

Carlo Pulsoni interviews Lydia B. Smith

*How did you come up with the idea to shoot a movie about the "Camino de Santiago"?*

Actually I would say it feels more like the Camino came up with me to make a movie about it! I had absolutely no intentions of making a film about the Camino, but when I walked the Camino in the Spring of 2008 and people found out I was a filmmaker – they encouraged me to make a documentary. I was very resistant to the idea – I had independently produced and directed a documentary ten years before and swore I would never do it again – it was just too challenging. My other hesitation was that the Camino was so sacred and magical for me that I was scared I couldn't do it justice. So I kept saying no, but once I got home I couldn't stop thinking about it. This little voice inside me kept saying over and over again – “you should make a documentary about the Camino” As I looked at my life and all the experiences I had had over the years, it felt like everything led me to giving me the skills to make this documentary.

Many people feel like they were called to do the Camino – I was as well and also felt called to make this film. So after several months of resistance, I finally succumbed and decided to move forward with making the film. I knew I, wanted to make this documentary a film of how the Camino would want to present itself. It wasn't about making my point of view of the Camino - but share the universal experiences of walking that everyone could relate to, just as the Camino does. I wanted to make a film that made people feel like they had just had a mini Camino experience, just by sitting in their seats and watching the film.

*There are many movies about the Camino de Santiago, among which La voie lactée by Buñuel is probably the most famous one. Were you inspired by any of those movies?*

Before I decided to make the film, I hadn't seen any movies about the Camino. The film that stood out and did influence me greatly was The March of the Penguins. I went back and watched it several times and discussed it in great depth with my director of photography, Pedro Valenzuela. Each year, thousands of penguins would march dozens of miles – a pilgrimage of sorts to give birth to their young. I was so impressed by how the film made the landscape such an important character in the film – they did that by doing very very wide shots with the penguins being very small in the frame. I actually would say to Pedro at times “Hazme un penguinino” which meant – do a very wide shot with the pilgrim very far away. Frequently people tell me, after seeing the film, that they felt like they were right there in Spain which was exactly what I was intending!

*Who are the main characters of your movie and how did you choose them?*

Since I really wanted this to be the Camino's film, the pilgrims's film – I felt it was important to let the Camino cast the film. So of all the people you see in the film, all

of them except for Annie O'Neil, I just met along the way and asked them if I could film them.

I knew Annie before shooting the film and when I mentioned to her that I was planning on going over and shooting the documentary, she immediately said "I want to be involved, I want to walk! "When I look back on this, I realize it was really important to have at least one person who I knew would be 100% open and honest with her emotions along the way, not to mention have someone to shoot the very first day! The rest of the pilgrims kept crossing paths with our cameras and it was clear the Camino wanted us to follow them on their journeys. We actually shot 15 pilgrims (a combination of solo walkers, pairs, or small groups) and had to cut it down to 6 for the final cut of the film so that it wouldn't be a six hour long documentary!

I was deliberate in picking a large variety of pilgrims – I wanted it to be a good reflection of what you encounter when you walk – people from all different countries, a wide range of ages and reasons for walking as well as spiritual/religious or atheist/agnostic.

*Which kind of public do you expect from Italy and do you think it could be different from the American one?*

In the United States, the Camino is not as well known as it is in Europe and not nearly as many people have walked. In most screenings in the US, only about 15-20% of the people that came to see the movie had already walked and about another 50% of the people were interested in walking it some day. I think in Italy, we will have much larger percentages of people that have already walked the Camino.

I am quite excited for that – as there are many parts of the film that speak directly to pilgrims/people that have walked. I made the film, more for people that have already walked, so that they had something they could show their friends and family when they got home – to say, this is what I did, these weren't the exact people I met, but almost. My favorite audiences are ones where people are experienced walkers, so I am very happy to be able to present the film in Italy where there are lots of Camino veterans.