

Thank you...and a “lifetime” history

Thank you to the American Pilgrims on the Camino for awarding me a Lifetime Service Award at the 2016 National Gathering. It was wonderful to be in such esteemed company as Lynn Talbot, George Greenia, and most especially, Sandy Lenthall, although I feel much too young to celebrate a “Lifetime” award!

My connection to the American Pilgrims on the Camino is really “prehistoric”. In 1979, immediately after graduating from the University of Nebraska, I walked the pre-yellow-arrow Camino from St. Jean to Compostela with a group led by David Gitlitz (who also led the 1975 pilgrimage which included **Lynn Talbot**). I earned my PhD in Spanish in 1985 (emphasis on allegorical pilgrimage texts), and led a group of students on the Camino in 1986.

The pre-history of APOC, however, really begins on July 25, 1989, when, thanks to the Program for Cultural Cooperation Between Spain’s Ministry of Culture and the U.S. Universities, I was able to launch a newsletter, the “Friends of the Road to Santiago” (**George Greenia** was one of the first subscribers). In the pre-Windows, pre-Internet age, these newsletters were not pretty, but they informed readers of upcoming pilgrimage conferences (both domestic and European), and of books or articles about the Camino. They also contained a list of subscribers and their addresses. Soon, pilgrims began sending practical tips and notes about their experiences.

In 1994, I, along with Linda Davidson were invited to attend the Primer Encuentro Mundial de Cofradías de Santiago where we began the first steps of making the Friends of the Road to Santiago an officially recognized Association. As a step in this direction we created a Friends’ Pilgrim’s Credential, pre-controversy over the “official” or accepted Credentials, or controversy over Compostela or Certificate.

In 1997, pre-(APOC) gathering, **Sandy Lenthall** called and asked if I thought persons might want to come together to talk about their pilgrimage experiences. I thought they would and so the Newsletter of October 1997 opened with this:

CALL TO A GATHERING OF PILGRIMS!

Dear Friends of the Road to Santiago:

Several of you have written or called about experiences—either yours or mine. It is always a pleasure to hear from someone who has “been there, done that.” I have also had contact with people thinking about making a pilgrimage. It is a privilege to help because of having a little experience in this unique life-adventure.

Would there be interest in getting together for the purposes of sharing experiences, books and guides, photos, “after life” perceptions, etc. with others who feel a nudge to come to Williamsburg, VA in the dead of winter 1998?

My idea is to be a GATHERING OF PILGRIMS for a weekend in February in Williamsburg, VA. The weather is usually kind (40’s), motel rates low (\$40/dbl), airfare lower (than summer), and much to do and see if you bring family and friends.

Please let me know if you’re interested. Sincerely,  
Sandy Lenthall (Pilgrim, October ’95, June ’96, Oct. ’97)

EDITORS' NOTE:

We are grateful for Sandy Lenthall's initiative in setting up this meeting! She has forged ahead with the invitation and has also coordinated hotel information and secured a meeting room. Sandy is in charge of the entire weekend gather. A special mailing with all of the details should reach you soon.

Sadly, life (notably children and finances) got in the way, and I was unable to attend this or subsequent gatherings. While my professional scholarship about the Camino continued, my journey with the Friends of the Camino had been slowly but surely going down a different path. Twenty years ago, in 1997, I ceded the day-to-day operations of the Friends to my friend, co-author, and fellow pilgrim, Linda Davidson. Finally in 2004, after the 7th Gathering, Linda and I agreed that the Friends of the Road had reached its final destination, and, after 16 years we said good-bye to our Friends, and Hello to the new American Pilgrims on the Camino, sharing with them our mailing list and the money which remained in our treasury.

And so, that is my "lifetime of service", my pre-history of APOC. It's been a great journey, I thank you again for the recognition, and I look forward to seeing you ... on the Camino. Ultreya y Suseia.

Maryjane Dunn