Padre Pio & Me — My Journey Back to Italy After 14+ Years...

Find out about my journey, my religious experiences and faith below and share.

February 28, 2019 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

Faith-Based Learning: Sharing My Devotion and Testimony of My Healing by Saint Padre Pio

I moved by faith and not by sight as a spiritual child of Padre Pio…

As a girl of 21 I left the USA to study in Italy … 21 years later, I returned for a religious pilgrimage because I had been called…

There is no way I would have been able to do this trip without a strong calling to do it. I never would have been able to leave my family to do it and let's face it, I do not have the finances to do this either, full stop.

The summer before my cancer diagnosis, I had a vivid dream. I always had my faith and I speak about it a lot in my talks, my blog posts and with others in general.

THE DREAM THAT BEGAN THE JOURNEY

Back to my dream. I dreamed of myself walking into an apartment in Brooklyn and seeing a small dinette area off the kitchen and sitting there was Padre Pio. He was sitting and looking at me and said, "Lisa, I am so happy you are here." And I said, "Wow, Padre Pio — you are amazing but how do you know me? I mean I know you of course but how in the world do you know me and my name?" He looked at me and said, "I know you because of this person," and he gestured to a piece of paper on the table with the handwriting clearly of my father. I said, "Wow, that is my dad's signature!" and Padre Pio told me, "He is my friend and he prays about you a lot…"

Just thinking about the dream gives me chills and a feeling of peace and excitement, at the same time. At this point, when I woke up on that long ago (just over 2.5 years ago but feels like a lifetime ago) I questioned if I should even tell anyone about my dream. I just did not know if I should tell my dad. In my life, my dad has been the parent so he and I have butt heads… a lot.

Something told me to share the dream, and it made my dad so happy that I was glad I did. It also helped me date when the dream was because my brothers have a better memory than I do, and the last few years have been a blur.

In my heart, this dream is when I became a spiritual child of Padre Pio. It is ok if now is when you want to stop reading but it is my hope that you do not stop.

We are all called by faith in different ways — my faith was always there and during the summer before my life changing stage 3 breast cancer diagnosis, I was brought comfort and inclusion into something that was happening during Padre Pio's life and has continued since his death in 1968, over 50 years ago. People all over the world have been included as his spiritual children and have testimonies regarding healing, peace and more through their intercessor, Padre Pio.

I had no clue that I was to be diagnosed in a few short months. I did not know anything but that I had been introduced to Padre Pio when I was a young child, before he was declared a saint. My dad knew of Padre Pio through a priest who knew him when he lived.

Life moved on — I continued to be busy raising my kids, working, running small businesses and just being focused on the faith. Bringing my kids to mass every weekend, saying my prayers, just trying to be a good person (or as good of a person as I could be) in my life.

BREAST CANCER AT 39 YEARS OLD

When I was diagnosed in November 2016, I just became very scared and ashamed, as I have recounted here many, many times. I had spent the last 17 years after living and studying in Italy just building my life on many wrong things. I worried all of the time even before my diagnosis, I was unhappy with my marriage, I was focusing on being a supermom without focusing on what I truly needed to be human and Lisa.

Again, I will never thank cancer for anything but going through cancer taught my many lessons. I learned who had my back. I learned who did not want to be in my life anymore (and I forgave them all), I learned how strong I truly was through the support and love of others. I suffered but I always smiled. I did not give in to the pain. I worked through it. Shortly after my mastectomy, I went back to working full time. Shortly after that, I began chemo. I barely complained but if I did it was over quickly.

My biggest regret is and always will be the experience of my children during this time in that if I could make it all never happen it would be just so that they did not have to experience me being so sick but then I also realize they saw me overcome and learned many great lessons so perhaps they will not replicate my mistakes in life of worry, panic and trying to be perfect.

During my illness, I continued to have dreams on and off about Padre Pio. Also, during one of the hardest rounds of chemotherapy, my mom was upset and hoped that her mother in law (who was my dear friend, Roe) was still alive to help me through it and that very night without me knowing my mom's thoughts, Roe was in my dream, having escaped from heaven just to tell me I was doing great and to keep up the great work. The next morning when I told me mom about it she started hysterical crying because of her thoughts about Roe being able to help me.

So time goes on and I complete treatment and begin focusing on the "after" part of life and

cancer. I focus on healing and health as much as possible and a few times, I find myself having some dreams of healing and Padre Pio.

