

Where's Rachael?

This article is based on an interview with Rachael Leonti by Barry Hanratty

By 1979 Rachael Leonti's back problem had gotten progressively worse. The attacks came more frequently, attacks that could land her in bed for more than a week at a time. Even when she was up and about her movements were restricted. She couldn't drive a car and had difficulty doing her household chores. Her doctor told her nothing could be done; she would just have to live with the problem. But then, in a rather unusual way, a healing began to take effect through the Garabandal kissed objects but this healing was so gradual that it wasn't until Rachael was completely free of her ailment that she realized what had happened to her.

Anyone who has been to the New York Garabandal Center in Lindenhurst on Long Island, New York, within the last ten years will have met Rachael Leonti or as Joey Lomangino affectionately call her, "Aunt Rachael." Along with Center coordinator Mary Tenety, Rachael, her husband, Silvio, and mother, Carmela Iandiorio, are central to the work of the headquarters. Rachael is the Center rosary makers' coordinator and supervises all special mailings and other work projects in addition to picking up the mail at the post office and helping Mary Tenety break it down. Silvio takes care of shipping and keeps the warehouse in tip-top

Rachael Leonti's new lease on life enables her to do things she never thought possible in her previous condition.



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shape. Carmela, Rachel's mother, is a hard-to-keep-up-with 90 years young rosary maker who helps out on other projects as well.

Rachael is also one of the world's great cooks. Old recipes come out perfect every time and new ones the first time. She just has that magic touch. And she's innovative. Rachael was making eggplant rollettes years before they appeared in the frozen food section of the supermarkets.

How does she explain her transformation from a person of limited mobility to the dynamo that she is today? She simply says, "I really think the Blessed Mother wanted me to work for her."

Eighteen Long Years

In 1960, Rachael had difficulty delivering the third of her eight children. "The labor was long and the delivery was hard and from that time I developed the back problem. It started getting increasingly worse with subsequent children I had after that. It got to the point where I was unable to

do a lot of housework or even pick up the children. There were times when the only way I could get around the house was to push a chair in front of me and walk behind it.

"I would get at least four or five attacks a year where I would have to stay in bed. Then I would be on muscle relaxers or pain killers which meant I couldn't do any of my chores; I'd be in bed for one or two weeks. And it was getting progressively worse. Sometimes it got so bad that I'd have to get around the house in a wheelchair. And if I wanted to do anything outside the house I would go with a cane or with crutches.

"There were times when I would be feeling fine. But if I bent down to pick up just a matchstick or something, the back could go right out and I would remain in the position I was in when my back went out. This went on for about 18 years."

Rachael had sought medical help. Her doctor diagnosed her problem as sacrolumbar sprain. As it worsened over the years she was told it was

chronic. She also had gone to a chiropractor who forbade her to drive a car.

Garabandal

In 1978, Rachael's husband, Silvio, became ill and was out of work for about a year. During his illness he asked Rachael if she had anything to read.

"I went rummaging through a box and found a book on Padre Pio that I had gotten at the Center in 1972." Rachael couldn't get involved at the time because of her many small children.

Silvio read the book and said, "That was great! Do you have anything else that I could read?" Rachael looked and came up with *Our Lady Comes to Garabandal* by Father Joseph Pelletier. Silvio was really taken by it and said, "Where is this place (the Center)? How come you never told me about it? Let's go there."

At this particular time, the Leontis were looking to add a more spiritual dimension to their lives and tried the charismatic prayer group at the local parish. "But," said Silvio, "It wasn't for me." Next they went to the monthly Holy Hour at the New York Garabandal Center held on the fourth Wednesday of each month. This time Silvio liked what he saw and heard and said to Rachael afterwards, "Let's come again." They did, and decided to get involved with the Center work.

With Silvio's blessing, because he was the driver, Rachael volunteered to become a rosary maker and went every Wednesday to learn.

An Attraction

As Rachael learned how to make the rosaries, she began to feel drawn to the Center and said to Silvio, "I don't know what it is. I feel like I always



It's a wonder Silvio doesn't have a serious weight problem with Rachael's culinary art.

A family portrait on the occasion of daughter Raquel's wedding, September 21, 1991.



want to go to the Center. There's something always drawing me there."

Rachael found herself going more and more often. "I used to go for the silliest little things: another bundle of string, another bag of beads and I think Mary (Tenety) knew it because she used to smile as if to say 'here she is again'. I felt there was something more I had to do but didn't know what it was. In the meantime, during the course of all this, I still had the same problem with my back."

Rachael told her friend, Anne DeNunzio, another Center worker at the time, of this feeling she had that there was something more she ought to be doing. Anne suggested she wait a week or two and just pray over it. Perhaps the Blessed Mother would manifest her desire in some way. Rachael recalled, "After about a week, Mary Tenety said to me, 'I'd like you to take over the rosary committee.' So I said to myself, I guess that's what it was."

Slain by a Kiss

Shortly thereafter, Rachael's back started acting up and she didn't think she would be able to handle her new assignment. But she was in for some surprises.

"I went to the Holy Hour at the Center and afterwards Joey asked if anybody wanted to go up and venerate the medal kissed by Our Lady at Garabandal and I did. As soon as he put the medal on me I felt something come over me and I just fell down on the floor. I didn't know what it was because it was the first time I had encountered it."

