A Tale of Two Summers

12/01/2021

USU alum and student spend the summer walking through Spain

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Chase Harward’s first half of 2021 was rough. He lost a student government election, did worse in his classes than he wanted and everything seemed to be going wrong for him. After a year of constant losses, Harward was desperate for a win.

“I think I was just looking for a reason to go and do it. I was at this low point and kept thinking, ‘What is the craziest thing I can do right now to drastically change my outlook and my life perspective?’” said Harward. “The first thought that I had was to go and do the Camino.”

The Camino de Santiago is a 500-mile pilgrimage in Europe, starting from France and ending at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. Harward had been wanting to walk the Camino de Santiago since his freshman year. He walked a portion of the Camino on his freshman year study abroad – led by world languages and cultures department head David Richter – and had wanted to complete it ever since.

“Ever since walking that portion of the Camino, I knew that I wanted to go and do this one day,” said Harward.

In order to get to Spain, Harward worked three jobs to have the financial means to get to Europe, and his girlfriend quit her job so she could take a few months off to walk the trail. After thinking about the pilgrimage for two years, his goal of walking the trail was finally in reach.

After 38 days, 500 miles and many terrains and cities, Harward and his girlfriend made it to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. For Harward, two years of dreaming became a reality. As Harward walked closer to the cathedral, he realized he did not want the experience to end. He and his girlfriend loved walking, loved the scenery and loved being able to get away from the business of life.

“For a year where I didn’t feel like I had any wins, this was the first time I had set a goal and I had accomplished it, and it was a big one,” said Harward.

Harward now believes that any challenge he has in his life now can relate to some experience on the Camino. Pilgrims on their journey are taught to “follow the signs” so they do not get off the path, and now, that is a lesson Harward applies everyday life. An experience started on a study abroad led to a permanent change in perspective and a life-altering journey.

Sharing Wisdom

Rosco Tolman has a similar connection to the Camino. Tolman is an 84-year-old Utah State University alum and former professor at Central Washington University. Tolman decided to complete the pilgrimage this summer to honor the memory of his wife NaDine, who died in 2018. This was Tolman’s second time completing the trail and he was frequently the only person of his age on the trail.

“I was in situations where I was just at the end of my rope, but I wouldn’t have traded places with anybody,” said Tolman. “It was frequently difficult. I swore that there weren’t very many level places in France.”

Tolman has always been an advocate of international experiences. Having grown up in a small town in Idaho, his college study abroad experience was the first time he was able to see the world outside of his home.

“Study abroad and education in general were both incredibly important in my life. The study abroad I did transformed me. Nothing in my life was the same after,” said Tolman.

As a demonstration of his belief in the value of study abroad opportunities, Tolman recently funded a study
abroad scholarship for USU students called the NaDine Memorial Study Abroad Scholarship.

The scholarship, just like his journey through the Camino, was created in honor of NaDine. Tolman has spent his career and personal life pursuing international experiences and wants to extend those opportunities to students that might not be able to afford the trips on their own. Many students in the world languages and cultures department desiring financial aid for study abroad programs may qualify for this scholarship.

“It made a huge difference in my life. I can’t think of a better cause,” said Tolman.

Recognizing the World

The value of intercultural experience cannot be understated. International relationships are formed by individuals before anything else, and the study abroad programs at Utah State University are gateways to understanding who we are as a global community.

Tolman’s scholarship is the newest in a college-wide effort to make programs like these more available to students. In an increasingly connected world, cross-cultural skills are essential to global communication. Study abroad programs and scholarships are essential to helping students develop those competencies as they learn to create a better world for all.

“Scholarships like these are extremely easy to set up and have an enormous, long-lasting effect on students’ educational experiences,” said Emily Heaton, CHaSS development officer.

For Tolman and Harward, their study abroad experiences were the key to opening their worldview. Their experiences on the Camino prove that the influence of studying abroad ripples through generations, creating a more connected, compassionate world. By crossing time and borders, studying abroad has the chance to change students’ lives for years to come, even after their traditional educational experience ends.