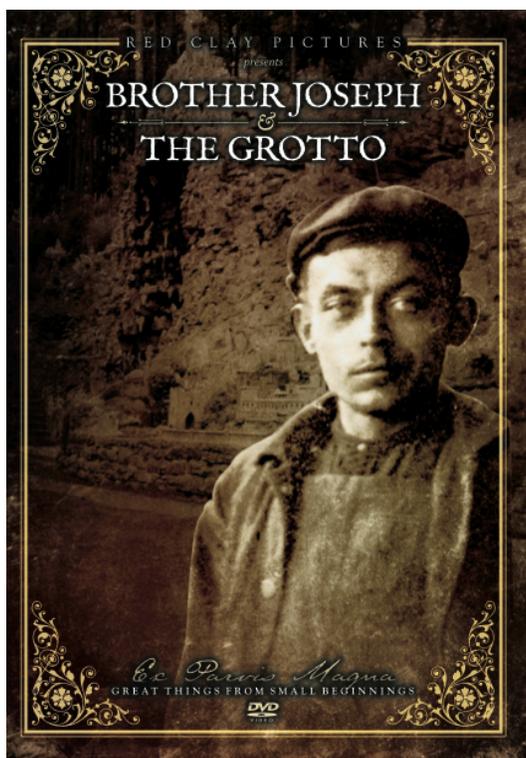


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BROTHER JOSEPH AND THE GROTTA



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SYNOPSIS

“Brother Joseph and the Grotto” tells the “true fairy tale” of Brother Joseph, the tiny Bavarian hunchback monk who built Ave Maria Grotto, a miniature city of recycled materials in the Alabama woods. Brother Joseph had a stepmother, took a long journey, got a new name, conducted a superhuman feat, lived in the woods, was “protected” by a godmother, and more – all features of classic fairy tales, which is why this documentary is framed as one and constructed of interviews, re-enactments, voluminous archival footage and storybook illustrations.

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New documentary tells the story of Brother Joseph and his quest to serve God in a small way through his life's work, the Ave Maria Grotto

Nashville, Tenn. – A new documentary film, “Brother Joseph and the Grotto,” is now available on DVD and for festival and sponsored screenings. The film tells the story of Joseph Zoetl, a hunchbacked monk from Bavaria and his quest to do something in a “small way” to serve God; which serves as the foundation of the creation of the Ave Maria Grotto at Saint Bernard Abbey in Cullman, Ala. The film was written and directed by veteran documentary-filmmaker Cliff Vaughn of Red Clay Pictures. Cliff got the idea for “Brother Joseph and the Grotto” from singer-songwriter Kate Campbell’s song “Ave Maria Grotto”; he also has a background in history and culture studies. Red Clay Pictures is based in Nashville, Tenn., with a satellite office in Birmingham that is headed up by Cliff’s sister and producer of “Brother Joseph and the Grotto,” Carol Ann Vaughn Cross.

“Brother Joseph and the Grotto’ is a true fairy tale about a young boy who immigrated to the United States and helped transform a small piece of land in the Alabama woods,” said Cliff Vaughn, writer and director. “It is also an inspiring tale involving folk art, Alabama history, perseverance, and a life of devotion.”

Cliff began his research for the film in 2011 when he began tracing Brother Joseph’s entry into the United States through Ellis Island in 1892. Other research uncovered a 1946 newsreel segment by Paramount Pictures, an unpublished manuscript by the monks at the abbey, and Brother Joseph’s personal album of more than 300 postcards from his family members in Germany. To clarify some of Brother Joseph’s biographical information, Cliff hired a researcher in Brother Joseph’s hometown. In addition, Cliff had extensive access to the abbey’s archives for research and to the abbey’s grounds for shooting scenes of the film. Cliff’s research also uncovered a common theme in the archives: references to Brother Joseph as a “little soul” in the tradition of both St. Therese of Lisieux and St. Francis of Assisi, patron of the new Pope Francis.

