

# PHIL'S CAMINO

*Wherever you are, just keep walking.*



EVERYDAY CAMINO PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS PHIL'S CAMINO  
WRITTEN BY LAURA KARPMAN DIRECTED BY TODD PINCKNEY AND DOMINICK WOLCZKO PRODUCED BY JESSICA LEVINS AND TODD PINCKNEY EDITOR DOUG BLUSH, A.C.E. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS TODD PINCKNEY  
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EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DOUG BLUSH / MAGGIE & BILL LYNCH PRODUCED BY ANNIE O'NEIL DIRECTED BY ANNIE O'NEIL AND JESSICA LEVINS



## About the Film

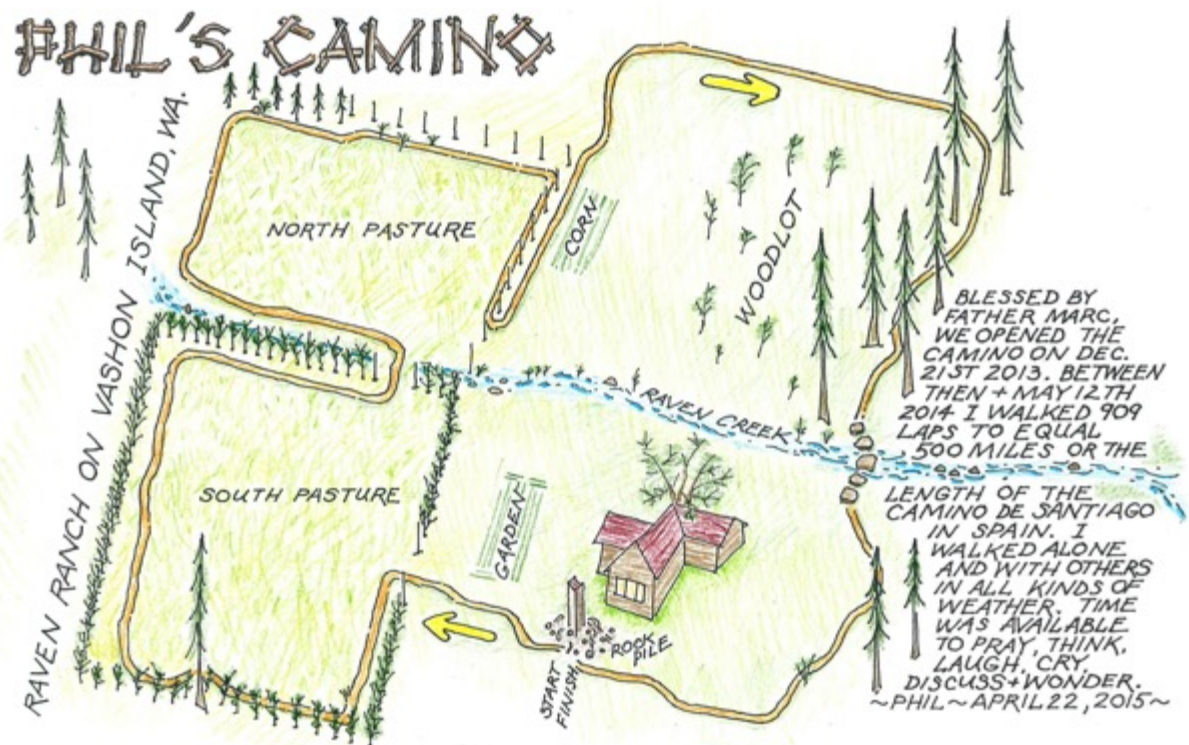
- The remarkable story of a Stage 4 cancer patient who discovers the secrets of living life to the fullest
- A story of resiliency and hope when challenged by a terminal diagnosis
- A story of learning the difference between being healed vs. being cured
- An inspirational story for anyone who ever dreamed and then achieved the seemingly impossible

## Synopsis

Phil Volker is a man who believes his cancer was a gift.

The film, *Phil's Camino*, captures his personal story – an inner journey that begins when he builds a backyard *camino*, then walks 900+ laps on his property near Seattle, WA, and eventually continues on to make a 500-mile pilgrimage across Spain's *Camino de Santiago*, and begins again with a triumphant return home to Vashon Island.

