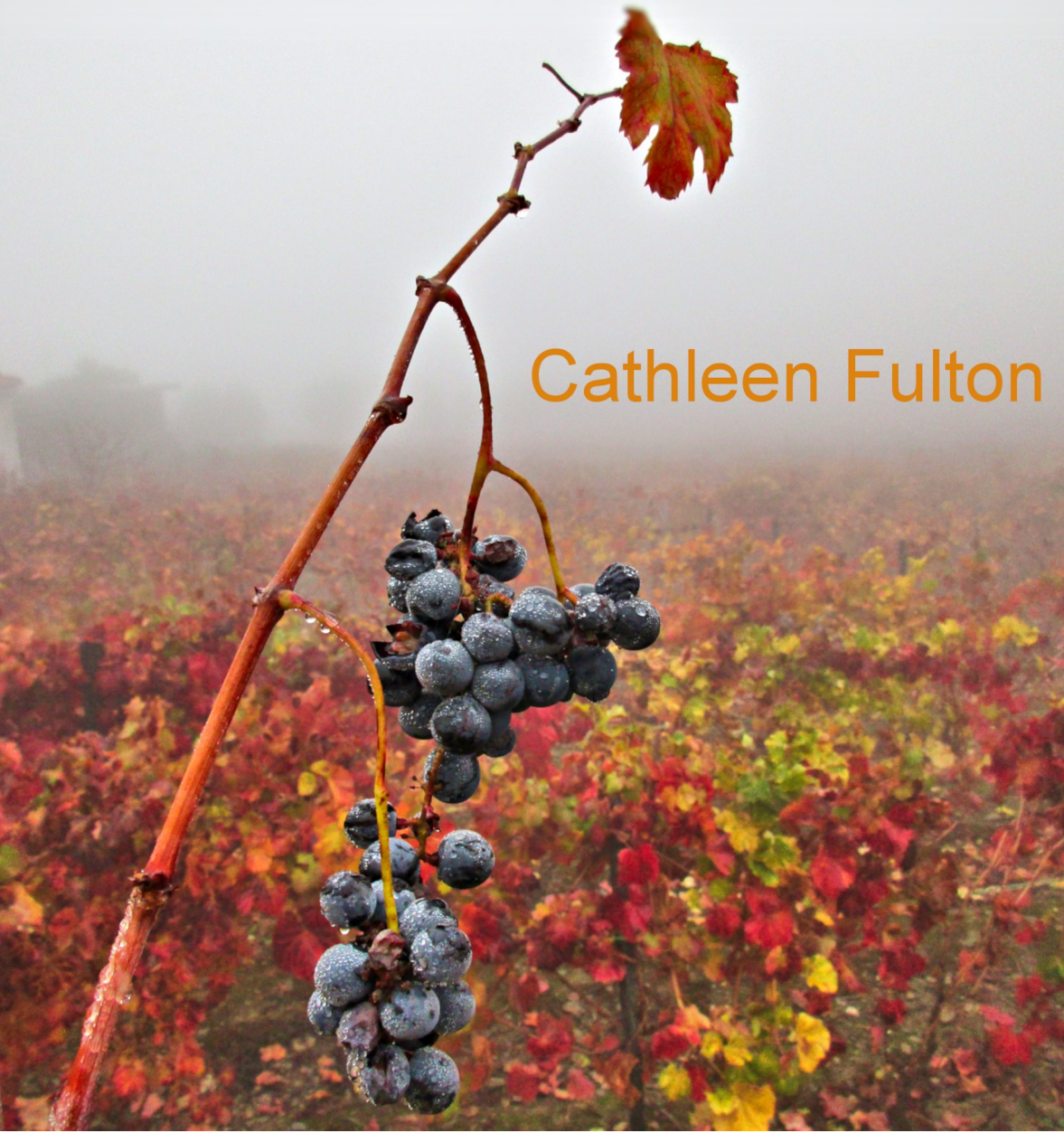


Cathleen's Odyssey

An Image Summons a Thousand Words

Cathleen Fulton



An Image Summons a Thousand Words

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Front cover: Vineyards near Castedo in Portugal's Douro Valley

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Cathleen's Odyssey

**An Image Summons
a
Thousand Words**

Cathleen Fulton

For Joe and Zule
I hope you enjoy this little dessert!

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INTRODUCTION

I am writing these stories from the perspective of month twenty-one of an eight-month trip. Yes, you read that right. When I left the United States in July 2018, I expected to be home for Christmas—February at the latest. But as I passed through country after country, I found I loved the solo traveling lifestyle. People I met would say something like, “Oh, you should go to Bali.” (And I did, eventually.) Some would almost beg me to visit their country. (That is how I ended up in Sri Lanka for *three* months!) One day, I received an email from my travel insurance company, “Five Reasons You Should Go to Kyrgyzstan.” I did not even know where Kyrgyzstan was or that it even *was* a country, but I went anyway. And now, here I am on a tiny island, Gili Air in Indonesia, writing a book to share highlights of this lifestyle with you

I have thousands of photographs and videos. Most are such poor quality or composition that they should be deleted, But as I peruse them, a few from each country stand out and evoke a strong memory...and a story. This is a collection of some favorite photos and their stories.

I am no great photographer. When a photo turns out well, it is mostly by accident. I have also gotten reasonably good at cropping images to improve the composition. Many of my favorite photographs are not particularly good ones. But there is value in the

◀ *The surprising Birmingham Farmer’s Market in England.*
[Story on page 29.](#)

memory. The tattoo photo is one of those. To be 64-years-old and getting my first tattoo in Sri Lanka—now that is a tale. (I surprised the heck out my kids!)

There is not much to say about canal walking...You walk along a well-worn path that is very flat. But oh, just looking at the picture of a swan family sliding by in single-file calms me all over again.

Unbelievable sand “sketches” created by the ocean in the Outer Hebrides turned a boring hike into a memorable one.