The story of Brother Joseph is fascinating in that he helped build Saint Bernard Abbey, but, according to the customs of the day, his hunchback prevented him from becoming a priest-monk. He could, however, remain at the monastery as a brother. He was sent to various parishes throughout the South to cook and clean for priests serving those at the turn of the century. He eventually returned to Saint Bernard where he built a small stone grotto to the Virgin Mary. It was blessed by Abbott Bernard, who mentioned that one day they would build a larger grotto.

In the meantime, Brother Joseph found inspiration from a book by Theresa of Lisieux, who wrote about her desire to serve God in a “little way.” At about the same time that he discovered the book, Brother Joseph began making miniature buildings of concrete and recycled materials. This he did for several years, placing them by his original little grotto. It was not until 1932, however, that Abbott Bernard approached Brother Joseph to build a big grotto down in the abbey’s old quarry. Ave Maria Grotto eventually opened to the public in 1934. Brother Joseph spent the next 25 years building more miniatures to place beside the big

grotto. These miniature masterpieces became known as “sermons in stone.” Brother Joseph died in 1961, and his funeral was held in the grotto park. Today the Ave Maria Grotto is hailed as one of Alabama’s leading tourist attractions.

Cliff goes on to say, “Closer scrutiny of Brother Joseph’s life and work has revealed a beautiful story – one whose new details only enhance the mystery in the abbey woods off I-65. We believe viewers will be as captivated by the magic and majesty of this single life, in service to God and others, as we have.”

“Brother Joseph and the Grotto” was also accepted for fiscal sponsorship by the Southern Documentary Fund, a non-profit organization with IRS 501(c)3 status. As a fiscally sponsored project of the SDF, “Brother Joseph and the Grotto” received tax-exempt contributions from individuals and granting sources that require non-profit status.

The film premiered at Saint Bernard Abbey’s newly renovated Abbey Byre for the Arts on Thursday, Oct. 17. Premiere hosts included Saint Bernard Abbey, the Cullman Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Cullman Economic Development Agency.

DVDs, which retail for \$19.95, begin shipping in late November.

INTERVIEWEES

Kate Campbell, singer-songwriter, whose song “Ave Maria Grotto” helped inspire the film

Brother Augustine Campion, O.S.B., member of the Saint Bernard community, who worked in the Ave Maria Grotto Gift Shop

Ruth Beaumont Cook, author, whose work on the history of Alabama marble figures into the film

Wayne Flynt, professor emeritus of history at Auburn University, who contextualizes Ave Maria Grotto within Alabama and world history

Abbot Cletus Meagher, O.S.B., the ninth abbot of Saint Bernard Abbey

Leo Schwaiger, who took over care of Ave Maria Grotto after Brother Joseph’s death

Julie Sears, widow of Monroe Sears, who dedicated his life to welcoming visitors to Ave Maria Grotto

Cliff Vaughn, writer and director of “Brother Joseph and the Grotto”

Father Marcus Voss, O.S.B., member of the Saint Bernard community and director of development