THE DREAMS PUSH ME TO TRAVEL

Then, I begin to dream about returning to Italy to go to San Giovanni Rotondo, which is where Padre Pio spend his 50+ years as a priest. I did not know it at the time but Padre Pio's body is on display at San Giovanni Rotondo yet I have some dreams about looking for his body to pray with him.

The dreams increase in frequency and type — I know I am supposed to go but I have no clue how to make that happen. Yes, I was lucky enough to have traveled to Italy many times but the last travel was before my marriage and before I had kids so how do I even consider to do this now? Also, traveling internationally is very expensive and let's face it, so is cancer so how can I even think of this trip. Oh and I am on a clinical trial which impacts my immune system and how do I know when / if I can travel.

My dad is a part of this — he had introduced me to Padre Pio when I was a child and also is the part of the original dream when I ask how Padre Pio knows me and in 2017, he has his own health crisis. He has massive surgery on his heart, which had been leaking, in September 2017 when I am at less than a year post cancer diagnosis. As the only daughter, the power of attorney and the medical decision maker, I am at the hospital and when my dad does not wake up after surgery, I am literally busting balls on everyone to try and find out what went wrong and what to do. Of course, this is very upsetting as my dad is only 64 and otherwise in good health.

He is in a coma for eight days with no improvement and we are told that he will have to be intubated and moved to a long term care facility. My middle brother and I travel home and begin to think of the arrangements we need to do in order to end his life as we know he does not want to be kept alive artificially. We are upset and looking over stuff late that very night when our phones ring with the news from our youngest brother that our dad is awake. We are shocked and so damn happy. The first words my dad says to me is, "Go get them, Lisa!" barely just above a whisper but it is like he knew that I had been kicking butt, respectfully, but we all know in a hospital you need an advocate, someone to ask the tough questions, to make sure that all is going ok and I was that for my dad after many many years of him being that for me (and not just when I was sick but for all of my life really even when it drove me insane as he has a tendency to be controlling and alpha … Gee, I wonder where I get it from?).

MORE HEALING BY PADRE PIO

When dad woke up, he kept telling me he saw Padre Pio in the window by his bed. He saw green scapulars everywhere, he, I guess, was being visited by his friend.

More time passed and I had more dreams. I decided in early 2018, after traveling locally to visit with relics of Padre Pio at various churches in NJ and at St Patrick's Cathedral that I would visit San Giovanni Rotondo. I had no idea how to do this but I did know from past experiences (over 13 years old at this point) that February is the cheapest month to travel to Italy and I begin to do

some searching for flights and other information.

My mom tells me she will go with me because she does not want me to go alone. That very night, I have a dream of tickets that I am picking up saying “Rome to San Giovanni Rotondo” in my name and my dad’s name. I tell my dad — he goes, “No way — I cannot travel…” Keep in mind my dad has gone nowhere since 2001. He has not flown or travelled or gone on vacation or anything.

So now I am sure he is supposed to come with me and I am also equally sure that he will not go. I call him and tell him about my plans again and this time inform him of the dream with his name on the tickets. He was of course shocked and against the whole thing. At this point, it is March 2018 and I begin to feel a low vibration humming in my head and it is kind of annoying but not in the “OMG this is a cancer thing” but just like a buzz to push me, it feels that way to me…

THE CALLING TO GO

After a few weeks, in April 2018 I research ticket prices and find a round trip fare via Alitalia from JFK to Rome for two people for $680, all included.

I ask my dad to please just book the tickets and that we will get trip insurance and that I will go by myself but I truly feel that he has to be there with me. He relents to book the tickets and immediately the buzzing in my head ceases. Of course given our medical histories, we also book our trip insurance — with both of us having pre-existing conditions, it took some time for us to find the right policy.

We had 240 days from ticket purchase to trip — the exact length of a full term pregnancy. In that time, I dealt with fears and worries about taking such a huge step, going so far and being away from my children. Originally, I only wanted to go for a week but my dad said it would not be enough and had us add on 2 days for a total of 10 days with 2 days of travel as it takes so long to get to Italy and so long to get home.

In those 240 days, I forced myself not to think about it and in fact did not even tell my kids until it was closer so they would not worry about it — and yes, they did worry… they are so used to me being in charge that they doubted how things would work, if things would work.

There were a million happenings to STOP us from going — from my clinical trial drugs and if I ran a fever, we would have to cancel to my dad having to go to the ER on Christmas Day 2018 with heart trouble and the list goes on and on.