Some images, like the last grapes clinging to a stem in a mist-shrouded Portuguese vineyard in November—well, they did not make it into that year’s Port wine, but they still remind me of a lesson well learned. (See the cover image.)

I make no apologies for the inconsistency in the lengths of stories. Most never came close to a thousand words despite the title’s claim. In others, I just have much more to say.

I hope you enjoy these tales. Perhaps they will encourage you to start your own collection of photographic essays.

Catheen Fulton
Gili Air, Lombok, Indonesia
March 2019

This is the first in a planned series of e-books about my two-year journey around the world. If there is something you would like to know about my trip, or how I go about my solo, independent, slow travel lifestyle, visit my website and blog at

CathleensOdyssey.com

or drop me a line at

cathy@CathleensHands.com



These photos did not make it into this volume.

They are being saved for a future edition.





JUST A DAY AT THE OFFICE

Back in 2014, when I made my first foray into solo, independent travel, I had not yet begun harvesting my Social Security benefits—that bit of gold at the end of the rainbow that we always claimed we would never see. I am a book designer. That means that I design the insides—the guts—of books and prepare them for publication. I also take on other graphic design jobs as well as some administrative work. I can do all of these things remotely.

There have been jobs where I have never even met my client face to face. Once I was an administrative assistant helping move a rather large estate through the probate process. I met the executor once during the two-year process, and never met the lawyer or accountant!) With access to the internet almost universal, working on the road is pretty much a piece of cake—well, as long as some file does not end up in a black hole and I have to go through and chase it down.

“HOW MUCH IS YOUR TRIP TO PERU COSTING YOU?”

In 2014, I was in Peru doing some design work for my friend Daniel. It was February—summer in Peru, but a long, gray winter in the northern United States where he lived. Daniel has traveled in and has many fond memories of Central America. After one two-hour business conversation via Skype, he was lamenting the cold, wet weather.

“Where do you work? Do you have an office, or what?” he asked.

◀ *My office overlooking Lake Titicaca, in the village of Chucuito, Peru*

“I tell you what, I will send you a photograph.” I replied. I sent him an image of the sunroom terrace of the guesthouse where I was residing for a month. My computer in the foreground—Lake Titicaca, in all its glory at my feet.

A bit later, he texted me, “I hope you don’t mind me asking, but how much is your trip to Peru costing you?”

TEACHING A COMPUTER TO SPEAK ENGLISH

In 2015, my second four-month trip to Peru was barely two days old, when my computer went south—completely south...well almost. If it were not for the amazing technogeek experience and patience of my ex-husband, Roger, my days of world travel may have come to a screeching halt. I had to be able to work remotely—clients were waiting. To make a very long story short, thanks to the *milagro* (miracle) that is Skype, a little Samsung tablet that was still working, and the ability of Roger and I to still work together like a well-oiled machine, my journey was rescued. Taking a leap of faith, we heated up the machine until some magical links inside reconnected and we got the thing to boot.

WARNING: *Don’t try this at home, unless you don’t care if your computer never works again!*

Then, Roger helped me research what computer to purchase and even find the store in Arequipa to purchase it. Let me tell you, walking into a department store electronics section with rudimentary Spanish knowledge and trying to ask technical questions can be pretty daunting. But, hoping I was getting the right computer model, I brought it back to my guesthouse and we proceeded to transfer everything over...bit by bit.

Did you know that some computers sold in developing countries do not have the Windows universal language pack installed? This one only spoke Spanish. Between us, we researched how to “teach” it English by tweaking some line of code deep in the bowels of the registry.

WARNING: *Again, don’t try this at home without expert help!*

I was in business. My trip was saved!

A few weeks later, I added up the minutes Roger and I had spent on Skype—over 200 hours of conversations, trouble-shooting, and finger-crossed trials! It is nice to be friends with your ex especially when he is a “technogeek!”*

AN ASIDE: *Over the next several years, without warning, the computer would still sometimes stubbornly speak to me in Spanish.*

FIFTY DAYS ON FOOT

The impetus of my current trip was to walk the Camino de Santiago del Norte along the coast of Spain. I was going to make the pilgrimage and return home. Then I kept adding countries, resulting in a “planned” six-to-eight-month trip. Once I was in Europe, I kept adding more countries, and here I am twenty-one months into an eight-month trip. Hmmmm, how did that happen?

Anyway, back to the Camino. Before leaving home, I had promised my client, Ann that I would be able to complete some extensive edits to a small regional hiking guide, *Walks, Trails and Parks of Vashon Island*. This was the fifth edition to be released in time for the holidays. It turned out to be almost a complete re-write. But thanks to the magic of the internet and my ability to carry a small laptop with me the entire 715 kilometers of the Camino, the

Ann sent me this photo of the day she picked up the finished books, over 5,000 miles away from my office in Alijo.



Photo courtesy Ann Spiers © 2018

* Roger rescued me again a few years later when Microsoft forced me to install a new update for which I did not have enough disk space. This time I was in Scotland!



View from my “office,” in Santoña, Spain—the quintessential Spanish plaza where locals gathered every afternoon to drink wine, visit, and watch the children play a daily football (soccer) game .

finished copies were in the hands of my clients in time for the holiday market. A bonus to this job was that it required me to take one or two days off from walking every week or so, in order to work on the page layouts. Ann kept apologizing for interrupting my trip, but those rest days may have meant the difference between my Camino’s success and failure.

My favorite Camino office? In the sweet town of Santoña. My *albergue* (hostel) balcony overlooked a quintessential town square where Spanish food and wine was served to me at a sidewalk café. It was also on this trip where I worked in the nadir of my array of temporary offices: two days in a seven-euro-per-night albergue, sitting in a bunk bed in an airless room. What preserved my sanity was that just outside the door was captivating Oviedo, Spain.

After I finished the Camino, I spent three-weeks in the Douro Valley of Portugal and that is where I finished the hiking book’s



My yurt office in Kyrgyzstan. Because it was summertime, I could sometimes work in an open-air common space in the same compound.

layout—in between gorgeous fall days walking through yellow, and orange, and red vineyards.* In November, the book was magically transported to a printer in Seattle, where Ann picked up the finished copies a few days later.