NARRATIVE TIMELINE FOR BROTHER JOSEPH

- Brother Joseph was born Michael Zoettl on Jan. 24, 1878. He survives a plunge into the icy River Isar, a flu epidemic and the death of his mother.
- After the arrival of his stepmother, he sails to America in January 1892 with Gammelbert Bruner, a monk en route to Saint Bernard in Alabama. Michael sees the Statue of Liberty, passes through Ellis Island and takes a train to the South, where German monks are building a monastery in the Cullman woods.
- Michael helps build the monastery, but an increasingly obvious back deformity (a hunch) means, according to the customs of the age, that Michael can never be a priest/father, only a “brother” at the monastery. Michael is renamed Brother Joseph and sent to various parishes just before the turn of the century to cook and clean for priests.
- Joseph eventually returns to his home abbey, where he builds a small stone grotto in 1905 to the Virgin Mary. Abbot Bernard blesses the grotto, says one day Brother Joseph can build a larger one, and eventually places the small monk in charge of the new powerhouse.
- It’s 1911, and Joseph is 33 years old but child-sized. He shovels coal and prays, prays and shovels coal for seven years. One day in 1918 he discovers something magical for him: a book by Therese of Lisieux. She writes about how she desperately wanted to serve God in some small way.
- Joseph treasures Therese’s book. As he reads, he begins crafting miniature churches of stone and concrete, placing them around his original little grotto. Local curiosity bothers some of the monks because the attraction is next to their recreation area. Abbot Bernard tells Joseph to halt construction about 1919 and to think of a new place to put the grotto and miniature buildings. Joseph suggests the old quarry, where the monks took sandstone for the construction of their abbey. But the abbot doesn’t agree to the plan ... yet.
- Joseph spends the next several years making “house grottoes,” tiny creations of concrete and miscellaneous materials. Visitors to the abbey purchase them ... and keep purchasing them for years. Joseph stops counting when the number of grottoes reaches 5,000.
- One day in 1932, in the midst of the Great Depression, when Joseph is 54 years old, Abbot Bernard approaches to say it is time: time to build the big grotto he mentioned years ago. Monks begin landscaping the old quarry, whose centerpiece will be a large grotto in honor of the Virgin Mary. It will be made of stone, concrete, broken marble and other discarded materials, and flanked by Joseph’s miniatures. Joseph spends two years constructing this grotto, which is opened to the public in 1934.
- Joseph thinks he is too old to do much more, but he spends the next *25 years* building more miniatures: St. Peter’s Basilica, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Alamo, Castle Trausnitz. Joseph spends the rest of his life making roughly 125 miniature masterpieces out of concrete, seashells, broken pottery, marbles, even cold cream jars and old bird cages. Joseph is an old-school recycler, turning discarded materials into sacred “sermons in stone” that everyone, even the smallest child, can see and appreciate.
- Joseph finally begins to slow down when he reaches 80 years of age. Now an old man—once a weak and unimpressive young boy—he has outlived most of his contemporaries. He dies at the abbey as the leaves fall in October 1961, and the grotto park holds the only funeral it has ever known. The monks bury Brother Joseph in the abbey cemetery, far from the land of his birth, but so very near to the birth of *his time*.

BACKGROUND & FUN FACTS

Ave Maria Grotto, a four-acre park in Cullman, Ala., featuring roughly 125 miniature buildings of concrete and recycled materials, was Brother Joseph Zoettl's life work. "Brother Joseph and the Grotto" reclaims the wonder and importance behind this location too often thought of as only an off-road oddity. Joseph's life illustrates not only a connection to his God, but also a connection to land and community. Embedded in the grotto park are history, art, landscaping, trial-and-error and, most of all, monuments to memory.

A "disabled" (Brother Joseph was a hunchback) and, some would say, marginal member of society fundamentally transformed a piece of land against the odds. Joseph used donated and discarded materials in an artistic transformation of his environment.

Preliminary research on "Brother Joseph and the Grotto" began in September 2011. Site visits began in October 2011. The script was completed in February 2012. Principal photography took place in June 2012, October 2012 and May 2013 at Saint Bernard Abbey in Cullman, Ala., and in Franklin and Nashville, Tenn.

The production scanned more than 1,000 images, and a translator spent four months deciphering and translating a collection of 381 postcards sent to Brother Joseph. An illustrator created 12 storybook illustrations specifically for the documentary, and the producers interviewed nine people and utilized 13 re-enactors (including a father and son who play the younger and older Brother Joseph).

DVD SPECIFICATIONS

The DVD of “Brother Joseph and the Grotto” includes the following:

- the feature film (82 minutes)
- a short version (43 minutes)
- chapter menus
- 3 additional vignettes about Brother Joseph and Ave Maria Grotto



The DVD retails for \$19.95 for home use and \$149.95 for institutional use (e.g. a school library). It is available at www.brotherjosephmovie.com and at the Ave Maria Grotto Gift Shop.

Other specifications:

- Aspect ratio: widescreen 1.78:1
- Language: English
- Audio: 5.1 Surround

A free, downloadable study guide for the film is available at www.brotherjosephmovie.com.

