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Scholarship Essay

In just a few short weeks I will be attending Western University to complete the fourth and last year of my undergraduate degree. This fall is not only the mark of a new school year, but also the time when I help my nonni jar tomatoes, pickle cucumbers and package our prosciutto that has been hanging in their cantina since last spring. I look forward to this passing every year, and the only time I am more excited is when we cover our eight foot long kitchen table with *cannoli*, *amaretti*, *biscotti* and other pastries during the Christmas holidays. People often joke about the fact that I have been given a typical Canadian last name, but that I am very much Italian at heart. This is entirely due to my nonni who are basically my second parents. They were the ones who took care of me every day as a child when my parents were working. They are at every holiday, birthday, and Sunday night family dinner. So it was inevitable that the morals and values which they were raised with in Italy such as hard work, kindness and perseverance have been instilled in me. My nonni are a major part of my life and I am forever grateful for everything they have done for me.

Both my nonno Antonio and nonna Maddalena were born in Italy in the 1940's and eventually immigrated to Canada with their families in hopes of a better life. They both landed on Pier 21 in Halifax and I can still remember the day we went as a family to visit the exact site they landed so many years ago. It was haunting hearing the stories of their long boat ride across the ocean, seasickness, having no money or clothes and the overcrowded cattle train, or so Nonna described it as, outfitted with benches which transported them to Toronto. Once they

settled in Canada they quickly adjusted to the North American way of living, however they continue to carry on their Italian traditions to this day.

Just recently I had the honour to travel to Italy with my nonni to visit their hometowns for the first time since they left more than fifty years ago. This trip was one of the most emotional and memorable experiences of my life. The complete happiness that shone on their faces while showing us their towns and introducing us to family and friends is a picture I will never forget. They are both so proud of where they come from, and I too feel very fortunate to come from such a beautiful culture. My nonno grew up in a town just south of Rome called Ceprano. He lived on a small street overlooking a field, and tells us stories of going to church, helping on the farm and finding military artifacts at his favourite spot along the river he visited every day. His town was located near the battle of Monte Cassino and so many soldiers passed through, and left a trail of belongings behind them.

Both my nonni have contributed to the person I am today, however most of the Italian traditions that my family have carried through the generations, originated from my nonna. She grew up in Ripacandida, Potenza which is in the region of Basilicata. This rural town is situated on top of a hill surrounded by large valleys, and my nonna has always spoken fondly of the area where she made many cherished memories. She talks of the cantina her father made wine in, walking through the fields and vineyards her family owned, and walking through the churchyard which the towns people call the "villa". Most of the cooking I have been taught is what she learned from her mother and grandmother before her. We have spent countless hours in the kitchen making homemade sauce, meatballs, pasta,sausages, and pizza, I could go on forever. Religion has also always been something that my nonna and I shared. I was baptized, had my

first communion and got confirmed in the Catholic church. Easter and Christmas are important times in our family, but things such as the *Festa di San Donato* which is celebrated every year in August are also significant to my nonna. We have travelled to Blue Island to celebrate the festival with my nonnas friends who immigrated to that area from Ripicandida. There is a beautiful mass, many large and loud meals, and a huge carnival. I love going to celebrate at this festival because there is so much history surrounding it- the people from Ripacandida who moved to Blue Island built the church in their new city in honour of San Donato who protected their homes in Italy- and because I get to hear so many stories of my nonna and what she was like as a child.

My nonna has always been the one who has pushed me to go outside my comfort zone, try new things, meet new people, and be outgoing. She was the one who told me to be open to new possibilities as I started a new chapter of my life and attended university. My nonna taught me to always see the good in other people and have a positive attitude. This perspective and the fact that I love everything Italian, was what pushed me to join the Italian club at Western University. I was just a scared first year who wanted to meet new people on campus with the same interests as myself, and so I blindly went to the first meeting that year all on my own. Attending that event was the best decision I have ever made. This upcoming school year will be the fourth year that I have been a part of CIAO Western (Canadian Italian Awareness Organization Western), and the third that I am an executive member of the club. There are approximately a hundred and fifty members across campus and this number continues to grow every year. The CIAO Executive Team aims to provide Western students with a social setting to become engaged and interact through the common interest of Italian culture. We plan events such

as socials, Italian movie nights, briscola tournaments, intramural soccer teams, language classes, cooking schools and so on. Not only have I been able to take part in activities which I love, but I have met some of my closest friends through CIAO. This club has become such an important part of my life and I do not know what I would be doing if I hadn't had such an opportunity or the push from my nonna. I love that I can pass on the many teachings and stories to peers that my own nonni passed on to me. It is truly an amazing feeling.

My university education is very important to myself, my parents and my nonni. For myself I put everything I have into my education because I know that in today's world it is almost impossible to get a good, steady job without some sort of degree. My parents want me to excel in school because they support me in whatever I choose to do. Finally, as cliché as this sounds, my grandparents' only wish is that I get a good education since they did not have the opportunity to do so themselves due to factors such as language and monetary barriers. The whole point of my nonni leaving their beloved Italy was to ensure that their families had better opportunities and could pursue their dreams freely. Therefore, if I am recognized with this esteemed scholarship I will use the award to continue my education in hopes of making my parents and nonni proud. My goal is to go on to graduate school and work towards a MBA. I hope that one day I will be able to work with older adults in a long term care facility as a manager. I have always dreamt of doing this as I want to be able to help the older generations live the remainder of their lives to the fullest and help them keep their traditions alive. My nonni have taught me that passing stories, recipes, traditions and secrets from generation to generation is extremely important and I am a better person today because I grew up in a family that embraced their background. When my nonni went back to their birthplaces, they were welcomed back like they had only left to go for a

walk. This is what I love most about being Italian. The Italian idea of family is a strong, secure and lifelong bond that can never be taken away from you. This proverb says it best: "*Chi si volta, e chi si gira, sempre a casa vafinire*".