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**THROUGH CARMELA'S EYES: REMEMBRANCE AND RECOVERY OF MY
ITALIC TRIBAL WAYS**

By

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Master's Project

Submitted in Partial Satisfaction of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Liberal Arts in Creation Spirituality

In the

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Of

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Of what use to us is the wisdom of the Upanishads or the insight of Chinese yoga, if we desert the foundations of our own culture as though they were errors outlived and, like homeless pirates, settle with thievish intent on foreign shores?

C.G. Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*

When she went out, the girl thrust her fingers into those holes and drew them out ringed with the most beautiful rings you ever saw. She lifted her head, and a star fell on her brow. Then she went home adorned like a bride.

The Tale of the Cats, Italian folktale

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I was guided to this path. I understand that now because the dreams and the place I find myself in tell me so. I thank all my ancestors and the spirits of this new land for this life. I have always had pride in my ancestors, known and unknown, and a desire to know them, but I have not always acknowledged them and their guidance. This is my acknowledgement.

My name is Kit Cooley, born Catherine Ann Cooley, wife of Steve Zukus. I am the eldest daughter of Marie Rose Deli and Albert Frank Cooley. My mother's parents are Lucy Rotunda, daughter of Giuseppe Rotunda and Carmela Madia, and Angelo Deli, son of Luigi and Rosa Deli. My father's parents are Frances Ruth Haralson, daughter of Thomas Francis Haralson and Toma Belle Pannell, and Albert Newton Cooley, son of Franklin Cooley and Dora McDowell. I am of the Brutti, Vestini, and Marsi Italic tribes, Gypsy (Romany), Irish, Scot, Welsh, Dutch, French, Cherokee and Iroquois. My people come from the lands of Italy, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Turtle Island (North America), Holland, and perhaps France.

I begin this in the traditional way: by telling who I am and where I come from. This is my story, and I am starting where I am, in the present. The way that I came here was through listening to my dreams and embracing the unknown: through this indigenous way of knowing. In all cultures, the traditional way of learning was an oral tradition. In this

process of remembrance and recovery of my Italic earth-based traditions, I have begun to learn—to remember—that way of being in the world. This story is my attempt to bridge the gap between the Western mind that I am used to seeing the world through and this new, old, way of seeing. The CD of images and sounds related to my process that accompanies this book is another attempt to bring the experiential oral traditions to this Western medium.

Although I am of mixed blood, I am writing here primarily of my Italian ancestors and my journey to the land of Italy. My Italian ancestors have chosen me to walk their path and remember them. Some of the ways I have come to know that this is true are through dreams and signs. When I was a child, I had a recurring dream of a man in a coffin. It was my maternal grandfather, Angelo Deli, that I saw. He died before my mother married and before I was born. In another dream that I had a couple years ago I was in my Grandma Deli's house on Benton Street and saw papers on the piano; the words were Italian and the clearest one was *sai*, which means "you know." The way opened up to me twice to go to Italy, even though I was struggling financially. I have found that I am supported on all planes in this process of remembrance. As I have remembered more and learned more about them, the door has opened to my other ancestors as well.

I give acknowledgment also to Naropa University and the University of Creation Spirituality that have given space for the Indigenous Mind Concentration to grow. Creation Spirituality is based on a section of Western spirituality that sees all of creation as good and a blessing. The Christian mystics, on whose ideas Creation Spirituality is

based, saw that there is a relationship between all beings in the universe. It is in maintaining the interconnection of all things that Creation Spirituality comes closest to the wisdom of indigenous cultures the world over. We are part of all there is in creation. This is the holistic approach to spirituality. Spirituality in this context does not ignore the body, but incorporates it into worship and prayer. In this way, Creation Spirituality becomes a practice and not just a set of ideas. It acknowledges each person as an artist—a creative being—as well as a creature of the earth.

Creation Spirituality is represented as a journey with four paths that can lead one from chaos to order. These paths derive from Matthew Fox's study of the Western spirituality of the Christian mystics integrated with post-modern science and its current story of the creation of the universe. Path One of Creation Spirituality is referred to as the Via Positiva and is an expression of the awe and wonder of creation. Path Two is the Via Negativa that is the place of suffering and letting go. Path Three is the Via Creativa that gives birth to creativity. And Path Four is the Via Transformativa where justice and healing lead to compassion. The Four Paths are seen not as a linear progression, but rather as a spiral movement.

What is key to Creation Spirituality is our connection to the universe. The mystics, indigenous people today, and our ancestors lived close to the earth and the seasons. Their relationship with all creation was strong.

I have found that the Indigenous Mind process works at a deep level of Creation Spirituality. The process of recovering the traditional ways of knowing of my Italian ancestors (and all my ancestors) has been, and continues to be, revelatory, experiential,

and holistic. I feel awe and gratitude to the universe and to my ancestors for leading me on this path.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

Indigenous Science is the method with which this remembrance work has been conducted in the Indigenous Mind process. Indigenous Science uses story, history, as a tool for research into the world we live in. As Dr. Apela Colorado has written: “Today, every day, we see our ancestors making the trail for us as we work and move about the face and surface of our mother, the Earth. Past, present, future perfect, and future exist at this moment.” (Colorado, 1997) She goes on to explain that this is why an Elder will speak to an infant, to teach the story and the baby’s place in the world. Relationship is important and the stories teach the lessons of relations. Again from Colorado, “Native stories, which may be 30,000 to 50,000 years old, have the ability to integrate and synthesize all the living relationships or events at any given moment in life. When we rely on a story to guide us, we are not only integrated with the natural environment around us and with our living relations, but also with the timeless past and culture of our ancestors.” (Colorado, 1997)

In listening to my family stories and the folktales and mythology of my people, I have begun to see my place in the world. When I decided to listen and to follow the stories back in time, I began to walk in my ancestors’ way. When I remember my ancestors, they are with me, supporting me and guiding me. When we situate ourselves in our genealogy,

we see not only how we are related but also how all are related. I have begun to live in the way of this traditional knowledge of right relationship and have experienced what happens when that is so. Indigenous Science is a life science and a way of life. I am not separate from that which I observe and interact with.

Dr. Apela Colorado defines Indigenous Science in this way:

Just like western science, indigenous science relies upon direct observations; there are tests to insure validity and data are used for forecasting and generating predictions. Individuals are trained in various specializations, for example, herbalism, weather observations, mental health and time keeping. Unlike western science, the data from indigenous science are not used to control the forces of nature, instead, the data tell us ways and means of accommodating nature. (Colorado, 1994)

She goes on to point out some of the distinctions between Western science and Indigenous Science.

1. The indigenous scientist is an integral part of the research process and there is a defined process for insuring this integrity.
2. All of nature is considered to be intelligent and alive, thus an active research partner.
3. The purpose of indigenous science is to maintain balance.
4. Compared to western time/space notions, indigenous science collapses time and space with the result that our fields of inquiry and participation extend into and overlap with past and present.
5. Indigenous science is concerned with relationships, we try to understand and complete our relationships with all living things.
6. Indigenous science is holistic, drawing on all the senses including the spiritual and the psychic.
7. The end point of an indigenous scientific process is a known and recognized place. This point of balance, referred to by my own tribe as the Great Peace, is both peaceful and electrifyingly alive. In the joy of exact balance, creativity occurs, which is why we can think of our way of knowing as a life science.
8. When we reach the moment/place of balance we do not believe that we have transcended—we say that we are normal! Always we remain embodied in the natural world.
9. Humor is a critical ingredient of all truth seeking, even in the most powerful rituals. This is true because humor balances gravity. (Colorado, 1994)

I have referred to these nine points to place in perspective my experiences in this process of remembrance. By using the method of Indigenous Science to orient myself in this process I have learned to recognize the times when I am in balance and in tune to the call of Spirit and my ancestors. This coming to knowing has helped me to understand dreams and events in my life for what they are: points on the map guiding me on this path.

Dreams have been another measure and guide of this remembrance process. Dreams are the road map that I follow. I see that now, but at times I have doubted that my dreams were “real.” Our ancestors paid attention to dreams as I am being taught to pay attention to mine. Some of my earliest dreams, from childhood, were recurring dreams. One, I remember, always ended with me sliding headfirst towards a pool of lava and burning off only the hair on my head. (I grew up in Ohio; now, here I am, living on Maui, Hawaii!) There was another recurring dream in which I walked through a landscape that was rocky—the rocks were smooth and tall, and obelisk-like—and I heard whispering voices. I could not make out the words and I wandered alone trying to find who was speaking. My mother remembered, in a recent conversation with me, that I used to stand on my bed in my sleep, eyes open, feeling along the walls as if I were looking for something.

In *Tales from the Night Rainbow*, Kaili’one Kame’ekua, who had been taught in the traditional ways of her Hawaiian ancestors, tells how dreams were regarded.

In dreams we had ways of telling ourselves simple truths. Those were things we needed to tend to but had put aside or forgotten. Dreams were the spiritual self speaking to the body. Messages were often simple and to the point.

A journey in a dream was our journey through life on earth. This could be walking or riding a horse or donkey. You could see the person in the dream as someone else, but it was usually yourself that you dreamed about. When you dreamed of a person you looked up to, that was the good in you. When you dreamed about a person you did not care for, or did not trust, that was your own negative side. When dreaming of an enclosure, a house or small area in which you were confined, the dream was about your own body. It was important to pay attention to repairs needed in a dream. Dreams were what would, in later years, be called a roadmap. (Kame'ekua, 1990)

Dreams are an important part of my story and continue to be. In fact, the more I have opened to the process of remembrance the more my dreams have deepened and the more connection I have felt to my ancestors.

The animals and plants have also been guides. I had always been close to animals and cared for them deeply—I had a friend once comment that I treated animals as if they had souls. In my family there have always been dogs and cats, the occasional bird or rodent or reptile. I used to lie in the grass and mimic the calls of the mourning doves, the crows and other wild birds that flocked in our area of Ohio.

In this remembrance work I became aware that the animals were coming to me as teachers. As I began to return to relating with nature and listening to my dreams I found that the animals showed up for me. Ravens and crows would follow me or perch nearby in San Francisco where I lived. I had my cat, Chula, as a companion. I also began to connect with the plants again. There was a beautiful cypress tree that grew in a neighbors yard in San Francisco that comforted me just to look at it. When the trees and the animals showed up in my dreams, I began to pay attention.