WE MAKE IT TO THE DAY TO TRAVEL

The day of our trip came and I was in shock but also oddly calm. Sitting in the waiting area at JFK for our gate to open up, I was shocked that I was so calm. Knowing I was about to get on the longest flight, go the greatest distance and be far, far away from my kids should have had me freaking out but I was not freaking out. The flight was a dream — not one bounce and we arrived in Rome an hour ahead of schedule.

Before I left, I created a seven-page document detailing EVERYTHING about the kids, their schedules, medications, doctors, and other general stuff that believe it or not only I knew — not by choice but just the reality of my situation… I gave copies of it to my mom, mother-in-law, husband and even the school.

My son cried the night before I left and I handled it ok — I said my goodbyes to them in the morning and was gone before they got home from school to not prolong the goodbyes. I set up a scavenger hunt and wrote them personal letters for every day I was going to be gone. My mom took off from work and my mother in law moved in to be with them and help them out.

I was told by my children that 3 people could not replace me… Knowing my issues with being ubermom in the past, just the fact that I got on that plane is shocking.

Also shocking or timely was that I was concerned about money — I had tried to save but with our budget it was next to impossible but a few weeks before my trip I was hired for 2 freelance gigs and paid for both right before I left making my trip money much more doable.

At one of the gigs before I left, I asked if anyone wanted me to pray for them — I had been soliciting prayers to bring with me to Rome and Padre Pio — one of them told me no right away but the other asked me to come back on the way out to collect hers. When I returned to collect hers, the other woman who had said “no thank you” told me her grandmother had met Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo and he looked at her and said, “You do not need me — get away.” I laughed because that so sounded like him — he could be abrupt but also joking but if he knew you did not need his help or were not truly sorry for your sins, you got thrown out of the confessional…

Back to the upcoming trip -- if I did not deal with cancer, I can tell you 100% honestly that I never ever would have even thought of going to Italy period full stop.

MY ITALIAN STORY

This despite living there for a year, returning many times before I got married in 2005 (my last trip was actually in 2005 but before the wedding) and knowing the language or having known the language at least and yet denying this part of myself for so many years. Going back 21 years after moving to Italy was very symbolic. A close dear friend of mine told me that it was like meeting myself, like reclaiming the woman I am now and reconnecting her with who I was then and it made me weep when I heard that because yes, so yes.

When I moved to Italy in 1998, my dad brought me there. I lived with him and my grandparents after my mom and he split up in 1990-1991. It was the first time I was to live away from home and my dad was the one who started my car in the morning before I had to go out and drive to school, the one who kept tabs on my schedule and knew what time I came home and helped me deal with life and issues that arose.

In 1999 when I walked across the stage with my MBA diploma, my dad was there to see it.

Almost losing him and then going back full circle with him on this trip was an a big gift for me. Realizing before the trip that I would be 42 on this journey which was the same age my mom was on her visit to see me during my schooling 20 years ago just led to another layer of weird/amazing coincidence.

Another blessing was the schedule of my clinical trial pill, Ibrance. I take it 21 days a month and 7 days off — the trip coincided with my 7 day break which was odd and unplanned. Though my side effects for the pill are very manageable (I am so blessed that way), having to not worry about eating and taking the pill in the morning made my traveling a lot easier. Also, I do find I have less fatigue on the week off of the pill so win/win.

So there I was on the plane, oddly at peace and excited to return to Italy. When we arrived in Rome, we were exhausted and the whole time my dad kept saying, "I cannot believe I am here. I do not know how this happened…how did you talk me into this?"

The first night we stayed in Rome and got to reunite with my very good friends and their children — one of whom is my goddaughter who I had last seen when she was 2 in 2005! It was amazing to be so welcomed in their home and to have an amazing feast together.

GETTING TO SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO & PADRE PIO

The next day, we woke up early to get to the bus to take us to the airport in order to catch another bus to San Giovanni Rotondo. There are a few ways to get to San Giovanni Rotondo from Rome. One way is to take the train with 2 different options — one which is super-fast and takes 2 hours (but costs a lot) and the other is slower and takes 5 hours (still more expensive than the bus). You take the train from Stazione Termini to Foggia and then from Foggia you take a bus for an hour to get you to San Giovanni.

To me, either option the fast train or the slower train seemed like a lot of work for a breast cancer survivor and heart surgery/coma survivor who had despite my attempts to pack light a backpack, carry on (me), a large suitcase (both of us) and carry on (dad) to bring around with us PLUS our coats and stuff.

