



Compostela. The oldest was an 88-year-old Spanish priest; the youngest, a baby in a **pram**⁷. They came from all over the world. Thankfully, many could speak English, so every night they were able to share experiences and stories with other travellers.

A night spent out in the open air was another highlight (“a billion-star hotel,” Jan says). There were birthdays, too: four people in the group (including J.J.) had birthdays on the road.

A Moment of Hopelessness

One of Jan’s most **intense**⁸ experiences never made it into the movie because there was no one there to see. They had just visited Cruz de Ferro, an iron cross by the road. At Cruz de Ferro, **pilgrims**⁹ traditionally say a prayer and leave a small stone from their homeland; over the years these stones have grown into a hill around three metres high. Jan felt very emotional after adding his stone, and he wanted to be alone. He decided to go down the mountain by himself.

He soon realized it was a mistake: the road descends (= goes down) from 1,800 m above sea level to just 800 m, and it is steep and dangerous. Jan kept slipping and had to lift himself painfully back into position every ten metres. Soon he was exhausted. But worse was to come. His wheelchair could not handle the slope. He ended up caught on the edge of a **ditch**¹⁰, unable to move and terrified that he would be thrown from the wheelchair.

“I couldn’t do anything,” he tells us. “I felt very alone. Very... how do you say it in English? ‘Under the weather*?’” At that moment he wanted to give up, but the thought came to him, “Live today. Cry tomorrow.”

An old Spanish couple found him and helped him, and he carried on (= continued).

Photos: Petr Hirsch, Tomáš Brabec, Tomáš Lénárd

When he reached the next village he saw his companions at a bar. For a moment, he says, he felt almost angry. But the feeling passed. “I was fine. Live today, cry tomorrow.”

A Journey that Changes You

After their return, Jan says, he had a call from J.J.’s teacher. “The teacher said, ‘What did you do? He’s not the boy I know.’ I said, ‘What do you mean?’ And the teacher told me, ‘He’s older, he knows what to do, he’s clever. What did you do?’ I said, ‘I did nothing. It was the journey.’”

So has the journey changed Jan, as well? “Yes. I live more intensively. I like every day.”

Paul Farrington-Douglas (UK)

CULTURE POINT

The Way of St James (also called **Camino de Santiago**) is an old pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, where St James, one of the 12 apostles, is allegedly buried in a cathedral. It has been a popular pilgrimage for Christians since the early Middle Ages, and today even non-believers take it.



SCIENCE POINT

Multiple sclerosis (*roztroušená skleróza*) is a disease that attacks cells in the brain and spinal cord (*mícha*). It can cause problems with eyesight, muscle weakness and loss of control over physical movements (including speech). People with multiple sclerosis also often experience depression.

Vocabulary

- is bubbling with enthusiasm** [ˈbʌblɪŋ ɪn ˈθjuːziæzəm] – srší nadšením
- pilgrimage** [ˈpɪlgrɪmɪdʒ] – pouť
- strap** [stræp] – popruh
- acquaintance** [əˈkweɪntəns] – známý, známa
- deal** [di:l] – dohoda
- to cope** [kəʊp] – vypořádat se, zvládnout
- pram** [præm] – kočárek
- intense** [ɪnˈtens] – intenzivní

- pilgrim** [ˈpɪlgrɪm] – poutník
- ditch** [dɪtʃ] – příkop

Glossary*

- crowdfunding campaign** – when you ask people on the internet (on websites like Kickstarter or Hithit) for money to support your project
- cabin fever** – when you get annoyed with other people because you spend too much

time with them and can’t leave them (*ponorková nemoc*)

to be under the weather – to not feel well (*cítit se pod psa*)

Language Point•

We can use **would** to talk about repeated actions in the past – something that happened again and again. (*When I was younger, I would spend whole days playing football.*)