You rarely see the designer mentioned in a book’s credits. We are an invisible part of the crew. So, I was honored when Ann included me on the Acknowledgements page, “Foremost thanks to Cathy Fulton who designed and produced this edition as she walked the Camino de Santiago, Spain.”

A COZY YURT IN KYRGYZSTAN

Where the hell is Kyrgyzstan and how did I get there? Well that is a completely different story. This is about my “office” in Kerakol,

* See [“Under the Douro Fog” on page 37](#) for images of these enchanting vineyards.



One of many afternoon repasts I enjoyed while working at Happy Nomads Yurt Camp.

Kyrgyzstan. For most of the six weeks I was there, I stayed in a very special yurt camp called Happy Nomads with the most incredible hospitality, breakfasts, and flower garden. I switched from working in my cozy yurt to an open-air structure, depending on my mood. Sometimes, Altynai, one of my hosts would bring me a tea tray with a snack of *borsook* (bread puffs) and fresh vegetables. I felt like an Asian princess.

It was in Kyrgyzstan that I first got encouragement from my friends to transform my hobby travel blog into a professional blog and website. So, I went to work learning about travel blogging, producing valuable content, search engine optimization, how to use Wordpress. In short, I felt like I had returned to university—it would open up a whole new world.



If I needed a break from work in my spacious Grand Hyatt room, I could just take the elevator 32 floors down to the pool or spa.

A TASTE OF LUXURY

And finally...a rare kind of office for me...but such a sweet treat! My daughter works for the Hyatt Corporation. She has a great perk—if a room is available, she can stay in any Hyatt in the world for three days for free and eat for half-price. AND she can bring a friend (or mother!). We decided to meet in Malaysia for her two-week vacation in February 2019. After 30 hours of travel, she knew she would be ready to crash. And, she knew the perfect place to do so—the Grand Hyatt in Kuala Lumpur—almost next door to the Petronus Towers. And that is how I came to be sitting in a luxurious cotton robe with a computer on my lap. Who couldn't be productive? It was there that I edited the first in a series of “We Travel to Cook” videos featuring my daughter Rebecca.



PICKY ABOUT MY HINTELAGETS

My trip to Bressay in the Shetland Islands of Scotland happened early in my sojourn around the world, but I still consider it one of the highlights. It combined my thrill of actually being in the Shetland Islands, my love of fiber and creating things from it, and hiking in beautiful locations.

First, a little backstory: I am a follower of an inspiring woman named Debbie Zawinski, who wrote the visually captivating *In the Footsteps of Sheep*. She is a Welsh woman who lives in Scotland. She sometimes walks through the countryside, gathering the tufts of fleece that come off the sheep in the field. These are so prevalent in the Shetlands that there is a local name for them: “hentilagets.” Debbie is known for spinning these as she walks using drop spindles she creates from sticks. She sometimes even dyes the yarn in a billycan with moss and lichens in her camp in the long summer-evening daylight.

Since I first read about this Feral Spinner, as Debbie calls herself, I longed to walk in *her* “footsteps.” I am not near as tough as Debbie, but one day I got a taste of collecting and spinning wool in the wild.

A very short ferry ride from Lerwick, Shetland is the Isle of Bressay, where I ventured to take a walk up the Ward of Bressay, the island’s highest point.

On the way up, I started my collection of wool bits.



These are hentilagets. You find them where sheep have rubbed up against walls or fences, but the best pieces for spinning are on the ground. I found that most hentilagets are rubbish. They have been weathered too much and are slightly felted, or they have a lot of kemp—short brittle pieces of fibers that reduce the quality of the yarn. I made a collection in my front pocket as I walked.

The wind in these far north islands can be biting—even in July, but I found a cozy place sheltered from the wind to eat a snack and examine and process my “loot.”

Remove foreign matter; line up the locks (fibers) parallel to one another; spin.

Before long, I had almost 10 yards of single-ply Shetland yarn.

You can read more about and watch a video of this excursion here: CathleensOdyssey.com/hentilagets





A TOAST TO THE BEATLES

Ahhh, Liverpool...what person who came of age in the 1960s doesn't think of the Fab Four? I was not planning to go to Liverpool...I really wasn't. But then I talked to my daughter Rebecca who is probably a bigger fan of the Beatles than I am. I was in Manchester and ready to make a bee-line to Wales to do some trekking along the Offa's Dyke Path.

"I'M NOT GOING TO LIVERPOOL"

"Oh, Mom," she sighed, "if I were in England, I would definitely go to Liverpool! How can you pass that up? I would get myself a dark beer and the best fish n' chips I could find. Then I would go down to some grimy pier and sit under the gray skies and imagine myself there back in the day. This apparently was the way she imagined the Liverpool of the '60s to be—grimy and gray. And it probably was—then.

We laughed at the imagined scene. "Yeah, but I'm not going to Liverpool," I said. We talked a while longer and said goodbye.

But I could not get that image out of my head. During the night I woke up with a smile on my face. I was going to Liverpool—just to do what she would do. But I was not going to tell her. I would just post a Facebook photo of myself on that grimy pier.

I made reservations at the Liverpool Youth Hostel. (Yes, ladies of a certain age can say in the "youth" hostels.)

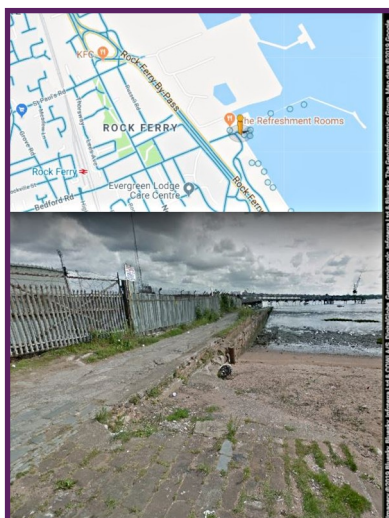
◀ *This is the Facebook photo I posted from Liverpool. Cheers, Rebecca!*

WHERE'S THE GRIMY PIER?

