

Padre Pio and Ellie Hunt



Ellie Hunt's family grew up in Pietrelicina, Padre Pio's hometown where everyone knew each other. At that time no one could have imagined that Francesco Forgione (the future Padre Pio) would eventually become Pietrelcina's most famous citizen.

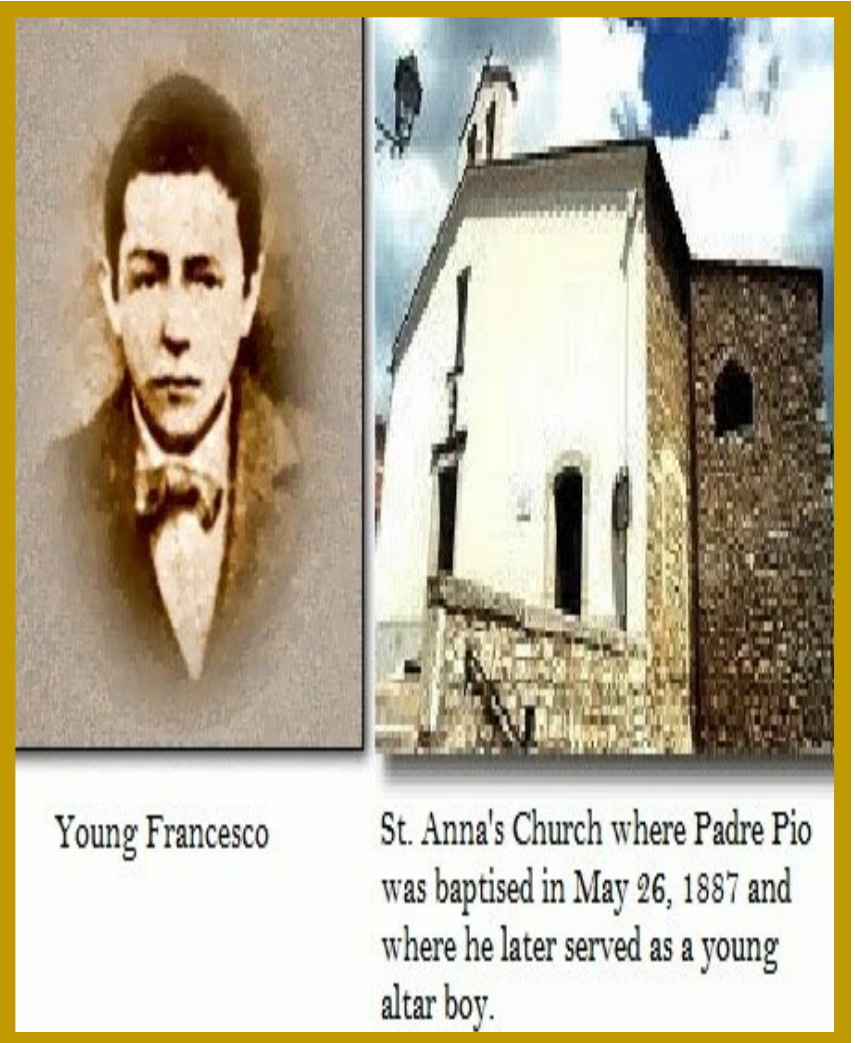
Padre Pio and Ellie Hunt

Padre Pio has been a part of Ellie Hunt's family ever since she can remember. Ellie's father, James Rummo as well as her maternal and paternal grandparents lived in Pietrelcina, Padre Pio's hometown. It was a small and close-knit farming town where everybody knew everybody else. Francesco Forgione (Padre Pio) would eventually become Pietrelcina's most famous citizen, although no one ever imagined it at the time.

Ellie's maternal grandmother, Anna Maria Scocco was the same age as Padre Pio and knew him as a child. Anna Maria's family owned a farm in the countryside of Pietrelcina, an area called Piana Romana. Padre Pio's family, the Forgione's, also had a small landholding in Piana Romana as well as a vineyard. As a youngster, Padre Pio tended the family's sheep.

Anna Maria recalled that Padre Pio was very pious as a young boy and always carried a devotional book with him. He was a quiet child and quite shy. Anna Maria once asked him why he was always reading books. Instead of answering, he asked Anna Maria why she didn't attend school. She told him that it was because her father wanted her to stay home and learn how to cook, clean and sew. At the time, education was not mandatory in southern Italy.

Padre Pio's health, which was never good, began to deteriorate during his time in the Capuchin seminary. Doctors were never able to successfully diagnose and treat the mysterious illnesses that continually wracked his body. The distressing symptoms of his ailments would come and go with no apparent reason. Padre Pio was forced to interrupt his studies for the priesthood and move back to the family home. For the better part of 7 years, from 1909 until 1916, he remained in Pietrelcina. He spent much of his time in prayer and solitude and did his best to regain his health. It was one of the few times of relative quiet and peace in his life. During this period, his prayer life grew in intensity. It is thought that the 7 years he spent in



personally thank her for the coffee she had been sending to him but he was unable to do so. In that large crowd of people he picked out one of his fellow citizens of Pietrelcina to give a special word of thanks to. He had never seen Rose before nor had she ever seen him. He loved Pietrelcina and he loved his spiritual children from Pietrelcina. Padre Pio once said, "In my lifetime I have made San Giovanni Rotondo known but after my death I will make Pietrelcina known."



