

GRATTERIAN CHRONICLES

A portrait of the village of Gratteri
in 24 portraits and thoughts of a visitor.





ANNE-MARIE CLOS

“Love for life is not about possessing, but about knowing how to look; like that day in India, before a flower too beautiful to be picked.”

Year of birth: 1947.

Anne-Marie was born in Algeria during the period of French colonization. She and her family left the country amid the turmoil preceding independence. Her life has been a long journey. After spending her youth in the south of France and her early adult years in Paris, she lived for thirty years in Rome. Life later took her to Palermo, and finally to Gratteri.

Her mother imagined her as an interpreter at UNESCO, she saw herself as a singer... life made her a waitress, a tour guide, a masseuse.

According to her, there is no reason for regret, no unfulfilled dream. One can give up anything, as long as one keeps a love for life. Whatever you do, you must do it as best as possible, with awareness. She tells of the time she had the opportunity to work as a masseuse in a wellness center in the Aeolian Islands. But she couldn't quantify how many massages she could do per hour.

“I never know how long a massage will last; it depends on the dynamic of the moment. I would rather live on bread and water than invest my time in assembly-line work.”

Her only fear is not being good enough at what she does. In Gratteri, she has rediscovered the sun, the light, the colors, and the scents of her childhood, but without the chaos and violence of what she experienced in Algeria. This stage of her life, in the Sicilian village, represents learning how to detach, while still preserving a love for life and for things.

The most moving part of her story, which she describes as her greatest life lesson: many years ago, in India, she saw a flower of extraordinary beauty. She picked it and placed it on the car dashboard. When they reached a checkpoint, the officer looked at the flower and said to her:

“Wasn't it enough just to look at it?”



LEONARDO RINCHIUSA

“To be able to see the beauty that many no longer see.”

Year of birth: 1994.

Leonardo has lived in Gratteri all his life. He studied economics, focusing on inequalities of opportunity — an issue that affects, among others, his own village, which lacks many essential services, such as hospital care and activities for young people. He is active in local social associations that care for the elderly and revive lost traditions (the *pignata* game, the feast of Saint Isidore, ...).

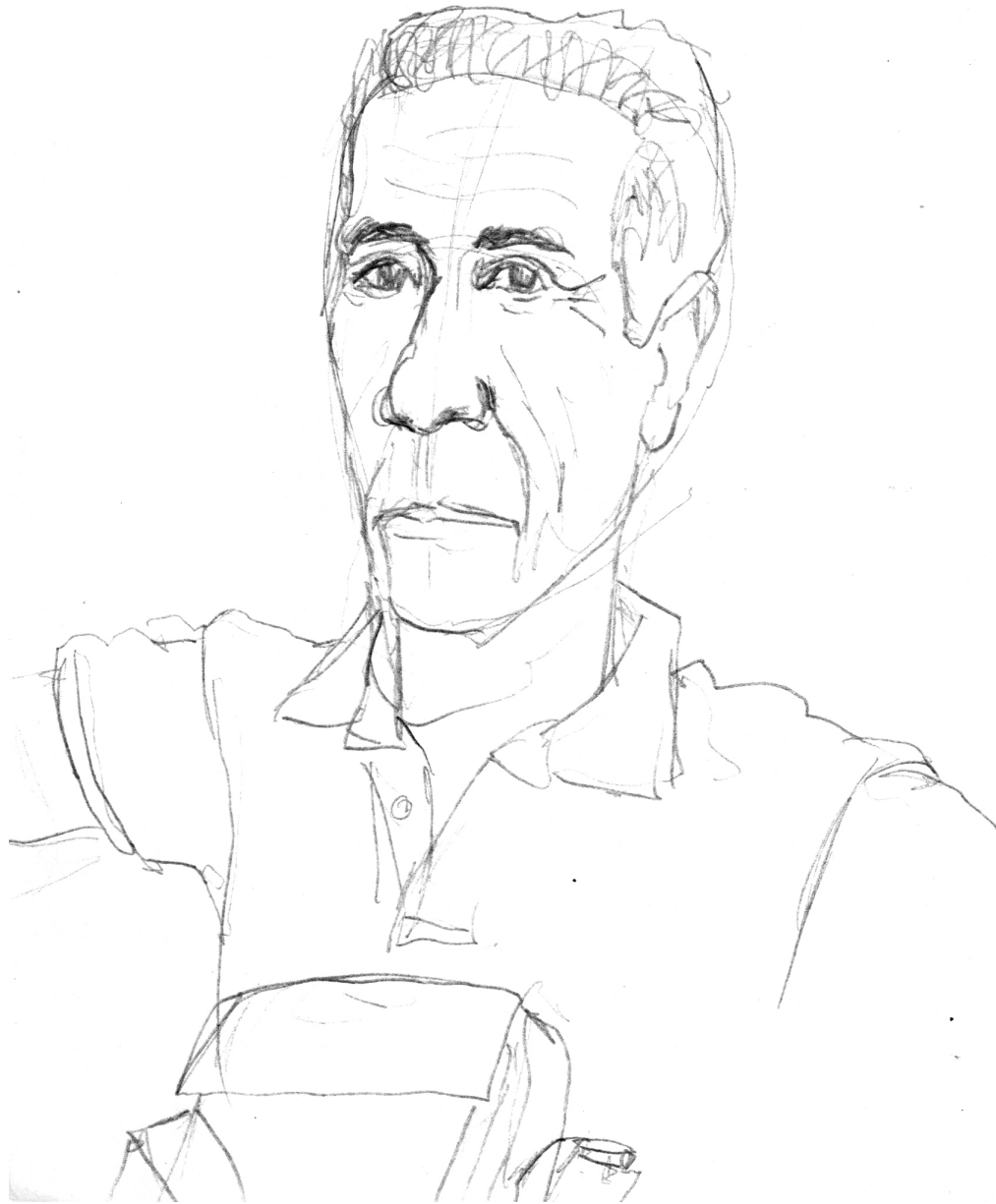
In Leonardo's words resonate affection, unease, regret, and hope. He loves the beauty of his village. He tells how, even today, after thirty years of walking the same streets, he can still see them in a new light. He appreciates the quiet, the kindness, the humanity of the people. He is convinced that Gratteri has much to offer: for its natural resources, its geography, and its traditions — which, unfortunately, are disappearing. He has expressed many possible solutions, directions, and areas of intervention: Gratteri inspires him.

Leonardo describes a community that is very harsh on itself. While people from Gratteri are welcoming and open toward outsiders, they are far less generous with their fellow villagers. Above all, his parents' generation is marked by political disagreements and old resentments; he also notices a kind of pessimism regarding their own land, its potential, and that of its inhabitants. It is as if people can no longer see the beauty of the place.

He regrets not having been supported by the older generations... in fact, every time he shared ideas or projects, he was met with discouragement from them. Parents, he says, always encourage their children to leave Gratteri. Still, he is happy to see that the younger generation after him is showing initiative and a desire to invest in the village. This widespread pessimism may stem from a lack of prospects: perhaps people from Gratteri should travel, discover other realities, learn elsewhere, and then return to share what they have learned with their homeland.

When asked about the world, he expresses concern. The international situation has never felt so tense, and he foresees a difficult future. He speaks of ecological and financial crises, of wars on the brink of erupting...

And yet, even Gratteri has a kind of knowledge, a richness to offer: slowness, the mental space that allows one to reflect on existence, on what it means to be in the world, on the things worth living for and fighting for. The first quality that came to his mind, when asked about the beauties of his village, was human warmth.



GIOVANNI CIRINCIONE

“The bright Gratteri of his childhood no longer exists; people have given up on dreaming.”

Year of birth: 1960.

Born in Gratteri, he began working as a mason between the ages of 14 and 17. He then enlisted for three years before moving to Milan, where he spent a year working in the textile industry. He returned to Gratteri for a while, before crossing the ocean: he settled in Los Angeles for ten years. He came back once again to Gratteri, alternating masonry work with a position in the forestry service. The wind later carried him back to the North, where he worked in France. He eventually settled in Gratteri for good upon retirement.

The most beautiful period of his life was his adolescence in his childhood village. There was a spirit of exchange, events organized together, simplicity. At the time, human relationships were not shaped by opportunistic motives.

“We were young people raised in the open air. Every day, the street offered you a different opportunity: one day you played football, the next you went to bathe in the river, the following one you climbed the mountain...”

