

# My Conversion Through Garabandal

by Roma Martino

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Although my parents were Catholic, and although I was baptised, they never practised their faith. God or religion was never mentioned in our home, except on very rare occasions when my father's friends from the old country, Yugoslavia (now Croatia), would visit, and the conversation would sometimes turn into gossip about a priest and his housekeeper. They had no respect for priests and just could not understand or accept that a man could remain celibate.

I attended a State school, and once a month a priest would visit the Catholic children, teaching us our prayers and preparing us for our First Holy Communion and later Confirmation. They were the only two times that I had set foot in a church.

During my teens I became friendly with a Catholic boy and spent quite a lot of time with his family who were very devout. They prayed the family rosary every evening. I was not impressed! I hadn't a clue about this rosary business. The mother gave me a rosary and a little booklet on the rosary. I learned to say it, hoping to make a good impression on my boyfriend.



Several years later, I met and married my husband who became a practising Catholic. After our marriage, I turned away from God, and he ceased receiving the Sacraments. In 1969, our marriage was going through a bad time. We had four children, the youngest was a one year-old, and I had become an alcoholic. I had always been a nervous, highly-strung person, even as a child, owing to the fact that my father had been an alcoholic. We owned a vineyard and he made his own wine. Many a time my mother would let the wine out of the barrels, which drove my father crazy, and grabbing his rifle he threatened to kill us. We'd have to run down the vines and hide for many hours in the night. *PHOTO: Roma Martino and her son.*

I had begun taking pills for my nerves at the age of 14. In 1968, I was taking 6 Librium and 6 Laroxyl per day, plus the alcohol. I was a complete mess. It was a miracle that I had survived. Towards the end of 1968, I spent a few weeks in the Mount Hospital, Perth, (Australia) recovering from a nervous breakdown.

My health or marriage did not improve. One night towards mid-1969, my husband told me that he could not stand any more and, if I didn't try to change my ways, he would leave and take the children. I felt so helpless, hopeless and useless. That night, lying in bed, I remembered Our Lady and the rosary of years gone by. I can recall saying that if she really existed to help me, because I didn't know where to turn. I could not help myself.

Meanwhile, my husband had turned back to God, and had started going to Mass on Sundays. He also began a novena to St. Anthony by attending Mass on Tuesday mornings at another parish named after that Saint.

## **An unknown lady**

Several weeks into this novena, he awoke very early this Saturday morning. He then woke me, saying that he couldn't get back to sleep, and had this great urge to attend Mass at St. Anthony's that morning, but could not explain why. I, personally, thought he had lost his marbles and told him so. Regardless of my opinion he went. After the conclusion of Mass, a lady unknown to my husband approached him and said that he needed help, that his wife was ill, and that the Blessed Virgin would help! Then she handed him a leaflet on the Apparitions of Garabandal.

My husband was quite astounded by the whole thing, and was afraid to tell me about the episode when he returned home from his business, for fear of an argument and ridicule. But that evening, God gave him the courage to tell me what had happened that morning, showing me the Garabandal leaflet. I can remember reading it, saying that maybe it could be true that Our Lady had appeared to four girls, but that did not interest or concern me! After much difficulty he eventually persuaded me to say at least one decade of the rosary with him. It ended up being five decades!

My condition still remained the same, except now, I was experiencing violent headaches and I couldn't get this Garabandal thing out of my mind. It never left me in peace. I also kept thinking about that unknown lady who seemed to know about our personal lives, that really irritated me!

My husband continued with his Tuesday Masses. After about two weeks of these violent headaches I decided to ask him if this strange lady attended Mass. She did! I was determined to get to the bottom of all this and asked my husband to get her name and address. Several more weeks passed by. I regret that a record of dates and weeks was not kept but, at the time, I was not aware of doing such a thing. Anyway I decided it was time to visit this woman. When I arrived on her doorstep I felt rather foolish. What would I say? But when this stranger answered the door, she immediately said that she had been expecting me!

I was completely taken aback. I could not understand any of this! The lady said that she knew it was my husband to whom she had given the Garabandal leaflet. She explained that, after she had attended the Tuesday Mass for a few weeks, on this particular Tuesday when the priest approached my husband to give him Holy Communion, Our Lady told her that my husband needed help, that his wife was ill, and that she was to give him the Garabandal leaflet and all would be well!

She always carried a leaflet in her bag, and intended to approach my husband after Mass, but he had rushed out before the Mass had ended. Then Our Lady told the woman that this man would be back on "Saturday morning", the morning when he awoke so early!

I was even more bothered and bewildered. I knew and understood nothing about religion. I was utterly confused!

## **A piece of kissed Missal**

*"I could not understand why Neville was standing there, smiling up at Our Lady. Then I remembered his hand and the relic."*

I found myself going back to see this lady again and again. Each time I received more knowledge about the Catholic religion, she even told me about Padre Pio. I couldn't grasp anything at the time about his stigmata!

On one of my visits she gave me a piece of Missal from Mari-Loli's prayer book that had been kissed by Our Lady at Garabandal. I didn't understand when she explained that this relic had cured sick people, that I

was to buy a locket, place this bit of paper therein and wear it around my neck. Rather strange I thought!

At this time our one-year old child had a very bad infection on the palm of his hand, being red, swollen and full of pus. The doctor had been treating him with antibiotics, but without success. He advised me to take Neville to Princess Margaret Hospital for children.

When I arrived home with this piece of paper, the Garabandal "relic", my husband suggested that we place it on our son's hand and ask Our Lady to cure the infection. I thought it was ridiculous, what could a bit of paper do for our child? But my husband insisted, and we said three Hail Marys.

The next morning, while preparing the table for breakfast in the dinette, I suddenly noticed our young son, standing in the lounge room looking up at a statue of Our Lady that my husband had recently purchased. I could not understand why Neville was standing there, smiling up at Our Lady. Then I remembered his hand and the relic. I rushed over to him. I was quite shocked to discover that all the redness swelling and pus had completely disappeared. In fact, his hand looked quite normal except for a piece of dried scab that I removed, revealing a small scar. That scar remained for many months. After that day the "little piece of paper" took on a new and special meaning for me. I purchased a locket and chain, and placed the relic therein. I am still wearing it to this day.

My life began to change. I wanted to know more about my Catholic religion. I received instruction from a Franciscan priest. I was amazed to learn that Jesus was present in the Blessed Sacrament, also about Heaven and Hell, the Angels and the devil, and especially about Mary. I began to pray every day, eventually receiving the Sacraments and attending daily Holy Mass.

I still wanted to have a drink, but it just would not go down my throat. The 12 nerve pills per day became a thing of the past! I don't remember exact dates nor exact numbers of weeks. I only remember that my conversion and cure occurred after July 1969, and that it was over a period of 6 - 8 weeks.

God is so merciful and good, and I cannot express in words what Our Blessed Mother means to me.

I kept in contact with the strange lady, who by the way is called Yvonne, and we became very good friends. I confided to her that I wanted to repay Our Lady in some way for all that She had done for me and my family. Yvonne then informed me that Our Lady wanted me to spread the Message of Garabandal. Yvonne had known about Garabandal for some time, but being the mother of six children she did not have the time or means to do anything about it, and Our Lady told her that She would send someone to spread the Message. That someone happened to be me.

Yvonne gave me a set of Garabandal slides and leaflets, and that was the birth of the first Garabandal centre in Australia. Now how Garabandal was introduced into Western Australia is another miraculous story, which I shall write about another time.

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