The other option was a bus from the airport to San Giovanni Rotondo directly for a total of 6-7 hours but it was, in my mind anyway, a more direct way with storing our luggage on the bus and not needing to lug it around until we got to our final stop.

I struggled with booking / finding the transportation options and was lucky to know Italian to find how to go forward. There was so much going against us on this trip with our health issues, our lack of traveling far away, our rusty language skills and tons of stuff to carry around both literally and figuratively.

There also seemed to be stuff trying to stop us from getting to Padre Pio. The first night in Rome, at the hotel, I woke up in the middle of the night aching for my kids and my home and even my husband (lol). I felt so homesick and it hit so fast but I prayed about it and was able to fall back to

sleep.

The morning of our journey to Padre Pio, we had to take a cab to the bus stop with all of our luggage then wait for a bus to take us to the airport, this bus took about 45 minutes and it was part of our travel ticket to San Giovanni Rotondo.

When we arrived at the bus pick up at the airport, we were unsure of where our bus would be to take us for the journey. We were shown where it was and then waited. We stocked up at the terminal on snacks, food and drinks for the journey. We knew the bus would stop at an Autogrill for food off the highway. I was excited to see parts of Italy I had never seen and in the authentic way of traveling via bus, a common way for Italians to travel as the trains can be extremely expensive.

Sitting and waiting for the bus, I saw it pull into the depot. I walked over and politely asked if I could speak to the driver. He looked at me like he wanted to kill me — he was rude and nasty — I was surprised because everyone in Italy has always been at least polite if not downright friendly and warm. I asked if we could board the bus and if he wanted to see our tickets and he yelled at me that it was too soon, then he stalked back into the bus and drove off.

I was not happy and looked on the tickets and the website for a number to call to find out what to do if the bus had just left without us or what and there was no number anywhere. Then I saw another bus pull in with the words, “San Giovanni Rotondo” on it and I asked that bus if they were going there today and if yes could we get tickets. They said yes and were much nicer. I was so relieved because for a few minutes I thought we would not be able to get there and wind up stranded.

My dad was another story though — at the time we were getting ready to switch to a new bus provider he was just shocked and upset — how can a bus not show up or leave when we were there to take it without us? He was upset about the cost of having to buy new tickets but I assured him we would get the charge removed for the tickets of the bus who left us. At the same time as this change (my dad does not do well with change in general) he got a disturbing message from someone he loves very much and was distraught over that and here I am about to get on a seven hour bus ride with him and knowing he will probably want to be upset the whole seven hours!

I said to him, listen, “I will give you 30 minutes to unleash about your feelings and then you have to stop and let it go — we will be traveling together on a bus sitting next to one another for several hours, I cannot handle you complaining and being upset the whole time.”

WHEN WE FELT LIKE WE WOULD NOT MAKE IT

So if you are keeping count, not only did the bus not show up but moments before we were to head to see Padre Pio, my dad gets hit with some emotional abuse that made him want to jump on a plane and return home right then and there oh and the night before I had my extreme homesickness. It seemed like everything was trying to keep us from getting to our destination.

We got on the bus and my dad kept to his 30 minutes of complaining (win for me) and we had a

lovely ride — I found my Italian getting better and better the closer we got to Padre Pio. Listen, the last time I spoke Italian was 2005. I mean, I tried to keep up with it without visiting the country but being the only person I knew who could speak Italian meant I had to speak to myself and you just cannot match dialogue or speed or vocabulary when speaking to yourself.

I got on the bus and thought my dad was behind me — he was not so I went back to the front and saw him trying to hold on to his carry on and the bus driver trying to take it away — I quickly realized my dad wanted to bring the carry on to the seat but the driver wanted it to go under the bus. I quickly explained to the driver that my dad had a heart condition and needed the suitcase for medication and other emergency needs and the driver agreed to let me dad come on the bus with his carryon. (All of this was happening in Italian.)

As we got closer to San Giovanni Rotondo, it got darker and later. I began to question how we would get all of our stuff from the bus stop to the hotel.

The last time I traveled to Italy, there were no smartphones. Let that sink in to you. There also was not a global network so when I arrived in Europe, my phone did not work. I was able at times to use the one I had gotten in 1998-1999 but oftentimes I went without a phone. Perish the thought. This meant I had to be aware of where a cab was going so as not to be taken around the horn (e.g., overcharged). Since I knew Rome so well, it was never a big issue. When I went to Naples and Capri, it was harder but often I was just in Rome and had no big problems with being out of touch.