As the years went by, he noticed a profound change in the community of Gratteri. Industrialization drew shepherds and farmers toward large complexes in the North, or pushed them to entirely different sectors (such as the FIAT factory in Termini Imerese). People abandoned harsher ways of life and more uncertain incomes in favor of stability: a fixed salary.

Mentalities also shifted because of politics. Since the 1990s, political divisions have taken root in the village, affecting even the most intimate relationships. People stopped greeting each other, collective initiatives faded... According to Giovanni, a general atmosphere has emerged, marked by envy, triviality, laziness and vanity.

If, in his view, the older generations are partly responsible for this attitude, he is pleasantly surprised by the new generations (aged 14 to 18), who show great maturity and initiative. For him, the future of Gratteri lies in tourism.



GIUSEPPINA TERRACINA

“Her gentle gaze tells of a childhood full of warmth and community. Today, she protects the village’s quiet and the values of family.”

Year of birth: 1958

Giuseppina has an infinitely gentle gaze. She does not like to talk much about the past.

“If the memories are beautiful, they make you sad; if they are bad, they make you even sadder...”

Nonetheless, she evoked images of her childhood: a Gratteri with streets full of children and animals — sheep, goats, and horses... streets still unpaved. What is today Via Fiume was then a stream that divided ancient Gratteri from the modern part. The warmth that shines through her descriptions reflects the spirit of the Gratteri community at the time: rich, united, and collaborative.

Over time, following a slow exodus caused by economic dynamics on a national and international scale, this reality gave way to today’s Gratteri: a village with few inhabitants, marked by internal conflicts, envy, gossip, and laziness.

Giuseppina now runs one of the last shops in the village, one of only two grocery stores. She lives with her sister, and together they care for their disabled brother. The values most important to her are quiet and peace.



GIUSEPPINA MARCÌ

“Having moved for love, Giusi remains captivated by the beauty of Gratteri. But the village’s atmosphere, steeped in envy and gossip, prevents her from feeling free.”

Year of birth: 1971

She has lived in Gratteri for 32 years, after getting married.

Giusi, the daughter of a military man, grew up in Campofelice on a barracks base, a very communal and stimulating environment. Her relationship with her father was warm. Her mother, on the other hand, was a hard and cold woman who did not enjoy going out. Giusi’s relationship with her mother has always been very tense.

As a child, she dreamed of becoming a teacher... but life had other plans. She took a course to become a secretary and then worked as a seamstress. In Gratteri, she worked at the municipal office for 26 years, but following tensions with the management, she resigned. For the past two years, she has been taking care of cleaning for the elderly in the village.

Giusi moved for love: it was to live with her husband that she came to her husband’s native village. After 32 years, she is still enchanted by the beauty of the place, but she feels a deep frustration. Over the years, the village’s atmosphere has changed significantly. Political divisions have fueled envy and gossip: she no longer feels free.

Giusi is an extroverted, creative mind, with a loud and direct voice... but in a woman, this is not always perceived positively. She loves singing, going out, smoking a cigarette in the square... yet she feels the judging eyes. She believes this atmosphere, which she describes as toxic, is one of the reasons Gratteri cannot flourish... in fact, it is making it die. The young people do not feel supported or encouraged.



GREGORIO CAPNIST

“He escapes a consumerist system governed by the whims of desire to refocus on essential needs.”

Year of birth: 1994

Gregorio spent his childhood in Veneto, between his hometown and Venice. After studying at university in Genoa, he moved to Paris for a few years before settling in Gratteri.

The Madonie village was young Gregorio’s holiday destination. He fondly recalls his daily mission: walking around the village with the shopping list written by his parents. He speaks of the characters who fascinated him back then: Sasà and his haberdashery, the baker and his workshop, the impressive Mimmo, the baker’s brother who handed out loaves of bread, the spinster Zà Nina who lived with her brother, and Zò Luciuzzo... The shepherd Epifanio Muffoletto (the Great) was a particular source of admiration: from dawn to dusk, he lived with his animals, always on foot. As a child, these figures represented an unattainable ideal for him.

With this ideal in mind, after six years in Paris, Gregorio decided to settle in Gratteri. Tired of the city, its lifestyle, consumerism, pollution, and mentality, he sought space and freedom. While freedom in a big city is tied to money, in Gratteri freedom is measured in time. In Paris, he could buy whatever he wanted; in the countryside village, he buys only what he needs — in his view, a greater kind of freedom.

Today, Gregorio’s dream is to own a country house with land to cultivate, and to be 60% independent — he hates the idea of dependence. This defines his ideal of freedom: partial material independence, enough to feed himself, and an ontological independence, no longer subject to the whims of desire but to the law of essential needs. In his account, all of this is connected to a “more ancient” way of life.



DANIELE COSTANZO

“Settled in Cefalù, Daniele appreciates in Gratteri the connection with an ‘old-fashioned’ way of life.”

Year of birth: 1994

Daniele lives in Cefalù, a half-hour drive from Gratteri. In the small village, there is neither a permanent doctor nor a hospital, only the emergency medical service, staffed by three people.

Daniele mainly takes care of the elderly, of whom he speaks with great tenderness and affection. Being the only figure connected to healthcare, he naturally and spontaneously assumes the role of confidant/psychologist. People insist on thanking him for his services... but since he refuses payment, he regularly finds himself receiving gifts in the morning, such as ricotta, biscuits, or home-cooked dishes.

He loves the “old-fashioned” spirit and the slow pace of life in Gratteri.



LUCIA BRUCATO

“She put the well-being of her loved ones ahead of her own dreams . . . also because she never felt encouraged to live them.”

Year of birth: 1979

Lucia is a discreet woman who puts her family's life before her own.

She recalls a Gratteri of her childhood with a simple life, where large groups of children had fun with very little: a branch fallen from a tree, two leaves, and they would build a little figure. There were no cell phones, which ensured everyone was punctual. There was a stronger sense of cohesion among people.

Lucia loves to sing. Over time, she had the opportunity to perform in Cefalù, after a man recognized her talent and her voice. She does not know why she never pursued this opportunity. Today, in Gratteri, she takes care of her husband and two children, in addition to doing cleaning work for the elderly.

Her view of her village is gentle: there is a warmth that allows anyone to ask a neighbor for help at any time; but there are also looks that are not always kind, and a lot of gossip. This last aspect seems to make her very uncomfortable.



SALVATORE CIRINCIONE

“To escape consumerism and the hectic pace of the city in order to reclaim space, time, and ideas.”

Year of birth: 1998

Born in Palermo, Salvatore has always lived in Gratteri, except for his high school years in the Sicilian capital. Today, he works remotely as a software developer for banks. In his free time, he manages the AUSER Gratteri association, which works to keep the village’s traditions alive.

The main difference between today’s Gratteri and the Gratteri of his childhood is the presence of cell phones. The simple absence of this device in the past made daily life much more organic, improvised, and spontaneous. People would meet at more or less fixed times in familiar places: whoever finished eating or doing homework first would knock on the door of the nearest friend, and together they would imagine how the evening would unfold. Today, daily life is much more planned and fast-paced due to the greater presence of communication tools.

Because of the increased population — in the region, but not in Gratteri — space and “spots” have become limited. Whereas before one could improvise a meeting at a restaurant or any gathering place, today reservations are needed. Another major difference is depopulation. Even if the population grows overall, it is distributed differently and small villages are deserted, mostly for work and service-related reasons. Now, to go to the gym, hospital, cinema, or middle or high school, one must travel many kilometers.

Salvatore was able to choose to remain in Gratteri thanks to the new work modalities that emerged during the Covid crisis, namely remote work. For better or worse, the travel times to get from one point to another in a city like Palermo are equivalent to those required to go from Gratteri to the municipalities offering the desired services. For Salvatore, his home village also offers a silence and space that the city cannot. In Gratteri, there are various gaps, needs that require solutions, creativity, and enterprise. Winter is harsh, but calm... and it is precisely this calm, this emptiness, that fosters a return to oneself, meditation, and imagination — even when not alone.



SALVO CURCIO

**“To be the link between memory and action:
to transform nostalgia into constructive energy.”**

Year of birth: 1975

Salvo is originally from Gratteri. He has always worked there, both in public administration (at the time of the interview he had just stepped down from his role as municipal councillor in charge of youth services) and in private business (property management).

His account reveals a deep nostalgia for the village of his childhood. He speaks of a place that was much more populated, with limited infrastructure and technology, and of a magic that has now been lost.

