

# TOLD TO ME BY PADRE PIO'S FATHER

*Mary Pyle records a father's memories.*

Zi' Grazio as most people call Father Pio's father, said that one day as he watched his son, Michele, working in the fields under the hot Italian sun, he turned to his little six or seven year old boy Francesco, later known as Padre Pio and said to him: "Francesco, I am not going to let you see the sun." "What do you mean, father," asked little Francis. "I am going to have you study to become a friar," continued the father. Little Francis answered: "But father, that isn't possible because we have no money and you need money in order to study." "And I will go to America to earn the money." Zi' Grazio said this, but what is more, he did it. He lost no time. He found a teacher and teachers were very scarce in Pietrelcina at that time; there were only two. Then, true to his promise he went to America and worked.

The teacher with whom he had arranged to have his little son take private lessons was an ex-priest who had fallen out of grace, had disrobed and was living a family life. This teacher was unable to teach Francis anything at all or rather, Francis was unable to learn anything from such a teacher. His brain seemed to be closed and nothing would enter - he could not even learn to read or write. Every morning he would run to church before going to school, to serve Mass, and the teacher objected, saying that he was wasting time which should be devoted to his studies.

Finally the teacher went to his mother and told her to send her son out to learn to work in the fields - to dig and to plough because he said that it was a waste of time and money to have him study. He said: "He has no brains and his head is good for nothing." The mother told Francis what the teacher had said and the little boy, generally so silent flared up with righteous indignation and said: "My head is no good! It is his head that is no good, who is living in sin in his home." At that time Francis was about

seven years old. Who had taught him the gravity of sin and who had given him such a horror of it as to close his mind and paralyse his powers in its presence?

No more school - no more lessons and instead of being able to go to church every morning, little Francis was taken out to their land in the country, about two miles outside the town. There he sat all day long in front of their simple, humble house, and cried. All his dreams of a future religious life which he so longed for, seemed to have crumbled.

When Zi' Grazio came to this point he stopped and I looked up and saw two big tears running down his cheeks. Fifty years have passed since Francis had shed those tears and still, his dear old father cannot even think of them without crying together with his little boy.

At that time, the father, although far away in America and busy working so as to be able to send the money home for Francesco's studies, began to think and worry about the teacher in whose care he had left his little son. What would the friars say when they heard that he had been prepared by such a teacher? Might they refuse to accept him for this reason? These and other similar doubts and questions tormented dear Zi' Grazio because he was not only working materially for his son's future, not only was he suffering privations and making sacrifices of every kind to enable his son to rise up onto a higher plane, to lead a life very different from the one that he and his elder son were obliged to live, a life filled with work, honest work but very hard work. But from afar he was trying to guard and protect him from any possible danger, and in this teacher he recognized a real danger. Zi' Grazio has always been a man of immediate action. He wasted no time and sent a letter home, telling his wife to find another teacher for Francis. And another teacher was found.



The Maestro Caccavo was the town school teacher but he did not want to accept little Francis in his class, fearing to offend the other teacher who had sent him away, as he owed some money to this teacher and needed to be on friendly terms with him. But the little mother left no stone unturned and not being able to succeed with the teacher himself, she pleaded her case with his brother-in-law who went to the teacher and said: "If you don't accept Francis Forgione in your school you will never see my sister in your house again." Francis was accepted. The necessary books were acquired even when they cost 14 Lire which at that time was a terrible price. No more tears but he studied and made immediate and rapid progress. In a few months time the boy covered a year's work, and the teacher went to his mother and said: "Pretty soon your son will be teaching me instead of my teaching him; he is so bright!"

He made rapid progress in his studies and finally the teacher said that he was ready to go to the school held by the Capuchin friars. The teacher, Maestro Caccavo accompanied him himself. As soon as they arrived at the friary in Morcone, the superior took Francis into a room to question him and the teacher began to worry. "I should have prepared him as to how to answer, how to act - he has never had any contact with anybody except his parents and me - he will be frightened and won't know how to act." He was much relieved when he saw the superior with his hand on the boy's shoulder with an expression which showed his approval, and he said that Francesco was well prepared and told him when he was to come to school.