Imagine my surprise when I arrived. Apparently, in 2004 Liverpool was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and money started pouring into the city to revitalize its waterfront. There were now cafes, tours of the tall ships, several museums, and (to my chagrin) a billion tourists! Not a grimy pier in sight. And, the first day was sunny and warm. Damn!

I walked and walked and spent a ridiculous amount of time looking at street view on Google maps trying to find *any* grimy places in Liverpool for my imagined photo shoot. I did learn that the best fish n' chips could be found at Yanni's, not too far from my hostel. God bless Google maps! It took a while, but I found an oil terminal across the Mersey River in the town of Rock Ferry.* I figured out how to get there by subway and a short walk.

"Okay, let's do this," I said to myself, knowing it could be a bust.

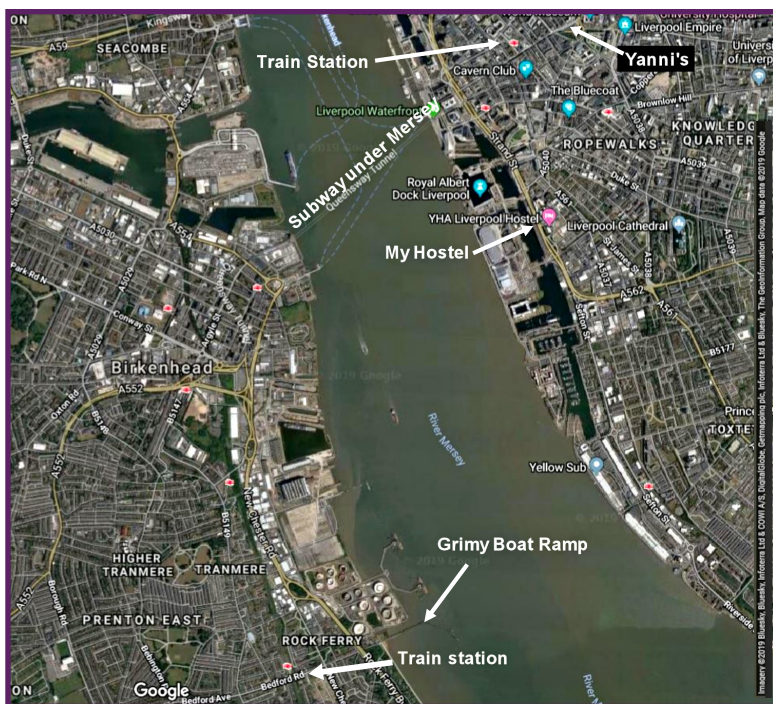


Google's Street View of the grimy "pier."

FRIED FISH AND BREWDOG

After a quick stop in a grocery store for a Brewdog Black Jet (sounded pretty dark to me and I do love dark beer), I went to Yanni's for my dinner. I wrapped the fish n' chips box in a towel to keep it warm and was off to the nearest underground stop. Thanks again to Google maps, I knew exactly the route to walk to the pier from the Rock Ferry train station. I worried the whole way that I would arrive and there would be a fence or something stopping me. The pier turned out to be a boat ramp, but it was grimy enough.

* My apologies to purists...I do recognize that crossing the Mersey River takes you out of Liverpool, but I make a claim to artistic license.



Just as I arrived, it began to spit rain. Perfect! Gray day indeed! Just what I was asking for—wasn't it??

My fish and chips were cooling; my beer was warming; rain was threatening. But with the help of a tiny tripod and some patience on my part, I managed some decent shots. I even got to eat my dinner, enjoy a beer that was thick enough to *be* dinner and get to the train station before the clouds let loose. It was a perfect traveling day—if a bit off the beaten track!

Thanks, @Rebecca, for the great idea!



THE SERENITY OF CANAL WALKING

I walked part of the Offa's Dyke path along the border of England and Wales in August 2017. In July I had done quite a bit of hiking in the Scottish Highlands, so I figured this would be a piece of cake. And it was—especially the part along the old canals.

Navigable canals like these were built throughout Great Britain during the Industrial Revolution. Goods were being manufactured too fast to get them all transported by packhorses on the mostly-muddy roads of the time, and rail transport had not arrived. Once trains were rolling (about 1850), the canals went into a decline. Many filled with silt and became useless swamps. But after World War II, a waterway restoration movement began, and many canals were re-dredged and made available for pleasure canal boats and walkers to use. Some are large enough to still have value for commercial transport.

My first experience canal walking was at the beginning of my Offa's Dyke trek. From Welshpool I embarked on several miles along the tow-paths of the Montgomery Canal and fell in love with the serene experience. The walking is easy because the canals, by default, are level. The slow flow of water is only occasionally broken by the fascinating canal locks.

In the summer people will rent one of the long-skinny canal boats and spend a lazy week exploring the canals. They are not allowed to travel more than four miles per hour, and usually it is

◀ *The beginning of my first canal walk on the Montgomery Canal's towpath near the town of Welshpool in Wales.*



less. Because I found myself walking faster than the boats, I enjoyed striking up a conversation with some of the passengers.

Some cool feats of engineering are the aqueducts that make it possible for the canals to cross OVER a river. I came upon a small one near Bath in England. A holiday canal boat was crossing the Avoncliff Aqueduct and I took some video and waved at the family on board. We started visiting as I walked along beside them. They asked if I would like to come aboard for a cup of coffee. I did not hesitate and enjoy a tour of the skinny boat and an hour of conversation before I returned to my towpath.



Holiday canal boaters cross the Avon river on the Avoncliff aqueduct. A little later, they invited me onboard for a cup of coffee and chat.



Someday I will return to England and just do a bunch of walks along these tranquil man-made streams, camping alongside, meeting new people, and eating my fill in English pubs.