His father, like many others, worked at the FIAT factory in Termini Imerese (a 45-minute drive). His mother was (and still is) a homemaker. During his childhood, everything had a different dimension: going to the sea was an event that had to be planned in advance; without the many sources of entertainment available today, children organized group games and numerous events (4 e 4-8, A corsa ch’i Scecchi, Sant’Isidoro, ...). He recalls the village of his youth as a place with more people, greater cohesion, and solidarity. He remembers how farmers would once pass through the village on donkeys to sell the surplus of their harvest.

Today, Gratteri, like all nearby villages, has been depopulated — especially since the closure of the FIAT factory in 2011 — and the arrival of the internet, mobile phones, and the development of transportation infrastructure have completely changed human relationships. Young people now organize excursions on their own; mobile phones have altered the value of communication and personal connections; many shops have closed without finding successors.

According to him, Gratteri’s survival today lies in tourism. The village, being ideally located between the sea, the inland areas, and Cefalù (the largest nearby town), offers a privileged position for visitors who want to explore the region, enjoying the milder climate of the hills and lower prices compared to more populated places. The preservation of architecture and traditions represents an important attraction for the small town.

Salvo wishes to become more deeply involved in Gratteri’s politics to defend his ideas and help those who share them.



GENOVEFFA GIALLOMBARDO

alias ZIA GINA

«Freedom is a choice.»

Year of birth: 1949. Born in Gratteri.

Daily, several times a day, one can hear a voice singing in the village: it is Aunt Gina, giving her customary gift to the streets.

Her childhood, as was often the case in her time, was not easy. Unlike her brothers and sisters, she did not do well at school, so at some point she had to attend evening classes after helping her mother with household chores. Washing, tidying, sweeping... this was her daily life as a child. She recounts the icy winters and the village isolated during the cold season. She tells of the dirt roads where countless children played. She recalls an incident when, while her father had set the ricotta to rest, she accidentally knocked it all over while sweeping. Her mother became so angry that she threw a plate at her. In protecting herself, Gina injured a tendon in her hand. She recounts how toys did not exist back then, and children had to invent them.

Gina never married. Her life has always been dedicated to caring for her family: she supported — and continues to support — her sisters and her brother. After their marriages, she devoted herself entirely to her parents. Upon their deaths, she fell into a deep depression that kept her confined at home for three years. Afterwards, Gina was born into a new life: she decided to live her desires independently of others' judgment.

Of the women of her generation, Gina is the only one who goes to the bar, who can be seen in the square smoking. Gina changes her clothes three times a day. Gina says whatever comes to mind without censorship. Gina is a generous woman: she offers anyone her stories, cigarettes, sweets, and dishes she has prepared... In her own simple and elegant way, Gina is worldly. Gina never married... perhaps to always remain a free woman?

One can ask Gina about Gratteri's past, but not its future: she now lives in an eternal present.



DEBORAH DI GIORGIO

“Reconciling different tempos: the speed of the city and the slowness of the countryside.”

Year of birth: 1980

Originally from the town of Bisacquino, Deborah now shuttles between Gratteri and Palermo. She appreciates being able to alternate between the numerous activities offered by the big city and the tranquility of the small countryside village. For economic reasons and quality of life, she took over Gratteri’s pharmacy together with a business partner.

Beyond its calm, what Gratteri offers are human relationships. “Everything is easier in Gratteri. I think of the simple fact of being able to chat with a customer at the shop entrance; of being able to leave the car unlocked all day, keys on the dashboard, and find it intact in the evening; sometimes the bread vendor comes to me instead of having to go find him; the general kindness of people...”

This explains how, in the Gratteri reality, she is entrusted with roles that would be unthinkable in Palermo, particularly that of a confidant.

She regrets the lack of initiative among local residents. “It is certainly true that, given the small population, it takes courage to start a business — and I particularly salute Aurora, who has just opened a grocery store!” Some young people want to create here... but they do not always receive support from their parents. There is also a certain envy and distrust toward those who succeed in undertaking a venture.

She hopes that the many foreigners investing in Gratteri will send a positive signal to the locals who wish to start a business in the small village. She would see the disappearance of the local culture as a profound loss.



EPIFANIO GIOVANNI MUFFOLETTO

“For something to be well done, it must come from the heart.”

Year of birth: 1975

Born in Gratteri, he now lives in Isnello (a 30-minute drive).

Epifanio Giovanni is a pragmatic and warm-hearted man. The son of a shepherd, he recounts how his father gave up his studies for the love of the countryside. He passed on knowledge to his son through empirical learning: to truly learn something, one must do it with their own hands. It was the heart that drove him to follow in his father’s footsteps. “This work — like any work, really — must be done out of love. If you don’t wake up in the morning loving what you do, it’s useless: you won’t do a good job.”

The first thing that emerges from his words is his love for his animals. He considers them fully sentient beings, endowed with spirit and will. Before being objects of exploitation, his animals are collaborators, each with its own personality. He shows them great esteem, trust, and respect. “My dog will never betray me... a human probably will, but never an animal.”

His speech reveals bitterness and concern toward humankind. Shepherding was already difficult in his father’s time. While society still enjoyed a certain abundance in the 1980s, the 1990s marked the beginning of a slow decline. Since then, coinciding with the rise of large-scale distribution, it has become difficult to sell animals or meat at a fair price — he explains that the ideal for those working the land is to be in direct contact with the consumer, without going through wholesalers. He describes the industrial world with some disdain: “What they sell you in the supermarket isn’t really meat... it’s meat, with a whole series of additives to prolong its shelf life. Even the honey they sell is honey, but cut with molasses.” This paints a picture of a consumer society in which quantity prevails over quality.

Is this what weighs on Gratteri? He recounts a radical and progressive change observed over the last ten years. What the village lacks are people... dreams and those who make them come true: the young. He says he does not have enough knowledge to imagine a future for Gratteri, but one thing is certain: nothing can be done without political will.



EPIFANIO MUFFOLETTO

“Between love for his work and concern for the future, he has built his own secret garden.”