This time, I already had global service on my phone I just never had used it and with my iPhone, I was able to track the route of the bus we were on, track the cabs, be in touch with my friends in Europe and family in NY and just feel so connected and aware — it was mind blowing to me after so many visits to Europe and being kind of in the dark.

Now, I was tracking our bus when the bus stopped in San Giovanni Rotondo and saw it was .8 mile away from our hotel. We were the only people on the bus. I walked to the bus driver and in Italian asked him to please drop us at the hotel if he could as we had our health issues and would not be able to make it the rest of the way. He agreed — which was a miracle.

When we got to the hotel, the bus stopped across the street from the place and I asked about our luggage — he had already put the luggage across the street by the entrance to the hotel!

What a double miracle and I was so thankful — we tried to tip him but he declined so my dad gave him a pack of American cigarettes, which are very treasured there as local cigarettes are considered not as good as American ones.

We crossed the street and the wind was blowing beyond belief, it seemed to be yelling at us — we heard what sounded to me like demonic voices in the wind as though we were about to be scared but the wind actually blew us towards the front doors of the hotel and pushed us directly into the lobby. It felt supernatural.

We found our rooms and went right to sleep. We had eaten on the bus and were just bone weary and tired. I found myself unable to fall asleep right away.

THE “YOU’RE CURED” DREAM

I was excited and nervous and just overall vibrating with the need to see Padre Pio and to be in his presence. I was able to fall asleep and dreamt quite clearly of walking into the tomb of Padre Pio, seeing his body and it looked the way it truly did which I had no way of knowing the night before as I had not done any research or looked at this tomb beforehand — I had only seen Padre Pio in his glass coffin when he was in Rome from photos in the newspaper — here in my dream, I knew what the crypt looked like and when I saw Padre Pio I began to cry and he sat up looked at me and said, “You’re cured”.

You might think I am crazy but I am not. I know in my heart at that point in that dream, like all of my others, that Padre Pio was speaking to me, that somehow I had been accepted as his spiritual child back when I had my first dream of him at the table in summer 2016 and now was given an even bigger grace.

Padre Pio accepted many people while he lived to be his spiritual child and said he would do more when his life was over than he could do when alive. He has been known to visit people even since his death and to also accept spiritual children after his death, asking Mary and Jesus for miracles on their behalf.

I had already also had a “dream” of Padre Pio and Mary where I was bathed in white light on the night of my birthday in December 2017 so I should have known I was cured but I still worried — after this dream, I know I cannot worry at all full stop.

I woke up at 5am after barely sleeping and thinking about this dream and feeling so incredibly blessed and so ready to share the news but no clue on how. I have been home already for almost 3 weeks and I still struggle with writing this all down and have found that when I normally can write and write and post so quickly, I have been going so slow with this to share it and yet I am not stressed about it — I know it will be shared and it will help people who are feeling lost or afraid and that it will be the foundation of how I move forward in my life, my nonprofit and so much more.

That first morning in San Giovanni Rotondo, I was in such a rush to get to the church and to see Padre Pio; my dad was exhausted and would not wake up as early as I had hoped so I went down to breakfast when the breakfast began and let me just say all of my healthy eating practices, my lack of carbs, my avoidance of bread and eating heavy were thrown out the window as soon as I landed in Europe.

Breakfast is a big thing in Italy — each hotel we stayed at offered free breakfast and it was intense. Every kind of pastry, croissant, bread product you can think of were included in the breakfasts. Tea, water, juices, too. Each morning, I ate like it was my last meal. So much food, so much sugary and carb-y and no guilt. Not even a little.

This day I ate so much, went and explored the hotel and then went to wake my dad. I was bouncing off the walls. I asked if I could go without him and he said no and I am so glad I did not go without him. What I thought would be a quick walk to the sanctuary was actually a straight uphill walk with my Fitbit registering over 30 flights of stairs!

If I did not wait for my dad, he would have never made it or found it (he has a bad sense of direction). As soon as he ate, we asked the front desk where to go and though I thought I understood, I used the map on my phone to guide us. I was in shock at how much of the walk was basically vertical. My dad is a couch potato (said with love). He has a bad heart. He has a ICD and a pacemaker implanted in his chest. He had to walk uphill, straight, for 30 flights to get to Padre Pio and I did not think he would be able to do it. I run and do exercise every day and I did not think I would be able to make it up the hill.