“NODA BAD ONE IN DA BAG”

I love traditional markets. I spend a ridiculous amount of time searching them out. But the Birmingham street market was a special surprise.

Normally, as soon as I arrive at my destination, I make a bee-line to my lodgings. I want to jettison the pack that I have been dealing with all day, and, usually, take a nap.

I arrived at the Birmingham train station to find that I had to walk through the gauntlet of a mall, full of fashionable shoppers, with a full pack on my back looking like I had just finished a five-day trek. (Well, actually, I had just come from my Offa's Dyke trek the day before.) This would be the first of many malls I would encounter next to a train station or airport throughout the world. Building these shopping behemoths has become the cosmopolitan thing to do—some marketing ploy at work that I have not yet figured out.

I emerged from the mall's front doors to the unexpected. A street market was in full swing—noisy, crowded, and full of hawkers.

I LOVE street markets—especially if food is involved. Despite my fully-loaded backpack and my desire to find my bed, I could not resist making my way through the stalls of luscious fruits, vegetables, cheeses, eggs, and much more.

Immigrant women in saris bartered over yards of cloth; a couple friendly vendors played buffoons for my camera; and hawkers were all around me: “Noda bad one in da bag.” “Three cauliflower a pain” (pound) in accents that transported me back in time.





Despite the temptation, I could not purchase much. Birmingham was just an overnight stop for me.

It turned out that I was just lucky. The market is only held once a week. I happened to be in the right place at the right time.

*You can see a slide show with audio
of my Birmingham market visit here:
CathleensOdyssey.com/birminghammarket*



FABADA

*1 October 2017: Day Twelve of my Camino de Santiago
San Vicente to Serdio, Spain*

Yesterday had been horrific. A planned short-distance day had turned into 32 grueling kilometers. And at the end of the day, I was not sure I would find a place to sleep. But that is another story.

Today, just nine kilometers brought me to the sweet village of Serdio. It was Sunday afternoon when I arrived and it seemed like the entire town was in the main plaza outside the single *taberna*/café. They had mostly all finished their dinner, and everyone was visiting and watching the children play.

I checked into my *albergue* (hostel) and returned to the square and the tavern.

The *menu del día** was on a chalkboard. I had no idea what any of the *primeros* were.

Fabada...hmm...now that sounds interesting...maybe. I asked owner what it was. He did not have enough English to describe it. He just kissed his fingertips and smiled. I threw caution to the wind and ordered the *fabada*, steak and potatoes, and red wine.

My *primero* (first course) arrived. This was the *fabada*. It turned out to be beans cooked with smoked salt pork—much like our

* The *menu del día*, which is a common practice here and which I had also encountered in Peru, is a set menu, sometimes with lots of choices, sometimes with only one or two. You get a first (*primero*) and second (*segundo*) course, wine or soft drink, and dessert for a set price—here it is between €9 and €14 (about \$10-14 USD). This one was €10 and included the bottle of wine. Wine was often my anti-inflammatory substitute for ibuprophen while walking the Camino.



family in Texas has created for generations—except the Asturians add chorizo and blood sausage. The addition of cumin, oregano and garlic resulted in a bean stew reminiscent of my childhood, and a dish I make regularly to this day. In short, it was a taste of home and tears welled up. Thoughts of my mother overwhelmed me—the woman who first encouraged me to travel back in 1971. She must have seen the wanderlust in my soul. The unexpected feelings some foods evoke can be mystical.

Just look at that picture: it would have been enough—surely. Then the steak and potatoes arrived. My calorie- and protein-starved body managed to absorb it all. I also found room for the fresh bread and cold lemon custard dessert. I also made a nice dent in the bottle of wine.

I would later learn that the province of Asturias is famous for its *fabada* and I was able to try it several more times, but none of the others measured up to this one in the little village of Serdio on a sleepy Sunday afternoon.

Ahhh...a good day's walk, a fantastic meal in a delightful café, a reasonable quantity of wine, and a quiet room. It all added up to a siesta in this quaint pilgrims' albergue.



A couple weeks after leaving Serdio, I arrived in Oviedo. At the central market there, I encountered this vendor who only sold ingredients for fabada.



UNDER THE DOURO FOG

FINDING GRATITUDE IN DISAPPOINTMENT

In November 2018, I was staying three weeks in Alijo, Portugal. While there, I experienced a hike that began with disappointment. In the end it turned out to be one of the highlights of my traveling year.

Sometimes, when I walked through the vineyards of the Douro Valley in Portugal, I felt like I was in a scene from *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Although it was late fall, the sun was shining brightly on most days and the mornings were clear and crisp.

I decided to take a break from writing to go on a downhill walk from the nearby village of Castedo to Pinhão on the banks of the Douro—about 8 winding miles.

Early on a cold, sunny morning I boarded a bus in Alijo. I decided to start the hike in Castedo, partway down the road. This shortened the hike so that I did not have to rush down to Pinhão just to be sure I made it in time to take the last bus back up to Alijo in the evening. As the bus wound its way downhill I noticed that the river below was cloaked in fog. “Oh well,” I told myself, “it will burn off before I get down there.” But by the time the bus dumped me out in Castedo, I was surrounded by “pea soup.” All noise was muffled and I could barely make out the church across the street.

My heart plummeted. I felt like I did not belong in this earie place. This was not going to be the scenic hike I had planned. I was deeply disappointed. But, one thing I have learned on my travels so far, is that things always seem to turn out. It is important to embrace your surroundings.



So, I set off, looking around. And it was not long before I discovered that the world around me was enchanted. The church became mystical; rows of colorful vines disappeared into the distance; the dew hung heavy on forgotten grapes; and, like wizened ancient wizards, the pruned vines hobbled away into the mist.

Over the next couple hours, the sun won its battle with the clouds and slowly the distant terraces emerged. It was still very cold and the hot tea in my thermos was calling me. I found a bench in Vilanrinho do Cotas to eat a snack and enjoy the sweet tea in the sunshine. The village straddles a saddle between valleys and to my right I noticed the fog trying its best to creep over the ridge to make an assault on the clear side. But it dissipated weakly under this Douro sun—even in November.



