



A JOURNEY oft TAKEN



Over the course of last summer, Kevin Reardon recommended I check out a film called “The Way” starring Martin Sheen. A few months after he first told me about it he asked if I had gotten a chance to see it. He was sure I would love it. It was available to watch instantly on Netflix, so I really had no excuse. Besides, when “Slider” tells you to check out something, it must be good. So I finally settled down with my laptop on my lap and watched this beautifully shot trail flick about hikers seeking their Holy Grail on a path that’s more than a thousand years old. “Slider” was right. I loved it.

Martin Sheen and the other actors walked about 200 miles of the 500-mile Camino for the making of the movie. A few years earlier, he drove its length with his grandson, Taylor, and it was that trip that inspired his son Emilio, Taylor’s dad, to write a script with Sheen in the lead role. The crew and cast of 50 hauled little equipment, treading the route reverentially.

REVIEW BY BILL O’BRIEN |

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELIXIR FILMS



Martin Sheen and fellow cast members in scenes from ‘The Way.’ It is rated PG-13 for mildly strong language.



A.T. thru-hikers will quickly recognize the underlying themes that make this story about hiking long distances with people who are complete strangers such a universally understood journey of self-discovery. You’re somewhat distrustful of the people you first meet on the trail, then after living and walking together for a few days — perhaps within a single day, perhaps in an instant — you learn to trust them enough to

*You don’t choose
a life, you live one.*

let them enter your life, taking down one small wall at a time from a lifetime of building walls.

Tom, played by Sheen, meets fellow pilgrims who’ve come from all corners of the globe to walk the Camino. As so often happens, he falls in with a few of these other international hikers — each one unique and colorful and mostly entertaining — and after initial resistance, bonds with them like you know they inevitably must. It is, after all, his Trail Family; yes, it is *your* Trail Family, warts and all.

Each and every pilgrim has his or her own reason for undertaking the walk. Some are on a spiritual mission, others on a more physical one. They are not all seasoned long-distance hikers. Tom’s reason is entirely accidental and intensely personal, and it is his journey of discovery that forms the underlying theme to the movie, which is, in the words of his son (played by real-life son Emilio Estevez), finding the difference between “the life we live and the life we choose.”

THE SCENERY IS BEAUTIFUL, shot without too much fuss over whether the skies were blue or the sun was shining, just the way it is on a real trail and this was the real deal. Charming scenes include Tom taking a break along a stone wall while being entertained by a kitten, with an appropriate James Taylor tune playing on the soundtrack in the background. Another

has the three males doing what males have to do occasionally along the side of the trail, while their female comrade stands guard with her back turned toward them. Then the roles are reversed, with the three guys forming a sort of privacy hedge for their female friend from Canada.

Fellow hiker Joost from the Netherlands is both funny and sad, and proves to be an excellent listener, not just a big eater. He is part Scarecrow, part Cowardly Lion in this Yellow Brick Road pilgrimage, with Tom as Dorothy trying to find the way home.

Speaking of the soundtrack, it is beautiful, too. For me, any film with Nick Drake’s “Pink Moon” in the score is an instant classic.

YOU LEARN A LOT ABOUT THE CAMINO while watching this film, including how hikers are given a “passport” at the start that they need to get stamped at certain locations along the route. (A sample of a stamp is used as an illustration at the very start of this piece.) You also quickly learn to recognize the iconic shell that serves as the trail’s marker (see image below).

I’ve watched it a few times now, and there are scenes that get me each time. It’s steadily, very subtly climbing my list of favorite stories, on film or in book form — a list that includes such diverse works as “Huckleberry Finn,” “Travels With Charley” and “The Searchers.” They all, not so surprisingly, have something to do with personal journeys.

Tom encounters trials and tribulations familiar to any long-distance walker, from losing his pack in a stream to losing something even more precious at the hands of a Gypsy boy, a would-be street urchin, from whose father Tom learns a valuable lesson about children. Through it all — the elements, the unfamiliar language, the initial wariness toward strangers, the snoring in hostels — our pilgrim finds his way. □



We hope to offer a workshop on the Camino de Santiago at this fall’s Gathering, and we’re also working on getting permission to show this film.