AGAINST ALL ODDS, WE MAKE IT TO THE MONESTARY

But made it we did — we got up to the top of the hill and saw the basilica, which is new and was confused — my first goal was to see Padre Pio. I had had that recurring dream where I was looking for Padre Pio and could not find him so I was kind of afraid that would happen in real life. I told my dad about my dream of Padre Pio telling me I was cured and he looked at me and said, “Lisa, I swear to God, if Padre Pio sits up when we see him, all you will see are my shoes because I will be out of there!”

We laughed and walked up to the church and my dad saw a sign saying, “Padre Pio body” and we headed that way and once we turned the corner, looming in front of us was the old church, the monastery and it was breathtaking. I knew from watching the movie about Padre Pio’s life what it looked like and here I was, here. And Padre Pio was someplace inside.

We walked into the door and found ourselves in a large church where mass was going on but we did not dawdle we walked forward and asked someone, quietly, where to find Padre Pio and they told us to go downstairs. I went at such a quick pace, my dad was way behind me. The crypt is below 2 small flights of stairs and there is a landing between the first and second flight — at that landing, I was able to look down and see Padre Pio and I began to cry.

Tears were rushing down my face, my heart was overjoyed, the tears were of happiness- I had made it to my spiritual father, against all odds, without a clue as to how but I did it — I made it.

I walked around his body, just speaking to him in my mind, in Italian, telling him so much and then I found a spot in the near empty crypt to kneel and pray. I sat there for a long while, my dad had joined me. He said to me, “Lisa, there he is … he called you and you came…” I was too busy crying and praying to do more than nod.

We sat there for a long while and then went upstairs to attend the mass we heard beginning from the lower area of the church. We went upstairs and I automatically began to feel self-conscious for wearing jeans. In Rome, it used to be the surefire way to be singled out as a tourist but now in 2019, many people wear jeans in Rome but NOT in the South of Italy and especially not in church.

WELCOMED & EMBRACED

I looked around at the few church goers (perk of traveling to Italy in February is the lack of crowds, this proved extremely true for San Giovanni Rotondo — we spent most of our time there with Padre Pio and in the museum and other locations with just me and my dad and a handful of others but a lot of time was just me and my dad) and lamented my choice in clothing.

I decided to just embrace it as I was not going to walk down to the hotel and walk back up again to change clothes. During the sign of peace, I smiled big and bright at everyone and shook some hands — at the end of mass, we decided to head to confession but first, people stopped me to talk to me and I found myself speaking fluently in Italian and explaining why I was there and about me and my family and my cancer and my dream and how I felt Padre Pio called me there and "Io ho lasciato il mio marito e I miei bambini per la prima volta perche lui mi ha chiamato e pero sono qua" (I left my husband and my family for the first time because he has called me and so I am here).

People were hugging me and looking for me all day — introducing me to folks who also had dreamt of Padre Pio, wishing me well, kissing me and more — my dad took some photos of the people talking to me and just was like, "Why are people talking to you?" It was like I was meant to be there.

I went to confession with a friar and he only spoke Italian (they have a list of confessors and what languages they speak). I was able to confess without any issue and also understand what the priest said to me. When he asked when was my last confession and I admitted it had been a year he was very stern with me and asked me what would happen if I did not clean my house in a year… I was absolved of my sins and even able to tell him about my illness, my journey and that I was called to be there.

After confession, I met more people. Then went back to sit with Padre Pio. We also found out how to get to his room, the place where he died in the monastery. So we walked through the building to the spaces that have been turned into a museum. We were flabbergasted to see how many letters Padre Pio received — the shelves went from floor to ceiling across a wall of the room and we found out they were the letters just from one year. It was amazing.

We saw his vestments, his bibles and as we walked along the corridor to this "cell" or room, we saw photos and knickknacks as we got closer to his room, it was just so amazing, my phone went white, I could not take photos or do anything for a while. We sat by the plexiglass that opened his room so you could see into it and just were in awe. We saw the stuff that had been in his room and was moved to a glass table outside of the room.

WHAT IT MEANT TO US

We were walking in the steps of Padre Pio — this was his home for 50+ years. He did not travel the world (though he could bilocate and appear in other places without physically being there) or hold press conferences but yet he changed more lives than anyone can count — here in this room and in these walls he prayed and he prayed and he helped people so much in ways that are

innumerable.

