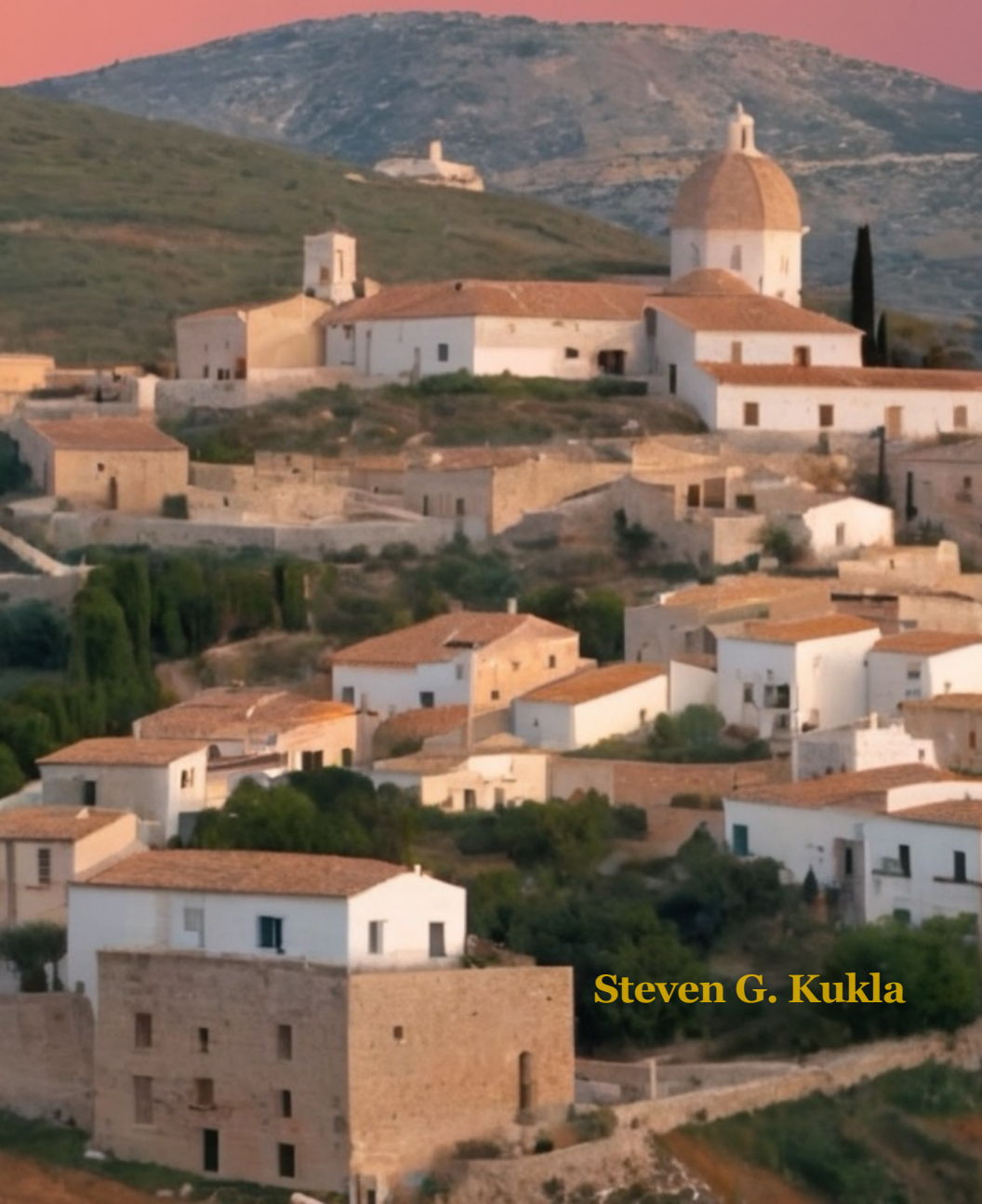


Strong Roots, Good Fruit

Monteleone di Puglia - A Fantasy, 2nd Edition



Steven G. Kukla

Opening Music: <https://tinyurl.com/a4uju56c>
Strong Roots, Good Fruit Song: <https://tinyurl.com/ynny6mhbt4>

*In northwest Puglia, an old man finds,
Ancestral roots, with ties that bind.*

*The mayor tells the village tale,
Of peace and change that now prevail.
Migrant homes and murals stand,
Testament to a gentle land.*

*Yet it's crest, a lioness in fight,
Seems misaligned in this new light.
He writes a tale, both grand and wild,
And dreams a new crest, spirit-styled.*

*In marble, he carves his vision clear,
A gift to hold their values dear.
Symbols blend, both old and new,
Strength and peace in every view.*

*For when a viewer takes a glance
It's face reflects their countenance.
A communion of a mystic grace,
Transcends across both time and space.*

*Through marble's form and story's art,
A village's essence, heart to heart.*

Strong Roots, Good Fruit

Monteleone di Puglia - A Fantasy, 2nd Edition

Steven G Kukla



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Cover design by Steven G. Kukla

Illustrations by author using photographs, Leonardo.ai, Microsoft Image Generator, OpenAI DALL·E 3 (2024) & OpenAI ChatGPT 5 (2025)

Digital music and CDs created by Suno AI, MasterChannel, Distrokid, and Diskmakers with author's contribution of original song lyrics, song structure, arrangement, instrument selection, and prompt refinements.

My heartfelt thanks to Stefano Ammirati of Southern Italy Travel, Mayor Giovanni Campese of Monteleone di Puglia, master marble artisan Massimo Baldoni, master marble toolmaker Antonio Mazzoni, and my wife Cynthia and son Daniel whose actions, inspiration and support made this project possible.

I dedicate this book to the memory of my Italian grandparents Angelo Gualtieri of Baranello (Molise) and Maria Assunta Capobianco of Monteleone di Puglia.



Baranello and Monteleone di Puglia

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Introduction

During April 2024, my son Daniel and I hired Stefano Ammirati of Southern Italy Travel, a brilliant Italian genealogist and translator, for a “roots tour” of the birth villages of my Italian maternal grandparents. There we discovered living descendants, forged bonds with places that were formerly just dots on a map, and met people who were once unknown faces in a box of old photographs. I certainly did not expect this trip would trigger a creative outburst to write a story, compose songs, and create a marble sculpture.

In my grandfather’s village of Baranello in southern Molise, we met mayor Riccardo Di Chiro, toured the sights, and were joined by my mother’s first cousins Giovanni and Antonia, who led us through the *cimitero* (cemetery) where our ancestors are buried. We then visited the *contrada* (hamlet) about 3 kilometers outside Baranello, where our Gualtieri clan still live. We viewed their homes, gardens, barns, vineyards, church, and looked upon the beautiful green, steep wild lands that spread out westward to the Matese mountains. We feasted on bread, wine, cheese, salami, and prosciutto, all homemade from the bounty of their land and their wild boar hunts.

We then traveled to my grandmother’s birth village of Monteleone di Puglia, a hilltop village *comune* (township) of highest elevation in the province of Puglia. Tears were shed when we tasted the sweet waters of the village spring fountain, where our Capobianco ancestors hauled water and hand-washed their clothes. And more tears, when we saw her stone birthplace built into a rock wall, now laying in ruins - a harsh reality of her early life, before her family left the village for Canada in 1906, and to the USA in 1913.

Mayor Giovanni Campese spent the morning as our personal tour guide, detailing every aspect of the village structures and citing its importance as an early crossroads for travelers, and shepherds, who took their flocks along the *tratturi* (sheep paths) that stretch from alpine meadows northwest, to the plains overlooking the Adriatic Sea southeast.