It was a joyous return to Pietrelcina. Like any normal boy, he wanted to tease his mother a little so he asked the maestro to let him go ahead and he told him not to tell his mother that he had passed. He ran ahead and I don't know exactly what he said, (he won't let us tell even a little lie for fun), but he made his mother think that he had not been accepted, that he had not passed and she poured out all of her disappointment. "I have been wasting money on a donkey. I thought that I had a son but I have been buying books for a donkey, go out and dig." He let her go on for some time and then he said: "Hurry up Mamma, go and get my clothes ready because I have to go to school in a month."

In school he was beloved by superiors and by his companions.

His superiors said: "This boy seems to know and obey the rules better than we do." His companions would turn to him for help when they wanted any favour from their superiors. Once when they had only been given two days vacation some of the boys objected because it did not give them time to go home as their homes were some distance from the friary. They asked Francesco to ask the superior to give them three instead of two days vacation "because," they added, "if we ask he will never give it to us, but if you ask we are sure to get what we desire." Francis was timid and did

not like to ask favours of the superior, but he was too good-hearted to refuse his companions' request. He took up his courage and asked for the extra day of vacation. The superior was surprised and asked him why two days were not sufficient for him as his home was only a couple of hours away, but before Francesco had time to answer, he said, "Oh yes, I understand, you are asking this for your friends; well, give them the good news that their vacation has been prolonged."

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### Whose Guardian Angel arrived first?

A young married couple had a little girl who was very ill with a high fever. They had already lost one child and they were afraid that this little girl was going to die. The mother was beside the child's bed, and the father was in the next room, when they both had the same idea: to send their guardian angel to Padre Pio. Almost immediately the child's fever disappeared and she peacefully fell asleep. The mother joyfully called her husband and said: "I sent my guardian angel to Padre Pio and our little girl is saved." Her husband said: "No, I sent my guardian angel before you sent yours," and then a very animated discussion followed, each insisting that it was his or her guardian angel which had arrived first. Soon the father decided to go up to the friary to thank Padre Pio for the grace which they had received.

He thanked Padre Pio for his little daughter's recovery and asked him if he had heard his guardian angel. Padre Pio said: "Yes, first your guardian angel came to me and after about three minutes your wife's guardian angel came." He had not only heard the guardian angels, but he had also heard the animated discussion.

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### In 1931

One of Padre Pio's spiritual children, the Baroness Antonina Melchione, who had come from Genova to see him, before leaving San Giovanni to return home after one of her frequent visits, complained saying: "Father, why don't you come to see me any more, as you used to in the past? I no longer dream of you, nor feel your presence nor notice your perfume." Padre Pio answered: "How can I go to see you when I am always with you?" But she was not satisfied and again insisted: "But Father, why don't you give me some sign? I don't see you and I don't feel your presence." "Very well, I will leave you and then, once or twice a year I shall visit you with some visible sign." She remonstrated: "Oh no, Father!" and he replied: "Well then let us leave things as they are."





**Maria Giuseppa, Padre Pio's mother.**

### **Prepare for a long journey**

**M**onsignor Pasquale Bucci, Vicar General of Foggia, an elderly and worthy priest had been living with his sister or rather, his sister had been living with him but her married daughter insisted that her mother must come and help her with her house and children.

The poor priest was at a loss as to what to do. He could not live alone – if he too went to live with his niece, there would be too much confusion for him in a house with children and young people. Should he go and live with the Giuseppina Fathers in their monas-

tery in Foggia? He could not decide what to do so he made up his mind to go and talk over his situation with Padre Pio and to ask his advice. He came to San Giovanni Rotondo and as soon as he was able to talk with Padre Pio, he tried to tell him about his problem but Padre Pio did not give him the chance to even begin. He put his arm around his shoulders, almost embracing him and said: "Brother, let us get ready for a long journey!" Monsignore went back to Foggia slightly disappointed at not having been able to ask for the desired advice. After a few days he was taken ill. It proved to be pneumonia and after a short illness, he died. The advice that he wanted was not necessary.





Mary Pyle in the early 60's, wearing her tertiary habit.

#### A Word of Warning

Edwin Standing, a recently converted Catholic, had heard about Padre Pio, but was undecided whether or not he wanted to go to San Giovanni Rotondo to see him. He believed in him but did not want to go simply out of curiosity to see him. He was in a pensione in Rome where there was a marquis with his

wife and daughter. The daughter was an extremely frivolous and modern girl whose only thought in life was to enjoy herself and have a good time! The parents decided to go to San Giovanni to see Padre Pio and to take their daughter with them.

