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My fondest childhood memories are the ones of Sunday lunches. Those days smell like wine in the cellar of my grandparents' basement and sound like lively conversation in Murese dialect. My cousin and I used to sit on the bench at the end of the table and we always got served our pasta first. Nonno performed card tricks and told stories from his own childhood: about how a blind man healed his broken arm, or how he cheated and won a pole climbing competition by putting cheese graters in his sleeves. Of course these lunches still occur; my friends always know what I'll be doing at one o'clock on a Sunday afternoon. "Pasta Sunday?" they ask. "Where else?" I respond. Sundays are still the highlight of my week for that reason, but they are not the same since Nonno passed away. My cousin and I give each other looks as we listen to the latest gossip—a debrief on the wedding from the night before, or Zio Mike's newest strategy to make his pizza restaurant better than all the others. We still sit together and laugh, but the two of us don't fit on the bench anymore. It felt like Nonno's death coincided with the end of my childhood.

My Nonno Gerardo was a man with a great deal of character. He enjoyed gardening, going for walks, and keeping track of the moon's cycles. He had two birthdays: one on the eighteenth of April, the day on which he claimed to have actually been born, and one three days later on the twenty first, which is the date on his birth certificate. Each year if we told him happy birthday on the eighteenth he would say we were too early, but then on the twenty first he would say we were too late. Although I was often around him it was hard to communicate, which is one

of my biggest regrets. The only time we really spoke was when he told me a joke —*una barzeletta*— in his broken English and I tried my best to understand. It wasn't until after he passed away and I got older that I realized how similar I am to him. We both enjoy reading and writing and are curious about the world. My mother found his old notebook where he wrote down stories and made lists of all the countries in the world and their capital cities. I couldn't read most of it, but I still looked through and admired the whole thing.

Upon this discovery I had the urge to return to Italy, and this summer my family and I finally did. We had been there before, but it was different this time around. The last time we went was five years ago and thirteen year old me did not appreciate Italy the way I do now. Back then Nonno was still alive; I didn't quite see the importance of the place I was from or understand that time was fleeting. My parents have always made it a priority to keep in touch with our relatives on the other side of the world, and I'm lucky that they've taken me and my siblings back several times now.

While we were in Italy we visited the region of Basilicata and went to Potenza, Matera, and most importantly Muro Lucano, the hometown of my mother's parents. Walking through the streets of Muro I felt as if I was entering another dimension. My body was in the present, but my mind was soaring through the past. It was all a bit surreal walking down streets that my grandparents once did, trying to envision what their lives must have been like like. My nonni and their three children came to Canada in 1960 on the *Queen Frederica*. They sailed from Napoli to Halifax, Pier 21, and then spent three days travelling by train to Winnipeg. They decided to make this major life change so that their children and grandchildren could have all the opportunities that we now do. And there I was in the town where it all began: walking beneath the very same balcony my Nonno once did the day he saw my Nonna standing up there all those years ago,

going inside the church where they were married, thinking about how this town shaped their lives. I asked myself “Why is this town so important to me?” And now I know: because if it wasn’t for this small town nestled on the side of a mountain my life would not be the same.

On a couple of occasions we headed down the mountain and visited the farm of Gerardo Bianchini, a man I do not think I will ever forget. I was surprised to know that he knew Nonno. That image of the farm stuck with me; it was truly the happiest place I have ever been. Mr. Bianchini and his wife led lives that were so simple yet so fulfilling, and it made me wonder if I could do the same. Seeing a completely different lifestyle than my own taught me to appreciate little things, and seeing how proud Mr. Bianchini was as he showed us around his garden taught me the importance of doing something you’re passionate about. I couldn't help but imagine what it would be like if my own grandparents had stayed in Basilicata; they would probably have a garden just like that one, surrounded by the vast expanse of land and the great green mountains on the horizon.

Here in Winnipeg there is a garden at my grandparents’ house, although one on a much smaller scale. When we were younger my cousins and brother and I used to play in the garden and pretend we were living off the land, which we always swore we could do if it were necessary. Nonno helped us pick peas and carrots and fava beans and played *bocce* with us on the grass. My favourite was when he showed us his spinning top. We watched in awe as he would slip his hand under it and pick it up, still spinning, and place it into one of our hands.

In Muro Lucano there is an area called *le case antiche di San Nicola* where there are ruins of what were the first houses in the town. It was incredible to see just how much older everything is in Europe compared to a much younger Canada. Exploring the thousand year old ruins was extremely insightful. Of course we can always look back and guess at how history

began and see how the world has changed and progressed over time, but we will never know how time will eventually play out. One day the whole town of Muro Lucano may be abandoned just like the ruins. When the older generations are gone who will inhabit it? When their children move away what motivation will they have to return? Who will remember the town if not us? This is why I feel that it is important for my generation to see where we came from and never forget it, because although we may never have lived there or some of us even seen it, we are still deeply connected to it.

When my mother was nineteen she spent a year in Perugia going to school and learning Italian, because her culture is important to her as well, and she has instilled these same values in her children. I am hoping to do something similar someday in the near future. When asked, I identify as being Italian although I am second generation Canadian, and am quite proud of the fact that all four of my grandparents came from Italy. I would love to visit Italy again soon, this time on my own so that I can learn more about the country where my family came from, and spend time with my wonderful cousins there. It is a goal of mine to learn Italian so that I can communicate with the older generations and hear their stories, read Nonno's writings, and help to preserve my Basilicata culture so that it does not become a distant memory like *le case antiche* in Muro Lucano.