He then outlined the village history, stressed the unique character of its people, and highlighted impressive, recent initiatives and accomplishments powering its transformation:

- Model for successful integration of asylum seekers & refugees into Italian society.
- Heritage of woman-led resistance to fascist oppression and religious intolerance.
- Mission as a village of acceptance, peace, and non-violence, with strong support for peace advocacy, creating a Center for Peace Education, hosting international conferences and annual award ceremonies.
- Innovation and creation of large-scale street art murals and a graphic novel, which highlight and commemorate the village's transformation.

After our tour, he took us into his office for a photo in front of the village crest, a coat of arms banner of a classic heraldic lion standing atop 3 hilltops. When he learned I am an amateur sculptor and stone carver, he said the village once had a school for stone masonry and carving. I noted many beautiful, decorative stone carvings, on most door archways and walls throughout the village homes and buildings.

The Mayor then paused, looked deeply into my eyes, and said:

*"Their strong roots made good fruit.
Your grandmother left, but you returned.
We accept you back as Monteleonese.
Perhaps you can one day make us a sculpture,
for permanent display in our village."*



Coat of Arms of Monteleone di Puglia

On the return flight home, I was filled with emotion, even deeper gratitude, and a strong drive to act in some way. My mind caught fire with a burst of imagination and creativity, and a story - this story - arrived complete in my mind, and an idea for a sculpture for the village emerged.

While everyone slept around me, I filled pages and pages of my notebook with ideas, sketches, and snippets of stories and songs. I could not wait until I got back home, to begin working, not just on a sculpture, but to help tell an amazing story of a far off place that is now a part of me.

The history of most places tells us of great suffering, war, calamity, oppression, intolerance, countless innocent victims of political actions and violence, persecution of those who are different, and many other woes. Yet it also reveals stories of great courage, faith, hope, strength, diligence, determination, compassion, good deeds, and wise actions of brave people caught in such strife.

The forces and winds that tear down people and places are challenged and countered by the efforts of such brave ones, whose inner resources guide them to act. Some act based on religious beliefs, others by moral and ethical codes they live by, and some by inspiration and an inner knowing of what is right and just what needs to be done in situations. They then rebuild, defend, seek justice, advocate, offer helping hands, tolerate differences, and serve as leaders, guides and those who hold the light for others to follow.

I learned these important insights and wisdom through the stories and history of the village, as told to me by the inspirational mayor of Monteleone di Puglia. And I was utterly amazed to learn how a village of 900+ people boldly redefined itself.

In addition to creating a sculpture, I decided to write this companion tale to capture what I learned about the village, its history, and the villagers' unique driving spirit.

The sculpture is a standing lioness, carved in white Carrara marble. In the story, I include references to the lioness in each Act (chapter). I think of it as a powerful symbol for the spirit of the village, as well as a wise teacher. And some of my Italian ancestry (and my Slovak side too) is reflected in a few of the names and characters used in the story - but in a hidden way. I had so much fun writing the tale and these songs, and I hope that you enjoy them too.

To listen to the songs, use the *short URL* links provided, or access the two digital music albums on YouTube or other music sites (see last page of book).

My reasons for creating the story and the sculpture are many: to honor my ancestors, to reconnect to what I experienced there, to offer these works as a gift to the village, and to encourage other descendants of diaspora immigrants to reconnect with their roots. Historical village events are weaved in, but in a loose manner, with likely inaccuracy (occasionally intended). Again, it is not a true historical account, but rather a historically-inspired fictional story.

This 2nd edition corrected errors and awkward statements and added links to the digital songs. The tale is intended as a companion to my sculpture "*La Leonessa*" which will be installed in the Museo di Pace in the village in 2026. Perhaps this story may one day become a musical play, or operetta, or animated feature film? Always dream big, for you never know how the Universe may assist you.

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Act 1

The Lioness Tale



“Where bloodshed was destined, a truce arose. A lioness chose mercy that day, and a legend was born.”

On a barren, snowy hilltop in a remote region of ancient northwest Puglia, a story unfolds, as a mountain lioness seeks food for her cubs. On this day, nature’s harsh reality meets a poor shepherd and his family, who live in a hut at the base of the hill. An epic encounter occurs, with a momentous, supernatural, and completely unexpected outcome.

Awakening before dawn, the shepherd Gual exits the hut to tend to his flock, only to discover a familiar scene - the gruesome remains of yet another of his sheep. Frustrated and enraged, Gual decides to hunt the culprit, a lioness, and storms out of the hut with his bow and arrow. His wife Daunia and their daughter awaken and Daunia pleads for Gual to stop. But he ignores her plea and runs off, determined to track down and kill the lioness.



The Lioness



Gual's Rage

Soon Gual spots footprints tracing a path straight up to the top of the great hill and stealthily sneaks up to see her resting there, along with her cubs. He notches an arrow, takes aim, but misses the lioness. The lioness snarls and roars, and charges Gual before he can notch another arrow. The shepherd is instantly killed by the lioness, who returns back to tend to her small cubs.



Death of Gual

Meanwhile, Gual's wife Daunia has been tracking his footsteps, frightened for his safety. She arrives to find Gual dead and immediately sees the lioness resting in the distance. Holding back her anguished sobs, a bloody rage consumes her, and she gathers up Gual's bow and arrows. She stoops low, inches closer and closer, and hears a low snarl, as the lioness rises up and slowly steps towards her. Daunia pulls back the bowstring and takes careful aim. Suddenly, her daughter arrives, crying "Mama!" and clings to her side, causing the arrow to go slightly off course.

A cub is injured by the errant arrow nicking its leg. Daunia immediately places her child behind her, then stands bold with great courage, and stares directly into the eyes of the fierce roaring lioness, now standing on its hind legs in a powerful stance of resolve. But nothing happens as they both continue to stare for a very long pause. Somehow an understanding is reached - a miracle occurs - which reveals profound teachings and a new way to live.

The lioness calms its right arm, extends it forth with right paw held face up, and claws retracted - a sign of peace and welcoming. Yet, she retains her snarl and her fearsome, tensed left arm raised high, with sharp claws extended - ready to strike.

Her injured cub limps forward and nestles close to the lioness, and her other cubs follow. Then with her foot, the lioness gently nudges the injured cub toward Daunia, as a gift, and Daunia slowly sets her bow down to the ground. Where further bloodshed was clearly destined, somehow a truce of peace arose.



Daunia and the Lioness

The lioness, a symbol of strength, chose mercy that day, and taught a new way to live - expressed in gestures of coded meaning and with the gift of her injured cub. The lioness retreats back into the wilderness with her remaining cubs, but the injured cub accompanies Daunia and her daughter back to their hut at the base of the hilltop.

Later that day, filled with grief and wonder, Daunia draws the likeness of the lioness on a sheep's hide. Fellow shepherds arrive to console her, shocked to learn of Gual's death, and listen to Daunia's incredible tale with awe, and all are surprised to see a small cub at her side.



Daunia accepts the injured cub

On hind feet -
a **Stance** of firm resolve.

Penetrating **Gaze** of fiery aim -
confident clarity to lead & light the way.

Left arm high, claws ready to strike -
a sign of defense & strength.

But **Right Arm** extended, open paw. claws retracted -
a welcome sign of acceptance, peace, compassion and charity.

And a fearsome **Face &** snarling **Jaws** -
brave, to roar the truth.



Daunia and the cub tell the fateful story.