From this time on, whenever Joey touched Rachael with his medal she went down—and out. And it wasn't only Joey's medal. If anyone touched her with one of the small "relic" medals or with another kissed object, the same thing would happen. Ra-

chael didn't understand any of this. "I used to cry and get very upset. As soon as the object touched me, I would go right out on the floor wherever I was. If I were sitting, I'd fall off the chair but never get hurt."

Rachael felt embarrassed being the focus of attention and tried to prevent it. "I would say to myself, 'I'm going to be strong, I'm going to withstand it, nothing is going to happen to me', but it did. So even though I was trying to, I don't know if you'd exactly say fight it, it would happen anyway. I was more comfortable if I were alone with Joey or with Mary but if there were people there at the Holy Hour, I would do everything possible not to let it happen. That's why many times I wouldn't get on the line to venerate the medal."

But then it got to the point where all Joey had to do was take the medal out of his pocket and if Rachael were in the room, down she went. As it continued to happen, Joey would say as he reached for his medal, "Where's Rachael?" or "Silvio, is Rachael OK?" In other words, "Are you with her?"

One time as Joey was about to remove the medal from his pocket, Rachael, trying to prevent the inevitable, headed for the door. She didn't quite make it and slumped to the floor. Another time, as Joey was about to offer the medal for veneration, Rachael went upstairs and was with Mary Tenety who was doing some work in

the front office. She said to Rachael, "You can't run away from it." Something told Silvio he ought to go up to be with his wife. He climbed the stairs and was standing looking at the crucifix on the wall then turned just in time to stretch out his arms and catch Rachael who was falling straight backwards toward him.

One day, Rachael told her friend, Anne DeNunzio she wasn't feeling well and wouldn't be able to go to the Center. Anne decided to visit her at home. Rachael heard a knock at the front door and was surprised to see Anne. She invited her in for a cup of coffee. As they were walking toward the back of the house where the kitchen was, Anne, walking behind Rachael and without saying a word, suddenly took one of the small "relic" medals and placed it on Rachael's back. The next thing Anne knew, Rachael was falling backwards toward her.

Some Spectacular Falls

Once, Rachael fell straight over backwards and Silvio didn't get there in time to catch her. She hit the floor with a thud and Silvio thought, "There goes the back." But Rachael was not hurt. On another occasion, Rachael was standing with Silvio and Mary Tenety toward the rear of the downstairs room where the monthly Holy Hour is conducted. When Joey took out his medal, Rachael suddenly dropped to her knees and arching over backwards (!), cracked her head

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against the concrete floor. Silvio feared the worst but there were no after effects when she came to.

But perhaps the most spectacular fall occurred one afternoon in the dining room of their own home. Mary Tenety was there and Carmela, Rachael's mother who lived with them, was not feeling well. Mary offered to place the "relic" medal on Carmela who was a bit shaky. To calm her mother who was sitting at the dining room table, Rachael stood behind her and placed her hand on her. Mary Tenety stood beside Carmela. Against the wall behind them was a small table; there was just enough room between the back of Carmela's chair and the small table for Rachael to stand.

As Mary placed the medal on the mother, the power from the object passed through the mother to Rachael whose hand had been placed on the mother to calm her. Rachael suddenly dropped to her knees and went out. When she came to, she was arched over backwards with her head and upper body under the small table, facing up. To this day she does not know how she could have gotten into that position in such a small space. When Silvio got home from work and was told about it he just looked at the small table and said, "Impossible."

The Healing

Throughout this whole process Rachael was being healed. "I don't think we realized it right away. It took almost two years for us to make the connection." Over the course of those two years the attacks came less frequently and were less severe. Gradually, Rachael found herself doing things she hadn't been able to do before and would ask herself, "But how did I pick up that box?"

The "spells" were having their effect. If Rachael's back were bothering her, when she was blessed with the



kissed object, as was often the case, she received instant relief. "I was completely relaxed, at peace and I wasn't aware of anything around me. If I had had any pain before I went out, I had none while I was out—I didn't feel any pain at all—and when I came out of it I wouldn't have any."

It's now ten years since Rachael was cured. The visits to the doctor, the injections, all the medication, the crutches, the wheelchair are things of the past. At home she does all her chores and at the Center she goes up and down stairs, lifts cases of rosary materials, etc., without difficulty. And interestingly enough, this woman who was not able to drive a car for all those years, now is the *only* driver of the family mini-van since Silvio, due to an accident at work, lost some mobility in turning his neck and is unable to drive.

* * *

If you should ever come to the New York Garabandal Center monthly Holy Hour, you will probably see Rachael, once the rosary is finished,

Still standing. Joey Lomangino blesses Rachael with his medal kissed by Our Lady at Garabandal.

busy fulfilling requests for the perennial two or three people always clustered around her. That's "Aunt" Rachael, always on the job. She even makes the coffee. And by the way, in case you were wondering about those kissed objects that knocked her flat for over a year and a half; once she was completely restored it all stopped and she was able to venerate Joey's medal just like anyone else.

Why was Rachael Leonti "chosen" in this rather unusual way to be the worker for Our Lady that she is today? A glimpse into her past perhaps gives the answer.

"As a child I had a special devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel because I was born in Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish in Brooklyn. All through my teen years I kept a perpetual novena to Our Lady of Mount Carmel every week. She was special to me."

A Mother never forgets. □

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