CHAPTER THREE

STORY

Stories and words are powerful. We can see that in the negative with the barrage of media hype and false claims in the news and in advertising that cloud our minds and judgment. The stories that are true, the ones that guide us, can also transport us. We can be listening in this room and also be in our ancestors' presence. Sometimes we may be listening to a story being told and then realize that we are in it! In this way we find an understanding of how "indigenous science collapses time and space with the result that our fields of inquiry and participation extend into and overlap with past and present" (Colorado, 1994)

In my research, I discovered that my Italian ancestors had a custom known as the *veglia*¹. The *veglia* was a social occasion in which social rules and values were discussed and transmitted. Stories were told over and over, all through the night. The whole family community, related by blood or marriage, would gather after the work of the day was done and the stories would begin.

First the fairytales were told, containing morals and lessons to teach the young children, who would fall to sleep earliest. Then the tales of lineage and ancestry were told so that the youth would know their history and so they could not forget where they came

¹ *Italian Witchcraft* by Raven Grimassi, page 18

from. To know where they came from was a way for them to take their place in the family, the community, and the world. The tales of tradition and how to behave in relation to each other and the world were the basis of these all-night gatherings. The stories told around the fire or the kitchen table gave us something to stand on, a firm foundation, from which we could get our bearings and move in right relation through the world. When we lose our own stories we have no foundation, no anchor. The simple act of relating our day to another brings us into relationship with that person. When we know the stories of our family, we know where we fit in there. But when we don't know the stories of how our ancestors related to the stars and the world, we lose our way. If you don't know how to behave, how do you know if you are behaving badly? Where is your direction and where is your map? The stories of our relationship with the world and each other helped to guide us and give us good lives.

Creation stories tell us how the world was made, transport us to our beginning, and guide us to our roots. One Italian story tells us the universe started this way:

Diana was the first created before all creation; in her were all things; out of herself, the first darkness, she divided herself; into darkness and light she was divided. Lucifer, her brother and son, herself and her other half, was the light.

And when Diana saw that the light was so beautiful...she yearned for it with exceeding great desire. Wishing to receive the light again into her darkness, to swallow it up in rapture, in delight, she trembled with desire. This desire was the Dawn.

Lucifer, the light, fled from her, and would not yield to her wishes; he was the light which flies into the most distant parts of heaven, the mouse which flies before the cat.

Then Diana went to the fathers of the Beginning, to the mothers, the spirits who were before the first spirit...And they praised her for her courage, they told her

that to rise she must fall; to become the chief of goddesses she must become mortal.

And it came thus that Diana took the form of a cat. Her brother had a cat whom he loved beyond all creatures, and it slept every night on his bed, a cat beautiful beyond all other creatures, a fairy: he did not know it.

Diana prevailed with the cat to change forms with her...But when in the morning he found that he lay by his sister, and that light had been conquered by darkness, Lucifer was extremely angry; but Diana sang to him a spell, a song of power, and he was silent...So Diana with her wiles of witchcraft so charmed him that he yielded to her love. This was the first fascination; she hummed the song, it was as the buzzing of bees (or a top spinning round), a spinning-wheel spinning life. She spun the lives of all men; all things were spun from the wheel of Diana. Lucifer turned the wheel.

(Leland, 2003)

This creation story of my Italian ancestors uses Roman names like Diana and Christian names like Lucifer, but I feel that it goes back a long way. Perhaps, as the Elders of other cultures have said about their own creation stories, it goes back to the stars. Diana is the darkness of the beginning, the womb. In classical myth, Diana is the goddess of the moon; Lucifer is Apollo, the god of the sun. He is also called Dianus in another version of the story and he is Diana's reflection. The story tells of the balance of light and dark, male and female.

My Story

There is an old photo of *mia bisnona*, my great-grandmother, Carmela Madia, that I love to look at. I can see my eyes, my mother's eyes, and my grandmother's eyes in hers as she looks straight on at the camera. I had never known her on this plane—she died when my grandmother was ten years old—but I wanted to know what she saw. This was not a conscious desire of mine, at first—the way has been circular and not always clear—but I came to recognize this desire to know Carmela, and all my ancestors, later in this process of recovering my indigenous mind. And so this work is also an attempt to see the world through Carmela's eyes and to tell my story of remembrance.

I came to the Indigenous Mind program indirectly; I was looking for a writing program or some way to get over writer's block and to be able to express myself. I wanted a change in my life because my freelance editing business was foundering and I did not know what to do next. I was told of Dr. Apela Colorado and her work with genealogy, and it was suggested to me that perhaps she could help me write about my family.

At Naropa University I met with a teacher² who told me about the program. I had been having visions of a lizard tattoo on my right shoulder for seven years. In the previous two years I had begun to work with the Medicine Cards³ to try and connect with

² Dr. Yacine Kouyate

³ *Medicine Cards*, by David Carson (Choctaw) and Jamie Sams (Seneca/Cherokee) are a set of 52 cards depicting animals and a book. The divination system is based on the ancient teachings of Native America. The text explains how the cards can be used to receive guidance and healing messages from the animal spirits.

the animal spirits for help in my life and to get closer to the ways of my Native American ancestors. Crow and Lizard had both come up as my spirit guides and the messages that I received from the cards had a resonance with me and offered guidance. After realizing, through my work with the Medicine Cards, that lizard is one of my spirit guides I had the tattoo done that summer. I was told, after relating this story, that the lizard was significant to what I would learn in the Indigenous Mind process. Something resonated with me during our conversation and I applied for the program. What I had signed up for was not clear until later. It had to unfold, piece by piece and layer by layer.

When I arrived on Maui in January 2002 for my first residency in the Indigenous Mind program I had no idea what to expect. I knew I was going to attend classes and that traditional elders and ceremony were included, but I did not know how that would look.

The first person I met outside of the place where we were gathering was Steve Zukus. At that moment, I did not *know* that I was meeting my husband, but for some reason I said, “I’m the new one,” as I introduced myself to him, referring, I thought, to my new student status. Steve and I spoke only briefly in my week on Maui. It was after I returned to San Francisco and we began to correspond that we began to meet in the dreamtime. It was a connection, I feel, made through Spirit. This was one of the ways in which we knew that we were brought together for a reason. By May we were engaged, I moved to Maui in September, and on November 2, 2002, we were married.

Some of what I gained with that first leap of faith and in listening to my ancestors’ guidance was my husband, a new home, and a new way of working—and the deepening

knowledge of my ancestors and who I am and where I come from. This has brought me a feeling of wholeness and balance and I continue to learn.

One thing I have discovered in this process has been the difficulty I have had in writing about it. The experiences run deep and are hard to express in words without sounding hokey or New Age-y. This struggle with words (frustrating for someone who loves words like I do) also made me realize how much I have lost. The context in which to express the sacredness of every day, and the ways and words to do that, are not easily accessible nor are they taught.

My story is continuous and this path for me began before I entered this university program. What this process of awakening to my Indigenous Mind has brought to me is awareness, validation, and context for my experiences and dreams. My experience with the power of the Kihawahine at the first residency for me in Maui explained the importance and pull of the lizard for me.

The Kihawahine is the oldest Aumakua or spiritual helper in Polynesia. She depicts the power of the knowledge of integration of dualism (conception). She brings the spiritual and earthly realms together through the heart. Her Kinolau or animal form is the lizard or mo'o. Every island has a Mo'o but only Maui has the Kihawahine, who lives in the pond that was at Moku'ula. This Mo'o took the name of Kihawahine when the princess Kala'aiheana, daughter of the High Chief Pi'ilani died and her spirit was dedicated to the Mo'o. From then on, the Mo'o and the princess were one, which is why | the ki'i or image has the form of a woman. The Kihawahine in the pond is representative

of the fetus in the womb. Each vertebrae of the long lizard spine represents a generation. The tail represents the ancient ancestors.

When I had heard this story of the Kihawahine, I felt then that the ancestors had been and were still calling me. Learning in this way has shown me that I have been living the story and the dreams have been my map. The more I ask for guidance, the more I receive, and the more I learn to also look within myself for the answers forgotten but kept in my heart.

I had a clear dream after I was accepted to the Indigenous Mind program in December 2001, and had committed to come to Maui for my first residency: *There was a large crow with a red heart shape on its breast. It let me hold it and was going to fly with us both. I had some fear of flying and did not know how to hold on properly and let go. The crow stayed with me.* (Dream, Personal journal, December 2001) Soon after this dream the number of crows and ravens that followed me around San Francisco increased. I was afraid that I would not be able to afford to attend the residency or to pay for tuition. I received financial help to continue this process. Because I had begun to see my dreams as signposts, I trusted the crow in my dream, even though I did not trust my own ability to fly.

Trusting has also meant embracing the shadow. My cat, Chula, had been my companion for seven years before she moved to Maui with me. She actually had to spend her first four months in Hawaii on the island of Oahu in the Animal Quarantine facility there. I could only visit her once a month because of the cost of flying from Maui to Oahu. That time was difficult but there was no question that she would not come with me

to Maui. We had a spiritual bond and she had guided me with her love and companionship through some hard times in our stay in San Francisco. When she came to our new home in January 2003 she was very happy. We had always lived in small spaces and now she had two acres to roam.

All seemed well until she disappeared in March. It was unusual for her to stay away and I could find no trace of her. One night as I looked at the stars, I asked the moon in prayer to know what happened to her. That night I had a dream: *Chula was walking towards me in a strange way, wild-eyed and scared. When I picked her up I could feel every bone in her body broken and she could not lift her head or focus her eyes or speak to me.* (Dream, Personal journal, 24 March 2003) I woke screaming. I did not want to believe that she was gone. I later got news from neighbors and friends that there had been a pack of wild dogs in the area and that the dream was probably the truth. I struggled with what lesson I could learn from this loss and my continued dream connection with Chula. My teacher⁴ reminded me that “all nature is alive and participates” in this remembrance process. Chula made the journey with me. Dealing with loss and learning to grieve is what I had to do to live the *whole* story. Chula was my teacher in this part of the journey.

In my research into the folktales of the Italian people, there was one I kept coming back to. I read it over and over during my process, and I turned to it again while grieving for Chula.