A little farther on, I came across what would be an unexpected highlight of my day: the Olive Oil and Wine Museum. Surprised it was open now in the low season, I walked in to find a small tour group immersed in a tasting. I walked through to a terrace overlooking the Douro River and Pinhao far below. Susanna, the museum host, walked out and offered me a tasting, “Outside or inside?” she asked. It was warm now

so I chose the terrace and she proceeded to treat me to the local offering.

This museum is run by the D'Origem estate, where they grow grapes, olives, and almonds. They also have honey from bees who feast on the local nectar of rosemary, rockrose, and lime.

Before long, a tapestry of local foods was set: three table wines (white, a rose, and red), olive oil, almonds, honey, and grape juice!

Once the tour group left, Susanna joined me and enlightened me about the origins of this fare. The extra virgin olive oil was smooth and flavorful—I think the best I have ever had! Susanna explained that it is because it only has 0.3% acidity, which is very low for olive oil. My favorite wine was the white, which I could not resist purchasing (for the quite affordable 8 €) along with a liter of the olive oil. The rosé was unexpectedly sweet even though most rosés are dry. Susanna said that usually rosés are a blend of grape varieties. But, the D'Origem family produces a single-variety rosé, resulting in a sweet wine.

Susanna gave me a short tour of the museum's olive processing equipment from an earlier time, and described how olive oil is produced. Then it was time for me to continue downhill.



A few more kilometers brought me to Pinhao, my destination. I explored the town a bit and crossed the Douro River for some photos. I enjoyed a nice sampler board of local ham and cheese with salad and wine before boarding the bus back to Alijo. It was dark now and on the return I savored a different view of the valley—twinkling lights from the passing villages and hillside estates.

Sometimes at the end of such a day, I get this overwhelming sense of “This cannot be my life,” and all the gratitude of which my heart is capable is not enough.



EPILOGUE

I had barely returned to my hostel when I composed one of my favorite blog posts about the excursion.

It turned out that I did not get a chance to drink the wine that I had purchased at the D'Origem estate before I left Portugal. It was too much to carry, so I gave it to my friend Laura Péra who staffs the tourist information office in Alijo. She said she would keep it until I returned and then we would have dinner together and open the wine. I laughed, "Oh I really want to come back, but it could be years!" She insisted it would be soon.

The following May—only six months later—I returned to the Douro Valley with my daughter. I could not wait to take her to the Olive Oil and Wine Museum. As we walked in the door, I was greeted like a visiting relative. They remembered me and had been delighted with my blog post. Rebecca and I left with gifts of rosé wine.

AND, we had dinner with Laura's family and we opened that promised bottle of wine.

*You can see more images of my walk
to Pinhao here:*

CathleensOdyssey.com/dourofog



THE OCEAN AS ARTIST

In April 2018, I was in the Outer Hebrides. (Doesn't that sound exotic and little bit out of this world?)

Because it was still low season there, everywhere I hiked, I was alone. The solitude was a sensual delight.

A few days earlier, I had experienced one of the most beautiful hikes of my trip on the southern island of Barra. Today, I would hike all around the isle of Berneray. It was lambing season, so all the fields were full of the entertaining tail-wagging beasts. Despite the lambs, about three kilometers in, the hike was beginning to feel boring. I had not planned to walk down on the beach. I had been to several Hebridean beaches and figured I would not see anything new. But from the highest point on the island, I could tell that this trail wasn't going to be anything to write home about. So, I decided to take a path down to the beach, just for something different. I told myself, that if I did not enjoy it, I would abandon the hike.

I am glad my original plans ended up being boring, for this was to be a captivating journey through an artistic wonderland. I spent about two hours on the beach and never saw a soul. But surely a sand artist had been there? No...the ocean had created this gallery, just for me, just for today.

As the tide recedes, remarkable charcoal-like sketches—and sometimes mixed-media collages—are recreated daily on the lonely beach.

*You can see a slide show of more of these images here:
CathleensOdyssey.com/oceanart*







WAITING FOR THE BUS

My daughter, Rebecca will probably kill me for including this one, but this is a collection of favorite photos and this is certainly a favorite—of mine, anyway.

I was in the sixth month of this sojourn and Rebecca calls me one evening in December. “Hey Mom, if I come to Portugal in May, will you meet me?” Now, this meant changing my travel plans quite a bit, but it took me about two seconds to say, “Yes.” I stayed in the Scotland and Ireland a little longer than planned and flew back to Porto on May 9. We had a glorious and short two-and-a-half weeks together in Portugal and Spain. Rebecca is a chef, and when she travels, it is all about the food! We ate our way through these Latin countries and drank WAY too much wine.

The train station near the sweet coastal town of Santoña was about three miles from our hostel and a short bus ride is required to reach the main square. I chose the wrong stop and we watched our bus turn the corner across the highway on its way into town. The next bus was not for over an hour!

Oh well, Rebecca had her own solution. We moved to the other side of the street. She reached into her purse for a cigarette and into her pack for the “emergency” bottle of wine she carried. And then she settled in to watch for the bus.

About two weeks after Rebecca returned home, she called me one evening, “Mom, I miss you. I miss traveling with you. I want to do what you are doing...”

Stay tuned...



A PHOENIX FROM THE ASHES

Jyrgalan is the most eastern village in Kyrgyzstan in the mountains at about an altitude of 2260 meters (7400 feet). It is a community that is developing its tourism potential to attract not only summer trekkers, but also people who enjoy winter activities.

Families here are still tied to their livestock—lots of horses, cattle, and sheep. (No pigs—this is a Muslim culture.) They keep their traditions alive. The young people are put on a horse about the time they can walk. A large herd of mares are milked five times a day in the summer. The fat-tail sheep and cattle are taken up to the high *jailoos* (grazing lands) for the summer. Some people still live in yurts.