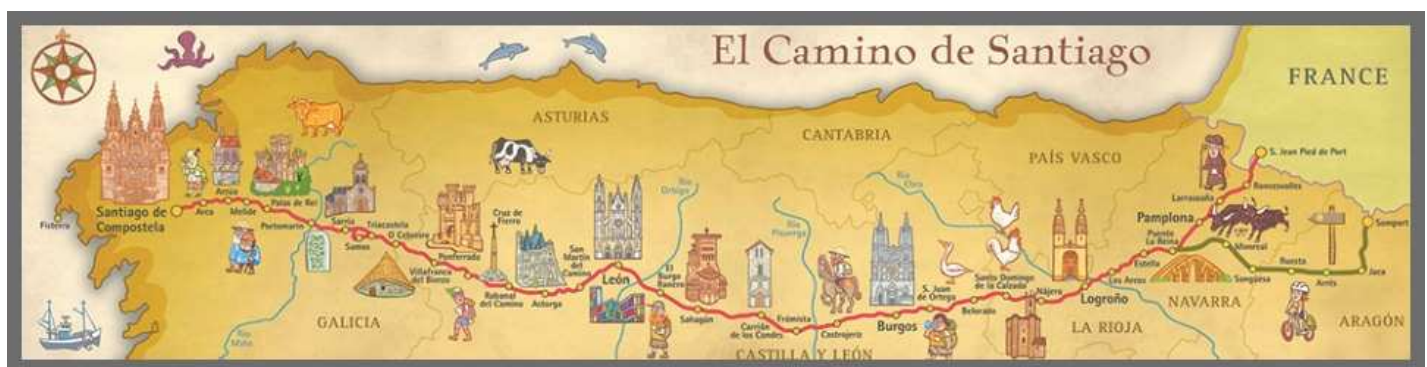
When faced with a cancer diagnosis, Phil opts not to allow circumstances to define him. Instead he starts walking. And much to his surprise, he finds emotional and spiritual healing in addition to physical strength and resilience during his chemo regimen. His secret? A *mindful* approach to life, one that replaced his initial fear and anger with determination, simplicity, and joy in the present moment. His remarkable journey is one of hope, acceptance and freedom, providing food for thought for those facing a health crisis as well as those just living life.



## Background: The Camino de Santiago

Across Spain, a sacred path stretches westward from the edge of the Pyrenees in France to the city of Santiago de Compostela where the bones of the apostle St. James are said to be buried. The Camino is world-renowned. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the Council of Europe declared it the first European Cultural Itinerary. Millions of people from all over the world have traveled this trail for over 1,000 years—in 2010 alone, over 270,000 people attempted the arduous trek—each one a seeker of something.

In the Middle Ages, pilgrims sought forgiveness of their sins and admission to heaven. The Camino remains for many a quest of faith. Others begin with no spiritual impetus in mind, but nevertheless are drawn to examine their personal beliefs and life purpose. And others are in it simply for the intense physical challenge. Whatever their motivation, no one can predict just how their path will unfold, whom they will meet, what personal demons or angels they will face, or what transformations they will undergo by the trail's end. Driven by an inexplicable calling and a grand sense of adventure, each pilgrim throws him or herself heart-and-soul into the physical trek to Santiago and, most importantly, into an inner personal journey.



## The Film's Message

### Phil's Camino

presents the personal evolution of a man, forced by cancer to redefine the way he lived his life, deepen his relationships, and rediscover connections with the world in which he lives.

This film speaks to young viewers

struggling to find themselves, to retirees and mid-lifers reflecting on their next chapters, and importantly to cancer patients, families and caregivers. For patients and caregivers, the film urges viewers to think outside the box. While the film chronicles Phil's walks on two caminos—the one he created and the one he dreamed of walking—your camino can be as short as a walk in the park. The film suggests that a camino may be a metaphor for life, a journey that helps you look inside yourself, that pushes you to step out of your comfort zone, and most importantly, encourages you to move beyond the fears, insecurities and obstacles that limit happiness. Walking *your camino* can be a first step in finding a personal strategy for living well in the face of a cancer diagnosis.