Song of the Lioness

*On a barren hill where shadows dwell,
A tragic tale of sorrow fell,
Daunia's love, a shepherd brave,
Was taken by a lion's crave.*

*With bow and arrow, heart in hand,
She vowed now, to make a stand,
But missed her mark, an injured cub,
The lioness paused, felt love's rub.*

*A stare, a fierce and fiery gaze,
The lioness with eyes ablaze,
Extends a paw, a welcome plea,
Daunia's heart began to see.*

*She laid her bow and arrows down,
Accepts the cub, with love profound,
The lioness then, turned to leave,
A bond of peace, they did achieve.*

*In years that passed, a village grew,
And in its crest, a tale they knew,
The lioness with arms both spread,
One for peace, the other dread.*

*But time brought strife, their crest transformed,
Both arms now claws, its stance reformed,
Survival's need, a fierce embrace,
Yet legends linger, time's own trace.*

Daunia's Song

<https://tinyurl.com/3fn9btkj>

Sung by Daunia after her fateful encounter with the lioness.

*I saw it stand, I heard it roar
The sound it shook me to my core
Transfixed we stared, in deep resolve
I with arrow, it with claws.*

*Time stood still, and miraculously
Its injured cub it gave to me
Then an act most unnatural
Something near impossible.*

*It moved its arm unusually
And spread its paw, a peace so true
Claws extended from left arm's might
But with its right, no threat in sight.*

*On its face, so terrible
A roar of strength, phenomenal
Yet in its eyes, compassion reigned
Which somehow calmed me, fear disdained.*

*I dropped my arrow to the ground
I held my child, no battle sound
The injured cub joined us that day
The lioness showed a mother's way.*

Act 2

The Tale of the Crest



“The village crest is altered by necessity, then is restored to its original form, through most unusual circumstances.”

Scene 1: An Altered Crest of Survival

In a thousand years, that remote hilltop becomes a village, founded as Monteleone di Puglia, in a region called Monti Daunia. During the dawn of the 1100s, the villagers create a crest - a coat of arms banner - of the standing lioness, based on the ancient legend of Daunia's sheep's hide sketch. In the crest, the lioness's face, stance, and its arm and paw gestures all have coded meanings, and express the lioness' teachings, guided by a rule of life, understood by each and every villager.



In the 1100s, the lioness's right arm is altered !

However, soon after the crest is created, the village is beset by a series of invasions, calamities, and strife, which place the village's survival at stake. Out of necessity they decide to alter a critical element of the crest, namely the right arm of acceptance, welcoming, and compassion, replacing it with a second raised arm, of fearsome strength and sharp claws.

The village indeed survives, but its people have somehow changed, become wary of the unknown, extremely mistrustful, quick to judge, and ready to strike anytime they feel threatened.

Scene 2: Old and New Songs

Centuries pass, and in the early 1500's, the villagers prepare to celebrate the return of their shepherds and flocks from alpine pastures up north in Abruzzi, along the *tratturi* (sheep trails), singing their sweet journey song: <https://tinyurl.com/4wc69wvm>

Song of the Tratturi

<https://tinyurl.com/59pphu8x>

From the poem "Shepherds" by Gabriele D'Annunzio, and sung by the village shepherds on their return along the *tratturi*.

*Let's go, let's go, from Abruzzi towards the sea.
Drink deep of alpine waters, calm our thirst, you and me.
Along the tratturi, from mountains to the plain,
Along the grassy river, until we see the sea!*

*Strong sun on our backs, browns the wool like sand.
Foot falls, gentle bleats, soothing sounds of this sweet land.*



Return along the *tratturi* paths

The clergy and civic leaders, who jointly rule the village, each form processional lines, one line upholding the church cross and the other holding the altered crest (with two fierce clawed paws extended), which remains as the village's guiding spirit. The processions sing old, plodding songs, akin to the style of a Gregorian chant.



The clergy and civic processions and the arrival of the stone masons;
Maria and Babin smile at one another.

A traveling band of happy-go-lucky, itinerate stone masons from lands north, approach the gate of the newly-walled village. They hear the villagers singing somber songs of old and ask for entry, food and lodging for a few nights, but are met with near tragic consequences, as the angry villagers rise up in vigilant defense.

The mayor asks *"Who are you, fellow? You don't look like you are from this land!"* To defuse the tension, the mason's leader Babin, a master stone carver with a great flowing mustache and beard, smiles and responds *"Aha, how perceptive, kind Sir, it's true that I'm Slovak from here on up (pointing from his waist to his head), but I assure you, I'm Monti Daunian from here on down (pointing from his waist down along his trousers)."* But in response, the masons receive only stone cold faces from the mayor and other leaders, who stiffen their stance, fix fierce gazes, and raise their left arms in strike gestures.



Babin, the master stone carver

Babin immediately calls his faithful friend Leo to fetch his *saqueboute* (a trombone-like horn), to try to calm the tensions. But before he can play, the anger of the villagers grows stronger. The mayor's beautiful daughter Maria, who has been watching this stand-off from her window, rushes out from her house, and runs to her father.

Maria, who secretly fancies Babin, pleads for her father to pause and to save the masons. She then strikes an entirely new gesture, a welcoming hand, accompanied with a smile and kind words to Babin and the masons, and asks her father again to please allow the men safe entry, at least to eat and drink this night. The villagers and leaders are all stunned by Maria's odd new gesture, unable to process what has just transpired.

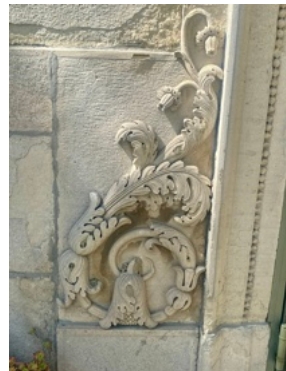
Babin, Leo and the masons sense a window of opportunity, and inspired by Maria's action, Babin decides to transform the village's old song and sing a joyful new song for the village, saying:

"My men, my men - shall we sing these fine people a new song and offer to stay, work hard, build, and carve some zest and life into all the stone of their fine village?"

His men cheer out: "Yes, we will, and we give great thanks to all of you." Leo picks up his horn and begins to play a beat in a foreign way, somewhat oompah-like, somehow joyful. And Babin begins to sing a new village song, and is soon joined by the other stone masons.

Maria joins in too, and the villagers tentatively join in, to sing this new song. Soon each of their hearts and minds begin to grasp the meaning of what has just happened, and they begin to recall their long-forgotten crest element. Many of the village women take a fancy to Leo and his happy music, and flock to watch him play. The village leaders welcome Babin, Leo and the masons into the gate, offer them places to live and work their craft. The shepherds and their flocks finally begin to arrive, greeted by great cheers of celebration and thanks.

Over time, the masons construct and carve beautiful decorations on all of the stone doorways, window frames, and walls of the village. And on the next feast of the village founding, the mayor and his aide work to restore the long forgotten element back to their crest. As they work, from high atop a rooftop, the spirit of the lioness looks upon them, wagging its tail with approval.



The Mason's Carving

Old Song of the Church Leaders

<https://tinyurl.com/yffvh9hz>

Sung by the clergy procession during tratturi celebration day, akin to the style of a Gregorian chant.

*We hold aloft this sacred cross,
We live by golden truths,
We till the soil, and tend our flocks
With faith in all we do.*

*When summer ends, from pastures high
They return along tratturi.
O watch us Lord, with mercy's eye,
Gloria, Dio Patri.*

Old Song of the Civic Leaders

<https://tinyurl.com/3e9wztsn>

Sung by the civic procession during tratturi celebration day, akin to the style of a Gregorian chant.

