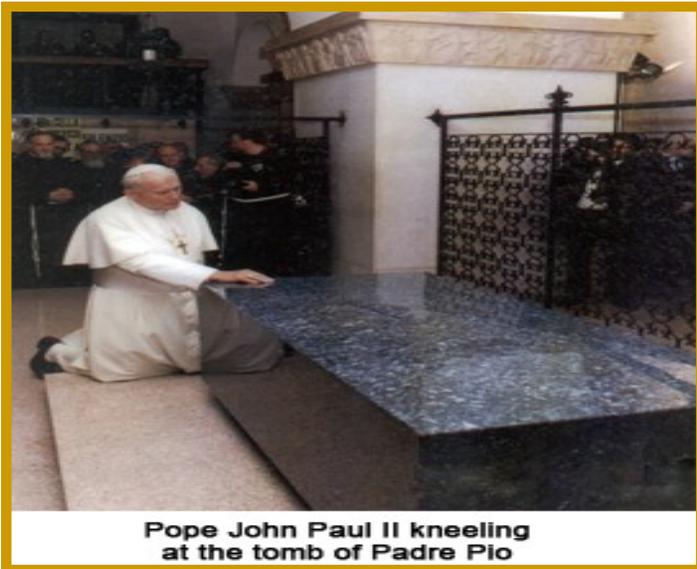


The Finn family never imagined the impact the trip to San Giovanni Rotondo would have on their lives. Melissa Finn felt compelled to go to confession while visiting the monastery church of Our Lady of Grace. She had not been to confession in more than twenty-five years. Joey told his mother that when he stood and prayed at Padre Pio's tomb, he had the sense that Padre Pio had heard his prayers. "Padre Pio has taken our family in as his own," Joey said to his mother.

For the Finns, the time spent at Padre Pio's monastery was a time of spiritual renewal and positive change. After returning home, they began to attend Mass together every Sunday as a family. It was something they had not done for a long time. Joey had a desire to learn more about his Catholic faith and to serve the Church. He soon became an altar server each Sunday at Mass.

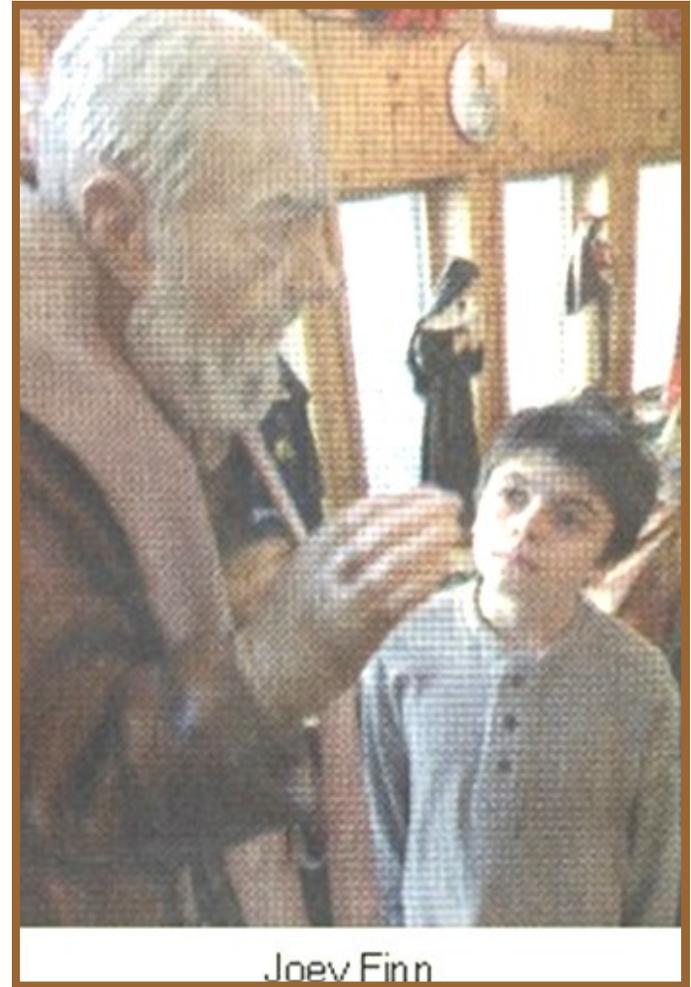
Joey had been able to purchase some very meaningful souvenirs of Padre Pio while in Italy. Back in Hudson, New York, he set up his own little shrine dedicated to his patron saint and placed it on display in his home. Quite unexpectedly, he even received a third class relic of the saint. A nurse who had heard about Joey was touched by his story. She sent him a very special gift. It was a Rosary which had been blessed by Padre Pio. One of her elderly patients had given it to her. "I believe that Joey found something in Italy which is of equal value to finding a cure for his disease," Melissa Finn said. "He found his faith, the strength that he will need in his lifetime to endure the challenges that lie ahead of him. He prayed, he listened, he learned ... He did this of his own free will and with great determination." In the final analysis, the greatest healings of all are those that take place in the human soul.