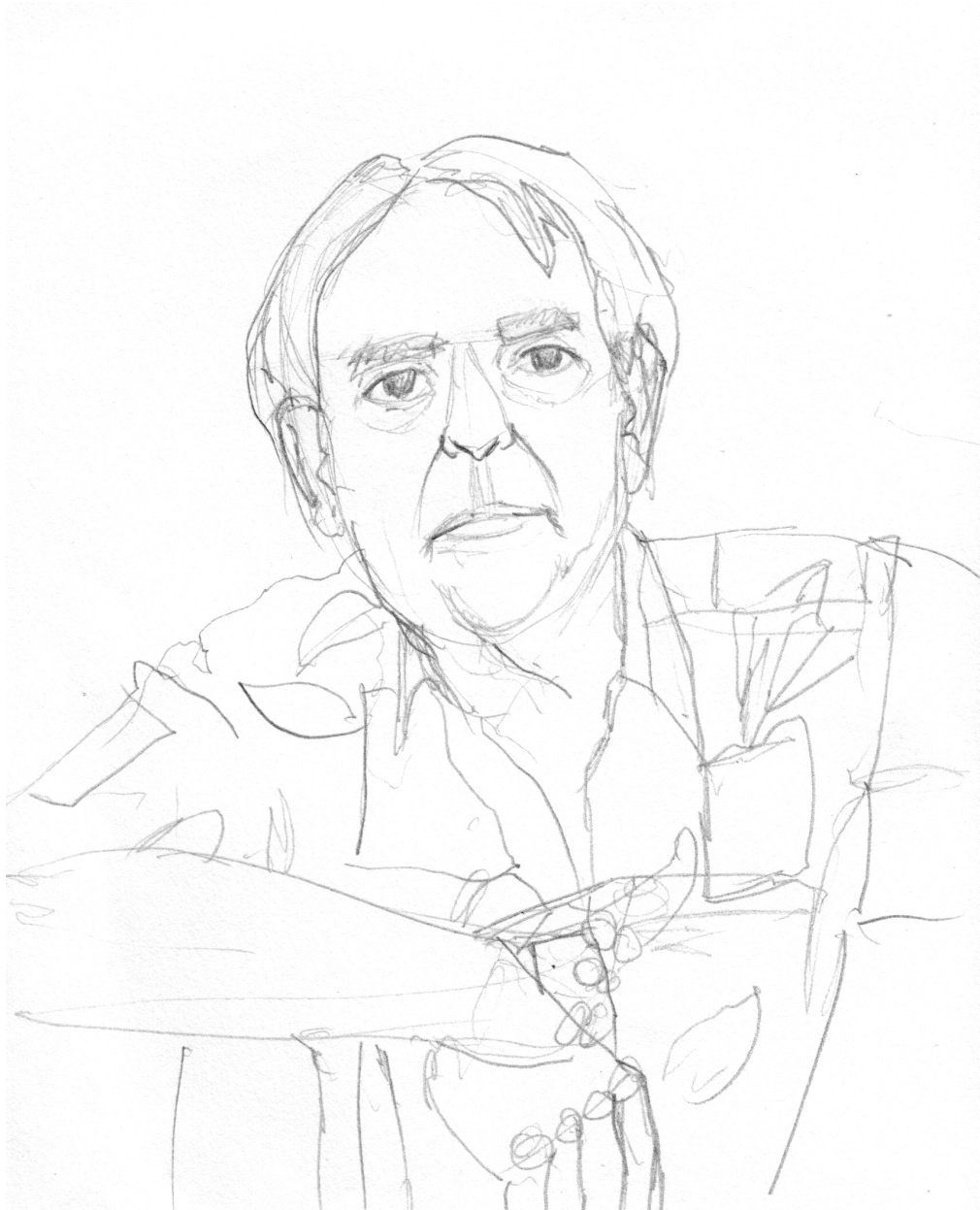
Year of birth: 1990

Epifanio is a hard worker. Before joining his cousin in shepherding, he worked in a variety of jobs: waiter in a restaurant, employee in a gelateria, laborer in a carpentry workshop. He recounts that during the first year, he helped his father with the animals, then worked in carpentry, and finally ended the day at the bar. Today, he works exclusively as a shepherd. Conditions are harder now because there is less available labor to help.

He is highly critical of contemporary society: times have changed compared to his father's era in the 1980s. Labor in agriculture has decreased, making work more strenuous; the mass distribution market has made sales less profitable; and people, in general, judge agricultural and animal-related work more harshly. He believes society has become more fragile. Young people lack motivation, dreams, and vision. The lure of easy money has replaced the love of hard work. He observes a lot of violence in the contemporary world. For example, a few years ago in Palermo, a young man was stabbed to death by his peers for looking at another's girlfriend. According to him, the root of the problem lies in a lack of proper upbringing. Due to laziness, lack of availability, or the intrusion of technology (e.g., cell phones), young people are left to themselves. They have no role models, encouragement, or ideals guiding their daily lives... fundamentally, there is an absence of heart.

The way he recounts some interactions with customers illustrates this idea well: many do not care about the living conditions of animals, which in turn affects the quality of their meat. Epifanio is a very peaceful and calm man. He recounts one of the rare times he lost his patience: a customer was trying, yet again, to negotiate the purchase price. Epifanio replied sharply: “When you buy a shirt in a store, it would never occur to you to argue about the price. Why do you grant yourself that right with me?” He condemns the disrespect for work connected to the land.

For his son, he sees no prospects in Gratteri... and he is rather worried about the future of the world in general.



GIACOMO GRASSO

“Times change, and with them, dreams.”

Year of birth: 1940

Giacomo was born in Gratteri to a shepherd father. As a child, he dreamed of following in his father’s footsteps. This job did not offer easy working conditions: one had to rise early, spend the entire day with the animals, and salaries were modest with uncertain income for the owners... Yet, for Giacomo, life was fairly sweet: his father, being the owner of the animals, granted him favors, exempting him from the hardest tasks. He recalls how he would take the animals to pasture and leave them there while setting off on adventures with his car.

Life at that time was different: until the 1970s, Gratteri relied mostly on agriculture and livestock, with a local economy based essentially on barter. By the late 1960s, with industrialization, a mass migration to the North occurred. Where traditional lifestyles offered unstable prospects (harvests and animal health varied year by year), industrial dynamics guaranteed more secure work and income. It was probably this same dynamic that led Giacomo to abandon the ancestral activity, leaving his comfortable position for a more modest, but less demanding and more stable job: after his father’s death, he decided to sell all the animals and join a cousin in Rome. There, he worked for 10 years as a doorman for Muammar Gaddafi. Subsequently, he spent 20 years in Palermo, also as a doorman.

After more than 30 years, returning to his childhood village, he notices that the mentality has changed: there is much envy. “At best, people criticize you; at worst, they criticize you even more.” This climate of distrust was likely created by the decreasing population, which made the future feel more uncertain—a consequence that is still felt today.



GIUSEPPE ILARDO

“In a world made of prefabricated pieces, what makes the difference is the touch of imagination you put into your work.”

Year of birth: 1953

Giuseppe was born and raised in Gratteri. He attended school up to the fifth grade, but, not getting along with his classmates, he decided to leave. He then began working in his hometown, which, offering no professional prospects beyond masonry, pushed him to emigrate first to northern Italy, where he worked as a specialized technician on a nuclear reactor. Later, he moved to Iraq for three years, working as an industrial assembler for a German company, and eventually settled in Hannover.

At a point in his life where he had to choose between a good salary and his loved ones, he chose the latter: the choice of the heart. He thus returned to live in Gratteri, becoming a blacksmith.

His account of Gratteri is full of affection and gentle nostalgia. He describes his childhood as a time “when we had nothing, yet had everything” — in contrast to today’s youth, “who have everything, yet have nothing.” Before the first foosball tables arrived in the 1970s, children made their own toys from whatever they could find: scooters (roller skates), handmade carts, or tin-can-and-string phones crafted by the village blacksmith.

He recalls the tranquility and solidarity of that time. Since people had little money, bartering was very common. Today, he says, everyone wants a comfortable life, an easy life, but without making sacrifices. People no longer take risks. There is much distrust and considerable laziness.

Giuseppe considers himself an artist: that childhood of self-made toys, his self-taught path, and empirical learning all fostered his creativity. In an age where everything is prefabricated, he believes that imagination is what remains for the artisan.



MARCO FRAGALE

“Saving Gratteri’s memory: a story of love and cultural resilience.”

Year of birth: 1983.

Born in Cefalù (since Gratteri no longer had a hospital), Marco grew up in Termini Imerese, nurturing from an early age a deep passion for his grandparents’ small village. Beyond the beauty of the place, he was fascinated by the elderly who lived there and the stories they passed down—the entirety of the culture they preserved. He recalls with emotion the video camera he received for his birthday, which he used to film scenes of everyday life at the time.

His passion led him to study history and anthroponymy. Together with his brother, he founded the association Gratteri nel Cuore, dedicated to enhancing and promoting the village. By reviving stories, legends, and the history of the place, he hopes to rekindle interest in Gratteri and counteract the gradual depopulation of this small Madonite village.

After all these years of dedication, however, he regrets not receiving support from the local authorities.



MARIA LA DUCA

**“Caught between attachment and the desire to be elsewhere:
a search for meaning.”**

Year of birth: 2008.

Maria was born in Gratteri, but she does not wish to spend her adult life there.

From an early age, she has felt the desire to leave her place of origin. Her words convey above all a sense of extreme quiet, sometimes tinged with boredom, tied to the village. She eagerly awaits summer, the season when the town comes alive again after the long winter months. That’s when friends who have moved away, relatives, and foreigners arrive. Activities for young people are few, as are the young people themselves; her social life therefore revolves around a small group of peers from the village or nearby areas.

She also looks critically at the generations that came before her. According to her, coexistence among residents is often spoiled by trivial quarrels, often related to politics.

Maria shows great sensitivity and a deep reflection on existence. In her eyes, the contemporary world is too dominated by “God Money.” For her, the true value of life lies in small joys, beauty, and human relationships.

The most important things in her life are: her little sister, her parents, Giovanni (her partner), Argo (her dog), her horse, Rita, Larissa, Maria-Teresa, Martina, books—her refuge—and her mobile phone, which she sees as an essential link to the outside world, helping her escape isolation.

Maria aspires to become a psychologist.



MISHA CAPNIST

“The need for stability in a constantly changing world.”

Year of birth: 1982.

Misha was born in Vicenza and moved to Gratteri in 2019.

He discovered Gratteri as a child: his grandparents had bought a vacation home there, and he would spend summers visiting. For him, Gratteri is intimately linked to his childhood.

He has traveled extensively. After university years in Milan, Misha moved to Paris, pursuing various professional activities. He then returned to Northern Italy for a few years, continuing to explore different fields. Finally, he decided to settle in Gratteri, treating it as a personal retreat.

