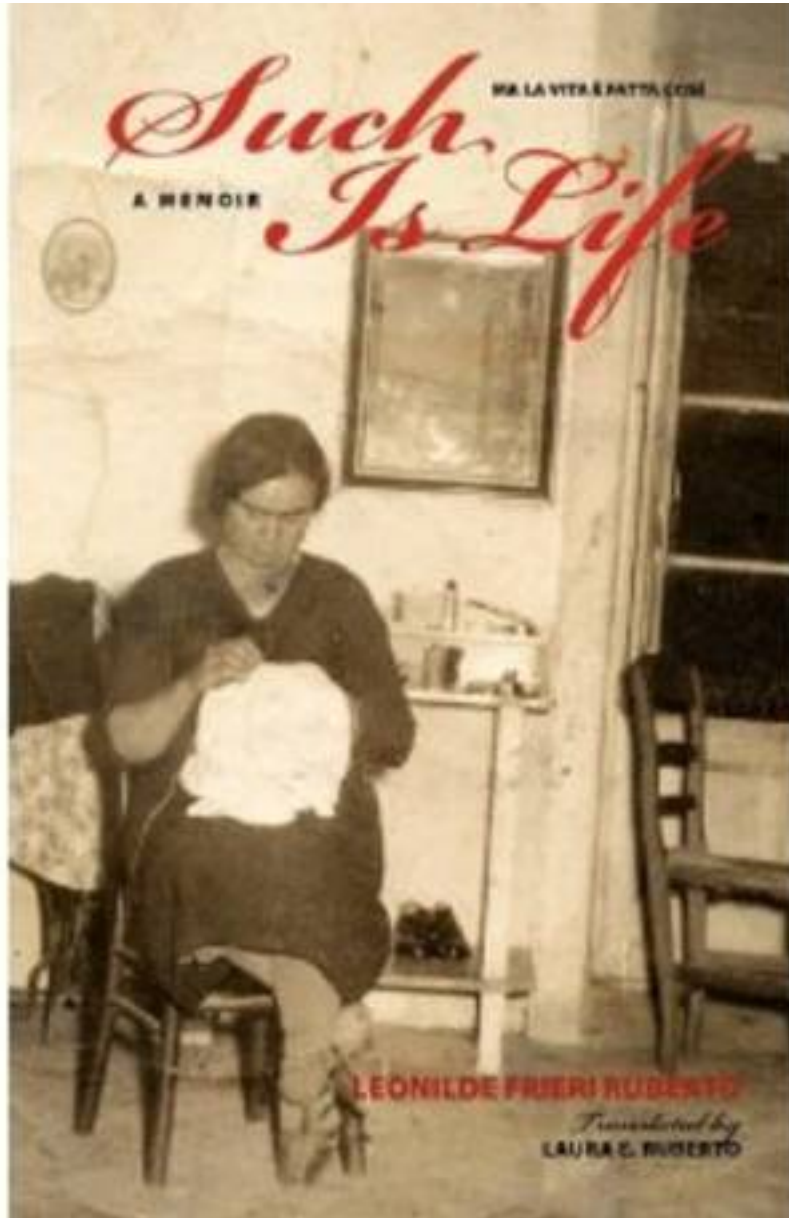




## "And so we left leaving Italy and all of my dear ones..."

Ilaria Serra and Laura E. Ruberto (April 24, 2010)



Introducing "Such Is Life" ("Ma la vita è fatta così"), an immigrant woman's memoir about her life between Italy and America.



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"my village was small, 1500 inhabitants, it was called Cairano in the province of Avellino, townspeople and farmers all worked their lands, the townspeople, even though they had a trade, cultivated their land, and the farmers sometimes worked their own land and sometimes worked the land for the townspeople in order to earn money for those things they had to buy, there were few signori rich in land who could have sharecroppers..."

Thus begins a simple memoir by Leonilde Frieri Ruberto, written when she was nearly 70 years old. This document, recently published in a bilingual edition by [Bordighera Press](#) [3], narrates Ruberto's life both in the Southern Italian village of Cairano, where she was born and where she raised her children, and the Italian American neighborhood of [Bloomfield](#) [4] (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), where she emigrated after World War II.

It is an unusual document. First, it is the only autobiography published in the United States that was written in Italian by a first-generation Italian American woman. Although there are testimonials narrated in Italian by women immigrants, as well as memoirs written in English, nothing quite like this exists. Moreover, this memoir speaks to the often-overlooked period of post-war emigration to the United States. And that it does so through the voice of a woman with a fourth grade education who never mastered English or standard Italian is in and of itself noteworthy.

Woven within this everyday story of her life are aspects of the larger narratives that pushed her and her family to emigrate; the aftereffects of the war, in particular, are hard felt. America plays a major role in her tale. From electricity to care packages, disease-free grape vines, to her husband—she describes a constant back-and-forth movement between the continents. She is forthright about her mixed emotions over place and home: "my village was poor but beautiful, don't you think that I was happy to leave it, I'd lived there until I was 43 years old, but I wanted to leave for my children".

The memoir was written quickly, in about two weeks. She wrote it while her husband was visiting Italy, where he had gone to see the damage caused by the 1980 Irpinia Earthquake (with an epicenter just a few miles from Cairano). It was handwritten in about 80 pages of a school notebook and is clearly the work of someone who was not used to writing. It rolls off the pages, seemingly all in one breath, making it exhausting to read. (Indeed, that there are but 50 periods in the entire story makes it a challenge at times to know where to pause.)

The memoir has been published with a transcribed copy of the original as well as an English-language translation. We say the publication is in Italian and English, but it was in fact written in a nonstandard Italian, though not exactly in dialect either.

It was translated by her granddaughter, Laura E. Ruberto, a scholar of Italian American culture and includes an Introduction by Ilaria Serra, also an Italian American studies scholar.

The book can be ordered online at: [spdbooks.org](#) [5] (Small Press Distribution), [amazon.com](#) [6], [barneandnoble.com](#) [7], or [bordigherapress.org](#) [8].

Per una versione italiana di questo articolo, visitate il sito della [Comunita' Provvisoria](#) [9].

Such Is Life, A Memoir / Ma la vita e' fatta cosi'  
(A bilingual edition, Bordighera Press/Crossings, 2010)

Written by: Leonilde Frieri Ruberto  
Translation and Preface by: Laura E. Ruberto (Berkeley City College)  
Introduction by: Ilaria Serra (Florida Atlantic University)

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