**Pope John Paul II kneeling
at the tomb of Padre Pio**

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Padre Pio and Joey Finn



Joey Finn

Joey had seen a documentary on the life of Padre Pio on the History Channel which had greatly inspired him. He learned about Padre Pio's stigmata, his prayer life, and his deep faith in God.

Padre Pio and Joey Finn

Joey Finn of Hudson, New York had been coping with severe asthma for most of his childhood. In 2005, when Joey was ten years old, he was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, an incurable disease that makes it difficult to breathe and eventually destroys the lungs completely. Joey's lungs already showed the damage from the disease and he would have to have breathing treatments twice a day for the rest of his life. The median survival age for those who have the disease is in the early thirties.

Shortly after Joey's diagnosis, his mother, Melissa Finn was introduced to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. The Make-A-Wish Foundation is a nonprofit organization which offers children with chronic, life threatening diseases, the opportunity to make a wish and have it granted. For the youth who daily struggle with incurable illnesses, the chance to have a wish come true can lift their spirits and enrich their lives. It gives them something positive to look forward to in life. The Make-A-Wish Foundation, in its ministry of compassion, has brought happiness to countless children.

When Joey said that he would like to submit a wish to the Foundation for consideration, his mother assumed that he would request a trip to Disney World in Florida. However, when he told his mother what he wished for, she could not have been more surprised. Joey wanted to travel to San Giovanni Rotondo to pray at the tomb of Padre Pio. He also wanted to see the holy father in Rome. Where did the desire come from? That is a good question. Joey did not grow up in a particularly religious household. Although the Finns were Catholics, they did not attend Mass on Sunday. As it turned out, Joey had seen a documentary on the life of Padre Pio on the History Channel which had greatly inspired him. He learned about Padre Pio's stigmata, his prayer life, and his deep faith in God. Like Joey, Padre Pio had suffered most of his life with poor health. He was afflicted with chronic breathing problems, including asthma and bronchitis. It was an acute case of asthma that was a contributing cause of Padre Pio's death in September 1968.

In thinking of her son's wish, Melissa had one deep concern. She was afraid that Joey would be crushed if he expected a miracle from Padre Pio and did not receive one. She talked to him about it and he assured her that was not the case. He had a devotion to Padre Pio and wanted to pray at his tomb. He intended to offer up his prayers for all the people in the world who were stricken with cystic fibrosis and to pray that there would someday be a cure. He was certain that there would be no disappointment in that.

One recalls that Padre Pio felt a great call to help the sick and suffering, not only through his daily intercessory prayers but also through concrete action. He founded the Home for the Relief of Suffering for that very reason. He spoke of it as his "earthly mission." There were many scoffers and detractors who doubted that the project

could ever succeed. But against all odds, the Home grew and prospered and has helped countless lives.

Joey Finn's wish was certainly one of the most unique that had been submitted to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Some of the popular requests included a shopping spree at the mall, an outdoor playground, and a trip to the Super Bowl. Occasionally, children requested a trip to Honolulu or Hollywood. But the request to visit San Giovanni Rotondo in southern Italy had to be a first. The Foundation checked with Joey's mother to make sure that it was his wish and not hers. She assured them that she was just as surprised as anyone else when she found out Joey's wish. Joey's request was finally approved and in June 2007, twelve-year-old Joey along with his mother, father and thirteen-year-old sister made preparations to travel to Italy. Their first surprise came, shortly after they boarded the plane. The pilot came over the loud speaker and proposed a question to all the passengers. "Is it true that Joey Finn, who is sponsored by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, is on board the plane?" the pilot asked. Joey's excitement intensified when the pilot asked him if he would like to step to the cockpit and turn the key to start the airplane. His reply was an enthusiastic, "Yes!" It was the beginning of an extraordinary journey for the entire Finn family.

The first stop on their remarkable pilgrimage was to Rome, where they toured the Vatican. They spent time at the beautiful Sistine Chapel, St. Peter's Basilica, the Catacombs, the Holy Stairs and more. Along with a multitude of others, they were able to see the Holy Father and to receive his papal blessing. Joey took many excellent pictures of the Holy Father.

In San Giovanni Rotondo, the pilgrims who were waiting in line to make a visit to Padre Pio's tomb, prayed the Rosary while they waited. Joey and his family joined in the prayers. They literally just squeezed into the church as it was closing that evening. Melissa was the very last person allowed to enter before the doors were locked.

Padre Pio's tomb was below the main altar of the church and was surrounded by an iron enclosure. People were able to draw very close to the tomb but the iron enclosure prevented anyone from actually touching it. On the evening of the Finns' visit, the little iron gate was unlocked and opened. All those who were present that evening were allowed to place their hand on Padre Pio's tomb. Melissa Finn was later told that the iron gate is customarily closed and locked at all times.