The Tale of the Cats

A woman had a daughter and a stepdaughter, and she treated the stepdaughter like a servant. One day she sent her out to pick chicory. The girl walked and walked, but

⁴ Dr. Kimmy Johnson

instead of chicory, she found a nice big cauliflower. She tugged and tugged, and when the plant finally came up, it left a hole the size of a well in the earth. There was a ladder, and she climbed down it.

She found a house full of cats, all very busy. One of them was doing the wash, another drawing water from a well, another sewing, another cleaning house, another baking bread. The girl took a broom from one cat and helped with the sweeping, from another she took soiled linen and helped with the washing; then she helped draw water from the well, and also helped a cat put loaves of bread into the oven.

At noon, out came a large kitty, the mamma of all the cats, and rang the bell. “Ding-a-ling! Ding-a-ling! Whoever has worked, come and eat! Whoever hasn’t worked, come and look on!”

The cats replied, “Mamma, every one of us worked, but this maiden worked more than we did.”

“Good girl!” said the cat. “Come and eat with us.” The two sat down to the table, the girl in the middle of the cats, and Mamma Cat served her meat, macaroni, and roast chicken; but she offered her children only beans. It made the maiden unhappy, however, to be the only one eating and, noticing the cats were hungry, she shared with them everything Mamma Cat gave her. When they got up, the girl cleared the table, washed the cats’ plates, swept the room, and put everything in order. Then she said to Mamma Cat, “Dear cat, I must now be on my way, or my mother will scold me.”

“One moment, my daughter,” replied the cat. “I want to give you something.” Downstairs was a large storeroom, stacked on one side with silk goods, from dresses to pumps, and on the other side with homemade things like skirts, blouses, aprons, cotton handkerchiefs, and cowhide shoes. The cat said, “Pick out what you want.”

The poor girl, who was barefooted and dressed in rags, replied, “Give me a homemade dress, a pair of cowhide shoes, and a neckerchief.”

“No,” answered the cat, “you were good to my little ones, and I shall give you a nice present.” She picked out the finest silk gown, a large and delicately worked handkerchief, and a pair of satin slippers. She dressed her and said, “Now when you go out, you will see a few little holes in the wall. Push your fingers into them, then look up.”

When she went out, the girl thrust her fingers into those holes and drew them out ringed with the most beautiful rings you ever saw. She lifted her head, and a star fell on her brow. Then she went home adorned like a bride.

Her stepmother asked, “And who gave you all this finery?”

“Mamma, I met up with some little cats that I helped with their chores, and they gave me a few presents.” She told how it had all come about. Mother could hardly wait to send her own idle daughter out next day, saying to her, “Go, daughter dear, so you too will be blessed like your sister.”

“I don’t want to,” she replied, ill-mannered girl that she was. “I don’t feel like walking. It’s too cold, and I’m going to stay by the fire.”

But her mother took a stick and drove her out. A good way away the lazy creature found the cauliflower, pulled it up, and went down to the cats’ dwelling. The first one she saw got its tail pulled, the second one its ears, the third one had its whiskers snatched out,

the one sewing had its needle unthreaded, the one drawing water had its bucket overturned. In short, she worried the life out of them all morning, and how they did meow!

At noon, out came Mamma Cat with the bell. “Ding-a-ling! Ding-a-ling! Whoever has worked, come and eat! Whoever hasn’t worked, come and look on!”

“Mamma,” said the cats, “we wanted to work, but this girl pulled us by the tail and tormented the life out of us, so we got nothing done!”

“All right,” replied Mamma Cat, “let’s move up to the table.” She offered the girl a barley cake soaked in vinegar, and her little ones macaroni and meat. But throughout the meal the girl filched food from the cats. When they got up from the table, heedless of clearing away the dishes or cleaning up, she said to Mamma Cat, “Give me the stuff now you gave my sister.”

So Mamma Cat showed her into the storeroom and asked her what she wanted.

“That dress there, the nicest! Those pumps with the highest heels!”

“All right,” replied the cat, “undress and put on these greasy woolen togs and these hobnailed shoes worn down completely at the heels.” She tied a ragged neckerchief around her and dismissed her, saying, “Off with you, and when you go out, stick your fingers in the holes and look up.”

The girl went out, thrust her fingers in the holes, and countless worms wrapped around them. The harder she tried to free her fingers, the tighter the worms gripped them. She looked up, and a blood sausage fell on her face and hung over her mouth, and she had to nibble it constantly so it would get no longer. When she arrived home in that attire, uglier than a witch, her mother was so angry she died. And from eating blood sausage day in, day out, the girl died too. But the good and industrious stepsister married a handsome youth.

(Italian folktale, compiled and translated by Italo Calvino)

At one point, I began to realize that I was part of this story and that it spoke to my journey on this path. My professor, Dr. Apela Colorado, helped me to see the connections that I felt were there. There was the cat that gave a gift, the rings that I received for doing the work in my life, the “star on the brow” or “insight” I had received—the layers unpeeled like an onion. When I told this story as part of my presentation before the Elders, they were able to confirm these connections. Through this story part of my story can be told. I am telling the story and I am in the story.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE JOURNEY⁵

What does my dream about gypsies mean? *I missed the gypsies in the parade going by the house. I felt very disappointed and went looking for them through the crowds in the streets. I could hear the music but I could not see them. Someone was telling me that they would come by my window on June 1st. I did not want to miss them.* (Dream, Personal journal, 25 April 2000)

I first traveled to Italy in September 2000. My Grandma Deli had died the previous June, and I suppose I wanted to go in remembrance of her. I don't remember when I had made the decision to go. (Perhaps another instance of my Italian ancestors calling to me.) It was not an entirely successful trip (I thought at the time). I went to Venice, Florence, and Rome, and had planned to take a train from Rome south to Calabria and then back to Abruzzo. I ran out of money and was forced to end my trip prematurely. I returned to San Francisco from Rome. I was frustrated at the time, but I see now that I was not ready to go to the South. It was on my return flight to the U.S. that I met my friend Chiara, who lives in Rome, and through our emails I was able to keep some connection with Italy. I resolved to try again to get to the South of Italy and eventually planned the trip for the summer of 2002.

⁵ In compiling my journal entries and writing about this second trip to Italy for the first time since I had traveled there, I realize that the dates of this writing are exactly the same as the dates of my time in Italy last year (2002).

I reflected on my upcoming trip to Italy as I traveled by train from San Francisco to Ohio to visit my family for Christmas.

There is something about traveling that takes you out of yourself and brings you back to your core at the same time. A train ride across the United States or a train ride across Italy, both contain that freeing moment, each moment distinct. There is immediacy to a train ride. You can see the landscape close up. Each mountain and river holds your attention....The broad expanse, the rugged hills and mountains, they don't make me feel small or insignificant. Things get put into perspective; I feel a part of it all. (Personal journal, December 2001)

After I began the Indigenous Mind program, I did more research, both through reading books and talking story with my parents. I tracked my dreams and I gathered what information I could, hoping to be better prepared for the journey. I continued my Italian lessons. I found the names of the tribal peoples of Abruzzo, where my grandfather was born, the Vestini and the Marsi; the Brutti were the tribal people of Calabria, where my grandmother's parents were born. When I traveled to Calabria and Abruzzo I kept open to the land and the feelings of the place and people.

I had come home to San Francisco from Maui early in May after becoming engaged to Steve. I began preparing for my second trip to Italy.

On the 30th of May I dream of my friend Kathryn and another woman named Catherine. This is one of a series of dreams over the previous six months in which my given name is repeated. (My family calls me Cathy, my given name is Catherine; during my first trip to Italy everyone called me Caterina.) My teacher⁶ mentions to me that she feels that I am being called by my grandmother to relate to her in the spirit realm. There

⁶ Dr. Apela Colorado

is some acknowledgment that I need to make for the support I have received from my ancestors.

A couple of days later, I meet a crow on the road. She lands right in front of me and I greet her as I walk to my friends' house to care for their dog and cat. When I return home, I pull a Medicine Card and it is Crow, the shape shifter and the holder of universal law. As I meditate on this synchronicity I feel I am being asked to shape-shift into my future self while balancing the past and present in the now.

I continue to pack, not only for the trip to Italy but also for my move to Maui. I begin to feel anxious and nervous about taking this trip alone. I burn some cedar and pray for patience. There are two or three crows flying and calling between the tall buildings on Battery Street as I run errands downtown one day. I am working three jobs. I have another dream: *My pink, blue, and white baby blanket is being used as a tablecloth by someone I had dated briefly and wasn't very fond of. I take it back from him, yanking it out from under the lamp on the table, and shake the dust off of it.* (Dream, Personal journal, 3 June 2002) This is one of a series of dreams I begin to have about this blanket and other items from my childhood. My dreams seem to be leading me backwards in order to go forwards.

On June 4th I pull Hawk from the Medicine Cards—the messenger. My mother calls and tells me that she is sending some pictures of her father for me to take to Italy. She has my brother Aaron scan them and send them to me by email. The next day, June 5th, would have been the 95th birthday of my maternal grandma, Lucy Deli. The jeweler is not sure that my engagement ring will be resized in time for me to wear on my trip and that makes

me anxious. I go to my last Italian class before my departure for Italy. I am missing Steve and feeling sad.

I listen to the CDs I have bought, one of traditional Calabrese music and the other traditional Abruzzese music. There is a difference: the music of Calabria seems darker and makes me uneasy, the music of Abruzzo is lighter and I feel happy when I hear it.

The next night I dream: *I am in a house very much like the one that my family lived in on Robindale Ave. I am sweeping up dirt left from someone else's work. The side door is open and the dirt is all along the walk that leads to the front yard. Chula is running and playing and I am worried that something in the front yard will hurt her, so I keep calling her as I sweep.* (Dream, Personal journal, 6 June 2002)

On June 7, I get an email from my friend Chiara in Rome. She invites me to stay with her the first night when I arrive in Rome. My ring is ready and I pick it up at the jewelers.