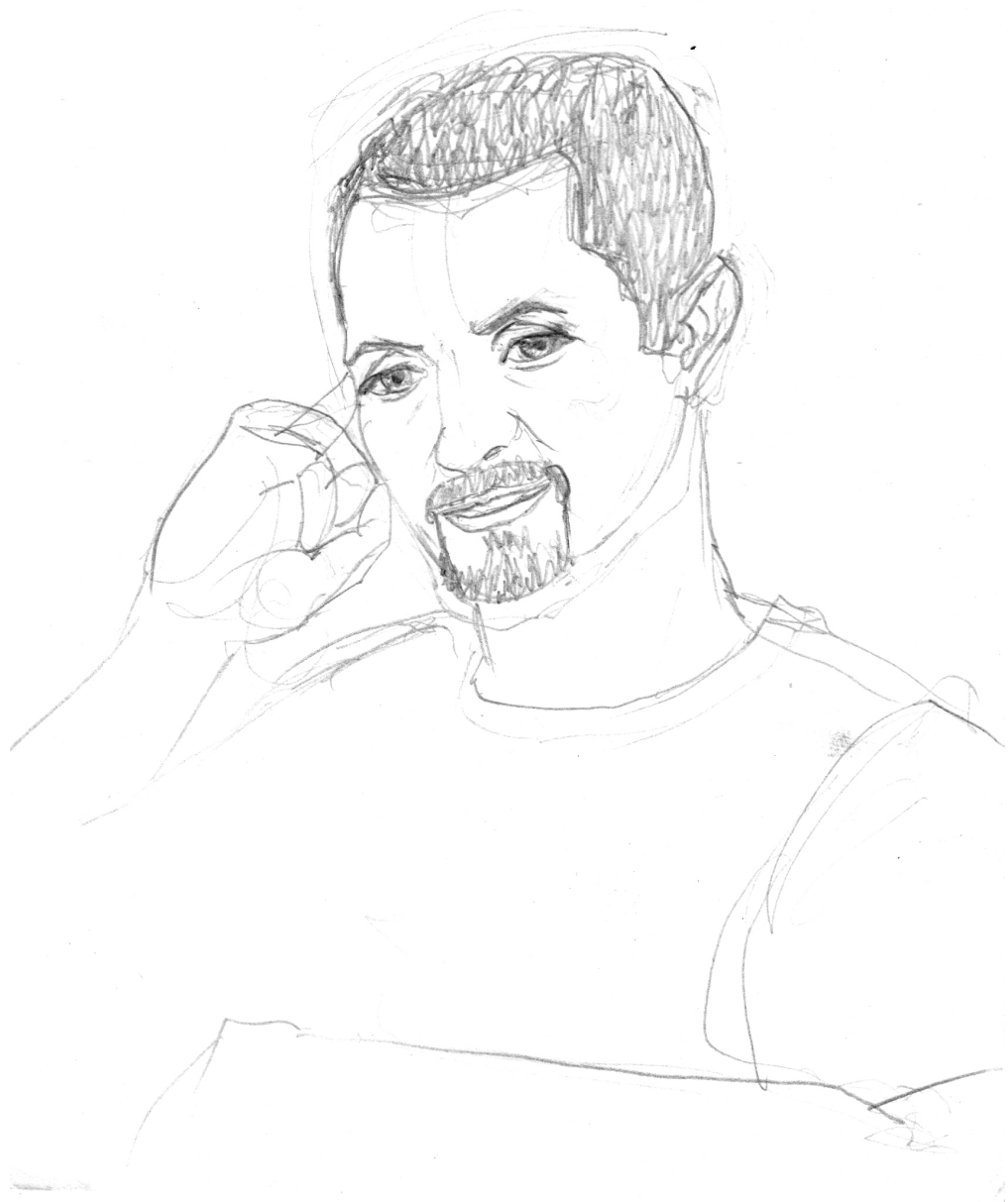
“After all these years constantly changing scenery, in a world that moves so fast, Gratteri is the only landscape that has remained constant, unchanged.”

He seeks to rediscover himself after experiencing the intensity and frenzy of a “System” he considers superficial, futile, and parasitic. The system—the big city, social conventions—constantly demands proof: a status, a job, a family, a car... “Here I am free as the air, a child of the wind, because I am freed from parasitic and heavy expectations. I feel freer to undertake things, and in a more stable way... perhaps also because I am an outsider.”

In Gratteri, he has freed himself from the gaze of neighbors, relatives, cousins, and bank accounts. He has given himself the space to think independently and recognize what truly matters in life: in most cases, immaterial things.

Today, Misha runs a cultural association he founded with other foreigners who have invested in Gratteri. Through this initiative, he works to safeguard the village’s architectural and cultural heritage while revitalizing the community. His work combines property management with organizing socio-cultural events.

He dreams of bringing life back to the streets of Gratteri.



SALVATORE D'AGOSTARO

"Believing in it even when everything seems to say otherwise."

Year of birth: 1983.

Salvatore was born in Cefalù and grew up in Gratteri. Until high school, he planned to study surveying. At 18, after his mother's death, he gave up university studies to take over the family bar, which had been run for 100 years. He renamed it Tabaccheria Stella in her honor.

Salvatore views Gratteri with pessimism. He first notices a lack of cohesion. Envy, fear, and mistrust create an atmosphere that hinders understanding, exchange, and initiative. The cracks affecting Gratteri appear on several levels: political divisions make opponents feel like enemies; at a more personal level, relationships are tense, lacking goodwill, and permeated by envy. People withdraw into themselves. Without trust in the future or in others, parents fail to encourage their children to explore or experiment.

Salvatore considers himself a hard worker, a trait inherited from his family. He believes that life requires taking risks. Yet, in a community showing little goodwill, he struggles to pursue his vision with few like-minded people: organizing events is difficult due to poor coordination with other local activities, and when exceptional help is needed, he must turn to outside workers.

The people of Gratteri often look for salvation from the outside, like a Messiah. Asked about the foreigners who have recently invested in his village, he replies that, commercially, it is very positive—but as a Gratterese, he cannot help but feel sadness seeing his hometown lose its culture. These foreigners are mostly already active elsewhere: they buy houses for summer stays and rent them out when absent. Gratteri risks becoming merely a dormitory town.

For Salvatore, the future of Gratteri looks rather bleak. He fights to keep his ideals alive, yet does not rule out the possibility of having to leave his village one day.



CLAUDIA PESSINA

"Peace in the outside world begins with peace within oneself."

Year of birth: ?

Claudia is originally from the Milan area, where she grew up and studied languages and literature. Feeling unfulfilled by literary work, she decided to pursue a master's degree in yoga, a discipline she has been teaching for over twenty years.

She lived many years in Milan. What she remembers most about that life is the lack of contact with nature. She recalls, for example, a time when she decided to have a picnic with a friend and was surprised to realize that they had to drive for over an hour to find a place not completely dominated by human intervention.

In search of new challenges and tired of the same environment, she moved to Palermo, where she spent 35 years. Once again, desiring peace and nature, she ultimately decided to settle in Gratteri. She appreciates that this place has remained authentic and well-preserved.

For various reasons, time seems to have stood still in Gratteri. The village's low attractiveness—which pushes many inhabitants to leave—is paradoxically what preserves certain aspects: real estate speculation has not distorted the landscapes; some ancient techniques endure; human relationships have remained simple.

Claudia works in Gratteri as a massage therapist and yoga teacher. She has been teaching yoga free of charge since April 2025. The social fabric of Gratteri needs to be mended: her lessons operate on a dual level, serving both as a meeting point and as a source of well-being. Yoga aims to cultivate inner peace, a condition necessary to generate peace in the outside world as well. Four people attended her first class. Since then, the number of students has grown to twenty.



JANE CLARKE

"Enough of being anonymous in the big city."

