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Basilicata Cultural Society of Canada Scholarship Joint Istituto Italiano di Cultura/
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Scholarship Application

Growing up in a predominately Italian neighbourhood, I was fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to learn Italian at my elementary school. Every year started the same, "Io mi chiamo Julia. Sono una ragazza italiana. La mia mamma è dalla Basilicata e..." As soon as I would announce this province, my fellow classmates would all have blank looks on their faces. "Bas-il-i-ca-ta?" With common answers such as Lazio, known for the Coliseum and Veneto, known for the gondola, very few of them had a clue Basilicata even existed, let alone all that it has to offer. However, other than the stories my mother told me about her childhood there and the few pictures I had seen, neither did I.

On December 8, 1966, at the age of six, my mother, her three siblings, and my Nonni emigrated from the small town of Vaglio, Basilicata to Toronto, Ontario. Growing up, the "Vagliese" culture has always been a part of my life. Whenever I visited my Nonna, she would often make typical "Vagliese" dishes, such as "gli strascinari," and "salsicce." Recently I realized that many of the traditions my family has followed over the years come from our "Vagliese" roots. For example, before she passed away, my Nonna would make two dishes called "maccheroni con la mollica" and "baccalà". Every Christmas eve, my entire family looked forward to having these dishes together with my Nonni. Why such a simple tradition seemed so important in our holiday festivities often confused me as a child. It was not until a few years ago, during my first visit back to my

mother's hometown that I realized the impact that the small town of Vaglio and the region of Basilicata has had on my family, my life, and myself.

I remember the day like it was yesterday, July 12th, 2006, the first time I set foot onto Basilicatan soil. It almost seemed like my Nonni had been preparing me for this visit for years through their dialect, food, traditions, and simple lifestyle. However, few words could describe the emotions I felt being in the place where it all began. Upon first arriving in Potenza, my family was greeted by one of my many "Vagliese" relatives, Antonio. With a warm smile and heartfelt welcome, he took us up the mountain to the town of Vaglio. The scenery was breathtaking – miles of beautiful farms, small towns, herds of animals, and vast grasslands – even more beautiful than in the pictures. As soon as we arrived, we were introduced to "zii, cugini, paesani, amici", and more, all of whom were pleasantly surprised to see how far we had travelled to visit the small town. Each person generously opened up their home to us and ensured we were very well fed with homemade meals and biscotti before we left. In such a loving and welcoming environment, filled with food, conversation, and family, I felt like I was visiting my Nonna's house. I felt right at home.

During our stay in Vaglio, we had the opportunity to attend a traditional "Vagliese" wedding. It was interesting to see how different the celebration was from a Canadian/Italian wedding. In Vaglio they still follow the old tradition where the bride and all of her guests walk through the town to the small church, "La Chiesa del Carmine." Walking to the church, I envisioned my Nonni on their own wedding day in 1950 following the same tradition.

After settling down in the town, we began exploring. It was interesting to hear my mother talk about various landmarks in Vaglio that she remembered from her early childhood and numerous visits growing up. We were able to visit the town church, the farm, my Nonna's old house, and much more. I was amazed that most of the buildings were hundreds of years old and still standing. One of the sights that I was most anxious to see was my Nonno's farmhouse. Growing up, I had seen pictures of my older cousins standing in front of it and heard multiple stories of my Nonni living there. Finally, I had my chance to see a family landmark. The farmhouse and its surrounding land had been in the family for generations. Unfortunately, time took its toll on the small house, which at that point had no roof and was slowly falling apart. However, to be able to stand in front of this stone house was almost surreal. Essentially, this house represented my Basilicatan heritage. I knew standing on the cracked porch that I belonged to a strong family with simple roots, which has ultimately shaped me into the person I am today. As I stood in awe, I listened to my mother tell stories of her childhood time in this house and began to understand the life of a young Italian family in Basilicata and the struggles of the early sixties. "The biggest struggle," my mother recalled, "was keeping the family together. With Nancy, 15, and Antonella, 14, both starting high school, and myself, 5, and Rocco, 5, starting elementary school, the family would have been separated." Living in a small farm town, there was only an elementary school and the nearest high school was quite a distance to travel everyday. The only way for everyone to attend school was to split up the family. Ultimately, my Nonni decided that keeping the family together was very important, and they decided to move to Canada. I often feel that the strong bond that I have with my entire family comes from my Nonni and their upbringing in Vaglio. My

Nonni always made sure that the entire family came together from time to time to share meals, celebrate life, and to be thankful for everything we had. Through their love for each other, their children, and grandchildren, they have taught me the importance of family and having a strong work ethic.

The time I spent in Vaglio was one that I will cherish for the rest of my life. By being able to immerse myself in the "Vagliese" culture, I developed a greater appreciation for my heritage and my family. While at a young age I may not have been able to understand why we followed certain traditions, I am now able to appreciate them and I will ensure that they will be followed for many years to come. The "Vagliese" culture has directly and indirectly shaped my life. The simple, wholesome upbringing of being raised on a farm and following traditions passed down from previous generations, that both my Nonni and my mother received in Vaglio has affected the individual I have become today. They have taught me the importance of hard work, dedication, and most importantly, family. I am certain that in the future I will carry on the "Vagliese" tradition with my children, and pass the same morals down to them.

In the fall of 2010, I will be entering my first year of studies at the University of Toronto. I would like to pursue an undergraduate degree in economics. If I were to be awarded the Basilicata Cultural Society of Canada Scholarship Joint Istituto Italiano di Cultura/Basilicata Cultural Society Scholarship, it would be used to ease the cost of attending University. I would be humbled and honoured to receive this scholarship. I am proud to have been blessed with a family who has carried on the Basilicatan culture. Thank you for allowing me to apply for this scholarship.