When Kyrgyzstan was still part of the Soviet Union, Jyrgalan was a coal mining town and its economy depended on the mines. When the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, the Russian mine owners pulled out. With no jobs available and their property worthless, the Russians workers moved away. And, they did something inexplicable, but very common to humans—they burned their homes. The only people left were the ethnic Kyrgyz people, and slowly the village began to die.

Then in 2016, a group of people, with the help of USAID Funds, began Destination Jyrgalan. USAID provided partial funding for renovation of three homes into guesthouses. The locals raised funds for tourism and guide training, renovations of additional homes into guesthouses, upgrade of town infrastructure (like electricity, plumbing, and the all-important wi-fi). Some residents were brought to the United States to attend training conferences. Last summer, Nazira, my host at Salamat Guest House, was sent to

Pagosa Springs, Colorado for her tourism training. The idea was to provide an atmosphere, amenities, and attractions that will draw international travelers, both summer and winter.

The plan is beginning to pay off for the village. Families have built new homes on top of the burned-out foundations the Russians had left behind. The Alakol-Jyrgalan Guest House and home of the Destination Jyrgalan office has two buildings built atop such foundations.

And there is certainly hope for the future. Walking through the streets, the visitor encounters lots of children, smiling and yelling “Hello!” “Hello!” wanting you to talk with them. Children mean young families are staying, not moving where jobs are more plentiful. They are finding meaning in this new/old life. I will hold good wishes for this young phoenix rising from its ashes.

*You can learn much more about Jyrgalan
and Kyrgyzstan in blog posts found here:
CathleensOdyssey.com/Kyrgyzstan*







REPTILE ENCOUNTERS

It was Christmas Eve, 2018. I was celebrating in Sri Lanka. My friend Raj is Tamil Christian in this mostly Buddhist country. I arrived at his café at 8:30 am to accompany him to the market. He had planned a buffet Christmas dinner (catering to the European tourists) and I had agreed to help

I walked in the door...Raj greets me, "Oh Cathy, we have a snack!" There was a person there I did not know, so I figured he had brought some special food to share.

I smiled, "Oh good, I am hungry."

Raj was very excited: "It is a big snack!"

And I said, "Can we eat before we go to the market?"

NO! No!" Raj said..."It is a snack! A snack!" And then he stood up on a chair and motioned me to go across the room.

Huh??

OHHHHHHH...."You mean a 'SNAKE?'"

"Yes! Yes! a SNACK!"

Raj's assistant, Shehan was trying to chase the terrified critter out from under a cabinet. No one paid any attention to my queries about whether it was poisonous or not.

I never saw the snake, but in a few minutes everyone backed away. Raj stepped down from the chair. They had successfully enticed it (meaning, "scare it silly") to go outside.

Turned out that it was not a poisonous snake, but I could not get that information from them until after it was gone, so I had not known how to behave—grab my camera or find the closest exit.

Sorry, no photos because the poor snake was hiding under a table by the time I got there. But before I had arrived, another

friend took photos of it slithering along a rafter overhead and fully stretched out. No kidding---it was at least five feet long! I am NOT exaggerating!

But not poisonous.

This was one post I would not put on the café's Facebook page... bad for business.

IN ALL DUE RESPECT TO RAJ: *We have joked and joked about this since it happened. But, as I tell him often, his English is much better than my Tamil or Sinhalese, both of which he also speaks fluently. (I know about three phrases in Sinhalese and none in Tamil.), AND I so appreciate—and try not to take for granted—the number of people who I meet on my journey who speak English!!!*

AND NOW FOR AN IGUANA STORY...

Raj and I had plans to make a fried herring salad during some of his kitchen down-time. We had returned from our weekly trip to the chaotic, crowded, and raucous Sunday Market, loaded with ingredients. (Why do these things happen on market days?) I walked the short way to my little apartment to get a few things we needed. On returning, just before I reached the café, Raj yelled at me from behind a makeshift wall between the street and side yard.

“Cathy, Cathy...(something garbled by noisy traffic)...take a video...” I could not see Raj, but when I rounded the corner, there it was—a four-plus-foot-long iguana, standing possessively over some raw chicken it had stolen out of the garbage. He (she?) had stationed himself in the narrow walkway between the bathroom and the kitchen entrance and was enjoying a feast.

Raj and his assistant, Shehan, were stuck in the back yard. If they had tried to scare it from their end, it would have run out into the busy traffic on the street, probably gotten run over, and caused a great ruckus.

Raj's first thought? Take a video! I scrambled in my bag for my camera. I got some good shots.

THEN...Raj wanted me (ME?!) to scare it back into the yard.

OH YEAH??? I was trying to recall exactly HOW aggressive iguanas might be. No, I remembered...they are timid creatures. But how about when they have a meal in front of them??

Hmmmm....

AND they don't LOOK particularly shy, do they?

Finally, I shuffled tentatively toward it and sure enough he ran back past Raj and Shehan into the back yard. It was the last we saw of that iguana.

But he (she?) did get a decent meal out of the excursion.

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one...



TATOOED LIKE AN OLD SALT

YOU MAY SAY I'M A DREAMER

The way I travel means that I spend a lot of time in hostels and cheap guesthouses. As a result, I encounter many other travelers that are much younger than I am. I have so many new twenty-and thirty-something friends, that I have lost count.

PEER-PRESSURE?

One of my favorite encounters was with three young Americans taking their gap-year touring Italy and Spain. With their encouragement (peer pressure??), I took the first vodka shots of my life. They videoed it and it got passed around on Facebook. Now I was empowered! What else had I missed out in life.

Because I am in contact with so many “young” people, I get ideas I never had even back when I was that age. Remember, I came of age at a time when one of my friends was grounded for getting her ears pierced! But at the same time, women were burning their bras and young men were burning their draft cards. Oh my! No wonder I am so confused.