*Behold our crest,
Heart of our home,
This day we call to mind*

*The lioness, who roared the truth
And symbol thus defined.
Both paws raised high in fortitude
To shield us from all fear.*

*From pastures sweet and wild they come,
With courage ever near.*

Monteleone di Puglia - The New Song of Joy

<https://tinyurl.com/mpppvok85>

Sung by Babin, the master stone carver, accompanied by Maria, as
they create a new song for the village.

Monteleone di Puglia

*Once a dot on a map, and a place of high walls
It has captured a place in my heart.*

Monteleone di Puglia

*On its great hill it stands there
Gleaming its beacons for all, for all to see.*

Monteleone di Puglia

*Symbols of meaning, and gestures far reaching,
It offers a good way to live.*

*Peace that is roared and defended,
Women with strong voices and action
That ring out the truth.*

*And for those who may have fallen,
Some kindness and aid, to help them stand up for themselves.*

Monteleone di Puglia

*You may think that you know it, but look closer,
It will certainly fool ya.*

Monteleone di Puglia

*Once a dot on a map, It has captured a place in my heart
A place in my heart
A place in my heart.*

Song of Babin, the Master Carver

<https://tinyurl.com/2s4dzw5x>

*In north Slovakia, among the hills,
A lad named Babin honed his skills,
With chisel sharp and hands so keen,
He carved his dreams in wood serene.*

*The whispers of the ancient trees,
He heeded with a craftsman's ease,
Yet stone would call his heart to rove,
To carve his name in tales of old.*

*From Babin's woods to quarries grand,
He shaped the stone with steady hand,
With every strike, a master born,
In rock and marble, dreams were sworn.*

*He gathered 'round his band so bold,
Of masons skilled, with hearts of gold,
Together they would journey far,
To southern Italy, beneath the star.*

*In villages full of ancient grace,
They etched their mark on every place,
On doors and walls, such works of art,
With each fine stroke, they touched our hearts.*

*The villagers watched with awe-struck eyes,
As beauty bloomed beneath their skies,
For Babin's hands, with skill divine,
Transformed the stone, and made it shine.*

*In every town, a legacy,
Of Babin's band, for all to see,
From Slovakia's hills, he came to share,
His band's good gifts, beyond compare.*

Leo's Song

English: <https://tinyurl.com/3bkyj57r> Italian: <https://tinyurl.com/22tj2hly>

Sung by the village women who have taken a fancy to Leo, Babin's faithful friend, master bricklayer / carver, and saqueboute musician.

*Oh, oh, oh Leo, this happy fellow
from way up north there, in Baranello
With line and trowel, and heavy mortar
He lays the bricks so, in perfect order.*

*Oh, oh, oh Leo, a man so cheerful
He plays a horn so, gives us an earful
With steady hands, he carves so fine
From dawn till dusk, his work does shine.*

*With every doorway, window and wall,
The village echoes, his joyful call.
Women adore him, his charm so grand,
Leo and his friends, lend us their hands.*

The New Civic Song

<https://tinyurl.com/2s4hxyz6>

Sung by the mayor and his aide as they work to restore the long forgotten element of their crest back to its original form.

*Dark ages of calamity,
Had raised her paw in fear,
Restored once more, now welcoming,
Of this we are now clear.*

*Recite again our lioness's gift
Abide by her great truths.*

*One paw raised high in fortitude,
To shield us from all fear,
The other, open, welcoming,
Goodwill and peace are here.*



Leo plays his saqueboute for the New Song of Monteleone di Puglia to the delight of the adoring village women.



The mayor and aide restore the crest to its original form.

Act 3

The Inquisitor's Lesson



"The village women come to the aid of a religious sect who suffer persecution from the hands of an inquisitor."

Scene 1: The Waldensians

A religious sect, the Waldensians, flee France, since they had challenged the authority of the Pope and the opulence and wealth of the Church, and were severely persecuted. As they wander south, they sing a song of hope, hoping to find a new place to settle, work, and be accepted to live free.

Eventually arriving in the Monti Dauni region, they are soon welcomed and accepted by the villagers. The Monteleonese women discover that the newcomers are quite adept weavers, and learn from them many new methods of working with wool and making fine clothing.



Weaving wool a new way.

Waldensian Song of Hope

<https://tinyurl.com/ymr8dt9n>

Sung by a father to his daughter, on their long trek from Lyon, France to the Monti Dauni region, hoping to find a new home.

*There's a place for us
Of this I know,
A place for you,
A place for me*

*Follow me now,
Keep thy eyes ahead,
Don't give up,
Courage as you go.*

*There's a place - we shall find
To rest, and build, and prosper
Friends there who'll help us
Sweet wild honey and larkspur.*

*We are Waldensians, the Poor of Lyon
It is He who made us, and we are His
We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.*

Scene 2: The Inquisitor's Envoy

But during the Inquisition of the late 1500's, a powerful Cardinal sends his nefarious Jesuit envoy to the village to persecute the Waldensians. The envoy was once a powerful warrior who helped the Cardinal save this region, fighting against the Turks. Upon his arrival at the village he orders each Waldensian to wear a garment with a red X embroidered on it, and warns them, that upon his return visit next week, they must all repent and follow the Church's authority.

The envoy and a few men arrive the next week on horseback, to begin their inquisition of the Waldensians. As they re-enter the village the envoy flares with a new anger, as he sees many village women adorning their doorways with *frasca* (twigs hanging over a doorway portal - the villagers' traditional symbol signifying warm hospitality and celebration for the new wine) and he decides to teach the villagers a very firm lesson as well.

He replaces every *frasca* he finds with a crucifixion cross, gathers the women together, and orders them to give up their pagan ways and beliefs, and to only display approved symbols authorized by the Church. He also tells them to never shelter nor help any of the Waldensians ever again.



Waldensian Red X



Frasca twig

Song of the Great, Grand Inquisitor

<https://tinyurl.com/yxxmn5fw>

*I rode a horse, I led some men
We yelled and killed, and took our stand
They tasted lead, and blades of steel
We made them run, we made them reel
They called it victory, we raised our flag
The pope came knocking, with honors bestowed.*

*I know a lot, experience too
So kiss my ring, or I'll run you through.
I'm here to clean, to set things straight
To guide you right, before too late.
No need for frasca, toss them away
In place go crosses, to recall our way*

*I hear some came, with crazy thoughts
Red X's for them, when they are caught.
It's a cross, as you well know
But fallen down, like they are now
Wear it in, the fields and town
With a smile, your brand new gown.*

*When I return, come back to you
Be prepared to start anew
You will kneel, repent, and pray
Or you will burn, that very day.*

*We both love God, his truth we seek,
Your way is wrong - far too unique!
I am merciful, fair and just
But heed my words, or turn to dust.*

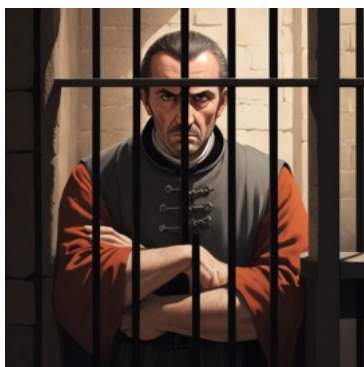
*For I'm so great, I'm so grand
I'm the great, grand inquisitor of your land.*

Scene 3: The Lesson and Gift

The village women rise up in defense of the Waldensians and for their own frasca tradition. But the envoy ignores their words and stands firm. They erupt and drag the surprised envoy and his men off of their horses, and chase them out of the village gate. He then stops, turns and loudly condemns their actions with the vilest of threats.