## Questions for Discussion

1. The feature length version of Phil's Camino is called Phil's Camino: So Far So Good. What does “So Far, So Good” mean to you?
2. What are your thoughts as you contemplate the difference between “healing” and “curing?”
3. What are your thoughts about resilience? Where do you see it in your life? Do you know someone who you think is particularly resilient?
4. Phil's finding new purpose in life gave him courage. How do you find purpose in the face of courage?
5. Phil saw and created humorous moments. How has humor been a part of your journey?
6. Did you know that chemo has wide ranging impact throughout the cancer patient's body, well beyond the tumor or its source?
7. Did you know exercise can change your mindset?
8. Did you know that one of the best strategies for coping with the side effects of chemotherapy is exercise?
9. Have you ever had a health challenge you overcame by doing something that gave you added confidence?
10. What is it about walking that is so powerful? Are there other activities that could provide the same benefits?
11. Do you think Phil's creating a journal to track his progress played a key role in his beating the odds?
12. Do you think walking alone vs. with a companion makes a difference?
13. Phil suggests that your sense of wellbeing will improve if you stop to examine and appreciate your life, journal what you are grateful for, and give a little something of yourself to everyone you meet. Have you had similar experiences?
14. Phil believes his cancer was a gift. Have you had what seemed to be an insurmountable challenge that in the end was an opportunity to reassess life values?
15. After seeing the film, how has your commitment changed about helping a friend, family member, or neighbor manage his/her cancer?
16. Can you imagine walking a camino where you live? Where would you start? What route would you take?



## How to Begin

Discuss this with your doctor. Set a goal, follow a plan, track your progress, make gratitude a regular part of your life.



Phil and Annie - Juli Goetz Morser / The Vashon Beachcomber

Experts tell us that fatigue can be the most challenging part of cancer therapy. Somewhat counter-intuitively, according to new scientific evidence, being active is an effective strategy for regaining energy. Beyond raising energy levels, this has other positive effects. It benefits our minds, bodies and spirits. The end result: Enhanced physical and mental fitness, a newfound sense of control, and an improved quality of life—all of which work to release the fear or anger associated with a cancer diagnosis—and help restore joy in everyday living.

In the documentary, when Phil started to walk, he never really dreamed of building his stamina to the point where he could walk across Spain. Nor did he see walking as the beginning of a spiritual journey that restored happiness to what might have been a compromised everyday life.

Many studies point out that even 10 minutes of activity each day can translate into improved happiness and wellbeing. And adding to that effect, is spending time in nature. But for those who can't get out and hike or walk in the woods, experts say even a walk to the mailbox or the elevator on the floor of your apartment building is a step in the right direction. That for each little bit of activity, your confidence will grow and you will feel better.



Gratitude, says Phil, is a natural by-product of activity. If exercise seems monotonous, rise to the challenge. Make the time you exercise a time when you think about all the things you are grateful for. Instead of worrying about what you can't change, look for beauty in your natural surroundings. Count the blessings in your life that may have eluded you as you dealt with your prognosis. The act of gratitude actually signals your body to reduce stress hormones.

Keep a diary: When gratitude diaries are kept—along with exercise journals—happiness actually increases. Phil began chronicling his steps and daily progress on an imaginary walk across Spain. In the

process, he became a blogger and chronicled all things he appreciated—great and small—in his life, his family, friends, and surroundings.



Fortunately, most individuals with cutaneous lymphomas are not totally debilitated by their disease, but from a psychosocial standpoint, they can be challenged by it. Neither patients or their physicians know with certainty how long a therapy will work, nor who may progress. When a therapy works, patients clearly feel better. When a therapy stops working, anxiety often increases. Even more challenging is a persistent fear that the disease will take a turn for the worse.

That's where exercise and gratitude come into play. Even those individuals who have not lived an active lifestyle can embark on an activity program—the result of which will be an improved sense of wellbeing, and a long-term strategy for resilience.

Walkers take note: Phil posts his walking schedule on his own website, [www.caminoheads.com](http://www.caminoheads.com). Each lap is about a half mile, and each day that he walks, both old friends and strangers drive up to his home on Vashon Island to walk with him. No reservations necessary. Just be on time, says Phil. And after the walk, it's tapas and wine—normally provided by the day's walkers—to celebrate new friends, old friends, new journeys and a life of resilience.