The next day my early birthday gift arrives from Steve. It is a pendant: two Celtic knotwork ravens, entwined in silver. I spend the day cleaning and packing. I dream: *I cannot find my car but my father is there with his van. I dream that my friend and former employer Jeff is teaching a class called "Crapshooting 101" that I will help teach. I dream that my guitar and my books are getting wet from a sprinkler and then it stops.* (Dreams, Personal journal, 7 June 2002)

When the airport shuttle driver picks me up the next morning we drive past my friend Jeff's house. After the driver picks up the last passenger in San Francisco, I look up and see a street sign that says "Aloha" and since I'm moving to Hawaii soon I take that as a good sign. When I board the plane at SFO I look at the TV screen and I see "Akron, OH"

and “Akron Beacon Journal”—where I was born and most of my family still lives—and, because I have started to pay attention to synchronicities and to listen, I feel encouraged.

On the plane I am reading *Healing Dreams*, and everything I read in the book seems to pertain to my trip, to my life journey. “Each moment is a fulcrum of choice; every act, every thought is consequential to the future, and perhaps even to the past.” (Barasch, 2000)

I wonder if I will be able to document this experience as I am in it.

There is an older couple sitting next to me on the plane. They happen to be Abruzzese born, but living in Philadelphia, returning to Pescara, Abruzzo, for a visit. They tell me in English (him) and Italian (her, the “first” Josephine) about Abruzzo: Sulmona is the best place to get *confetti crisperi*, the traditional candied almonds for weddings; now is the best time for *i filaciu*, the first figs that are as big as a grapefruit!

I feel loved by my Abruzzese grandfather, although I never knew him, to have sent such good ambassadors of his *paise*. My Abruzzese grandfather, Angelo Deli, was born in Campotosto, in the mountains, and as a boy took the family’s goats and sheep to pasture in the hills. As we fly, I try to remember all the stories I have heard about him.

We were not in contact with any of the family still living in Italy after my Grandpa Deli and my Great-grandpa Rotunda died. We lost the connection with the land. I did not realize how much was lost until I returned. The old people I met in Abruzzo and Calabria, who listened to why I had come, were filled with sadness at this tragedy: I did not know where my family was or if there was anyone who would know who I was.

I arrive in Rome on June 10th, my 40th birthday. The cabbie from the airport to Chiara's flat overcharges me, but still I am happy to have made it. Chiara and I spend the day shopping, talking, and eating. She helps me buy my train tickets to Catanzaro, Calabria and Avezzano, Abruzzo. I meet her youngest daughter, Sofia, at lunch, and her husband Giovanni at dinner. She has prepared a dinner of *agnello con finocchio e patate rosmarine, fragioline, mozzarella di bufala, e vino rosso* (lamb with fennel and rosemary potatoes, green beans, buffalo mozzarella, and red wine). The vegetables and lamb are from her villa in Umbria—from the land. She gives me as a birthday gift a traditional cloth from Northern Italy. I show her photos of Steve and Maui. I am relaxed but anxious at the same time.

Shadow

The next morning Chiara drives me to the train station, Roma Termini. I think I hear a crow as we leave her house, but she thinks it is *un gabbiano*—a seagull.

On the train I am at first too shy to start a conversation. I am afraid that I won't understand what anyone is saying; their Italian is so fast. Later I have a conversation with the women who are sharing my compartment. The mother and daughter are returning home to somewhere outside Catanzaro. The older woman is going to Catanzaro Lido, to the ocean. They give me advice on hotels and buses and Pontegrande, the town where my mother thinks her grandparents were from. They say I am brave—*che courage*—to go alone and without an address or phone number of any relatives. I tell what I know: my Calabrese great-grandmother, Carmela Madia, came from a landowning family in

Pontegrande and her husband, Giuseppe Rotunda, was the son of a schoolteacher. I tell them that the family has lost track of each other, after the grandparents had died.

The Appenines are on the left of the train. There are cactus and grey-black cattle on the sides of the hills. Then there is farmland. The apartments and houses in the towns we pass all have laundry hanging out to dry and cans or boxes with plants where there is no ground to garden in. I am a little nervous and a little lonely. I hope that my ancestors are guiding me on this trip.

We pass Naples. I see the ocean, grey-green and full of trash. The city looks very modern. The further south we go, the more blue and beautiful the sea. At Lamezia the train divides and our section heads to Catanzaro. There are towns and what look like ruins perched in the craggy mountains. I feel a tingle through my body and in the pit of my stomach (excitement? Some fear of the unknown?). The *ginestra*—the yellow-flowered broom—is everywhere. After my return to San Francisco I find out more about the plant. “Thus the qualities of broom are renewal and rebirth, as evidenced by the bright yellow flowers that grow from the previous year’s growth.” (Bouchardon, 1999) I also find a poem, in dialect, calling *la ginestra* “the light of the people.” (see Appendix A)

The Brutti had inhabited the area of Calabria in the Neolithic period or earlier until colonized by the Greeks. The Greeks first set up a trading post in Syracuse, and then began the colonizing of the Southern peninsula; the beginning of the Magna Graecia, the Greek occupation of Southern Italy. The dialects in the South include some based on Greek and Albanian, reflecting the almost constant invasions. The towns perched in the mountains away from the sea show the effects of invasion also.

The trip from Rome to Catanzaro is listed as six hours by train, but with delays and stops it is getting closer to eight. I arrive in Catanzaro around 5 p.m. The station is at the bottom of the cliff and the city proper is on the top. I take a bus to the city and manage to find the Hotel Belvedere, the one listed in the guidebook. The young man behind the counter is arrogant and rude. I feel that I am being overcharged but he pretends not to understand my Italian. He speaks quickly and I give him almost all my cash—90 euros—for a room. I go to find an ATM and it is then that I find that none of my cards work in the machines here and I have no travelers' checks.

No one in Calabria speaks English and in my panic I can't think or speak clearly in Italian. I manage to call Steve, buying a phone card with my last 5 euros. He is not sure what to do and I go back to the hotel in despair. I am seized then with anger at myself and my predicament—similar to my last trip to Italy—and in my fear and anger I curse my apparent arrogance and stupidity: Did I think that I would just walk in and have cousins waiting with open arms? No one seems friendly in Catanzaro. A teenage girl tries to push me into the road. No one offers to help.

Back in my hotel room I cry and pray. It is a difficult night. I am full of doubt and sadness. I cannot see the stars from my room and I feel a failure. I am reminded of my previous trip to Italy, when I had to cut my trip short without making it South because I had run out of money. I am too distraught at the time, but later I reflect on the fact that it is the lack of money and the fear that comes with it that has stopped me both times (and in many other situations in my life) and that lack of money was the impetus for so many Southern Italians to leave for other lands.

I dream: *my Grandma Deli is getting rid of all my mother's things without telling me and I am crying.* (Dream, Personal journal, 12 June 2002) The fear and loss I am feeling over money and loneliness on this journey comes through in my dream.

I find out the next morning that the night clerk, a kindly older man, had tried to wake me when Steve had called the hotel. I go to a payphone and call Steve back. The help comes today (12 June). Steve wires money to cover the rest of my trip. I feel better with money and food.

Then I find a museum of cultural history, Museo Comunale, and the young guard there, Antonio, hears my story and the reason I am in Catanzaro. He looks at the names my mother has written down, my great-grandparents' names, and he calls all the Madias and Rotundas in the phone book to see if they are relatives. No luck. He becomes my guide and interpreter and takes me to the Ufficio Anagrafe, the hall of records and helps me explain to the clerk there and to fill out the forms to find out about my family there.

A man at the provincial office offers to drive me to Pontegrande, but I do not feel safe about it, so I decline. I am not able to find a way to get to the village. I walk around Catanzaro, looking for clues to my ancestors but feeling apart.

There is ugliness and beauty mixed here. I find the Piazza Santa Caterina—the Plaza of Saint Catherine—and there is a beautiful fountain. Behind it is the ugly cement police station. I look out over the mountains and the ravines to the wild land around and wish I could walk in nature. Catanzaro is on a high cliff and the only way down seems to be the highway, with no way to walk safely. I feel helpless and stressed and find that I am

having difficulty traveling alone while trying to reconnect with the land and the spirit of the land.

I find a church as I wander through the streets. It has the names of many people either the builders or benefactors, I cannot tell, carved in stone on the front. There is a name, “Madia, Raffaele,” an ancestor! On that same street is a shop that sells painted porcelain items. The woman who paints and her son are pleasant and I buy a plate for my mother there.

That night I eat a traditional meal in a restaurant, Da Salvatore, near the hotel. The homemade pasta is delicious. Another local dish is tripe, but I find it just as disgusting now as when my grandmother used to try and get me to eat it as a child. I walk in the warm evening and have a gelato, feeling calmer. The moon is up, just a sliver of a crescent with Jupiter in her arms, shining over the Chiesa San Giovanni. I pray and give thanks to my ancestors for watching over me before I sleep.

I wake to see the sunrise over the hills. I can just glimpse the Adriatic Sea. The wind is blowing and the birds, they look like swifts, are swooping and calling. I decide to leave Catanzaro and see if I fare better in Abruzzo. I feel stuck and unable to go further in Calabria. The way seems closed.

Nevertheless, I have found some of the beauty here behind the grimness. What I reflect on as I buy food and pack to leave are these: “the sight of the crescent moon and Jupiter over Chiesa San Giovanni; the kindness of the museum guard; the fountain of my patron saint, Santa Caterina; and, the perfume of the peaches and apricots that tasted so delicious, grown on this land of Calabria.” (Personal journal, June 2002)

It is later that I add to these the finding of the name of my ancestor in stone and the recognizing of the character of my great grandparents' people and thus my own (the closed feeling of fear and defense). While I was in the midst of it I gathered things I did not know I had until later.

I call my mother from the Catanzaro train station. I had not called her earlier so as not to worry her with my panic over the money situation. I tell her what I think I have found about the family and apologize that I have not gotten more. She is not as disappointed as I am and surprises me by saying, "It is enough that you are there on the land." I ask her about her Calabrian grandfather: was he hard to know? She tells me he was sometimes hard and then I remember how my grandmother had been angry with her father for his harsh treatment of her.

On my way to Oakland, California, for graduation, almost a year later, I am compelled to bring a book I have been reading about the effect of immigration on one man's Calabrese family.⁷ As I read, I was becoming angry and saddened being reminded of how badly Italians were treated in the U.S. and also by learning how the Southern Italians were scorned and mistreated by the Northern Italians.

All sorts of prejudicial and pejorative things were said of a people who had come from isolated mountain towns and worked hard to not only make a living for themselves, but also to send money back to support whole families in Italy.