The woman roar with defiance, storm out the gate, chase and capture the men. Bound in irons, led to jail, and into separate cells. The spirit of the lioness accompanies the women, who walk slowly past the envoy's cell. Each tosses a fracas twig into his cell, and sing a song of protest, hoping to enlighten him, but he stares back in contempt. The envoy's cell door is not fully secured and the spirit of the lioness kicks it loudly shut.

The next day, a sliver of understanding dawns upon him, and he and his men are soon released. Instead of ordering a complete massacre of the Waldensians and the village women (as was done in neighboring Calabria), he will use a softer approach, gathering just 40 Waldensians and villagers for judgement and imprisonment in Rome. The lioness accompanies the captives to Rome, then seeks out the envoy's home, deeply scratches his door with its claws, and defecates upon his front steps.



The Indignant Envoy



The Lioness' Gift

Village Women's Song of Protest

<https://tinyurl.com/msnk2bub>

Sung as the village women pass by the Envoy's prison cell.

*My Grace misleads
He knows not much
Might's not greatness
Without the rule.*

*The rule of life, which we all follow
Which he forgot, or let go fallow.*

*Might and strength in one arm
Acceptance, peace & charity in the other.
We stand with fierce resolve
And roar out this truth.*

*This we truly believe
This we always follow.*

*You're not great
You're not grand
You're not worthy in our land.*

*To help you understand this all
To help you realize what's true
We bind you in these iron chains
And into prison shall thee go.*

*We pray that you will change your mind
We hope you'll make a brand new start
To grant forgiveness and lend a hand
And find compassion within your heart.*

Act 4

The Diaspora Lament



“Over the mountains, to Napoli, On a ship, we’ll sail the sea”.

In the late 1800s, large numbers of villagers begin to leave southern Italy, due to desperate times, failed crops, raging disease, heavy taxes, and severe economic and political hardship. The villagers sing songs of wretched sorrow and gloom, trying to decide whether to stay or go. And to make matters worse, the officials alter the crest once again as a raging, rampant lion in fight.

They are encouraged by Matteo, a savvy “*agenti di emigrazione*” (emigration agent) from *Napoli* (Naples), who speaks of greener pastures, jobs for all, an easier life, and a brand new start, just a little way across the sea.



Matteo inspires Domenico

A peasant mother Maddalena soothes her sick child Nanni, while her husband Domenico excitedly tells her what he just heard Matteo say. Domenico promises to work even harder so they may leave sooner for America.

As families tearfully say their final goodbyes and begin travel to the port of Napoli (Naples), the spirit of the lioness sends along a spirit cub to accompany them as they board their ship.

Recovered from her illness, the young girl, Nanni, hides the spirit cub in the folds of the material in her basket. Later she places her own bonnet upon the head of the cub, so it resembles a doll, to fool the agents and ship's crew.



Nanni and the spirit cub

Song of the Emigrants

<https://tinyurl.com/4n2u7574>

Sung by the desperate villagers, agonizing to either stay or emigrate
out of Italy.

*The earth lies cracked, the crops have died
Our toil and sweat all cast aside
The landlord's greed has left us dried
With hunger pangs we cannot hide*

*The sun beats down, no mercy lent
Our weathered hands are torn and spent
Shall we endure this punishment?
Or sail away with discontent?*

*Oh Lord, come, in my hour of need
Deliver us from this life that bleeds
The peasant's plight, and never free
Oh Lord, come to me, come to me.*

*Oh Lord on high, awake and heed
Your humble flock in desperate need
Shine your light upon our face
Oh Lord, come, show me your embrace.*

*The western shores hold promise bright
A chance to shed this wretched plight
But fear rings true at fortune's sight
To stay or go, we face the night.*

Song of the Agenti

<https://tinyurl.com/49t5m4ra>

Sung by Matteo, the emigration agent who persuades the desperate villagers to leave their homes, families and village for a new life in Canada, Argentina, USA, and other far-off places.

*Come with me, come with me
Over the mountains, to Napoli.
On a ship you'll sail the sea
To new lands, hope and prosperity.*

*All it takes is a little amount
Save your pennies, do the count.*

*When you're ready to finally leave
Ask for Matteo, he'll not deceive.*

*Pack your bags, but not too much
Say goodbyes, you'll stay in touch.*

*When you arrive, you'll see our man
He holds a flower in his hand.*

*Others are with you, so do not fret
Just stay healthy, without regret.*

*Come with me, come with me
Over the mountains, to Napoli.
On a ship we'll sail the sea
To new lands, hope and prosperity.*

Song of Despair and Decision

English: <https://tinyurl.com/yzv6ck22> Italian: <https://tinyurl.com/4ekw9php>

Sung by Maddalena, a peasant village woman, her sick daughter Nanni, and her husband Domenico, anxious to depart for America.

*Nanni: Mama, why is my plate always empty?
 Why is my cup never full?
 Why is my Papa so tired all the time?
 Why do I cough without stopping?*

*Maddalena: There, there, there now, my sweet little dove
 Let me cool down your hot burning face
 One day it will all be so much better
 Now rest, close your eyes, find some peace.*

*Nanni: Mama, why can't I see any colors?
 Why can't I hear grandmother's song?
 When will my head stop its pounding?
 Why can't I get up and walk?*

*Maddalena: There, there, there now, my sweet little dove
 Let me kiss you and help you sit up.
 I promise we'll find a way out of this
 Now rest, close your eyes, find some peace.*

*Domenico: Just hear what he told me!
 He says it's all true.
 Such wonder, such plenty
 For me and for you.*

*Domenico: Il lavoro è abbondante ... Work is plentiful.
 Con terra per tutti ... With land for everyone.
 E anche istruzione gratuita ... And also free education.
 Con le strade lastricate d'oro ... With streets paved with gold.*

*Domenico: I will work even harder
 I must start today
 For Nanni and Maddalena
 God please help me find a way.*



Maddalena soothes Nanni

Act 5

The Women Roar



“We want bread! We want flour! Down with the war! Give us back our children and our husbands!”

During World War II, a group of village women lead the first revolt in Italy on August 23, 1942, against the fascist regime, driven by misery, hunger, and rage at the absence of their men, who have all been sent abroad to fight.

While they plead for food and better conditions, an official, Scaramuccia, a pompous, uncaring fascist carabinieri, is completely deaf to their needs, and insistently asks for more boys he can take, to fight for the glory of their leader and Italy. Then in great anger, he simply tells them to grind stones if they are so hungry.



Grind some stones!

A revolt erupts - the food riot - and the women roar in defiance, joined by the spirit of the lioness who walks and roars at their side. Chaos ensues, barracks and buildings are set on fire, Later, 92 women, children, and even the elderly are detained and imprisoned for 14 months. And many years go by, before their legal status is resolved. Today they are memorialized in murals, stories and song and remembered in the village.

The fascist years reverted the lioness crest back to its aggressive form, with both arms ready to strike.



Song of Scaramuccia

<https://tinyurl.com/2r28s67s>

Ignoring the women's plight, he says to wait for their *pagate*
(husbands' war payment), asks for more "men" to fight, and ignites
the food riot.

