

Megan Elena Keane

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Basilicata Cultural Society of Canada Scholarship Essay

My name is Megan Elena Keane. I am extremely proud of my Basilicata/Lucania heritage. My mother Rosa and her family came to Canada from Italy to be with my nonno Vito as he found work in Canada in order to mail money home to support his wife Nunzia and his four children. At the time my mother's family very much missed my nonno and they wanted to be close to him in Toronto. They did eventually move to Toronto and that is how my story began. There is so much that I love about my mother's language and culture that it has now become very much part of who I am which defines a great part of how I view the world.

My nonno has had kidney disease for five years. This summer I have taken him to dialysis at the Toronto General Hospital three times a week to keep him company and make sure he is as comfortable as possible and assured. When I first sat in the dialysis unit with him I often wondered how he has such a vigorous temperament and strength. I decided to do a little research about Basilicata and its people. I discovered an article dedicated to the description of the Lucani people from Italy. It stated that they were recognized by others for their tenacity and resilience. The Lucani are very proud and hardy people which I can see in my nonni, my mother and her siblings.

Even though my nonno is four years shy of his ninetieth birthday and has kidney disease, he still wakes up regularly at 6:00 AM in the morning during the spring, summer and early fall to work on his small garden before he goes for his dialysis. Since my nonno immigrated to Canada, he has planted the seeds and then picked the final tomatoes of the season except for one year when

he had surgery, This is what he lives for; he can work with land no matter how harsh and produce sweet vegetables which I have been told is the very meaning of being a Lucano.

Ever since I can remember I have been asking my mother and her family to share all their stories about Basilicata and their home town of Montescaglioso. I have listened to them speak about life ranging from the *Festa di San Rocco* and *Carnevale* to how my nonni were not able to buy much food but still enjoyed eating *pane e cipolla*. Now that I am older, I truly understand the hardships my mother's family had to endure in order to live a happy life in both Italy and Canada.

My mother Rosa Santarcangelo was born in Matera but her family is originally from Montescaglioso. My mother and her family immigrated from Montescaglioso to Toronto in December 1975 but they had to move to other countries prior to coming to Canada. My nonno Vito Santarcangelo originally immigrated to Brazil in 1960 to look for work. He had to leave my two year old mother and my nonna Nunzia Mianulli pregnant with my zio Nicola. The whole family eventually moved to Brazil in 1960. However life became very difficult for my nonni so they had to return to Italy in 1965. My nonno again was unable to find work in the almost poverty stricken region; he ended up immigrating to Germany and sent money to his four children and wife in Montescaglioso. My nonno made many sacrifices while in Germany; eventually life became very hard and he decided to ask his brother Giuseppe Santarcangelo to sponsor his wife and their four children to come to Canada.

Once in Canada, my mother's family had to deal with numerous hardships because my nonno was the only breadwinner. He has a grade eight education and has worked in scrap yards using his bare hands and hardiness to earn a living most of his life. Today he has lung problems as

a result of being exposed to asbestos while working with car parts. Despite all these harsh times in their lives my nonno and his family were able to keep their Lucano spirit alive.

When they left their home in Montescaglioso they brought their traditions, customs and recipes to Toronto. I vividly remember asking my mother when I was very little to cook *cialledda* which is a soup made from bread. My nonna and my mother make it with olive oil and garlic. I would sit in the kitchen eating my *cialledda* pretending I was eating it in my mother's home town amongst its beauty and tranquility. Back in Montescaglioso my nonno would prepare this dish either when they did not have much money or they had stale bread that they did not want to waste. Even though this dish is not very extravagant, it is one that cannot be forgotten about. Another delicious food is *le pettole*; an old recipe that has been passed down from generation to generation. My nonna and I would spend hours making *pettole*. This delicious dessert was especially prepared on December 15 for *La Sagre delle Pettole*. The dishes that my nonni cook are very simplistic but they truly represent all the things that Montescaglioso and the Region Basilicata have to offer.

Religion, being a very important part of the Basilicata and Lucania culture, was heavily practiced in Montescaglioso. They celebrate *San Rocco*, the Patron Saint of the town every year in the *Festa di San Rocco*. The feast celebrates St. Rocco's miraculous intervention that saved the people of Montescaglioso from an earthquake. Even though my nonni are in Toronto they try to keep this tradition alive by going their local Roman Catholic Church which has a small celebration for San Rocco. It makes them feel like they have a small piece of their home town with them in Canada.

Seeing my nonni practice the Basilicata culture, I feel that I have a strong link to this region. I am able to picture in my mind Basilicata's charm, natural beauty and majestic towns. But most of all I see the love that my mother's family has for their town; now this love has been bestowed unto me and I am truly grateful that I can share this with my brother and my father's extended Irish Canadian family. The Basilicata customs and traditions and way are strongly visible in my home and have become part of who I am. I feel fortunate that my family has provided me with the opportunity to experience Basilicata's unparalleled beauty through their stories and traditions. Now, while sitting with my nonno in the dialysis unit I no longer wonder about his past but rather let it run through my mind and feel like I was once there with him.

One of the reasons why my nonno and nonna came to Canada was to have a better life and more opportunities for their children. My nonni did not want their children to endure the hardships they endured by moving from county to country; Toronto seemed like the best place to stay because of the vibrant Italian community that was growing here. My mom was the eldest of four children and was able to complete her university education with an honours degree. She took nursing at the University of Toronto and is now a successful nurse practitioner. I see the tenacity and determination of the Lucani people in her which inspires me to vigorously pursue a better life through education.

I am now doing as my mother did and going to the University of Toronto to study the Life Sciences and hopefully get into medical school and become a nephrologist. I want to help courageous people like my nonno, who deserve the best care in surviving kidney disease and perhaps one day reduce the pain of dialysis. He suffers and if anyone deserves a better quality life then it should be a person like my nonno that came from a place that is both sweet and harsh. It has taught me the value of persistence.

Should I be awarded with the scholarship, the money would be used to pay for my tuition and education at university to get into medicine so that I can someday travel to Basilicata and my mother's home town so that I can see with my own eyes what I have been told.

I am very thankful to the Basilicata Cultural Society of Canada for encouraging me to further discover and reflect upon my Basilicata's heritage. I hope that someday I become a successful nephrologist. I will take my cultural background from the Lucani to work hard even in difficult times but always be welcoming to those that need help and assistance.