

Keeping with Tradition

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Spending hours on Sundays rolling dough to make gnocchi, celebrating St. Anthony's feast day every June, or frying thirteen different kinds of fish on Christmas Eve are just a few of the cherished Italian traditions I have grown up with. These are the things that when I was young and just starting school, I assumed every kid did with their family. However, I soon learned that almost none of my friends spent August canning fresh tomato sauce like I did with my family. I discovered that while many of my friends had very interesting and diverse family histories, very few of their heritages played such an evident role in their lives as my Italian heritage did and continues to do today. Now that I am older, I take great pride in my Italian heritage because I know that I belong to a rich ancestry of culture and tradition that not everyone in the world can say they are a part of. However in 2011, a dwindling amount of people fully recognize the Italian culture, and the traditions and customs that it entail are losing relevance in our daily lives. My parents and grandparents took great strides in raising me with the Italian cultures and traditions they grew up with, and now it is essential that I keep those traditions so that the Italian influence in America can stay strong for generations to come.

My parents and four grandparents have always made sure to teach our Italian heritage to me and my two sisters, Antonella and Olivia. My grandparents, whom I call Nonno and Nonna, would always be sure to make their Italian influence evident in my life, even when I was a baby. For example, while most American toddlers would be taught songs like "The wheels on the bus" or "the farmer in the dell", my grandparents taught me the Italian American songs of Dean Martin and Lou Prima. Also, it was a safe bet to say that I was the only fourth grader in my class who helped his nonno crush grapes to make wine in the fall. They have told me countless stories from when they were growing up in Italy, with many elements that they have kept alive in this country, such as planting a tomato garden every year or making sure never to start anything new on a Tuesday or Friday. Had my grandparents not shared with me their Italian customs, I would never have learned about my Italian heritage or cared so much for it. That is exactly why it is our responsibility to share our Italian culture with others in our daily lives, because if we don't, future generations will have no knowledge of how great it is to be an Italian American.

In America in 2011, it is very easy to let people know that you an Italian American by wearing a t-shirt saying: "kiss me, I'm Italian." However, more and more people today understand being Italian as simply a title. It is our duty to let people know that being an Italian

American does not mean being part of a classified group, rather it means being a part of a great culture of pride and tradition. And there is no better way to do this than to simply keep with the traditions that we were raised with and to share them with others. Doing the little things our parents or grandparents did, like celebrating special saints' feast days or enjoying a Sunday meal of pasta with the whole family. The more we practice these simple traditions, the more they can spread to others, and the more evident they can become in America today. We cannot remain content with our Italian heritage being nothing more than a bloodline. If we choose to leave our heritage in the past, then that's where it will stay. But if we bring back those memories and at least try to repeat them, then they can become stronger than ever. Dusting off the old Dean Martin cassettes or digging up the family pasta recipe is the best way we can guarantee our Italian heritage will not fade away. We owe it to past Italian Americans to keep their influence alive in this country for generations to come. Keeping the tradition and practicing the culture is the best way to share the Italian culture with others in 2011. Tremendous pride should be taken in being an Italian American, not just as a title, but as being a part of a culture, an identity, and a tradition.