*Yes, Yes, I'm here. I'm here.
And what's your problem today?
Ah, no flour, no bread, no money, you say?*

*The solution is simple
I'm surprised you don't know
Simply work harder
And watch everything grow.*

*Calm down. Calm down.
Your pagate will come
Just a few days more now
Then you'll have fun.*

*A more pressing matter
Where's your teen boys?
I need three or four
At the front, to deploy.*

*Yes, Yes, Yes, Yes
I hear what you say
But Italy needs them
This very same day.*

*Stop your complaining
They'll have glory immense
Their blood will bring victory
It makes perfect sense.*

*No, No, No, No
You're out of control
If you are so hungry
Then grind up some stone!*

Song of the Women's Roar

<https://tinyurl.com/2udzs4vb>

*In Monteleone, with hearts of steel,
Our women's strength will never kneel,
Through strife and storms we stand as one,
Injustice faced, our battles won.*

*When old Spanish flames of craze did roar,
A Cardinal's hand spread fear and more,
Our women rose to thwart that hate
Oppressors bound, and met their fate.*

*In Europe's war-torn shadow and mire,
With husbands gone, our rage afire,
In '42, a summer's daze,
Our unheard cries, set streets ablaze.*

*A Carabinieri's cruel command,
Seized wheat from women's weary hands,
"Our children must eat," our voices cried,
In hunger's grip, we each defied.*

*Imprisoned, starved, in warehouse gloom,
Our fury grew, a looming doom,
We set the food-stock place alight,
Escaping chains to join the fight.*

*With pitchforks, clubs, we stormed the streets,
Against the fascists' cruel deceit,
We roared the truth, a mighty wave,
In justice's name, we're strong and brave.*

Mural Wall Art Commemorating the Women's Revolt in Monteleone di Puglia



Author's photo of a wall mural. Note the spirit of the lioness. Author unable to identify artist.



Author's photo of a wall mural in the Piazza Municipio in Monteleone di Puglia, painted by the artist *Hyuro* (Tamara Djurovic)

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Act 6

The Refugee's Tale



"Today's migrants can become tomorrow's citizens and repopulate depopulated villages like ours" - Mayor Giovanni Campese

A modern day tragedy of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, desperate emigrants from Africa, Asia and elsewhere, who end up on the shores of southern Italy.

Giuseppe and Antonio, two brothers from the village, arrive on their holiday at a sunny beach on the Adriatic coast, and express great joy.

Soon they discover drowned people at the water's edge, and hear a moaning sound coming from the wreckage of a boat on the rocks. They discover Amadin, a badly injured asylum seeker from Benin, in the wreckage. The villager's are initially shocked, then wary and unwilling to act, until they notice a tattoo of a lioness paw on the right arm of Amadin.

This reminds the two of the important element of their crest - the gesture of acceptance, compassion, welcoming, guided by the rule of life. They extend immediate help, and invite Amadin to come and stay with them, offering him material and instructional aid, to learn Italian and the ways of the village.

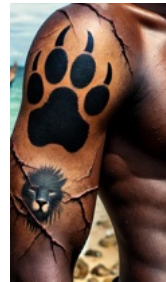
Eventually Amadin integrates into village life, is accepted by the other villagers, and one day he moves to a neighboring village, to work as a dependable, skilled apprentice of a local plumber.

His success is duly noted by the leaders of the village, and becomes a template for a bold expansion of this innovation. The village obtains grants, guidance, and special funds, as well as assistance from their diaspora communities around the world.

New attractive housing, a sports facility, dedicated staff and more are soon set up and operating, and this novel approach continues to be successful. The Italian leadership is so pleased, that they award and recognize the village as a best-in-class model for immigrant integration in Italy.



Amadin is saved



Amadin's tattoo



Amadin finds his way

Song of Acceptance

<https://tinyurl.com/7tj884hy>

Sung by the villagers Antonio and Giuseppe as they discover a tragic boat wreckage, and recall the lioness's teaching of acceptance, to aid the lone survivor, Amadin, an asylum seeker from Benin.

*Ah, the sun, warm waves, and a beach full of sand,
Our wonderful holiday, perhaps we will tan.
The sea looks so beautiful, on this very day
What's that? Oh, no, no! What did you say?*

*A person has drowned, two more there, beyond.
And down by the wreckage, a moaning sound.
But look at his color, darker than most
Surely he's not from, our eastern coast.*

*I'm afraid, I'm afraid. Should we just walk away?
Quiet, he speaks now, what words does he say?
Do you see his right arm, do you notice his mark?
A tattoo of a lioness paw, though it's quite dark.*

*Recall our fine teachings, the words we abide
Let's offer some mercy, and rush to his side
Dear Sir, let us help you, we'll carry you soon
To a home in our village, your very own room.*

*We'll offer you aid, to help you stand on your own.
We'll teach you our language, and how to get around.
You'll master some skills, and work will arrive
With friendly assistance, soon you will thrive.*

*We welcome you here, though you're beaten and down.
Such terrible struggles, will all soon be gone.
We ask only one thing, when your future swings wide
That you help another, to help turn the tide.*

Song of Amadin

<https://tinyurl.com/n5md6yr4>

Sung by Amadin, the asylum seeker from Benin.

*I was nothing, you gave me your hand
Without hope, in such a strange land
No sleep for days, you gave me a bed
With sores and pains, I should be dead.*

*I was hungry, you gave me some food
Then gave me water, and lifted my mood
When my legs faltered, you offered an arm
I knew that you would, do me no harm.*

*Without understanding, your words or ways
Yet you asked me sincerely, if I would stay
Then you taught me, and I began to learn
With every kindness, my trust you earned.*

*From shadows deep, I rose to your light
No longer fearful, nor ready for flight
With strength anew, I stand by your side
Together we face, the world's turning tide.*

*Now with heart full, and courage in hand
I reach out to those, from desperate lands
For I was rescued, and now I see
It's my turn to help, and set others free.*

*So here's my promise, a vow I'll defend
To be the helper, the guide, the friend
For every soul lost, seeking their way
I'll be a beacon, as you were that day.*

Act 7

The Advocacy Tale



“War upsets everything, even the bond between the brothers. War is insane, its plan is destruction. Say no to war and violence and yes to dialogue and peace.” - Pope Francis

Over the past 100 years, the words and actions of great moral, spiritual, and brave world leaders such as Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Pope Francis, deeply resonate with the villagers, who seriously adopt and apply them into the fabric and life of their village.

For they recognized the spirit of the lioness living and working within the words, lives, and wise actions of such leaders.

Not mere words, but wise action too, becomes their modern day mantra, and results in a bold transformation and commitment to become a true village of acceptance, peace, and non-violence.

They create a Center for Peace Education, hold annual peace conferences and awards ceremonies, advocate for peace, and celebrate their heritage.

Descendants of emigrant communities in Canada, USA, South America, etc. are welcomed, accepted as *Monteleonesi*, and instructed in the teachings of the lioness - not simply by words, but by kind and wise action. Yet the crest of the lioness remains unchanged and defiant.



Comune di Monteleone di Puglia Centro Internazionale per la Nonviolenza "Mahatma Gandhi"

Invitano al

II° PREMIO INTERNAZIONALE
per la Pace e la Nonviolenza



War - No More! Song

<https://tinyurl.com/386wrrhk>

Sung by the villagers at every festival, ceremony, and meeting, to confirm their belief and commitments as a true village of acceptance, peace, and non-violence.