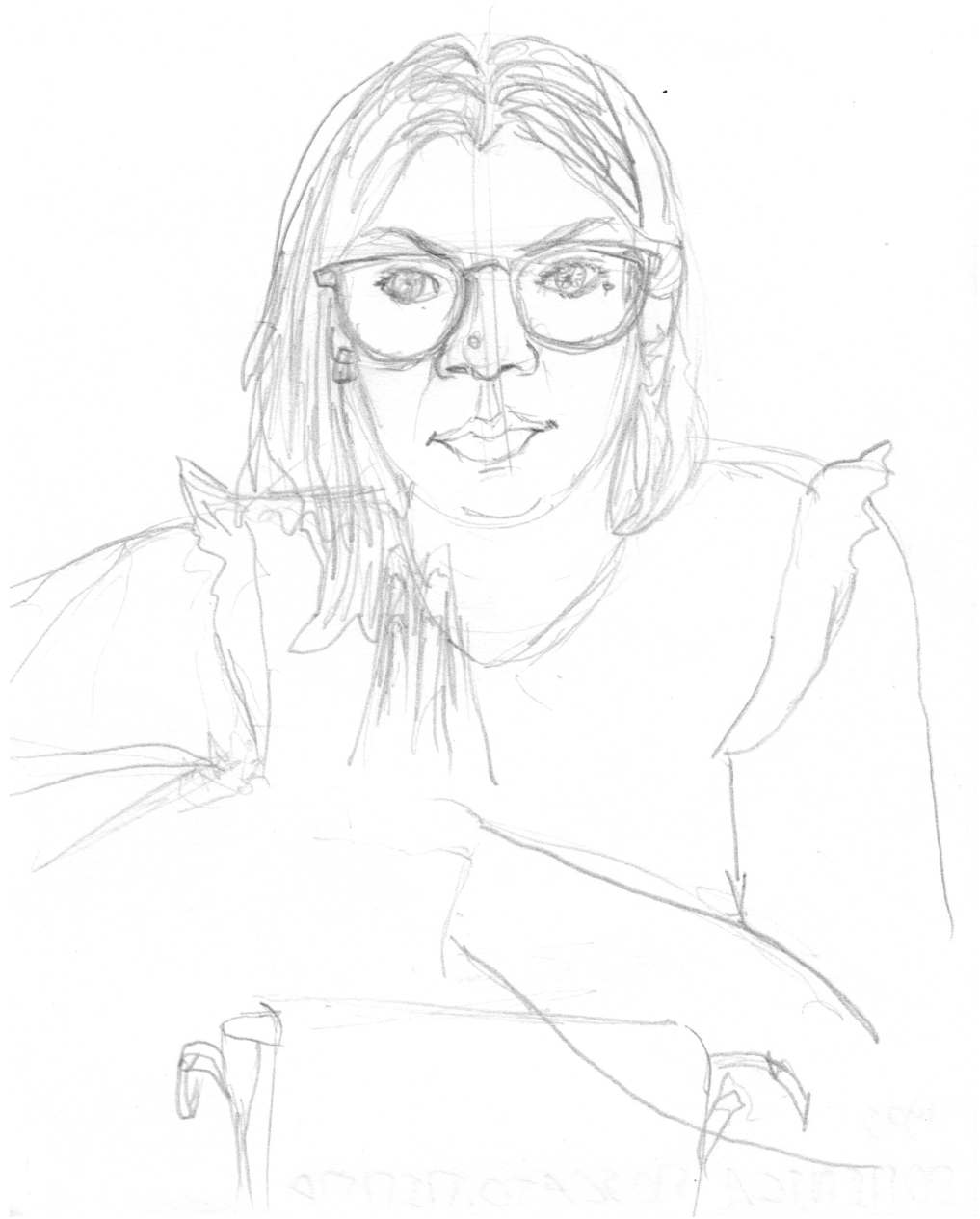
Year of birth: ?

Jane is originally from New York, where she has lived her entire life. She is concluding her career as a school principal. Married to a Sicilian whose family lives in Palermo, they are planning to move to Gratteri, where they hope to create an artist residency.

After a life spent in a large metropolis, Jane feels the need to be part of a community more connected to nature, and above all, in a place where she can feel less anonymous.

She is deeply struck by the kindness of the people, their curiosity and openness toward outsiders, but also by a certain melancholy she perceives in them.

She finds it sad that the village is losing its inhabitants, that the bakery has closed permanently, and that Gratteri risks losing its soul... While welcoming newcomers warmly, the locals seem pained to see their village increasingly populated by foreigners.



DOMENICA MOSCATO

To leave.

Year of birth: 1973

Born in Cefalù, she grew up in Gratteri. She works as a home care assistant and in the municipal canteen.

On Sundays, she dreams of traveling. Although she and her partner are not particularly fond of Gratteri, she is forced to stay to care for her elderly and ill father.

She has lived with her partner for 17 years without marrying or having children, which is frowned upon by the community... or at least by the priest. In general, the local atmosphere, the looks, and the gossip make her feel constrained and prevent her from enjoying her free time. This is the main reason she wishes to leave Gratteri.



GIADA LA DUCA

"The sole representative of a generation."

Year of birth: 2013

Giada is a very sociable girl who loves having fun outdoors with her friends.

She attended first, second, and third grade in Gratteri, but being the only child born in the village in 2013, she had to take classes with students from other grades. The teacher, focusing more on the larger class, often paid less attention to her, leaving her somewhat on the sidelines. For this reason, she and her parents decided she would attend fourth and fifth grade in Isnello. However, discovering that middle school classes in Isnello would also be combined due to the same issue, she chose to continue her education in Cefalù. All these changes in environment had a strong impact on her friendships: she still sees her classmates, but the bonds have lost their intimacy.

In the future, Giada wants to become a doctor because she loves helping others. Although she loves Gratteri very much and wouldn't change anything about it, she envisions herself in larger settings, such as Palermo.

GRATTERIAN CHRONICLES

S U M M A R Y

**Philosophical and aesthetic reflections
after 14 days in Gratteri.**

It is six o'clock in the morning in the Sicilian highlands of the Madonie Park. While Pietro, the baker, can finally return to his bed, Epifanio is getting out of his: it is time to walk the four kilometers that separate Gratteri from his stables, where his goats are resting. Few Gratteresi are still awake and active at such an early hour in 2025. In fact, there are few Gratteresi left at all. The village, which counted around 3,300 inhabitants in 1911, is now home to only 800 souls. Like many rural realities across the globe, Gratteri, in the province of Palermo, is suffering from the exodus of its people.

Misha Capnist has always enjoyed going against the current. Six years ago, he decided to settle in the village where he used to spend his summer holidays. For more than two years now, he has been running the association Grattaluci Si Diventa ("One Becomes Grattaluci"), which works to activate dialogue and exchange, and to revitalize the cultural life of Gratteri. It was therefore only natural for him to address the issue of rural exodus in his adopted village. Who are the Gratteresi? What is this culture, this lifeblood that slowly thins with the passing years? Is this extinction inevitable, or can it be countered?

In order to address these questions—if not to provide answers—Misha joined forces with the author of these lines, Stefano Alaimo, a multimedia designer and artist with a background in philosophy. We initially chose to adopt an experience design (UX design) approach, grounded in field research. The reflections that follow are based on more than thirty interviews with inhabitants of Gratteri, as well as on a selection of historical data.



GRATTERI, A LAND WITHOUT TOMORROWS?

If we trace the population of Gratteri over time, we notice it peaked in 1911, with 3,291 inhabitants. Several macro-structural factors help explain this dynamic.

The early twentieth century was marked by large waves of emigration to the United States, Argentina, Brazil... The First World War, the rise of Fascism, and the Second World War plunged Italy into poverty, lowering the birth rate and pushing Italians—especially those from the southern countryside—to seek better fortunes elsewhere. This dynamic continued in the postwar period, both abroad and in northern Italy, as national development strategies, facilitated by the Marshall Plan, favored the growth of industries in the north.

Giacomo Grasso was born in 1940 in Gratteri. His father was a shepherd and livestock owner, which allowed him relatively comfortable working conditions for the standards of the trade. In his twenties, Giacomo chose not to follow in his father's footsteps, seduced instead by the conveniences of city life: he became a doorman in Palermo and later in Rome until his retirement. His friend, Giovanni Cirincione, born in 1960, also emigrated, working as a technician in different contexts—from northern Italy to the west coast of the United States. In Gratteri, he could have been nothing more than a mason, but his peregrinations allowed him to become a specialized technician. Both ultimately chose to spend their retirements in their place of origin.

Several industries had chosen to establish themselves in the Palermo region. FIAT, for instance, had a factory in Termini Imerese, just 30 minutes from Gratteri, allowing many families to live and work in the area. However, the closure of the facility in 2011 closed many life prospects.