# Being Active When You Have Cancer

Exercise  
is Medicine

AMERICAN COLLEGE  
of SPORTS MEDICINE

Do you want to feel better, sleep better and move better? Being active during and after a cancer diagnosis is an important way to reduce fatigue, increase strength and help ease depression. Regular physical activity, including aerobic activity and strength training, can help you get through your treatments and decrease treatment side effects. In addition, stretching can help restore flexibility in joints that have lost range of motion due to surgery or radiation.

Research supports the following benefits of physical activity for cancer survivors. Being active:

- Helps reduce fatigue, the most common side effect of cancer treatment
- Improves symptoms of depression and anxiety and helps you sleep better
- Helps maintain or improve physical function (your ability to get things done in your life)
- Improves your immune system, appetite, muscle strength, range of motion and simply helps your body and brain work better
- Does *not* increase your risk of breast cancer-related lymphedema and may help with these symptoms;
- Decreases your risk of cancer coming back.

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

## Getting Started

### Keep It Simple

Avoid inactivity! If you get moving as soon as you are diagnosed, you'll feel better. Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Do laps around the dining room table. Find opportunities to move throughout your day.



### Talk with Your Doctor

Talk to your health care provider before you start a new exercise program. Are there any activity limitations due to medications, surgeries or treatment?



### Expert Support

Ask if your hospital or local wellness center has a structured cancer exercise program. ACSM Certified Cancer Exercise Trainers (CETs), some physical therapists or members of the health care team can help you design your activity plan.



### Build a Plan

Keep a daily log of your exercise, fatigue (0-10 scale), medications and treatments. This will help you learn what works best. Find an activity buddy from home, work or a cancer support group to stay motivated.





# Aerobic Activity



Aerobic activity increases your heart rate and breathing. Build up to doing 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like walking, light cycling, yoga, tai chi or water exercise), 75 minutes/week of vigorous activity (like brisk walking, singles tennis or hiking hills) or a combination of both. You'll improve the way your body stores and uses energy, as well as your stamina and heart health.

## What?

Any rhythmic, continuous activity!



## How often?

3-5 days/week



## How hard?

Fairly light to somewhat hard



## How much?

Start w/ a few minutes. Gradually build up to 30-60 total minutes over the day.



**Remember:** Fit in 5 or 10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20-30 minutes. During treatment, several short sessions may work better than one long one. Be active however you can.

## Aerobic Activity Tips and Cautions

Some cancer medications (chemo, etc.) and treatments (surgery and radiation) cause side effects. Check with your health care provider for specific precautions. For example:

- If you have peripheral neuropathy, take care in walking on treadmills — use handrails.
- If you're at increased risk of infection or irritated skin, avoid swimming pools.
- Avoid exercise if you have an active infection (fever); just after surgery, have extreme fatigue or difficulty walking
- Some treatments are associated with damage to your heart. Ask your doctor if you've

# Strength Training



Strength training is important for people with cancer because it builds muscle. Muscle tissue plays a big role in balance, fatigue and quality of life. Muscle may also be important to processing chemotherapy drugs. You don't have to be a bodybuilder! Plus, strength training can make daily activities like lifting laundry baskets or yardwork easier and safer.

## What?

Hand weights, resistance bands, weight machines or your own body (for example, kitchen counter push-ups chair squats).



## How often?

2-3 days/week  
\*Rest day in between!



## How hard?

Start with light effort. Build up to medium or hard effort.



## How much?

10-15 repetitions to start (for each major muscle group). Build up to 8-12 reps of challenging effort.



**Remember:** If you need it, get help from a certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises and how to breathe properly. If you have lymphedema, you may benefit from wearing a compression sleeve during strength training.

# Other Types of Physical Activity



Aerobic activity and strength training are at the heart of a program for those with cancer. But you may enjoy and benefit from these other options.

## Flexibility

Gently stretch your muscles 2-7 days/week to the point of feeling tightness. Hold for 10-30 seconds. Make sure to stretch specific areas recommended by your health care provider.



## Take More Steps

Simply take more steps! Use a smart phone or activity tracker to measure your progress and stay motivated. Slowly build up to 7,000-9,000 steps/day.