*When we let in these seeds of war,
Threat, hatred and vengeance,
The bond of brothers flies apart,
And destroys God's holy presence.*

*Conflict, destruction and madness rule,
While innocents become its victims,
Flames arise in every place
As Death revs up its pistons.*

*But there must be a better way
Of this I am most certain
Our lioness teaches us the way
To open any closing curtain.*

Educate and Advocate Song - Words of Wise Action

English: <https://tinyurl.com/4rhd2nvp> Italian: <https://tinyurl.com/yvbk2u>

*In halls of peace, where learning thrives,
Educate and advocate, and change some lives
We sow the seeds of love and care,
From words to wise action, everywhere.*

*Non-violence grows with gentle touch,
Care and compassion, teach so much,
With every act of kindness shown,
From words to wise action, seeds are sown.*

*Advocate for those in need,
Educate and advocate, take the lead,
Injustice fades when we unite,
From words to wise action, shine a light.*

*Acceptance can blossom in every heart,
Educate and advocate, play your part,
Embrace each soul, the weak, the strong,
From words to wise action, we belong.*

*Together we can change the world,
Educate and advocate, flags unfurled,
Our actions speak of what we dream,
From words to wise action, make it gleam.*

Song of Peace Education

*In minds of men, where wars arise
We sow its seeds, 'neath peaceful skies
But war is madness, tears lives apart
By learning peace, our hearts restart.*

*Defenses strong, through words and deeds,
By learning peace, we plant new seeds.
With strength and truth we can aspire, to
Douse the flames of war's raging fires.*

*Examples set, by those before
Who carried light, with peaceful roar
By learning peace, we change our way
Peace and coexistence, night and day.*

*Defenses strong, through words and deeds,
By learning peace, we plant new seeds.*

*In villages of love and grace,
Non-violence takes a rightful place.
Where peace and acceptance freely flow.
Kindness reigns and all live free*

*So come and join me, put down your arms
A village of acceptance, strong and true.*

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Act 8

The Finale



"Immigrants - No More!"

Scene 1: The Call of the Ancestors

An old man, an American grandson of a young village girl who departed with her family in 1906, decides to reconnect with his ancestral roots and finally visit the birthplace of his deceased grandmother in Monteleone di Puglia.

He becomes inspired after meeting with Giovanni Campese, the mayor of the village, who explains its history, the character of its people, and its reincarnation as a village of acceptance, peace and non-violence. While walking throughout the village, the old man sees direct evidence of this transformation, and comes to understand the profound teachings of the lioness.



Welcome to America!



The old man, his son and
Mayor Campese

A day later, the old man heads to Assisi and walks its steeply inclined cobbled streets. In late afternoon he ventures into the crypt of St. Francis, sits at a pew to rest, and mentally expresses gratitude for this incredible journey to discover his roots.

Suddenly recalling a childhood prayer, he begins silently reciting the prayer, and imagines his grandmother saying it along with him, then his mother, then grandfather, then father, and soon all of his family members and ancestors, all reciting the prayer with him in unison - a mighty chorus of silent prayer.

Sitting there, he feels deep joy and comfort, knowing that, though they are gone, they are still with him, in his heart and mind. He returns back to America, and while recalling his trip, a strong desire arises to learn more about the village and to create something. The blessings of that golden afternoon, bestowed to him as a gift, remain with him to this day.

He closes his eyes, and dreams of a blue sky, filled with a few billowy clouds, and the scene shifts back, toward the hilltop village of Monteleone di Puglia, and to its *cimitero*, where two ancestral spirits in ancient robes are standing. The spirit of the lioness approaches and sits next to them, and they are then joined by other ancestral spirits. The group of ancestors hold hands, smile, and begin singing a song of love, welcoming, and acceptance to the old man and to all of their far-flung diaspora community.

As they sing, tendrils stream out from their hearts, and fly out to reach and connect with the hearts of their living descendants, both near and far away. Each recipient smiles with an understanding, and then hears a beckoning call. They hear the chime of a distant church bell, then remembrances of their deceased family members appear to them, and a curiosity, wonder, and joy begins to grow within each of them.



A mighty chorus of silent prayer.



The spirits begin to sing.

Song of the Spirits of the Ancestors

<https://tinyurl.com/3rhfbemy>

Sung by the spirits of ancestors, to their living descendants,
welcoming and reconnecting with them, both near and far.

*In a land where stories bloom,
A grandchild's love dispelled the gloom,
Our cherished lore, from days of yore,
Led him to roots, forever more.*

*In southern Italy's sweet embrace,
He found his ancestors' resting place,
Our tales rekindled ancient ties,
In heart and mind, we would arise.*

*Our spirits danced with whispers sweet,
Across the realms, our souls did meet,
Merged with his soul, beyond the veil,
In heart and mind, our love prevailed.*

*Love surpassed the bounds of life,
With us through the joy and strife,
Our essence flowed in every part,
Beyond life's end, we filled his heart.*



Scene 2: The Gift

The old man rises the next morning with abundant energy and a burst of creativity not experienced before. He conceives of an ambitious project, hopefully worthy to honor his Italian grandmother and ancestors. He decides to create a carved marble sculpture of the lioness of Monteleone di Puglia, and express through its gestures, the essence of what he has seen and learned.

He believes that the values driving the village's impressive recent transformation, stem from a true commitment to:

- Strength, Fortitude, Resolve - defend, endure, solve problems, and roar
- Welcoming, Empathy and the Rule of Life - acceptance, peace, non-violence, and the skills of advocacy

The old man hopes his sculpture may help bring joy, strength, and hope to those who view it. As he shapes it, he dreams it may one day become a part of the village.

To help seal the experience for each viewer of the sculpture, he imagines a way for each viewer to see their own countenance projected upon the lioness' face - akin to a spiritual communion, in a sense, directly acquiring the teachings of the lioness within themselves.

The sculpture becomes his gift to the village, and when viewed, the sculpture imparts the village's spirit, as a gift to each viewer.

The old man realizes that his unplanned burst of creativity and relentless drive to create the sculpture did not come from himself, but was channeled to him by his ancestors. With great gratitude and joy, he sings out a song of encouragement for other living immigrant descendants to reconnect with their roots one day.

Immigrants - No More Song

<https://tinyurl.com/yht94n3y>

Sung by the old man after reconnecting with his own ancestral roots,
encouraging other immigrant descendants to reclaim their roots.

*In villages where old stories sleep,
Walk the paths your kin did keep,
Through books and tales, you can explore,
Discover your roots. Immigrants - no more.*

*Learn songs from olden times gone by,
Ancestors' dreams beneath the sky,
Discover tales of rich folklore,
Honor your roots. Immigrants - no more.*

*Visit homelands, feel the past,
Traditions held that still can last,
Dances, customs, you will adore,
Celebrate your roots. Immigrants - no more.*

*Creative ways to bridge the gap,
Crafting links on heritage's map,
Through art and stories, memories soar,
Reclaim your roots. Immigrants - no more.*

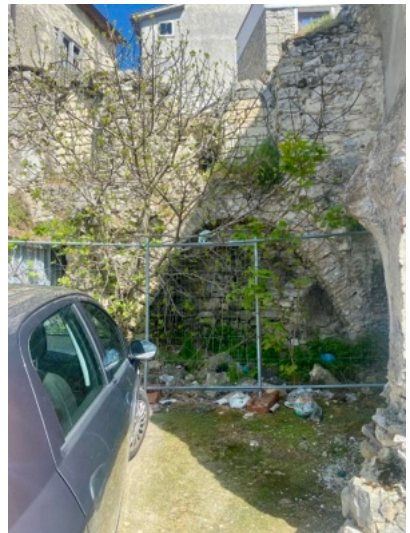
Scene 3: Dream of the Unveiling

A flurry of images soon appears in the old man's imagination, as he dreams about his ambitious project.

*The chips fly as the old man
carves the mountain lioness.*



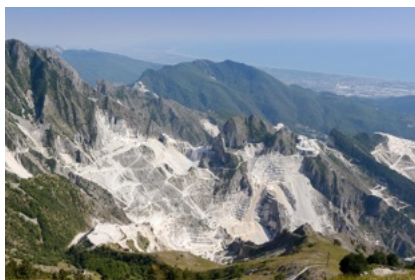
*The hilltop village of Monteleone di Puglia and the stone home of the old
man's grandmother, now lying in ruins.*



Middle Ages drawing of the altered lioness, and the current village crest (coat of arms) which the old man saw in the mayor's office.