Bilocation of Padre Pio

his hometown were almost like an extended retreat, arranged by Divine Providence, to prepare him spiritually for the great mission that was just up ahead.

It was during the time of his long convalescence in Pietrelcina that Ellie's father James came in contact with Padre Pio. James' grandmother, Saveria, would send him with fresh eggs to deliver to Padre Pio. The hope was that the eggs would build up his strength. Everyone in the community knew of his illness and hoped for his recovery. Even in his youth, the townspeople held him in the highest esteem.

It was difficult to make a living in Pietrelcina and for this reason, Ellie's father, grandparents, and other relatives eventually moved to New York. Once in New York, the men joined the "Pietrelcina Society," which sent regular financial help to those who had stayed behind.

Alfred, one of Ellie's cousins, made yearly visits back to Pietrelcina all through the 1950's. He noticed that St. Anne's parish, where Padre Pio had celebrated Mass for a number of years, was in a great state of disrepair. "Someday people from all over the world will be coming to our town," he said to his relatives in Pietrelcina. "They will want to see Padre Pio's birthplace and the parish of his youth. The church must be kept clean at all times. It must be swept and dusted daily. It cannot be neglected like this!" he said emphatically.

In the 1950's when Alfred spoke these words, Padre Pio was almost completely unknown throughout the world. The tiny, impoverished town of Pietrelcina was even more unknown. It could barely be found on a map. Many of its residents had long since moved away. But Alfred was convinced that the saintly priest from Pietrelcina would one day become world-famous and that people would be interested in seeing his hometown. His words proved to be prophetic. Gradually people from all parts of the world began to learn about Padre Pio. Today, the

pilgrims who annually visit the town of Padre Pio's birth and pray in the rustic church of St. Anne's, number in the thousands. The increase in visitors has been so dramatic that the town is hard-pressed to accommodate the crowds.

All through Ellie's growing up years, she heard the family reminisce about Padre Pio but she was never very interested in these stories from the "old country." All that changed however due to an incident that happened in 1960, when Ellie was 31 years old. That was the year that her grandfather, Jack Crafa became gravely ill. Ellie and her parents lived close to his home in Flushing, New York and during his illness, the family stayed by his side. When Jack fell into a coma, everyone knew his end was near. One day while Ellie and her parents were at her grandfather's bedside, a stranger knocked at the door. It was a Capuchin monk dressed in a dark brown habit. Ellie was surprised to see that he was wearing sandals without any socks for it was a particularly cold day and there was snow on the ground outside. He said he had come to pray for her grandfather.

Ellie was perplexed. There were not any Capuchin monks in residence at their parish in Flushing or in any other parish in the area for that matter. Ellie was also annoyed. It should have been the parish priest to come to pray for her grandfather and not a complete stranger. But she was impressed by the kindness and compassion of the young religious. He went in the bedroom and blessed Jack Crafa. He told the family to pray the Rosary while sitting at Jack's side and to pray the Hail Mary close to his ear. He had the sense that Jack was still able to hear. After the monk said that, Ellie was surprised to find that when she took her grandfather's hand in hers, she felt a very slight response from him, a very slight squeeze from his hand.

The young monk gave Ellie's grandfather the Last Rites, he blessed the family and then bid them goodbye. As he walked out the front door, Ellie's father, James, observed that there was no car waiting for him outside. James watched him as he walked up the street until he disappeared in the darkness. It was that very night that Jack Crafa passed away. He had been in a coma for nine days.

After the monk left, James became pale and appeared quite shaken. Ellie's mother Lucy, asked him for the reason. "Don't you know who that was?" James replied. "It was Padre Pio. He came in bilocation to give the Last Rites to your father. He looked exactly like I remember him when I used to deliver eggs to him in Pietrelcina."

Ellie believed her father's explanation and she was aware of Padre Pio's gift of bilocation. Her grandfather, Jack Crafa had been one of Padre Pio's spiritual sons from Pietrelcina. But Ellie was confused about one thing. The black and white photos she had seen of Padre Pio showed him as having very dark hair, almost black. This monk had sandy colored hair. Later when Ellie read a biography of Padre Pio, the author described Padre Pio's hair as a dark sandy color. It confirmed her own observation.

Padre Pio had always said that the people of Pietrelcina held a very special place in his heart. Ellie's mother had a cousin named Rose from Pietrelcina. She was very devoted to Padre Pio. Rose heard that Padre Pio enjoyed American coffee. She used to regularly send packages to her aunt who lived in San Giovanni Rotondo. The packages always included coffee with instructions to take it to the monastery and give it to Padre Pio.

Rose was finally able to make a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo. One afternoon, she was standing among a large crowd of people who were gathered outside the monastery waving to Padre Pio. He was standing at a window, waving a handkerchief in greeting to the crowd below. As he looked at the large gathering of people, he pointed out Rose to one of the Capuchins. The next thing she knew, one of the Capuchins approached her and told her that Padre Pio wanted to speak to her. Rose was escorted inside the monastery and asked to wait. After awhile the Capuchin returned. He apologized to Rose. He said that Padre Pio wanted to come down and