The departure of inhabitants gradually led to the loss of many services. Below a certain population threshold, the administration removes non-essential infrastructures. The story of Giada La Duca illustrates the concrete individual impacts of this decline. Born in 2013, Giada was the only child born that year in the village. Her case, a reflection of Gratteri's falling birth rate, posed logistical and administrative challenges. The primary school survived only by merging classes into one. Giada recounts how the teacher focused on the most numerous age group, leaving her with a sense of neglect, often copying the lessons of older classmates. To remedy this isolation, she continued her schooling in Isnello, a neighboring village with a slightly higher population. The same problem arose again in middle school, requiring her to relocate to Cefalù to be surrounded by peers. Similarly, the village lacks health services and many other amenities.



Private services have also declined. In the past, Gratteri had an ice cream shop, a hairdresser, restaurants, and many other service providers that no longer exist. In November 2025, the baker Pietro d'Angelo retired. After fifty years of loyal service, he found no one to take over the family business. Of his two sons, one pursued a career in forestry services, while the other, who had helped in the bakery for years, moved to Cefalù, the nearby city, to open a wine cellar. Consequently, the village's attractiveness for both locals and visitors has decreased. Maria La Duca, born in 2008, dreams of studying psychology and living elsewhere. To enjoy her free time, Maria organizes herself with her peers, moving from village to village to vary her experiences. There are few activities for young people. The only contacts with the outside world come through media, particularly her mobile phone. Her village is perceived as a place of cultural isolation.

These logistical and practical constraints, affecting the appeal of a village like Gratteri for both occasional visitors and permanent residents, reverberate on an intimate level, deeply shaping social relationships within the community and, consequently, the approach to work, entrepreneurship, and politics.

The shrinking of Gratteri's community has intensified certain psycho-social traits. Interviewees often complain about gossip, envy, and arrogance. In any small community, gossip is common. Daily life is poorer in events than in a big city, so boredom is filled with small village episodes where everyone becomes, willingly or not, an actor on a stage: each person is therefore subject to the judgment of others. In larger groups, the opportunities to form connections are virtually greater, so a neighbor's opinion carries less weight. In rural realities, losing the goodwill of even one friend can be socially significant. Giusi Marci tearfully recounts, with one of her few village friends, Domenica Moscato, how the community's gaze can be harsh toward women who do not behave as expected: going out unaccompanied by a man, smoking, wearing light clothing, or living with a partner. Several young people also reported how some agreements or friendships were broken over political differences.

The theme of difficult living conditions regularly appears in the elders' discourse: the village, being isolated and economically poor, often relied on barter. The spirit of neighborly help has always been crucial, even today: social ties are extremely close, for better or worse. In precarious realities, collaboration and good order are essential; individual behavior conforming to the group's welfare is therefore the norm. The harshness of judgment, perceived as malicious, may reflect a reality in which any deviation from proper conduct could lead to ruin. Young people feel this acutely: "We hoped for more encouragement from our parents," they say, but the elders are affected by the prevailing gloom and pessimism, products of years of feeling judged or abandoned.

For any enterprise, the size of the potential market must be considered in projections of success or failure. A small number of potential clients is a bad omen, demanding even more courage and creativity. Several have noted that individual success is not always well regarded. Salvatore D'Agostaro recounts that, as his father experienced, many people tried to prevent the demolition of the village's old watering trough in the 1960s, which was replaced by a tobacco shop. The project came to fruition only after great effort and elbowing. The same Salvatore explains how, today, his success does not always elicit positive feelings: "Here, your head must not rise above the rest, or you are looked at with envy and suspicion..." He also mentions how difficult it is to create cohesion and collaborative dynamics among the few remaining businesses, and to coordinate common events





GRATTERI, THE BEAUTIFUL.

But it is not only those who leave: there are also those who stay and those who arrive.

The first thing that strikes you in the Sicilian village is its beauty. Situated at 600 meters above sea level, Gratteri offers a wide view of the northern coast, stretching from Palermo to Cefalù. Located within the Madonie National Park, it is surrounded by preserved nature, with mountain peaks and forests. The village, dating back to the Paleolithic, bears traces of various historical influences: from the Middle Ages, Arabs, Normans, Spaniards, and French all left their mark. It presents the picturesque setting of an old Sicilian village. The place has remained protected from real estate speculation, which has disfigured many Sicilian towns. The beauty of the place may seem like a characteristic with little impact... yet it is precisely this beauty that attracts outsiders like Claudia, from northern Italy, as well as Anne-Marie Clos, wellness professionals, and retains Leonardo Rinchiusa, born in 1994, who aspires to work in socio-political contexts in his home village. When he tells his story, one first feels his love of Beauty, which he sees in people and places, inspiring him daily. It is this drive that makes him active in Gratteri's associative life.

The low economic attractiveness and the resulting exodus have, conversely, allowed the Madonie village to preserve its uniqueness. Slowness and quietness, which some call boring, are for others virtues, synonymous with rest and rejuvenation. It is no coincidence that Gratteri is near two notable places of worship: the ruins of the Abbey of San Giorgio and the still-functioning Monastery of Gibilmanna. The area invites contemplation. Activities that have kept Gratteri alive through the centuries are also those that unfold over long periods: livestock and agriculture, in a traditional perspective, follow the rhythms of the seasons; artisanal skills require the body to adapt to elements: fermentation, rising, aging, maturation for food; drying, cooling, resting, etc. for wood, metal, and other construction materials. Salvatore Cirincione, born in 1998, speaks of the harshness of winter, which is also tranquility and reflection. He has always lived in the Madonie village and works as a software developer, a job that can be done from anywhere. For this reason, he chose not to emigrate. Where some see winter as a test of solitude and boredom, Salvatore sees it as a chance for introspection and inspiration. For him and Leonardo, the cold season is an opportunity to meet, play music, discuss various problems, and imagine solutions together. In Gratteri, the relationship to time is different, making possible situations that would be unthinkable in a big city.



Debora Di Giorgio, born in 1980 and originally from Bisacchino, studied in Palermo. Having had the opportunity to acquire Gratteri's historic pharmacy, she now splits her weeks between the Madonie village and Sicily's capital. Due to the village's size and pace, certain interactions are made possible. With a lower flow of customers, she can devote more time to each visitor, naturally taking on the role of confidante. She also describes leaving her car keys in the ignition: Gratteri is a crime-free place. Daniele Costanzo, in his thirties, is an on-call doctor based in Cefalù. He works three nights a week in the village and appreciates the warmth of the people. Residents often confide in him and want to pay him personally for his quasi-psychologist role; he systematically refuses, and often finds the next morning "payments in kind" in the form of cooked dishes, cheeses, biscuits, etc. Occasional visitors also recognize the friendliness, curiosity, and openness of the Gratteri residents. Besides the human aspect, Gratteri offers logistical advantages, notably its geographical position. Its mid-height location provided military surveillance advantages: relatively fast access to a wide field of view. Today people travel for different reasons, but the advantage remains. Equidistant from the sea, Cefalù, and more inland towns, Gratteri is ideal as a base for exploring the region. Salvo Curcio, born in 1975 and former municipal youth services advisor, has always lived in Gratteri. He manages several tourist rental businesses and believes the village's future lies in tourism. According to him, Gratteri is the perfect place to accommodate visitors and allow easy access to nearby hotspots. Additionally, the elevated location brings milder temperatures in summer. Moreover, general costs are lower, making prices attractive across all services. Salvatore Cirincione, mentioned earlier, chose to stay in his childhood village for these reasons, among others. Lower housing and living costs allow savings to be redirected toward travel and activities.

The drop in real estate prices has thus created a counter-exodus phenomenon: more and more foreigners—Americans, English, Germans, Poles, Italians—are investing in the Madonie village. Martin and Stéphanie Gray, in their thirties and based in London, fell in love with Gratteri. They first bought a holiday home, then a second one for seasonal rental. Many others are doing the same, initiating the dynamic desired by Salvo Curcio. This phenomenon has the undeniable advantage of revitalizing the local economy. While not rejected by locals, it still leaves a slightly bitter feeling: the village becomes a place of mere passage. As Debora, the pharmacist, says, Gratteri risks losing its soul: although the foreigners are very kind and curious, those who stay only a few days each year do not integrate. It would be preferable for people to settle permanently, allowing them to absorb the village's spirit and enrich it with their own. Leonardo and Salvatore, two young men in their thirties who grew up in the village, express it differently: Gratteri residents should go out into the world, learn from the outside, and return to share that knowledge with the community. When considering permanent settlement, the primary factor is the type of activity one will pursue. The relationship to work is essential in shaping one's time, daily life, and existence.

