightning storms  
in open fields, surviving constant drenching,  
bone weariness, a day of violent illness.*

*Thanks be for the will to shoulder  
backpacks once again, to rejoin  
the holy pilgrim stream.  
May we follow to the end,  
grateful to our bodies and minds,  
for letting spirit through.*

The prayer-like quality of the poem is echoed throughout the collection.

Despite Foley repeating that walking the Camino de Santiago was absent any religious impetus, the pilgrimage itself comes to seem a spiritual journey, which is reflected in several poems. “Rabé de las Calzadas” luxuriates in architecture, church bells, and roaming animals. “What was the best cup of coffee?” imagines an interview wherein Foley answers questions about what it was like to be on the pilgrimage, and her coming to accept the term “pilgrim” being applied to her and her wife, who are non-religious. A state of self-reflection, and of being open to the spirit and

noticing incremental, monumental changes is established. The final line of the piece encompasses the entire collection, with illuminating strength and depth of spirit. In answer to the imagined question “What Did You Discover?” Foley says, “By the end, how strong we came to feel; how quiet inside.”

Even when the poetic focus shifts from the journey on the Camino to a cancer diagnosis, the collection maintains the reverence that’s exemplified in earlier poems. It takes the fortitude built over months of training, preparation, and execution, and turns it toward the experience of chemotherapy and support. Where it took several poems to relate the Camino, it only takes two to follow the cancer journey. In both arenas, the strength of ancient travelers brings heartfelt comfort.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (May 25, 2022)

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