Not only were they discriminated against in the U.S., but also when they came back to their towns, they were looked askance at because they had learned new ways and were

⁷ *Unto the Sons* by Gay Talese

not as obedient or respectful of the elders and the old ways as before. The immigrants in the U.S. and their children internalized this scorn and hatred. I think uncomfortably about how I was not always so interested in my Italian roots as I was my Native American and Celtic roots.

Gay Talese, the author of *Unto the Sons*, expresses that self-hatred:

I saw myself always as an alien, an outsider, a drifter who, like the shipwrecked sailors, had arrived by accident. I felt different from my young friends in almost every way, different in the cut of my clothes, the food in my lunch box, the music I heard at home on the record player, the ideas and inner thoughts I revealed on those rare occasions when I was open and honest.

I was olive-skinned in a freckle-faced town, and I felt unrelated even to my parents, especially my father, who was indeed a foreigner—an unusual man in dress and manner, to whom I bore no physical resemblance and with whom I could never identify. Trim and elegant, with wavy dark hair and a small rust-colored moustache, he spoke English with an accent and received letters bearing strange-looking stamps. (Talese, 1992)

Then in a ceremonial circle celebrating our graduation, one of my fellow students said that she had “wanted to be Italian” and suddenly I felt a rush of joy. With that one sentence of affirmation, I was hearing the opposite of all that had been thrown at my ancestors: “dirty,” “dago,” “lazy,” and “cowardly.”

The train is full and I am stuck in a smoking car for six hours back to Rome. I want to watch the scenery pass, but a woman sharing the compartment (her name is Anna and she is near my age) wants to chat. She has been visiting her parents in Calabria and is returning to Rome and her fiancé Roberto. I show her pictures of Steve and Maui, my soon to be new home. There is an old man, happy and drunk, singing in the corridor; apparently his sports team has won a match. He pops his head in and offers us cheap red

wine in plastic cups. We decline. Anna is full of advice and worries that it will be too late for me to continue on to Avezzano from Rome. She insists I find a hotel and stay in Rome. I argue that I should go on (my Italian is getting better from constant use). I feel some urgency to go on and not stop.

When we reach Roma Termini, Anna asks Roberto to help me to the next station. We all pile in his car and Roberto drives like a maniac to Roma Tiburtina, where Anna helps me run with my bags to the train I must catch. She looks worried as she gives me a quick hug goodbye. As the train pulls out into the darkening evening I begin to worry myself if I have made a mistake.

My uneasiness grows when a group of loud and drunken gypsies gets on the train before it pulls off. There is almost no one else on board. I *faccio le cornata*—make the horns and touch metal (my raven pendant) to ward off bad luck. I also pray silently to my ancestors for protection. I feel a little easier when the gypsies get off (after an argument about “lost tickets” with the conductor) a few stops outside of Rome. They wave as the train pulls off. I can’t explain my discomfort and fear of the gypsies; after all, I feel that I have Romany blood. Perhaps it is part of the shadow I felt in Calabria.

It is now full dark and there is the crescent moon and Jupiter again. I cannot see the countryside and most stations are dark and there does not seem to be any real towns close by. That worries me a bit, since it will be nearly midnight when I reach Avezzano. I decide to trust and sit back and enjoy the quiet ride.

The train is an older type with windows in the car that open to the night air. I smell fresh rich earth and the sweet smell of some flower. There are birds singing in the night at

one station we stop at, and I stick my head out the window while we are stopped there to try and see what kind they are.

There is a certain smell as we travel through the night that reminds me of something I cannot place. It seems like a smell from my childhood. It grows stronger when we enter the tunnels. All is deep velvety black, so the change in smell and sound is my only indication of our entering the tunnels. Of the smell I write in my journal, “Perhaps it is the breath of the mo’o of this land—*la lucertola, il serpente.*” (Personal journal, June 2002)

Since the car is empty now, I start to hum a tune I remember from the Abruzzese music CD. I feel this amazing warmth and love around me as we clatter through the night.

When we reach Avezzano the station is about to close; we are the last train that night. I drag my heavy bags out of the door. Across the plaza is the Hotel Italia. I am relieved and thankful that there is someplace still open and so close to the station. I check in and notice with relief that it is cleaner and more modern than the Belvedere in Catanzaro.

Reconnecting With the Land

In the morning I ask to move from the first to the second floor. I must explain to the proprietress, an older woman who smokes heavily as we speak, that I don’t dislike the room but that I prefer to have one on the second floor. Since I am willing to prepay each night and I am staying for a few nights, she finally agrees.

Outside I can see the mountains. Avezzano is in a flat valley central to the places I think I should visit, including L’Aquila and Campotosto. The day is quite hot and still. I

check for buses to L'Aquila in the train station—open now—and I am directed to the other side of the train station where the bus station is located. I check the schedule and decide to go to L'Aquila the next day early. Returning to the train station I notice a newsstand that also sells books and postcards. I find postcards of the traditional clothing of the region and five books, in Italian, about the stories, costumes, and culture of Abruzzo. It is there that I find a passage describing the tradition of the bride wearing a lace kerchief on the head. I realize that what I am searching for is starting to come to me. My ancestors coming forward to meet me and help me as I move toward them. I decide to take Steve's advice and try not to try so hard to have an experience—just go with the flow.

That evening I find a restaurant, Saponi Vecchi, downstairs in the hotel. There are other Americans there and the proprietor asks me to help translate the menu for them. It gives me a feeling of connection and I take a pleasant walk in the piazza after dinner looking at the moon and the stars.

I have time to reflect on my experience in Calabria. I wanted to be out in nature; the city of Catanzaro seemed too hard and mean. The feel of the place was like the sound of traditional Calabrian music that I had listened to before I traveled. It made me feel uneasy whereas the Abruzzese music made me feel happy. Perhaps in Calabria I was encountering my own shadow and having trouble owning it: the side of me that can be hard and mean and can shut people out. The nagging money worries are a recurring theme in my life and affected my family. My parents always seem stoic in the face of

precarious financial situations, but I worry and become depressed. I want to fix things, like my Grandma Deli always tried to do.

“Abruzzo has opened up to me.” I write this in my journal on June 15th, the third anniversary of my Grandma Deli’s passing. I feel warmth, as if my grandfather and his people wanted to hold me and protect me. Having never known him in life, I was very moved, and it made me feel part of something bigger.

I take the bus from Avezzano to L’Aquila, only an hour away. At the main bus stop for L’Aquila there is a piazza with a strikingly beautiful fountain. Two women stand on a large rectangle holding a *conca*⁸. The water pours out of the *conca* and the women’s arms form the handles of the jug. It is called *La Fontana Luminosa*. I am transfixed and sit down near the large white dogs (Abruzzese shepherds) that lay in the shade at the bus stop to look at the fountain. I feel welcomed.

To the left of the city proper and up a hill is a park that contains a Spanish fort from the days of Spanish occupation of L’Aquila, now a museum. There are magnificent trees—cedar, juniper, pine and fir—surrounding me as I walk and *la ginestra* with its yellow flowers all along the fort walls. I hear crows and doves and another call that I find later is *il nero*, the blackbird with a red beak.

I walk around the fort in the park and look to Gran Sasso nearby. I know that Campotosto, the town where my grandfather was born, is somewhere in that direction. There are a few people taking a morning walk in the park. I see an older man picking something from *la ginestra*. I am curious and ask him what he is doing. He shows me his

⁸ Traditional copper water jug of Abruzzo

harvest: translucent tiny white snails—*le luminose*, he calls them—and they are for his lunch. He tells me how to cook them in olive oil and garlic. He then tells me that I should return on a day that the museum is open and view the ancient skeleton of an elephant that is kept there. He bids me *buon giorno* and goes on to the next bush. As we chatted near the broom I realize that it is these yellow flowers that smelled so sweet as the train from Rome traveled through the night.

It appears that L’Aquila was founded in 1254 to sustain the anti-imperial rebellion in western Abruzzi. At the battle of Tagliacozzo in 1268, the last of the Swabians, the Emperor Conrad, was defeated and captured, and the Anjou dynasty finally became rulers of Southern Italy.

Benedictines also colonized areas of Abruzzo and Molise. Most of their establishments were built on pre-existing pagan temples. “As clever and energetic entrepreneurs, colonizers and improvers, they soon developed a network of economically-integrated convents, which, in the absence of economic and productive structures at that time [11th century] were autonomous and able to provide for themselves.” (Olivo)

Hearing the Call

I go into L’Aquila and wander the streets. I find the Piazza Duomo. There is an open-air market there and I look around the stalls until I come to one where a woman and her son are selling concas and other antiquities. I ask the woman about the concas in Italian and she replies in the Abruzzese dialect—and I understand much of what she says! Her son knows Italian and is able to fill in the gaps of our conversation. There is a large ancient conca that I have no way of getting home, so I look at some smaller, newer ones. The son explains the different patterns etched or stamped in the copper. He points out the traditional patterns and I choose two of them: one has a spiral pattern and the other is stylized birds and flowers. Then I see a terracotta jar. It looks ancient and as I hold it I feel the age. It is caked with mud and straw (the son says that old people sell them items

from their barns and attics) and smells of goat or sheep. The woman says that cleaned up it will make a nice vase for *fiori* (flowers). I ask her what it was originally used for and she says *legumes*—it was used to store the family’s beans. She wraps my purchases—the two small conca and the jug—in newspaper and gives me advice on how to find my family in Campotosto. I feel gifted with these things that held the water and the food of my ancestors. (I find later that the conca is also used as a drum.)

I find out more about Campotosto from two old men in the piazza outside the bookstore that I visit next. I ask them first about the bird I hear. They say it is *il nero*, the blackbird. When they hear my story they tell me a little history about Campotosto; how it is the location of an artificial lake and is the main source of hydroelectric power for the peninsula.

I return to Avezzano that afternoon feeling fuller. One of the hotel clerks has brought me something. He motions to me to wait as he pulls out a map and a local guidebook that focuses on the sites of the Marsi, one of the Italic tribes of the area, one that I feel I am descended from. He has made a hobby of studying their culture, he says, and gives me the book as a gift to help in my search for my ancestors. My simple Italian and his lack of English make it difficult to have a scholarly discussion about the history of this place, but he understands my gratitude at his gift.

