

La Leonessa

Its Meaning in Marble

On hind feet—
a **Stance** of firm resolve
Gaze of fiery aim—
confident clarity, to lead and light the way.
Left arm high, claws ready to strike—
a sign of defense & strength.
But **Right** arm extended, open paw, claws retracted—
a welcome sign of peace, acceptance & non-violence.
And a fearsome **Face** & snarling **Jaws**—
Brave, to roar the Truth.



*For when a viewer takes a glance
Its face reflects their countenance.*

*A communion of a mystic grace
Transcends across both time and space.*



Steven G Kukla

Sculptor · Writer · AI Media Composer

Born in 1953 near Cleveland, OH USA. In my career in technology, I conceived, specified, and marketed pioneering products in videographics, consumer electronics and Internet services.

Now retired, I live with my wife in Litchfield, CT and our 3 children live nearby in NY. I am grateful to fill my days with my passions: family, travel, yoga, hiking, figurative sculpture, stone carving, writing and AI storytelling.

WITH DEEP GRATITUDE

To those who made this project possible:

Giovanni Campese

Former Mayor, Monteleone di Puglia, Italy

Massimo Baldoni

Master artisan of marble carving, Luni, Italy

Sebastiano Maraschiello

Current Mayor, Monteleone di Puglia, Italia

Stefano Ammirati

Genealogist, Southern Italy Travel, Italy

Antonio Mazzoni

Master artisan of diamond abrasive tools, Carrara, Italy

Immacolata Scelzo

Former Municipal Councilor, Monteleone di Puglia, Italy

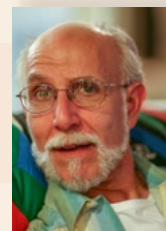
Special thanks to **Rosa Pollastrone**, Italia

"Thank you all, from the bottom of my heart."

CONNECT

Webapp, with link to Personal Website:

[STRETCHY54.GITHUB.IO](https://stretchy54.github.io)



LA LEONESSA

Strong Roots · Good Fruit



*A marble lioness in Carrara Bianco Venato
To the community of Monteleone di Puglia*

MONTELEONE DI PUGLIA, ITALY · 9 AUGUST 2026

Maria Assunta Capobianco

(Susan A. Wills) · 1900 - 1984 · My Grandmother

Born in 1900 in Monteleone, Assunta grew up in a cave-like stone home, hauled water up steep paths, while siblings died around her. Her family emigrated to Canada in 1906, her mother died in 1909, and a second move to upstate New York by 1913 — loss followed loss. Yet those years made her: forging a deep faith, practical skills, physical toughness, and a resilience that carried her for the rest of her life.

In 1917, Assunta met and married my grandfather in Herkimer, NY — Angelo Gualtieri (1893–1973), a native of Baranello, Italy who had emigrated to the USA in 1910. They built a family together, raising two daughters, Maria (my mother) and Maddalena. In the 1930s they relocated to northeast Ohio, reinventing themselves as Charles and Susan Wills. When I was young, my grandparents were part of our household.

Though my father was of Slovak heritage, our household was Italian-American. I helped my grandfather dig ditches, lay bricks, and stomp grapes for wine. I gathered chicory & dandelion greens, roasted chestnuts, and helped prepare tomato sauce and holiday feasts with my grandmother.

Italian was spoken at home, but quietly, among the elders, and my heritage remained out of reach until my journey in 2024 changed everything.



La Leonessa

From Concept to Statue · 2025-2026

From sketches & clay studies to a 3D digital model, I created two 25 cm maquettes (head & full body) with a 3D printer. Injury prevented me from carving, and robotic carving was far too costly, so my friend Antonio Mazzoni recommended a master marble artisan Massimo Baldoni.

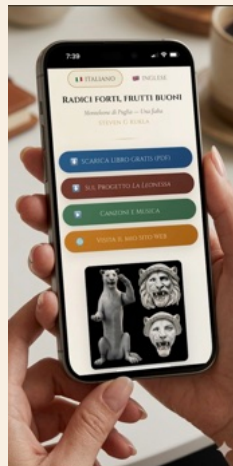
In 2025, a block of Carrara Bianco Venato marble was selected & carved by Massimo in Massa, Italy. Using traditional techniques, he transferred points and scaled measurements from the maquette to the marble. The form evolved from rough block to detailed surface, with hand tools, powered saws, diamond grinding tools, and finally sanding & polishing by hand.

In 2026, the beige marble base was carved, and the bronze inscription plaque was cast & mounted. All pieces were then transported from Massa & assembled in Monteleone.

La Leonessa is my cultural donation to the municipality of Monteleone di Puglia and its worldwide diaspora community, and is dedicated to my grandmother — Maria Assunta Capobianco.

COMPANION WEB APP

A QR code nearby La Leonessa launches a bilingual landing page stretchy54.github.io — offering a free PDF of my book, instant listening to any of the song tracks, plus a project description, and a link to my personal website.



Strong Roots, Good Fruit

Graphic Novella · Songs · Sculpture

Strong Roots, Good Fruit is a bilingual, lyric fantasy graphic novella in 8 acts, rooted in the history of Monteleone di Puglia and the courage of those who left and those who remained.

It is illustrated and accompanied by original poems, which are reimaged as digital music & songs, to breathe life into the story. The music & songs were composed with AI assistance.

It follows an aging sculptor who discovers that his Italian grandmother's hilltop village of 900 souls has rebranded itself as a village of acceptance, peace and non-violence, becoming a leading model of refugee integration, and a host to annual international peace conferences. Not mere words, but genuine hospitality & acceptance of diversity.

For over a thousand years, the village crest preserved an encoded memory of a lioness who chose mercy over killing. Moved by his discoveries, he vows to tell the story and give it form in marble. Then the marble lioness comes to life with an urgent message for humanity.

Act 1 tells the origin of the legend. Acts 2–5 unfold as historical movements: a medieval love story touched by levity, an Inquisition thriller, a diaspora melodrama, and a World War II resistance drama. Acts 6 and 7 move into the contemporary era, while Act 8 brings emotional resolution and a final plot twist.

My project is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother and my Italian heritage, and hopefully encourages other descendants of emigrants to reconnect with their roots.

LOOKING AHEAD

Over the next 18 months, I hope to create an animated trailer and perhaps an immersive interactive experience for viewers of the *La Leonessa* statue.

In a world that urgently needs such stories, I believe Monteleone di Puglia's modern transformation deserves to be shouted from the mountaintops—and may even be ripe for adaptation as a film, stage play, or operetta.

