

What Was That Film About?

"What was that film about?" asked Julie after she and her husband, Colin, had watched 'The Way' on a DVD.

"What do mean, Julie?" replied Colin. "It was about that guy, Tom Avery, walking the Camino to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia – more than 800 km, or 500 miles in old money." He laughed and added: "Not bad for a guy in his 60s."

"I know that, Colin," said Julie. "And it wasn't just to Santiago, was it?"

"OK, Julie," said Colin, "I know, he went on to Muxía; but that was just to scatter what remained of his son's ashes in the sea. Besides, Muxia's one of the final destinations for pilgrims after they've visited the shrine of St James in Santiago de Compostela."

"All right, Smarty Pants," replied Julie. "I do know that. I meant at the very end. That wasn't Muxía! It looked a lot like Marrakesh to me."

"Oh, that," laughed Colin. "I guess Tom had picked up a touch of Wanderlust in his old age."

"But why," asked Julie, "does an obviously successful, staid and comfortably well off American ophthalmologist give up everything to begin traveling the world?"

"I told you, Julie – Wanderlust" said Colin.

"No, Colin," said Julie firmly, "*before* that. Why did he walk the Camino in the first place?"

"That's obvious, Julie," Colin retorted, "to complete the journey his son had started."

"No, it is *not* obvious," insisted Julie. "When he went out to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port it was to collect his son's body and bring it back to America. So why didn't he? Why did he change his mind?"

"I don't know," said Colin. "Perhaps seeing his son's body made him feel bad that they had parted on bad terms."

"I got the impression," said Julie, "that it wasn't so much seeing the body, which he knew would be there, but that, when he started unpacking Daniel's rucksack and looking at the things he found, he became unsettled. You remember after he had been looking at Daniel's things he went straight to Captain Henri to ask for the body to be cremated. The request couldn't wait. He wanted Daniel's ashes *so that Daniel could complete the walk!*"

"All right, Julie," said Colin. "But remember what Captain Henri said to Tom when Tom told him that he and Daniel were going to walk the Camino. 'You walk the Way only for yourself.'"

"Well, that's just it," said Julie. "Something had happened that made this staid widower turn back on his comfortable life and begin the long walk. And what did he get out of it in the end?"

"He got to Santiago, didn't he?" laughed Colin.

"He got further than that," Julie retorted. "But in a corny film you would expect this lapsed Catholic, as we discover him to be, to find his faith again. But does he? It's not obvious, is it?"

"Well," said Colin, "we see him in Santiago at the Pilgrims' Mass and praying at the shrine of St James, don't we?"

"Is he actually *praying* at the shrine? And we see Joost, Sarah and Jack with him at the Mass. Don't try to tell me that all three had gained faith!" said Julie with feeling. "They were all doing the things that everyone who completes the

Camino does when they get to Santiago, whether they did it for religious reasons or not. People have done it for centuries for all sorts of reasons – just look at the characters Tom falls in with along the Camino."

"All right, all right, Julie," said Colin, "calm down. So why do *you* think Tom walked the Camino and what do you think happened to him?"

"That's just it, Colin," replied Julie, "I don't know; but change him, it did."

"Huh," grunted Colin, "it didn't change his companions much, did it? You're reading too much into it. It's just a fantasy travel story. Instead of Dorothy going along the yellow brick road and meeting up with the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion, we have Tom going along the Camino de Santiago and meeting up with Joost, Sarah and Jack."

"Oh," scoffed Julie, "Then who's the Wizard of Oz? What about the good and bad witches, the Munchkins, the Winged Monkeys et cetera? You're talking tosh!"

"OK, Julie," said Colin, "so it's not exactly the yellow brick road ..."

"Not exactly," interrupted Julie. "It's nothing like it; and Joost, Sarah and Jack are not exactly like the Scarecrow, Tin Woodman and Cowardly Lion! Forget Baum's fairy story; get back to the film. Jack and Sarah, at least, are changed. I'm not sure about Joost."

"I liked Joost," laughed Colin. "Better than the surly Tom, neurotic Sarah and that garrulous Jack and all his blarney. Joost was a real man!"