The Vestini name derives either from the cult of Vesta, the goddess of the family, whose original temple was in Alba not Rome and whose cult the Romans and Sabellians derived probably from the East. Or from the Celtic words *ves* (meaning river) and *tin* (meaning country); so that Vestini would mean “inhabitants of the country of the waters”

and they would have originated from the Illyrici, Celtic populations who were the earliest inhabitants of the Adriatic coast. There is evidence that the Marsi in Abruzzo were at first wandering healers and “snake charmers” with connections to Africa. They eventually settled the Lake Fucino floodplain. There have been people living in Abruzzo for about 70,000 years when the first nomadic populations of hunters and harvesters of the Palaeolithic period lived in those valleys of the region, which opened towards the sea. “At the beginning of the Metal Age sheep-farming developed progressively with the arrival of peoples of oriental origin who subsequently took over from the Neolithics, thus generating the new cultural world that was made up of elements of agricultural and pastoral extraction and which provided the basis for the Italic civilization.” (Olivo)

The next day is a Sunday (June 16) and I am forced to stay put—nothing is open. I have not prepared for no open shops or restaurants, and so have only the *pecorino* cheese (brought from Catanzaro) and crackers to eat. The inability to get to L’Aquila or anywhere else gives me a chance to rest and reflect on my trip. When I was just trying to fulfill a “shopping list” of places to go and things I thought I should get, I was blocked. When I went out and just paid attention as I walked about, things came to me. Following the smell of cedar burning, I had found the open market in L’Aquila where I purchased my concas and jug.

If I had bought these things in an antique shop it would not be the same, it would not have held the same link for me. Because I was on the land and communicating in the language of the land these things that I have on my altar connect me to place. The language and culture of a people grow out of the land.

I have dreams that night of saving people and animals. In one dream, *someone has a heart attack and needs to be dragged on a cot to the nearest help. The way is treacherous and hard to maneuver, with rubble and twisted metal, as if there has been an earthquake or some disaster. I am nervous as I drag and carry the cot, afraid that I might fall or that the person will fall off the cot.*

In another dream, *there is a lynx that keeps pestering me and I try to avoid it. Suddenly we are in the ocean together trying to find land. I have a piece of carpet or a mat that is helping me to stay afloat. The lynx comes over and tries to use it too. I am unsure about it being close to me but I don't want it to drown. Finally it manages to climb on the mat and lies down while I swim and push it along. The lynx gives me a loving and thankful look, its eyes level with mine as I swim.* (Dreams, Personal journal, 16 June 2002)

I wonder about the meaning of the dreams. Earthquakes have plagued these mountain towns, but perhaps I am just feeling my way on this journey through unknown territory. The lynx is the keeper of secrets. I wonder what secret I am the custodian of?

The next day I take the bus to L'Aquila early. I spend much of my time in the park around the Spanish fort. It is a feast day of some kind and many of the shops are closed until later. As I sit under a tree and eat my *panini* (sandwich) for breakfast, an old woman comes up to me and starts chatting. I tell her something about myself and why I am in L'Aquila. She sits next to me and tells me to keep eating as she chats away. Her name is Giuseppina (the "second" Josephine), and she says she is going to try and help me get to Campotosto

In fact, she knows a man in town who is originally from Campotosto, and when I have finished my sandwich, she takes me to his door. He is not at home, so she leads me to the bus station and asks about the bus schedule. There is not a bus available until tomorrow—too late for my purposes. So then we try the taxi drivers.

The cost of a taxi round trip is too much for me to afford, so Giuseppina argues with the driver, trying to convince him to take me for less. No luck. She is perhaps more despondent than I am and insists that I go to the market (which is now open) with her. At least I can get something to eat, she says, *mangia*. This is the Italian cure-all: a little food and a little drink to soothe the soul. When I part company with her a while later, she seems sad to see me go and gives me her address to write to her. I felt I had been looked after.

Months later, I am given an article on travel in Italy that sums up what I had experienced this way:

We had, indeed, found a spiritual connection in Italy. It wasn't the churches, the tombs, the art, or the traditions—although we loved all that. It was the food. Not just the culinary delights on our plates, but the people, the stories, the lingering meals, the ingredients plucked from the earth, the wine, the laughter, the new friends, the time we took to enjoy.

There is something special about eating in Italy.... Food is not something fast or convenient. Nor must it be expensive, rarefied, or hard to obtain. Food is religion. Food is sacrament. Food is spirit. When we sit down to eat with new or old friends, we share a bit of our souls. When we eat slowly and enjoy what we are eating, we honor the bounty of the earth, the fruit of the vine, the richness of the soil. The greatest gift we can give to a foreigner, a sufferer, a friend, or even a foe, is a meal. (Fein, Judith. "Savoring the Soul of Italy", *Spirituality & Health*)

I return to the park and make an offering of tobacco and ask permission from a cedar tree to take a branch back with me. I cut the branch quickly and carefully and give thanks

as I put it in my bag. I see a lizard on the side of the road looking at the bus on the way back to Avezzano. As I walk around Avezzano looking for a restaurant I see a candle in a shop window: a gold lizard on a red leaf. I go in to purchase it and the woman in the shop says it is the last one.

My last day in Italy (June 18) and I feel fatigued. I ask Spirit for strength and the grace to accept what is. At the bus stop as I am waiting for the bus to L'Aquila, a lizard creeps up behind me and that makes me feel cared for and watched over. Everyone is hot and cranky with this third day of a heat wave. The air conditioning in the bus *non funziona*. I try to hold the sights of this land in memory. The mountains with the picturesque towns perched on their middle peaks show me ways that Steve and I can build our home in harmony with the landscape. The moon still shows over the mountains.

This is my last walk around L'Aquila and the park. The *nero* shows me where to buy my deck of Italian tarot—it sits and calls outside a *tabaccheria* on the main street into town. I find my lace kerchief to wear on my head for my wedding (the book on Abruzzese customs is where I had found that particular wedding tradition). The lace is handmade by the women in this family shop. The younger woman, Paola, is helpful and excited when she understands what the kerchief is for. She recalls that the wearing of it on the wedding day is an old custom. Her aunt comes in from lunch and joins in the choosing of just the right lace pattern. She notices and comments on my lizard tattoo. I tell her it is one of my spirit guides. The lace is chosen and we are all very happy.

I walk around the park again and say goodbye to the birds and the trees and plants. I ask permission of the spirits of this place to take a little yarrow that I have found back with me.

As I leave L'Aquila on the bus that day I see a shepherd leaning on his staff surrounded by his sheep and think of the old ways and how my Grandpa Deli would have watched the family sheep as a child.

I was also able to gather “pieces” of the past: the conca, traditional water jug of copper used by women in Abruzzo. In trying to investigate this later, I found that the women might use it also as a percussion instrument. This inspiration came to me in one of Russill Paul’s yoga classes at UCS in September 2002. A guest musician was playing an African kettle-type drum of wood or clay (*urdu*). I had also found out in September that Abruzzo and Mali, Africa had the same offerings and water ceremony (Water of Boffe). I had water (conca), food and earth (terra cotta jug) and fire (lizard candle). I had my tree: cedar (*el cedró*) was used extensively to cook. The CDs of traditional Abruzzese and Calabrese music that I had bought and listened to before I left for Southern Italy showed the difference of these regions, and I saw that reflected in the character of the people I met there. Calabria was grim and tough, although beautiful in landscape and building. Abruzzo was warm and more inviting; it smelled fertile on the train riding in the dark from Rome. I have been blessed on my journey.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LOSS

Tribal ways

I was not able to find much about the people of the Italian peninsula before the Romans. Most histories mention the Etruscans and jump right to Rome and its “civilizing” influence on the peoples there. What I could find told me that the Italic tribes of Southern Italy lived an agrarian life. Their religion (referred to by many as *La Vecchia Religione*, the old religion) was based on the cycles of the earth, the sky, and the seasons. The early pastoral and farming communities had trading relations with people from the East and Africa, and with the Mycenaeans. The Etruscans developed the central part of the peninsula. There is some question still whether they were indigenous to the area around the Po River or if they had come in as settlers from elsewhere. The Latin people were living on the Seven Hills of Rome at the same time and were actually ruled by a number of Etruscan emperors before rising to power themselves.

The people of the peninsula were of various tribes and did not have a common national identity or government. The Romans began the conquest of their neighboring tribes in earnest. The usual method was to simply occupy the land and fight for dominion with the other Italic tribes. The Roman imperialist push met its greatest challenge in the

Samnites, an alliance of tribes that included the Vestini and the Marsi. Thus started a battle for conquest of the peninsula and the first “unification” of Italy.

There was a steady resistance to Rome’s hegemony from ancient times and onwards into the Middle Ages. The peoples of the Italian peninsula tried to hold onto their separate identities and the old ways. They took to the mountains for protection.

The old mountain villages were built mainly of mud and stone. They served as self-defense for the people in the feudal wars of the Middle Ages. The primary economic activity was sheep farming and the roads, paths and houses and villages were built to accommodate this economy. The fortified villages were made up of stone houses built close together like a wall (*casemura*) and the steepness of the mountain slopes necessitated the structure to have three to six rooms one on top of the other.

I remember my Grandma Deli always stressing the importance of land. Whenever my parents moved to a bigger house to accommodate our growing family, my grandmother would move close by. Hard work, home, and family were what were important in life. In my journey to her parents’ homeland, I could see that deep connection to the land.

Government in the Italian peninsula has varied from region to region and changed as the conquerors changed. Early on it was village based, and each region was self-contained. Families gathered in small villages and farmed the outlying countryside. Because farming and shepherding was mainly for subsistence for the majority of the population for much of its history, there was a huge gap between the nobles or landowners of the ruling class and the peasants and small trades people. Italy remained semi-feudal in many areas, especially the South, until the nineteenth century.

Religious Roots

Italy is a place where the Roman Catholic Church eventually took over the entire country. But it is also a place where the old ways were continued alongside and actually amalgamated with Catholicism. There were isolated mountain villages, especially in the South, that practiced an exuberant Catholicism, infused with paganism, which shocked the Italians of the cosmopolitan North.