In this regard, the story of Gregorio Capnist is significant. Born in 1994 in Vicenza, northern Italy, he spent his childhood and adolescence there before moving to Genoa for foreign language studies and settling in Paris for a few years. There he held various jobs in restaurants and bicycle repair. He describes a "compressed" urban life, subjected to the codes of appearance and money. He moved to Gratteri in 2022 to embrace a simpler, "old-fashioned" lifestyle. In Paris, freedom meant spending money in rare free moments; in the Sicilian mountains, freedom means having control over one's time and creativity. Gregorio seeks challenge. He wants work that tests him, fills his days, and gives a sense of accomplishment. His choice is also ideological: he wishes to detach from a moral, political, and economic system he disapproves of. His ideal is to divide his daily life between a job that pays essential



bills—energy, taxes, healthcare—and chosen exploitation of the land for partial autonomy.

Similarly, Jane Clarke and her husband Sante Miceli, weary of New York's frenzy and anonymity, have inherited buildings in Gratteri and wish to acquire others to live, set up a creative workshop, and create a residency for artists from elsewhere. In recent years, medium-to-luxury hotels have developed, focusing on wellness and rejuvenation.



Finally, it is love for their work that keeps the Muffoletto cousins, shepherds for generations, rooted in Gratteri. Epifanio Giovanni was born in 1975, his cousin Epifanio in 1990. Both continue the family livestock business. Their testimony, particularly poetic, speaks of love. "Everything we do, to do it well, must be driven by love." Respect for memory, land, and animals. Epifanio Giovanni considers the animals full-fledged collaborators, endowed with sensitivity and deserving respect. The cousins discuss a changing world: more violence, less attention to the quality of human relations and products. Young Epifanio is gentle, kind, and simple. He lost patience only once with a client who tried to haggle over the price of his meat: "When you buy a shirt in a store, you don't think of negotiating the price... why not give me the same respect?? Because I work the land!" Senior Epifanio describes new consumption habits: "What you buy cheaply at the supermarket cannot be a quality product... first-price meat is full of preservatives that extend shelf life. What they sell as honey is cut with molasses... etc. Considering my methods, I cannot afford to lower my prices that much. I simply couldn't survive!" The Muffoletto example teaches that if a business cannot rely on mass production to survive, it can focus on quality.



THE MARCH OF TIME.

We can thus identify two movements in Gratteri, one centripetal and one centrifugal, both linked to dreams of life. What has inspired people to dream? What do the young Gratteresi aspire to? And what were the ambitions of their parents? And of their grandparents?

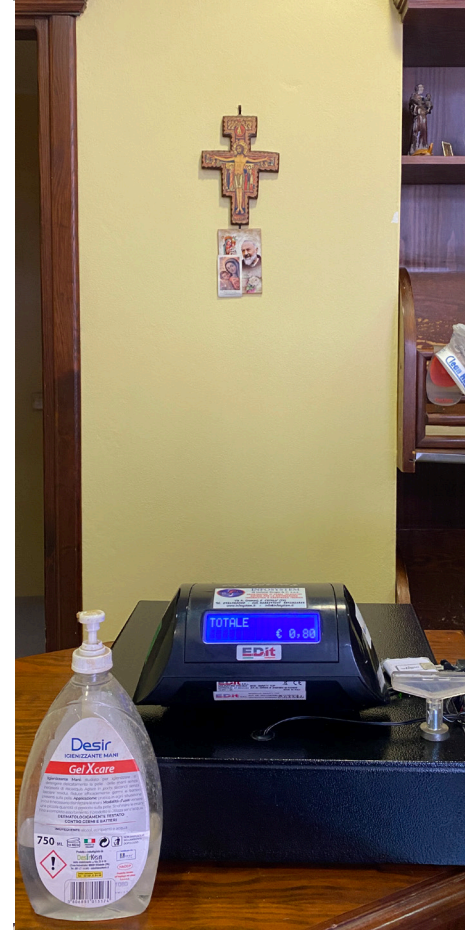
The movement that drives souls to leave Gratteri is primarily material: the search for better working conditions and, consequently, better living conditions. The elders recall their youth as a harsh reality, filled with effort and deprivation. According to the testimonies of the Muffoletto shepherds, the baker Pietro, the bartender Antonio, and others, the professions that sustain Gratteri are demanding and unrewarding. The Gratteresi longed to no longer submit to excessive hours, the rhythm of the seasons, the burn of the sun, and the bite of winter cold. But the primary aspiration underpinning all others is undoubtedly the need for security: a common thread in much of the pessimistic discourse about the village is uncertainty. When raising animals or cultivating the land, an unexpected epidemic, a late frost, or a new pest can ruin a year's work. In the service sector, fortunes are equally subject to chance: undertaking any business in a sparsely populated area with a limited market is risky. Thus, those who can leave seek better horizons, while those who cannot hope to provide new opportunities for their children.

These new paths, these new dreams, take shape in a more urban context. The counterpart to manual labor is intellectual or service-oriented professions: Giada wants to become a doctor, Maria a psychologist, Leonardo aims for a career in politics... the latter would like to return to Gratteri if possible, but the first two see their future elsewhere. They also describe the importance of their mobile phones in daily life: it is perceived as the only link between the village and the "rest of the world." It is striking to note that the most frequently mentioned vision for Gratteri's future is the renovation and availability of housing for tourist rentals—the famous BnB! Another path is that of civil service. There is a standardization of dreams. Giuseppe Ilardo, born in 1953 in Gratteri, exemplifies this. He left school very early and began working as a mason and blacksmith. Traveling through Italy, France, the Middle East, and Germany, he acquired specialized mechanical skills. At thirty, following the call of the heart, he decided to start a family in his native village. According to him, contemporary times are characterized by prefab and disposable products... to stand out, one must be imaginative and creative, adding a personal touch no machine could ever replicate.



This final point highlights the core issue: technology is central to changing social habits, especially the relationship to work. Industrialization, technological acceleration, and the speeding up of production methods make it impossible to regulate places like Gratteri, which lacks space. The change has been so rapid that it has left many individuals at an impasse, with the urgent material need to survive depriving them of the time and freedom required to develop resilience strategies. The Gratteresi are overwhelmed by the whirlwind of innovations and dream-images marking the acceleration of our world. They are also left behind by public authorities focused on economic development. They can no longer see the beauty of their environment.

It is therefore from the outside that a breath of life and confidence can come to Gratteri: financial and moral support from public authorities (raising a concern mentioned by some Gratteresi about the programmed death of rural villages), and a fresh, sensitive perspective toward the peculiarities that have become invisible to the locals—the view of the outsider. These outsiders are precisely those who have experienced the urban dream and returned: Gregorio and Misha from Paris, Anne-Marie from Rome and Palermo, Claudia from Milan, Jane and Sante from New York. They have exhausted the pleasures offered by the entertainment society, felt its emptiness, and seek fulfillment in what some Gratteresi might perceive as emptiness.



AN ETHIC OF ATTENTION.

The particular case of Gratteri raises very universal and timely questions. It builds a bridge between two domains that we tend to separate: the Material and the Spiritual, two spheres that come together in the question of Morality—that is, the principle guiding the actions of each individual. We were particularly moved by the words of Gregorio, the urbanite who aspires to a daily life filled with meaningful effort; by the Muffoletto shepherds, for whom Beauty resides in work guided by Love; and by Leonardo, who manages every day to marvel at the graces of his childhood village. As the experiences of the village pharmacist and doctor show, the Gratteresi need to be listened to. Lucia and Maurizio, one of the couples interviewed and filmed, touched us deeply when they said, “you have seen us.” What emerges from these two weeks of immersion in Gratteri is a profound sense of abandonment, a lack of trust, and low self-esteem.

We therefore wish to offer a creative, formal response that reveals and reactivates the dormant beauties of Gratteri. Based on the history of the place and its ancient knowledge, we propose to create artistic moments that invite people to no longer consider Gratteri as an isolated and uninteresting island as compared the “great outside world”; to no longer see foreign cultures as opposed to the vernacular, but to integrate them to create something new. Sicilian culture—but isn’t this true of all cultures?—was born from the layering of influences brought by foreigners across the ages. Keeping culture alive precisely means maintaining this process of integration: nurturing curiosity.

The Divertimento residency project proposes to invite artists, designers, scientists, artisans, and researchers of all kinds and from all horizons to focus their attention on Gratteri, collaborating with its residents to create moments of beauty—catalysts for exchange, ideas, and initiatives that stimulate openness and curiosity.