When Mr. Standing heard that they were going he began to wonder what Padre Pio would say to that girl. Would he reprove her for her vanity and lightness,



would he warn her of the danger that her conduct represented – would he scold her or preach her a paternal sermon? They invited him to go to San Giovanni Rotondo with them but he decided to wait until he heard what Padre Pio would say to this girl before making his decision.

As soon as they returned he asked the girl what Padre Pio had said to her. "Oh nothing, he hardly spoke to me at all," was the answer which she gave with a slight tone of irritation. Mr. Standing had awaited this answer too anxiously to be so easily put off, so he forgot his discretion and insisted: "But he must have said something!" Then the girl said: "He only said two or three words. He said: 'Remember that hell exists!'" "Remember that Hell exists!"

The next day Mr. Standing went to San Giovanni Rotondo, taking the first train which he could catch and he himself told me this fact.

In passing through Foggia on his way back he went into a barber shop for a shave and conversing with the barber the conversation soon drifted onto Padre Pio. The barber wanting to show that he was a superior being, boasted that he did not believe in Padre Pio and added "I do not believe in Padre Pio, but I believe in Gandhi." "Oh really?" replied Mr. Standing calmly, "I just happen to know both Padre Pio and Gandhi personally. When I met Gandhi, I felt that I was in the presence of a very good and holy man but when I met Padre Pio, I felt that I was in the presence of a supernatural being!" The barber said no more.

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### A Winter Scene

It was a cold winter's day; the ground was covered with snow, but the sun was shining and the sky was blue.

In the corridor of the friary at the door which goes into the cloister, stood Rachelina wrapped up in innumerable shawls. She had called Padre Pio saying that some women had come from the town to confess. Padre Pio, obedient to the call had come to the door and was scolding Rachelina because she had not told the truth and Padre Pio does not even allow little fibs said just for fun. But Rachelina said, "Father, it is true that I am a poor woman who has come from the town with all this snow and if I don't confess today, I will confess another day. I have been mending all morning in the guest room and I could not go down to the town without first kissing your hand. I knew that you would not come down at all if I did not use that pretext."

Padre Pio was very pale and slender and his eyes were large and luminous. He tried to look severe, but his eyes were laughing. At that time, he never put on his winter clothes until after Christmas no matter how cold the weather might be. He had on a thin habit with no cape and looked so slender and cold in contrast to

Rachelina with her many thick, warm shawls and her red cheeks.

Rachelina suddenly opened her shawls and said: "Greet the Father," and a little robin red-breast flew out from his warm retreat and with open wings rested on Padre Pio's heart. Padre Pio looked down tenderly at the little bird and the little bird seemed to return his look as though a mute understanding existed between them. It did not try to fly away, it rested and then Rachelina said: "Now come back to where it is warm," and pulling the thread which was attached to the little bird's foot, she pulled it in under her warm shawls.

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### Did he yell for the war?

Shortly after Italy had entered into the war, a family wrote from Bologna asking for the cure of their son who was dying of a very serious throat trouble. They wrote to a person here who asked Padre Pio in person for the desired grace.

Padre Pio, generally so gentle and full of compassion for those who are suffering, this time turned with a severe expression in his eyes and voice and asked three times: "Did he yell for the war? Did he yell for the war? Did he yell for the war?" The person who had received the letter was unable to answer at once, not knowing the boy in question personally, but having asked for information he found that the boy had headed the university students who had gone through the streets yelling for the war. The penalty had to be paid. He received no grace and after a few days, died – he who had thoughtlessly called down death upon thousands of innocent victims.

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### You will never see your child's face again

A fascist, who had committed innumerable crimes, following the orders of his masters, at the beginning of the Fascist dominion, was grieved and terrified upon seeing his only child, a little boy, stricken with a mortal disease. The man lived in Bologna where he had often heard of Padre Pio, so he decided to come to San Giovanni in order to ask him to save his child's life. He left the child dangerously ill and hastened to San Giovanni, as fast as the long distance would allow him, and pleaded his case. Padre Pio's answer, or rather the answer which the Lord obliged him to give to the man was brief and concise, "You will never see your child's face again."

When the man reached Bologna, he found that the child had died and as the disease was so mortal and contagious, the little corpse had immediately been taken to the cemetery and covered with lye.