The crypt room of St Francis of Assisi, where the old man imagined his ancestors silently praying with him.



Marble mountains of Carrara

The old man's completed sculpture lies hidden under a cloth, ready to be revealed to the villagers.



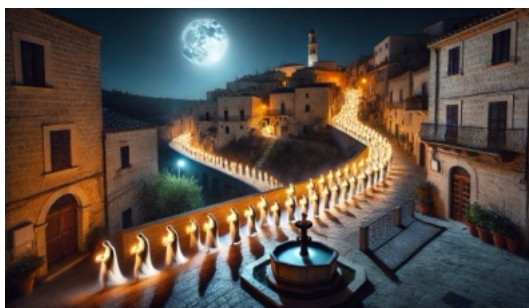
The unveiling of the sculpture, and as villagers view it, they see themselves reflected on its polished face. After their "spiritual communion" with the sculpture, each villager walks away with understanding, joy, strength, and a resolve to follow the lioness' teaching.



Scene 4: The Marble Lioness

Midnight approaches. In the village, gentle breezes carry an occasional cloud in front of the moon, causing a flickering glow upon the marble lioness.. The flickering makes it appear as if the sculpture is breathing, perhaps becoming alive and alert, to watch over the village.

A church bell marks the midnight hour, and spirits are seen walking up the long lane from the village fountain at the base of the hill, up the lane to the center plaza of the village.



Leading the procession is the spirit of the lioness and her cubs, then Gual, Daunia and their child. Behind follow Babin and Maria arm in arm, followed by Leo carrying his saqueboute, and the stone masons. Soon we see the Waldensians, then Domenico and Maddalena, followed by Matteo. Their child Nanni carries her basket with the spirit cub wearing its baby bonnet. Amadin, Antonio and Giuseppe walk hand in hand, followed by a long line of ancestors in the distance, all silent and gathering together.

Babin and Maria come forward, and Leo plays his saqueboute, and they all begin to sing the New Song of Monteleone di Puglia. Soon they are joined by the entire gathering of spirits, all joyfully singing together. When the song is finished, all the spirits stand together with the stance of resolve, eyes gleaming forward, and in unison, they all strike the gesture of strength, followed by the gesture of acceptance.

One by one each of the spirits slowly ascends towards the stars, and calls this tale to end.

But as darkness falls into a deeper silence, we begin to hear a very faint growl coming from the marble lioness. She presses down on the marble base with her left foot, and a secret panel springs out to the side, revealing the words:

“My work is not yet done, for humankind has lost its way again.”



La Leonessa Footpress Instrumental:

<https://tinyurl.com/3ub3y9ab>

La Leonessa di Monteleone di Puglia

La Leonessa Narration: <https://tinyurl.com/3wyk253v>

On hind feet -
a **Stance** of firm resolve.

Penetrating **Gaze** of fiery aim -
confident clarity to lead & light the way.

Left arm high, claws ready to strike -
a sign of defense & strength.

But **Right Arm** extended, open paw. claws retracted -
a welcome sign of acceptance, peace, compassion and charity.

And a fearsome **Face &** snarling **Jaws** -
brave, to roar the truth.

Closing Instrumental: <https://tinyurl.com/5329baut>

Postscript

The White Marble Carved Lioness Sculpture

Something unsettled me when I viewed the village's coat of arms (crest) featuring a heraldic lion. I wondered why such lions are always aggressively pictured on so many flags and crests. When I thought about Monteleone di Puglia's recent transformation to become a true village of acceptance, peace and non-violence, this type of crest did not seem to fit anymore, since it did not include these new elements.

So in the book I wanted to create an origin story for the crest and to propose a new one - a three-dimensional, figurative sculpture of a lioness, whose gestural elements carry coded meanings that represent the village's values and spirit. The great courage displayed by the village women throughout history, suggested using a lioness rather than a lion. And since I am a carver and learned that the village once had a school devoted to stone masonry and carving, a sculpture in stone seemed appropriate. The choice of white marble was due to my tour of the white marble quarries in Carrara a few days after I departed Monteleone di Puglia.

I was deeply moved by Mayor Campese's statement that I am now *Monteleonese*. I liked the idea of offering my sculpture as a gift back to the village. And to extend this circle of acceptance, I had the idea to make the sculpture interactive, so that the driving spirit of the village (the teachings of the lioness) could somehow be gifted to any viewer of the sculpture. Perhaps one day I will be able to create this immersive feature for the marble sculpture.

About the Author

Steven G. Kukla is retired and lives with his wife Cynthia in Litchfield, Connecticut. He is grateful to fill his days with his passions: family, travel, yoga, hiking, figurative stone carving, clay modeling, rockhounding, and now writing his first book. He is currently struggling to learn basic Italian and how to compose music.

"I typically carve by hand, often taking four months for a sculpture. I enjoy the challenge of figurative work, but also dabble in the abstract. I do not sell my work nor accept commissions - for me it's all about exploring, learning, and the mental and physical challenge."

"HOWEVER, for the lioness sculpture, I wanted to try modern methods that I learned about while touring Carrara and the white marble mountains in Italy. The lioness was designed as a 3D digital model, to permit 3D-printed resin replicas of various sizes to be created. To robotically-carve, the 3D digital model is modified and converted into a series of tool-path curves and grinding instructions for the specific milling machine to be used, which carves ~90% of the lioness. The programmed paths and grinding movements use a variety of diamond-coated grinding bits to efficiently carve the marble. The remaining surface details are then shaped with diamond files, sanded and polished - voila, a new statue arrives!"

OH NO! While the 3D digital model and 3D printing went smoothly, my plan for robotic carving and to create the interactive face projection technology was far too cost-prohibitive. Then wrist & shoulder pain halted my ability to carve the lioness myself. Fortunately, the Universe rescued me and the master artisan **Massimo Baldoni** from Luni, Italy agreed to carve the lioness for me. Hopefully new lower-cost technology may make the immersive experience feasible one day, too.

Personal Website: <https://stretchy54.wixsite.com/sgk-stone-sculptures>



Steven G. Kukla

Digital Music Albums

The poems of this book are brought to life as songs and music, and available as two digital music albums (Vol. 1 and Vol. 2).

Scan the QR code below to access each album on YouTube.

Note: YouTube files may begin with a short video ad.

If you prefer, all of the songs and music are also available on popular music sites such as Apple Music, Spotify, Pandora, Amazon Music, and many others. Simply search on artist name "[Steven G Kukla](#)".



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Strong Roots, Good Fruit

Monteleone di Puglia - A Fantasy, 2nd Edition

By Steven G Kukla

Unknown dots on a map come to life in this inspiring tale set in central southern Italy. An old man's quest to uncover his roots takes him and his son to the birthplaces of his Italian grandparents. What starts as a genealogy tour turns into an extraordinary adventure.

Embraced by living descendants of their ancestry, they hear touching stories and feast at their table. In his grandmother's village, the inspirational mayor reveals the village's captivating history: the incredible defiance and courage of Monteleone's women against oppression during the Spanish Inquisition and the Fascist regime in World War II; the anguish of emigration of the late 1800s; the village's transformation as a haven for asylum seekers; and its modern-day rebirth as a village of acceptance, non-violence and peace advocacy, all told through a fantasy legend of its guardian lioness.

The journey ignites a creative fire in the old man, who embarks on an ambitious project to tell the story of Monteleone di Puglia through a graphic novella, lyrical songs and music, and a carved marble lioness sculpture. Overflowing with joy and gratitude, he extends a heartfelt message to all children of immigrants to seek out their roots.