THIS IS NOT A GOOD IDEA

The crazy idea came to me when I was in Denmark in July. Here is the kind of conversation that went on in my head for the next several months:

◀ *Asanka, my tattoo artist grins in the background as I show off my new tattoo.*

“Pssttt, Cathy, How about a tattoo?”

“No way.”

“I wonder what would it be?”

“Stop it...I can’t help imagining myself with a fading tattoo in the nursing home. It’s not that far away.”

“Yeah, but just assuming you did, what would you get?”

“I am NOT getting a tattoo...I am too old.”

“Yeah, yeah. And where would you get it?”

“Stop it! My kids don’t even have tattoos!”

“So?? Why should that stop you? They would be stoked if you got a tattoo.”

You can see where this debate was heading. Once the idea was in my head, I could not shake it. I would be in south Asia; maybe I could find a good artist and it would not cost so much. (Hmmm... but would I get some horrible tropical disease?)

And slowly, things took shape. It had to be something that memorialized my trip. I had had so many conversations about how traveling can encourage a person to be more accepting of differences. I had come to believe that if everyone traveled for an extended time to places outside their comfort zone and really met locals, that the world would become a more peaceful place.

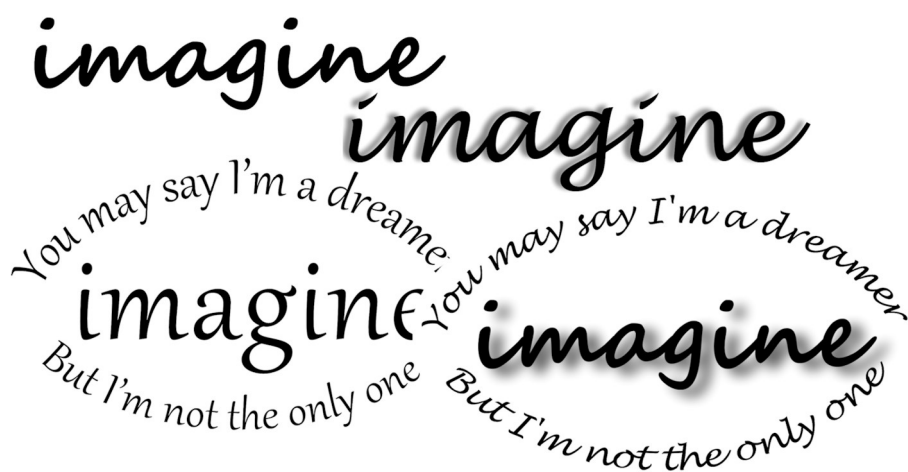
And then I decided to think about it some more. I traveled through Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, and to Northern India. The idea kept resurfacing. And each time, I came closer to saying, “Yes.”

JUST IMAGINE

John Lennon’s *Imagine* played in my mind. Just about my favorite song of all time. It says so much.

The lyrics, “You may say I’m a dreamer...but I’m not the only one...,” truly embodies the spirit of my travels: my personal dreams of traveling; my desire to encourage others (especially those who are reluctant) to travel as well; my belief that meeting locals while traveling is an avenue to peace; dreams can become reality; I’m not the only one....

One day, in India I could not help but start playing with designs:



And then, because those lyrics are almost universally recognized, I knew that I could do away with the word “imagine.” People would get it.

ASANKA

In Sri Lanka, I found my tattoo artist: Asanka. I had learned about him after a lot of internet research—checking out his reviews and confirming that his practices were hygienic. My simple design did not do his artistry justice. But he treated me like royalty.

It turned out that his studio was right across the street from my little apartment in Hikkaduwa. We met a couple times and then I committed. It only took about an hour and voila, I was the proud owner of my first tattoo—and probably my last.

I kept it a secret from everyone until my daughter could see it in person a few weeks later. We were to meet in Kuala Lumpur. You can imagine her surprise: “Mom, that is MY TATTOO!”

Imagine is her favorite song as well.

A few weeks later, I was on the tiny island of Gili Air in Indonesia. No cars, no dogs. You can walk all the way around it in an hour. The locals are Muslim, so I usually keep my shoulders covered out of respect, even though there are lots of skimpily-clad tourists. But one day the heat was such that I was sleeveless. Aji, a young

man I had visited with a couple times, said that he liked my tattoo. Many people in this part of the world have never heard of the Beatles. But Aji knew the song and as he broke into a beautiful tenor rendition, I almost cried.

Asanka works part time in Hikkaduwa and part in Doha, Qattar. So, if you are going to be in Doha or Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka and if you are thinking about a tattoo...well, tell him I sent you.

*Asanka works part time in Hikkaduwa. Sri Lanka
and part in Doha, Qattar. So, if you are going to
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*You can view Asanka's work at:
[Facebook.com/hiddentattoos](https://www.facebook.com/hiddentattoos)*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathy Fulton has been a world nomad since 2014. She is a citizen of the United States, but she does not have a permanent residence. Traveling solo and independently has become a way of life for her. This means that she plans and books all her own travel and does not go on organized tours. Her goal is to travel cheaply so that it is financially sustainable. This means that hostel dorm rooms and small guest houses are usually her temporary homes. Cathy is always looking for ways to save while still experiencing the cultures deeply. She has found the best way to engage with locals is through common interests such as cooking and the fiber arts (knitting and spinning).

You can learn more about Cathy's way of life on her website and blog, CathleensOdyssey.com.

Walk with Cathy Fulton across a beach where the ocean exhibits its artistry, along serene English canals, or through some very foggy vineyards in Portugal's Douro Valley. Learn about *hintelagets* and *fabada*. And discover what it means to find gratitude in disappointment.

From the perspective of her twenty-first month as a solo independent traveler, Cathy shares a few favorite photographs from her odyssey along with the stories behind them—some touching, some funny, some to make you think, and all to inspire you to follow your own dreams—whether you are a traveler or not.



Cathy Fulton has been a world nomad since 2014. Her solo, independent and frugal travel style has become a way of life. She hopes to inspire others to take a step outside their comfort boundaries and follow their dreams as well.

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