Many of the sacred places in Abruzzo today are witnesses to an extraordinary continuity in worship that has involved the whole region since earliest times. This is the case, for example, of some of the grottoes. The sacred nature of grottoes dates from ancient times and is associated with the entire history of Man's culture.

Before Man became physically at one with the earth, through farming cultures, it was the ancestral adoration of the earth element which prompted him to make of the grotto a sanctuary, more than just a refuge." (Olivo)

I recall the feeling of Catholic feast days or holidays having a little something different in our family than in my classmates' families. There were some "extra" feast days that we honored that others in our Catholic grade school did not.

On my journey through the south of Italy, it was clear that beneath the overlay of Catholicism, even after all these years, there is a deep connection to the spirit of the land. Still Catholicism is very strong as it is also in my family. My father had to convert from Protestantism to marry my mother. All ten of us children were put through Catholic school. When I was young, I enjoyed some of the ritual and the music, but then grew uncomfortable with the patriarchal and anti-woman stance of the church. I was more drawn to the land and a spiritualism based on nature.

Conquered

How did the tribal ways of my Italian ancestors become lost? My family lost most of the old ways when our ancestors left their homeland. But previous to that, those ancestors had also lost their indigenous minds and had become part of the Western world. Colonization by many peoples attempted to erase the power of the conquered people by taking or destroying their language, religion, and land in order to break their connection to that land, the source of life and power.

Land

In ancient Italy, with an amplitude and rigor without precedent in Greek and Etruscan colonization, the Roman conquest liquidated the remains of the *Ius gentium* and the communitarian economy of the populations it dominated, which could still have coexisted with the old agricultural system of temporary clearings; and it developed and heightened the system of fallow and plantations of trees. In a juridical and political sense, property relationships were now made fully parallel to relationships of production in the chief state founded on a slave economy in classical antiquity. (Sereni, 1997)

There were many peoples that invaded and occupied the Italian peninsula: Greeks, Etruscans, Celts, and many others. When Rome first began to expand and take over the surrounding tribal lands there was great resistance by the people there, including the Vestini and Marsi. The Greeks in the south had overrun the Brutti much earlier. There were also incursions by Arabs, Turks, and later the Normans. The Italian peninsula was conquered and reconquered and divided between various states of Europe throughout history, until unification.

Italy as a single nation has only existed since 1861 when Garibaldi brought all the disparate states on the peninsula together ruled by one government. It was

after his death, under Despiti's rule, that the newly formed Italian nation began an incursion into Africa. It was none too successful and the Italian troops were badly defeated by the Ethiopians at the end of the nineteenth century. Mussolini and his fascist regime tried again to go against Ethiopia in the Second World War, again with no success. In both the nineteenth and twentieth century there were as many internal struggles—the government trying to eradicate socialism and anarchism and any popular movements of the Italian population. Many Italians, especially from the poorer South, emigrated to other countries to search for work and an end to repression and the constant bickering between ruling classes.

Language

There was not even one language. “Italian” was based on the Tuscan dialect and was grudgingly accepted as a “common” national language only late in the nineteenth century. Today local dialects are still prevalent and for some older people the dialect is their only language. Italian is learned and spoken in commerce and politics.

Song and dance was integral to both work and play. It was another way to tell the stories and to heal. Listening to the old songs that I found helped me to understand my experience in Calabria and Abruzzo. I hope to learn more about the traditional music. I have found that when I leave out music: singing, dancing, playing—that I cannot keep in balance. Accordions and tambourines, bagpipes and drums—all these are instruments of Southern Italy. I remember my mother playing the accordion when I was growing up.

Religion

In writing about *La Vecchia Religione* (the old religion) Raven Grimassi points out that, “In Italy today, many Catholic traditions have preserved the old Pagan ways. The two most obvious examples are the reverence for Mary (as the “Mother of God”), and the belief in the intercession of saints (a remnant of Pagan worship related to specific spirits who have power over various aspects of life).” (Grimassi, 2000)

Bona the goddess of fertility and the earth became Saint Agatha (Christianized, she had her breasts cut off) who was worshipped in a cave 6,500 years ago at Grotta di San Angelo.

Also worshipped by pre-Roman Italic tribes was Ercole Curino (Hercules) who was reminiscent of ancient shepherd warriors. His temple near Sulmona (Abruzzo) was an important religious center for the revolt against the Romans. He became Arcangelo Michele who slew the dragon (the representation of feminine power and genealogy) in Christian times.

Lucina the morning star, goddess of light, became Santa Lucia, who, when the Christians claimed her, had her eyes plucked out.

La Befana is an ancient goddess, the connection to the ancestors and the crone of winter. She is the goddess of Fate and Time. She is connected to the ancestral spirits as a mythical ancestress who returns yearly (Jan. 6). Through her timeless visits to the family hearth, her function is that of reaffirming the bond between the family and the ancestors through an exchange of gifts. She is associated with weaving and spinning, and with fire, whether astral or earthbound. Her feast includes the blessing of the water and the fire of renewal.

When I was a child, we would celebrate Epiphany or “Little Christmas” and my parents would have small gifts for us. We related this celebration to the Catholic legend of the Three Wise Men reaching the manger later than the Christmas birth date of Christ. We also celebrated St. Nicholas on December 5, putting our shoes out to be filled with fruit and candy and small gifts.

The Roman conquest and after that the Catholic Church influence gave a patriarchal structure to the family in Italy. But the old matriarchal ways are still strong: it is seen in the worship of Mary, the sanctity of motherhood, and the power that women wield, at least within the family. I always felt the women in my family had a power, but I also had to struggle with the patriarchal society. I did not experience this directly, from my family—my father is kind and gentle and supportive—but the influence of the Church and my Catholic upbringing was something I had to reject in order to find my own way. Later I could see the treasure that is hidden in the hagiographies. When you peel back the veneer of the saints’ lives, somehow there are pieces of the old ways underneath.

CHAPTER SIX

GROWING STRONG ROOTS

Start Where You Stand

Farming works in the same way. We don't just farm. We have to be able to invoke the kind of power that can only come from the natural world and bring it to bear on the work we are doing. Only then can the nourishment that is pulled from the land have lasting consequences and lasting effects. (Somé, 1999)

My husband Steve and I are blessed with the opportunity to be caretakers of this land on the west side of Maui, Hawaii. We intend to alter it gently, while planting trees and vegetables and herbs, and building our house. We are living on the land in a one-room cabin with no electricity, and with running water outdoors. This has given us an opportunity to get to know the land intimately. We live close to the rhythm of the land and the stars and the moon. Sunset is usually bedtime and sunrise is when we get up. We are learning what it means to live here with the land and not just own it.

We plan to grow fruit trees, vegetables, and herbs, and native Hawaiian crops. There are many rocks here and lots of wind. The west side of Maui is hot and dry; not as much rain as on the other side.

The rocks dictate where and what we plant, as do the trees. We clear garden space from the brush and move rocks to make room for plants as we go along. I learned from my research of traditional Italian agriculture that the ancient Italic tribes planted in

temporary clearings, *campi ed erba* (Sereni, 1997), so, by necessity, we are growing in the old way.

There are spirits on this land and we ask permission with prayers and offerings for our digging and planting and building. We try to ask Hawaiian Elders, when we can, to guide us in the right way. We are trying to respect the ways of this land and learn how to grow food and trees here.

Bringing Her Back to Herself

“The sun in the sky for pardon, the birds in the trees for mirth, one is closer to God in a garden, than anyplace else on earth.” Those were the words on the plaque that my Great-grandmother Toma Haralson had on the wall of her kitchen. This was the first poetry I remember memorizing. My great-grandparents had a small farm and orchard in North Canton, Ohio. I loved to visit them with my family. We would walk through the fields, swing from the bar that Great-grandpa Frank had put across some limbs of the apple trees, and eat fresh vegetables and fruit from the bounty of their garden. I would walk barefoot, feeling the earth speak to me.

I believe all my ancestors farmed: the Italian, Irish, Cherokee, Scottish, Iroquois, Dutch, and Welsh. My parents and my grandparents always had a garden. I helped my father tend our garden. I enjoyed digging in the dirt, the smell of the soil after a rain, and eating the green beans, peas, and tomatoes right off the plant.

I am filled with emotion as I write this. The memories are beautiful to me and I cherish them all the more because when I grew up I moved away. My journey took me further from the land: to Boston, and then to San Francisco. I had my plants in pots and

the concrete was always too filthy to walk barefoot on. I lost my close connection with the earth, and with it, my connection to myself. My Cherokee ancestors would say that I was no longer in right relationship to the world.

As I strove to know my ancestors and the old ways, I became more and more alive to the senses I had buried, living in the city. I talked to the birds again and to the wild animals. The animals and my ancestors visited my dreams. I asked for connection to and guidance from the universe. I remembered how to pray. While continuing on this journey through the Indigenous Mind concentration, my life has changed in many ways.

Sometimes I am just amazed at the life I have now and the parts of myself I have recovered. As I settle into this place, memories from my childhood of happy times spent outdoors come back to me. I will find myself remembering ways of planting certain vegetables or flowers, or I will see my grandmother cooking rhubarb from our garden, or see myself as a child bringing apples in from the tree and making applesauce—all the tastes and smells come back and nourish me. It is a great blessing and a gift to be able to come full circle and to savor the richness of a simple life.

When I made my ancestral research trip to Southern Italy, I marveled at the rich smell of the earth and the delicious taste of the fruit and cheese. I look forward to growing food in this land, so similar in some ways to the hot Mediterranean climate, and to taste the goodness of our own crops.

There is so much joy in my heart when I work with the land and on the land. I am so grateful for the chance to return to my roots and to myself. This is not the land I was born on, and it is not my ancestors' land, but I feel welcomed by this place and hope that I can

dig some new roots in the soil here. My connection to the universe is strengthened when I can feel the rhythms of the earth and sky and watch the ways of the birds and animals. One day when I was hiking with Tasha (our dog) it came to me that the hiking was a prayer, the wonder at the beauty of the lava rocks was a prayer, and the joy in my heart was a prayer. Making relationships right starts from the inside out, but the outside comes in and sustains me and makes me whole. This life helps me to remember that I am one with the universe and all my relations.