CREW

Cliff Vaughn (producer/director/writer/editor) is the principal at Red Clay Pictures. Under that banner, he made the documentaries “Immaterial John” and “Sawyerille,” both of which focused on unique individuals. He has also shot, edited, written, produced and directed eight documentaries and non-fiction videos for a religious non-profit, all focusing on social justice issues. One was awarded Best Documentary at the International Black Film Festival of Nashville, and another aired on more than 130 ABC-TV stations. He holds a doctorate in American culture studies from Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

Carol Ann Vaughn Cross (producer) teaches “Cultural Perspectives” and “Communication Arts” at Samford University in Alabama. She has made presentations to diverse academic, civic and religious groups, including the Society for Scientific Study of Religion/Religious Research Association; the Southern Historical Association; the Alabama Historical Association; and the Alabama Association of Historians. She is well connected in Alabama and has served on the boards of the Alabama Poverty Project, the Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform, the Leading Edge Institute, and the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation. She holds a doctorate in history from Auburn University in Alabama, with specialties in American religious history, gender, technology and culture, and the South.

Allen Laseter (cinematographer) is a professional cinematographer in Nashville with a resume as DP on short films, music videos (e.g. Big Kenny, Gretchen Wilson), commercials and television pilots. He holds a bachelor’s degree in film with concentrations in directing and cinematography from Watkins College of Art, Design and Film in Nashville.

Brad J. Halverson (composer) is a San Francisco-based composer who specializes in all forms of visual media. He is a multi instrumentalist, trained in classical and jazz. His music has been featured on numerous shows and networks such as ABC, Bravo, The CW, Lifetime, G4, Spike, OWN, Discovery and Animal Planet. Though mainly recognized for his quirky orchestral and dramedy compositions, he is highly versatile and can compose in a variety of styles. In 2012, he composed the main titles for “Real Vice: Miami” on Discovery, a show which featured an extensive amount of his cues. He has also worked with Specialized, CGMatic and Ubisoft, and has two documentaries set for release in 2013. In addition to his film and television work, he acts as an assistant sample editor and in house composer for Soundiron LLC, a Bay Area based virtual instrument developer, and participates in audio codec listening tests for Dolby Laboratories.

Jimmy Jernigan (audio post-production) has been active in the national recording scene for more than 15 years. His work covers a wide gamut of audio services, including recording, digital editing, mastering, and sound for picture. His clients include Warner Bros. / Word Music, Warner Chappell, Universal / Brentwood Benson, Lifeway, Hal Leonard Corporation, INO Records, and several independent music and film companies.

Mary Rose Pardales (production designer) has done production design, art direction, costumes and/or make-up on five student films. Pardales also interned at the Tennessee Repertory Theater, with a focus on props management. She is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in film studies, with a focus on production design and screenwriting, at Watkins College of Art, Design and Film in Nashville.

Seth Kiehl (illustrator) works as a graphic designer for Fellowship Bible Church in Nashville, and he has also operated Seth Kiehl Design for four years, where he works on a wide variety of solo and collaborative projects. He provides design, concept, illustration and identity work, and his clients have included Hayley and Michael

DiMarco, Drew Holcomb, Vanderbilt Medical Center and Tree Top Records. He studied graphic design at Millersville University in Pennsylvania.

Amber Wilkinson (hair and makeup) has worked in various production roles on more than 60 projects, including nearly a dozen as assistant director. Most recently she served as director of the unreleased Third Day music video, "Hit Me Like A Bomb." She graduated in May 2012 from Watkins College of Art, Design and Film in Nashville with a bachelor's degree in film producing. She currently works in Nashville at Last Dollar Studios as a content manager and visual media producer.

LINKS

Official movie site: www.brotherjosephmovie.com

Production company: www.redclaypictures.com

Fiscal sponsor: www.southerndocumentaryfund.com

Ave Maria Grotto: www.avemariagrotto.com

Saint Bernard Abbey: www.stbernardabbey.com

Cullman Economic Development Agency: www.cullmaneda.org

Alabama Tourism Department: www.alabama.travel