My goal in life NOW is to be more like that — to stop chasing “fame” and being “liked” and instead to do real good in many ways — in any way. My focus is on helping people move forward in their lives after or during a cancer diagnosis and to share the grace of “pray, hope and do not worry” in whatever way I can through faith based education — not exclusionary but instead inclusionary — you do not have to believe to be helped by me and my nonprofit. In fact, many people did not believe in God or even were Catholics and were still moved, healed and helped by Padre Pio.

The rest of the trip was a cascade of graces.

That first day we found the gift shop and I met a new friend there, too. Her name was Michaela and we had a great chat during which she informed me that there was a mass held in the crypt every day at 430pm — this was something I never would have known if she did not tell me. She also informed me that the main office accepts for free prayer requests for the rosary that is done on Fridays. I went immediately to the office and put in requests for the rosary.

We then walked around some and explored the town by the monastery we went to lunch and then went back to explore Padre Pio’s home again. At 4:15pm sharp, we went to the crypt and found seats by Padre Pio’s body for the mass. It was something that really made me have peace, showed me some big decisions that I had been harping over and unsure about it — well, it all became clear to me with a talk in my head with Padre Pio.

GRACE UPON GRACE AND HEALING UPON HEALING

He told me, “You are cured, why do you still want to live where you do?” My husband and I had gone back and forth many times about moving away from our current location — budgeting being a big problem but also the facts of raising a family in our current location and the impacts of the world on our doorsteps. With the dream showing my family with me at my next visit at San Giovanni Rotondo, that just is not possible living where we do now and how we live.

This was a huge grace — to have this confidence to know it is time to move on that it is in the best interest of my family AND me because despite my often held belief that I was ok and cured I still was weary of being far away from my treatment hospital. Now that holdout is gone and the belief I have is that we will sell our home and use the proceeds to settle someplace quieter, less expensive and to put down roots away from our current home.

That night I went back to the hotel so happy, so emotional and so ready for the next day to return to Padre Pio, to see more of the city and to continue to pray and reflect on my path and my journey.

The next day, we headed back up the steep hill and decided we would go to Gargano to see the place where Michael the Archangel appeared many times and a place of great importance to Padre Pio. In the morning, sitting with Padre Pio and making our plans (the priest at mass had even said that Padre Pio told pilgrims to see him that they MUST also visit Gargano) I complained that we

would miss the mass in the crypt at 430pm given our plans. At that exact moment, the priest walked into the crypt and said mass. I was floored. The time was 10:30am, which the day before the mass was held upstairs in the church.

At lunch, I saw some women who I had seen in the tomb with us — I began talking to them and sharing my story of cancer, kids, life, etc. The women were so friendly and before they left, they came to our table to hug and kiss me and one of them was crying for me… She said I moved her so much she was in awe of what had happened to me and she kept saying, "You will be ok." It was powerful…

We happened to be able to see a cousin who lives in Bari — my dad's mom is from Grummo Appulo a small town outside of Bari. We had thought about traveling there, too, but it was too much for us. Originally, when we made our travel plans, my dad was like, "What are we going to do in San Giovanni Rotondo for 4 days?" but we found stuff to do every day — we spent hours in prayer and reflection with Padre Pio, walked his hallways, met up with amazing people and had blessings in many ways.

Our cousin happened to be in San Giovanni Rotondo without us arranging it — unfortunately, she was undergoing radiation for cancer. She is the first person in my family line that I know of who has dealt with cancer — though she is about 15 years older than me and a distant relative.

We met up for a coffee and it was just such a strange coincidence. We still considered taking the trip to the town but we decided against it in order to continue on with our visit to San Giovanni Rotondo.

MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

We took the bus that afternoon to Gargano and though it was a cave carved like 800 feet below the surface, it was not as much of an impact on me as it was on my dad, a fellow Michael Angelo.

It was cold and a bit dreary but I could understand the historical and religious significance. I think I was overwhelmed on many levels at this point. We stopped in the gift shop and again, I made a new friend. We chatted for a long time and she gifted us a chaplet for Saint Michael the Archangel and explained to us that with Padre Pio and Michael the Archangel that we would be protected from everything.

We returned to San Giovanni Rotondo and walked through the museum again — running into an elderly monk — we asked him to bless us and he did. We said good night to Padre Pio and headed back to our hotel.

The next day was to be our last day in San Giovanni Rotondo as our bus was scheduled to pick up at 6:45am the next morning. Honestly, it was a blur.