Opening the Door

After Steve and I were engaged, I took him to meet my family in Ohio. I took him to the cemeteries where my grandparents and great-grandparents are buried. I asked their blessings and made offerings there. At Greenlawn Cemetery where my paternal ancestors are buried, Steve found some cedar. At Holy Cross Cemetery, where my maternal ancestors are buried, I found a crow feather and stuck it in the earth at my Great-grandma Carmela's grave.

I have had dreams of my mother's family, my Italian relations, since I was young. I had a strong dream connection with my Grandma Lucy Deli. I would dream of her getting injured and then find that I dreamed it on the day she *had* injured herself. Other times I would see her face when I closed my eyes while I was awake. I would call her and she would say she was just thinking of me.

I did not have many dreams that I could identify as being about my father's parents or grandparents. But just before I became engaged to my husband, my paternal grandparents started showing up in my dreams, and since moving to Maui and getting married the

dreams have become stronger and more frequent. I have also seen the house my family lived in when I was coming of age and those of my paternal grandparents, Francis and Albert Cooley, and my great-grandparents, Frank and Toma Haralson.

This dream of my grandfather was particularly strong: *I find some old dusty books that belonged to my Grandpa Cooley. They are supposed to be valuable and I try to sell them for my parents on eBay. No luck, I tell them. Suddenly I am outside a house (it is a combination of my Grandpa and Grandma Cooley's house and my parents') at the side door. A station wagon pulls up and my Grandpa Cooley gets out and says hello to me. There is a wolf with red eyes near his feet. He goes into the house and sits in his recliner, and I follow.... Grandpa is stern and trying to say something to me about remembering.* (Dream, Personal journal, 21 February 2003)

This dream was so powerful I got up from it and prayed. My Grandpa Cooley was never stern with us, so his sternness in the dream seemed to mean I needed to pay attention; that he has a message for me.

In another dream, I am at my paternal great-grandparents' farm. *We (Steve and I) are visiting my great grandparents' farm in Ohio. The area has been developed all around. The little cemetery across the street has been dug up and built on. Steve gave me some money and wanted to walk around the new town to find something to eat. I said I didn't want to because I wasn't fully dressed.* (Dream, Personal journal, February 2003)

In the dream, I don't feel as confident as Steve that we can just walk around the farm. I don't feel as if I belong there anymore. Some of the best times in my childhood were spent at that farm. The whole family would go to have cookouts and talk story. The

cemetery across the road was old and somewhat neglected, and was under the pines and full of violets, my favorite flower. There were often crows around. The dream landscape, full of houses and shops, makes me feel sad that the land has been dug up. This dream made me feel as if I had lost something close to my heart.

These dreams were hard to share. So much of what I have been remembering feels sacred and not easily shared in the context of an academic work.

I talk about my difficulty in writing about my dreams with my teacher.⁹ She asks me to sit with my grief and anger and loss, and ask myself what I need. It comes to me that I need my grandparents. These are the dreams I have after talking to her about being unable to write.

I am walking along a difficult trail. It is supposed to be near my great grandparents' farm, but the landscape is somewhat different, bleak and rockier. It is winter or almost spring, patches of snow and mud and bare trees. On the trail, I have passed close to houses (almost inside of them) that have burnt down. I can see all the insides, the wood slats of the walls, and they are just shells of houses. Some are still smoldering. There is a cliff ahead and I cannot continue on the trail. I don't want anyone to see me turn around and think that I made a mistake. When I turn to retrace my steps, I see a black man in a hooded jogging suit running towards me. I am uncomfortable because he has seen me turn away from the dangerous trail and ashamed of myself for not keeping on the trail in the other direction. But he is friendly and says good morning and I am relieved. (Dream, Personal journal, April 2003)

⁹ Dr. Kimmy Johnson

Seeing the landscape changed and bleak and the houses burnt down, I felt sad and unsure and my right to be on the trail. The cliff frightens me and I don't want to show my fear. I am somewhat curious as I pass the houses and I can see the boards of their shells very clearly. I have to turn back and look at what is "at home" in the old houses before I can continue on the hard trail. When we talk again, my teacher helps me to see that I cannot ignore those things that need care and attention, for I will not be allowed to write until I have acknowledged these things that are being neglected.

At first when I looked back on my dreams, I did not see a pattern. After I acknowledged that I needed to look at the grief and pain that my separation from my grandparents and my parents caused me, I suddenly noticed some connections. I begin to see the pattern in my life with the help of these dreams.

In my adult life, I had started moving early: from place to place; from relationship to relationship; and from career to career. I first moved away from my parents, and then further and further away. In these moves, I moved further also from my center and what gave me joy. I was confused and depressed.

The dreams tell me something about how and where I lost my way. When issues of sex and sexuality came up for me in my life, and I could not navigate through them, I cut myself off from my body and feelings. In that process of distancing from all that grounded me, I also cut myself off from the earth and that intimacy that so sustained me and gave me joy as a young girl. Because I could not see my part in the story, I tried to find my place elsewhere in the world.

The return to myself and to my indigenous mind has nourished and enriched me. It fills me with gratitude to be loved and supported in all these ways by Spirit and the ancestors. Once I had opened the door to my ancestors, they are here. It is possible to remember what has been hidden, as the Elders have told us, because it is in our hearts. We have the keys.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN CONCLUSION: MY PRAYER

The Altar: Holding the Center of Balance

My altar is a place that reminds me to be grateful and to pray. It was prayer—asking for help and being thankful for that help—that led me here. Not only were my prayers for the right partner and a good life answered, but also I found that my coming here was the answer to other prayers. Some of those prayers were said on the feast of Santa Lucia, December 13, 2001, in an awa ceremony¹⁰ here on Maui. Here was another example of being in the story as it is being told, and also an example of how we are all connected.

The altar I prepared for my presentation of my thesis work to the Elders contained the objects I had brought back from the land: conca, terra cotta jug, candle; and the offerings of fava beans, nectar, and cedar.¹¹ These I set on a black cloth borrowed from a sister student with Italian and Spanish ancestors. I found out later that the cloth was significant because “A black cloth is laid over the table to symbolize the darkness of ‘procreation’ from which all things manifest.” (Grimassi, 2000) The way I laid out the altar and the prayer in Italian that I made all came to me through my ancestors and through Spirit in a dream. I had also prayed that morning for guidance in these things and to remember the

¹⁰ A traditional Polynesian ceremony

¹¹ These items on my altar are traditional items from the South of Italy, but I do not list them as a “prescription.” They are what came to *me* with *my* ancestors’ guidance.

right way to honor them. When I had finished presenting one of the Elders said, “You don’t know how far back you took us.” She also told me what she saw as I told my story and it included my connection to my mysterious gypsy ancestry.

The prayer that I was guided to make in Italian included a call to the manifestation of the feminine earth-based power of my Italian ancestors: Lucia (Lucina), Bona Dea, and Befana. I make another prayer now to heal the wounds and celebrate moving toward wholeness.

The Prayer

Diana was the first created before all creation. In her were all things; out of herself, the first darkness, she divided herself into darkness and light. Dianus, her brother and son, herself and her other half, was the light.

And when Diana saw that the light was so beautiful, the light which was her other half, her brother Dianus, she yearned for it with exceedingly great desire. Wishing to receive the light again into her darkness, to swallow it up in rapture, in delight, she trembled with desire. This desire was the dawn.¹²

Hear me, Creator, and my ancestors, I am grateful for this dawn. I ask you, Grigori, Watchers of the Four Directions, to bear witness to my desire to become whole. Through the darkness that I have embraced and the unknown that I learn to embrace may I continue to be given guidance, awake and in dreams. This place that I have come to, the island of Maui in Hawaii, has welcomed me and I am grateful. I give thanks to the spirits here, and the people and their ancestors for allowing me to be here. I give thanks to the Kihawahine who opened the way. I give thanks to the Hawaiian Elders, Mr. Makua and Auntie Poepoe, who share so much wisdom and aloha with us. I give thanks for the love and support of my parents, my teachers, and Elders that has helped me to grow. I give

¹² Italian creation story as told by Grimassi, *Italian Witchcraft*.

thanks to the plants, the stars, the stones, and the animals, especially Chula, for helping me and guiding me.

I grieve for what I have lost, what my family has lost, and what the world has lost in all these millennia, separated from the land and Spirit. I rejoice in the recovery of some of what was lost; what we had misplaced. My life has been enriched by your blessings.

For all the years of oppression and poverty that my Italian ancestors have endured, my heart aches, yet we have been made a strong and stubborn people because of it. We have learned compassion and *la dolce vita*. Show me how to forgive and to be thankful every day.

For the oppression my people may have perpetrated on others, I ask forgiveness and for wisdom in my words and deeds to make that wrong right. The further my people got from the land and their language and the Mother, the further from balance and right relation. May we make our lives whole again. The Age of the Daughter, of the feminine, is to come.

For this traditional way of knowing and the recovery of the indigenous ways of my ancestors and their support that I have received on my path, I am truly grateful. When I allow the flow of this process, I am calm and feel joy. I am ready to know all my ancestors, and all my relations. I am ready to continue tracking my progress on this trail through my dreams through the stories and through my journey on this earth walk.

As it is above, so below. Grazie, grazie, mille grazie.

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APPENDIX A

Le Jnestre

Quande lu sole je cchiu 'nfuche' te,
Manne scrizze 'nne pe' lu ciele
Sgrejje di fo' che ardende
Sopra la terre.
Scuffene di 'bbotte li povere sgrejje
Zi trafonne dentr'a la rocce....
Ma, quande giugne z'avvicine, a cioffe, a cioffe,
Tra lu verde cupe de le culline
Ariesce fore ngihe tutte lu splendore
e le jnestre zi culore.
Pe la povera ggende amamande di luce,
A bboffe, a bboffe,
Di ragge d'ore le jnestre spo'ppe
Gne tante fijje piccirille di lu sole.

The Ginestra

When the sun is very hot
It sends its rays into the sky
And sends a fire of burning rays
Over the earth.
When it thunders, the poor rays
Sink inside the crevices of the rocks....
But, when June arrives, little by little,
Among the dark green of the hills
With all its splendor appears the jnestra
With its beautiful colour.
For the poor people, who are lovers of light,
Little by little,
The golden rays burst open the buds
Of the jnestra, that are like little children of the sun.

By Anna Basti, translated to English from dialect by Constantino Conte, Fedora and
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