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Basilicata Cultural Society of Canada
Scholarship Application

There are certain childhood events that have the capability to stick with you from the moment it happens to years later when it is only a slight memory. For me, those events include the day I learned to tie my own shoes, the first puppy my dad brought home, passing my ballet examinations, and the first time I walked the streets of Grassano, the town my nonni grew up in, in the beautiful province of Matera. I was 15 years old and my parents took my brother and I to Italy for the first time. After touring the major cities like Rome, Florence, and Milano, we changed gears and spent some time in the small town of Grassano, Basilicata. It was like another world. I remember constantly tripping over the uneven cobblestones because my head was always up, either watching the women hang their fresh laundry from the windows or I was looking at the vibrant red peppers hang off the wall. From that point on, I felt a connection with Basilicata and my ancestors that would define the person I am today and what I believe in.

Growing up with a Chinese mother and an Italian father, I quickly learned the importance of embracing diversity in a family and appreciating what every family member brings to the table. The value of growing and learning together is priceless. The rock of the family was always my Nonna Filomena. She welcomed my mother into the family with open arms and taught her to cook her favorite Italian dishes. The joke in the family is that my mom can cook Italian food better than she can cook Chinese. When I was 6 years old my nonna suffered from a stroke and for the next eleven years was partially paralyzed, which also impaired her speech. Every Sunday we would drive up to her nursing home in Woodbridge, pick up some banana popsicles and spend the afternoon outside with her. Although she couldn't speak, somehow she found a way to communicate with everyone. She was always the life of the party, and never let her disability stop her from going out. Even when things got bad, she would find strength and courage in her family. When I was seventeen years old, my nonna encouraged me to return to Italy and spend my summer there studying the Italian language with *Centro*

Scuola. That same summer she passed away. To this day I still wonder why things happened that way. It was hard for me to not have been with her during that time. All I wanted to do was leave the school and jump on a plane back to Canada. Looking back now, I realize that everything happens for a reason. That summer I learned a lot about the legacy of my grandparents. Through talking to my family in Italy, I learned a lot about the way my nonni lived their lives, their morals and values in life, their work ethic, the importance of building strong friendships that will last a lifetime and their passion for family. That summer, Italy and my hometown Grassano became more than just a gorgeous vacationing spot. It became a place that has influenced and shaped my life, a place that will never let me forget where I came from. I returned to Canada confident in the fact that these deep cultural roots still exist in my family. It is now up to myself to discover the historical stories of my nonni, to continue their traditions and to retell their legacy to my children and future generations.

It has been 4 years since my last visit to Grassano. In that time I started my university degree at the University of Western Ontario, where I am also minoring in Italian studies. Before entering my final year, which starts this September, I felt that it was time to return to my hometown in Italy and visit my cousins. This past June I worked as an English tutor in northern Italy, teaching English to Italian children ages seven to eleven with the company *Lingue Senza Frontiere*. Was that ever an experience! It was amazing to watch the ambition and courage in these young children, as they tried to make sentences and communicate to each other in English. How frustrated and emotional they would become when they didn't know how to say certain words. I thought about my grandparents when they left Basilicata to come to Toronto, and how hard it must have been for them to leave everything they knew. When I went back to Grassano for the first time, a cousin took me to a baptism celebration down the street. When I arrived I was introduced as the granddaughter of Angelo. Immediately all the friends of my Nonno Angelo came up to me and started telling me stories about him growing up, and how much of a great person he was. My nonno passed away when I was only two years old, so I never really got to know him too well. However, listening to his friends talk about him, and watching them laugh uncontrollably as they went through

memory lane with me made me feel like I was apart of it all. I now know that my nonno was the one who brought back zucchini in his shoes every trip from Grassano, and that him and his brothers even brought back a bird that accidently got loose on the plane causing a ruckus for the rest of the passengers the entire flight. He had a passion for all birds. Nonetheless, it was all these stories and memories that I could only discover by going back to Grassano, that enrich my past and keep me feeling so connected to the region of Basilicata.

I just returned from Italy this mid-August to prepare for my graduating year. I'm still pleasantly full of "il formaggio di Grassano, la salsiccia di Grassano, e il vino di Grassano" as my cousin Severio would say. Being surrounded by people that are still so proud and passionate about their Basilicata roots encourages me to genuinely share that passion and continue to learn about my heritage. I am twenty-one years old, and at this point in my life, I'm really starting to grasp what my grandparents instilled in my parents and what they have instilled in me. Life isn't all about social status and possessions. It's about being present in the moments in life that bring you joy. Enjoying an espresso with my dad, going for a passeggiata with my mom, watching a movie with my brother. I've been blessed with a unique and supportive family that has allowed me to explore every opportunity that has come my way. Should I have the honor of receiving this scholarship, I will use it towards helping fund my future master's program after earning my undergraduate degree next year. I am also hoping to teach English again next summer in Italy, therefore part of the scholarship will help with my airfare to Italy. The incredible Federico Fellini once said; "There is no end. There is no beginning. There is only the infinite passion for life." It is the passion in the Italian people that keep our beautiful culture so strong to this day. It is the passion that keeps us united. It is the passion that keeps us present. I am so proud to be of Grassanese descent and look forward to future discoveries I will make about "la storia" of my ancestors and my past.