We found on the last day the entry to the original church where Padre Pio said mass. We had seen it many times from the upstairs choir loft where Padre Pio prayed before the massive crucifix so

often and received his visible stigmata. From that choir loft, we could look down into the original church but we had no idea how or if we could get in there. By chance, we were able to find the way in (it was the middle of the 3 doors).

CONFESSION, MASS & PADRE PIO

We were just blown away to be in the church where Padre Pio said mass. It is said by those who attended his masses that he became Christ during the mass that there was a special bond and that though his mass lasted over an hour or two it seemed like moments.

His confessional was there — where he sat for 10-13 or more hours a day not just hearing confessions but reading souls and throwing people out who were not truly sorry for their sins. In throwing them out, he brought them back to their faith more times than not.

We saw the sacristy and I wanted to much to see it closer. We found that by chance, too, looking for a certain priest we had met we found the way to see the room where Padre Pio got ready to say the mass and were able to touch the table he used to get ready. I also was able to open the door to the alter and I was hit with the smell of sanctity it is called — when you smell something so heavenly it is often said to mean an angel or saint is near you. We are so lucky we got to see this area and again we found it by accident.

I spent a lot of time with Padre Pio in prayer and reflection — I cried again a lot. I was in awe that I was able to be there, to fulfill what to me was a mission, a calling. I was so excited that my dad was with me, too and being blessed as well.

It was not a goodbye to Padre Pio but a “see you later” as I will be bringing my children and husband next year.

In reflection during the several hour bus ride back to Rome the next day, I was just vibrating with happiness.

BACK TO ROME

Upon return to Rome that afternoon, we went to the Vatican and I got to pray before Pope John Paul II — I had met him a few times when I lived in Rome — not to speak to him but he gave me a blessing or two from a short distance away — and my husband actually was chosen to guard him during the 1995 mass he gave at Central Park. My husband has a strong relationship with Saint Pope John Paul II — I was able to video tape and photograph the crypt from afar and pray with his body.

Slowly, I was beginning to remember my way around Rome -after so many years, it can be difficult to find your way. My dad and I were able to visit some touristy attractions and also regular neighborhoods.

I noticed a decrease in my Italian skills as soon as I returned to Rome — I chalked it up to being fatigued but I think it was a bit of a miracle that I could speak and understand so much more

fluently in San Giovanni Rotondo, where I needed the skills more as due to the quiet season there we found less English speaking folks. In Rome, though, you can always find someone who can speak in English.

I had some reunions with friends who I have kept in touch with religiously and one who had seemingly checked out of my life and someone else who has stood by me through my whole cancer treatment.

Before we knew it, the time came to go home. I was finally nervous. Here is when it hit me — I am ashamed to say — that "What if the plane does not make it home — my kids are expecting me to come home today but what if…" I prayed my rosary openly in the airport — something I would have hidden before — but it brought me peace. Unfortunately, as soon as we got on the plane the pilot announced we would be experiencing mild to moderate and at times severe turbulence. I worked hard to stay calm and luckily the periods of turbulence were more mild than anything else but 10 hours on a plane with 3-5 screaming babies (poor parents) and most of it over the wide expanse of the Atlantic is definitely not for the faint of heart.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

I was able to manage my anxiety though and made it home to my babies, my husband and my new life — because yes as corny as it sounds, I feel as though I have been reborn. I do not know why I was given this honor, this gift. I am just (trying to be) a humble person and to give back and to never take for granted this healing, this religious experience and to share my story to hopefully give others hope — that there is a power greater than us and at times we can be healed spiritually, physically and mentally. I know there are many stories of people who were not healed and who did not make it — I see it everyday in the community of cancer that I belong to — I see it in the news, in my social media, with people I know in real life and beyond and not just cancer but everything bad — it makes this experience of mine, I think, all the more hope inspiring because you just never know.

Life is a mystery to all of us — though I believe I am cured, life can still happen. I hope you consider finding out more about Padre Pio, his devotion to Mary, our Blessed Mother and Jesus as well as how he used the Rosary as a weapon to protect those who were able to ask for his blessing in life and beyond. And as Padre Pio said, "Pray, hope and don't worry."

Some resources:

- Franciscan Archive
- Saints Resource
- How to Become a Spiritual Child of Padre Pio
- Padre Pio Foundation of America
- National Centre for Padre Pio in the USA

- Shrine Monastery of St. Pio of Pietrelcina
- Pray, Hope, and Don’t Worry: True Stories of Padre Pio Book 1, by Diane Allen
- More books on Padre Pio

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/padre-pio-me-journey-italy-14-years