## Just for Fun

Find ways of being active that are just plain fun. Dance to your favorite song. Try yoga or tai chi. Play with your kids or grandkids. Find what makes you smile and do it often.



## Balance

Exercises may include standing on one foot, walking on a line or using a balance board. Train in an uncluttered area and use a chair or wall for support if needed.



## To stay safe and injury free:

- Start with light to medium effort. If you experience extreme fatigue (typically 2-3 days after chemo), still do light activity. Just cut back exercise time on those days.
- Gradually increase your pace and time spent being active. Start low and go slow!
- Warm up and cool down at an easy pace before and after exercise.

## More Help

To learn more about being active with cancer, check out these resources:

- American Cancer Society: [www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/physical-activity-and-the-cancer-patient.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/physical-activity-and-the-cancer-patient.html)
- National Comprehensive Cancer Network: [www.nccn.org/patients/resources/life\\_with\\_cancer/exercise.aspx](http://www.nccn.org/patients/resources/life_with_cancer/exercise.aspx)

Go to [www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro](http://www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro) to find an **ACSM certified exercise professional** near you.

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## How You Can Make a Difference

- Share the message. Sharing the messages of Phil's Camino beyond the screening is critically important. According to experts, an exercise regimen is recommended today to only 5% of all cancer patients. Research now correlates the positive benefits of exercise with improved outcomes across the cancer continuum. By screening this film, you can make a difference in the lives of those individuals, families, and healthcare professionals who interface with cancer every day.
- Like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/backyardcamino](https://www.facebook.com/backyardcamino)
- Share about us on Facebook. Share about the film and what you've learned.
- Encourage others to schedule/attend future screenings.
- Donate to our campaign to raise awareness through the non-profit: [http://thefundforsustainabletomorrows.org/portfolio\\_page/phils-camino/](http://thefundforsustainabletomorrows.org/portfolio_page/phils-camino/)
- Visit [PhilsCamino.com](http://PhilsCamino.com)
- Visit Phil's Blog, [CaminoHeads.com](http://CaminoHeads.com)
- Connect us with your church, college, club, community or other group that might be interested in hosting a screening: Email us at [shari@thefundforsustainabletomorrows.org](mailto:shari@thefundforsustainabletomorrows.org)

## Cast / Speakers Bureau



Phil Volker, Cancer Commando. Phil Volker was diagnosed with colorectal cancer in 2011 and in 2014 learned his cancer had metastasized to his liver and lung. At the suggestion of his rehabilitation physician, Dr. David Zucker, he embarked upon an exercise program focused on walking and being in the outdoors. Taken with the idea of pilgrimage, Phil built a trail, or *camino*, on his own Vashon Island property, and walked over 909 laps chronicling his progress as if he was walking the Camino del Santiago across Spain. Through a series of small miracles and remarkable coincidences, Phil met Annie and together created their first film, and premiered it in 2015. Phil's story is part medical, part athletic, part historical, part religious, and part spiritual as well. He believes his cancer has connected him to a whole new world of gratitude, awareness, and healing, all of which he believes have kept him alive.



Annie O'Neil, Director. Annie O'Neil, is an award-winning documentary filmmaker, director, and producer. She made her first film in high school and since then has devoted her life to film, the performing arts, and to inspiring cancer patients. A camino walker herself, she was a featured pilgrim in the 2009 documentary [Walking the Camino: Six Ways to Santiago](#) which she also co-produced. Walking 500 miles along the Camino de Santiago in Spain had a profound effect on every part of her life, the lessons of which she transcribed in a book, *Everyday Camino with Annie*. She met Phil Volker in 2014, and the rest is history. It was Phil's personal journey that was the inspiration for the award-winning short, [Phil's Camino](#), that Annie directed and produced that premiered at SXSW in 2016. In October of 2018, Annie finished [Phil's Camino: So Far So Good](#), the feature-length version, that had its world premiere in Indianapolis at the Heartland Film Festival where it won the Best World Premiere Award for Documentary. Currently Annie is working on a documentary about diversity that features her choir, a truly diverse group of people who make more than just music together.

# PHIL'S CAMINO

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Screening Inquiries

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