"Just like you," said Julie, "to like that fat over-aged Dutch hippie; all he was interested in was food and the dope he smoked."

"Aw, come off it, Julie," pleaded Colin. "He was funny; he had a sense of humor."

"Is that what you call it?" retorted Julie. "He was loud and in your face."

"But you have to admit," said Colin, "that he was also kind; he offered to share his food with Tom."

"I suppose so," agreed Julie, somewhat reluctantly. "But the one I really felt for was Sarah."

"What!" exclaimed Colin, "that bitter, neurotic, chain-smoking Canadian blonde! Do me a favor!"

"Just like a man!" said Julie with feeling. "She had recently extricated herself from a marriage to a physically abusive husband. Can you imagine what those years of abuse must have done to her?"

"Screwed her up a bit, I guess," said Colin.

"A bit!" exclaimed Julie, "a bit! Good grief! The woman had aborted her baby daughter for fear of what her husband might do to the child."

"Well, I ..." began Colin.

"You've no idea what that would mean to a woman," interrupted Julie. "It haunted her. She told Tom she sometimes heard her dead daughter cry to her. A little wonder she was the way she was!"

"All right," said Colin. "She'd had a hard time. But the walk didn't make much difference, did it? She didn't quit smoking though she said she would when she reached Santiago."

"I know that's what she said on the walk," replied Julie. "But do you remember what she said when she was given her Compostela? When they asked her why she had walked the Camino?"

"No," said Colin, "I suppose she said it was for health."

"No," said Julie. "It was Joost who said that and he probably believed it –"

though I'm not sure how much weight he really lost. Sarah was the only one of the four who said she had done it for religious reasons."

"Humph," snorted Colin. "Didn't see much religious about that blonde. Anyway, doesn't the Church teach that abortion is a serious sin?"

"Yes," said Julie, "but it also teaches that one should condemn the sin, *not* the sinner. Just remember that. I think that beneath her chain-smoking shell she was walking as a sort of atonement, sort of to bring peace to her dead daughter."

"I think you're reading too much into it," said Colin again. "I didn't notice much religion about the film."

"Am I?" said Julie. "You've no idea how that girl must have felt. But even though the Camino is a pilgrimage route, religion was certainly understated in the film."

"It certainly was," agreed Colin. "And as for Jack getting over his writer's block, that was hardly a miracle, was it? His companions made him see sense and gave him a lot of material he could use for his writing."

"But perhaps that's how miracles work," said Julie. "Anyway, Tom underwent a profound change."

"Well," agreed Colin, "he became less surly, opened up a little and actually seemed in an odd way to like his companions in the end."

"It wasn't just that," said Julie. "You remember when Joost talked about returning to real life, Tom muttered 'You call that real life?' He realized the shallowness of the life he had led. 'I need to travel more,' he said when he got Daniel's Compostela. That's what he was doing at the very end: traveling more."

"So it was a road movie then," said Colin in a bored way. "Certainly the shots of the Galician countryside were splendid enough; but I thought the way Tom kept seeing his dead son was a bit odd."

"I don't know," said Julie. "It wasn't overdone and it was Tom's imagination, wasn't it? I mean, it wasn't supposed to be a ghost or anything like that."

"I guess not," said Colin, "and, whatever the merits or not of the film, I have to admit Martin Sheen held it together well with his portrayal of Tom. You know Emilio Estevez, who directed it, is Sheen's son?"

"Yes," said Julie, "yes, I knew that; and he also played the role of Tom's son, Daniel, in the film - father and son in real life; father and son in the film. But wasn't Galicia where Sheen's own father came from?"

"Yes," said Colin, "it was. I suppose that's why the film was dedicated to Sheen's father, Francisco."

"So it was," reflected Julie. "I seem to remember Sheen had once said he would like to walk the way of St James through his father's homeland."

"Well," laughed Colin. "He did, didn't he? Thanks to his son."

"That's right," said Julie, "Estevez made that possible, didn't he? Shall we agree that whatever else it may be, the film is Emilio Estevez's gift to his father."

"Yes, let's. I'll drink to that," said Colin, as he poured himself a whisky. "What will you have, Julie?"