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The Italians: Communicating in a Discourse Community

By Madeline Dziak

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Growing up, I mostly learned about my Italian heritage as I am part Italian, along with part Ukrainian and half Slovak. My great grandparents, my nana's parents, were immigrants of Italian descents and so while my mom and uncles grew up under a lot of Italian traditions such as homemade everything, I am growing up with a little bit of the traditions that my mom grew up with. The Italians have a rich history with the arts and cuisine that has come over to America from different immigrants and passing on their knowledge of their heritage from generation to generation, my generation including me, my brother, and my cousins included. With this knowledge of our history, we can teach others about the history of Italy to someone who does not know much about the history of the country based on what we were taught throughout our lives. Italians are able to communicate their tradition to others through the way of the recipes from the country of Italy, the arts of different time periods such as the Renaissance, and various holiday traditions.

Italians are mostly known for having an exquisite cuisine, and different times it can tell what Italians grew up with eating and sharing among the generations up to today. Italians are known to make everything from scratch, that includes pasta and sauce. I know that my mom would tell stories about when her grandmother and my nana would spend all day preparing dinner for them. As time went on, my nana came to accept the idea of premade tomato sauce and began using that during the times I was around when she was still alive. I asked my mom for a couple of recipes that she got from my nana who she got from my great grandma, or cookie grandma as everyone called her, and she sent me three recipes that stayed in the Fagnoli-Skrobola generation (my mom was the only girl in her immediate family so she was the only one whose last name changed from Skrobola to something else. In this case, it was Dziak). The first recipe she sent me was called Panettone. This is a traditional Italian bread recipe that is made during Easter, as my mom described it. The second recipe that she sent me was a recipe for Canolis. While it is an Italian dessert, I was told that this specific recipe that was sent to me is made by my mom's family every Christmas. The third and final recipe was eggplant parmesano, which was a Sunday meal in my mom's family when she was growing up. These recipes are a good way to know the different types of foods that my mom ate growing up and what specifically they were meant to be eaten during.

Another way that the Italians have been able to talk about the different traditions is through the topic of art. This idea mostly prevailed back in history during a notable time called the Renaissance. During the Middle Ages, there was a rediscovery of the classical world in Greece and Rome, and everyone felt that there was a need to participate in this reformation. This would eventually become the Renaissance (Britannica). While humanism was on the rise, the main focus of the Renaissance was art, especially in Italy where famous artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael would emerge. All three of the artists that I just mentioned had famous paintings that are still being discussed about today. Da Vinci's most notable work was *Mona Lisa*, which was oil painted onto a wood panel (Brittanica). Michelangelo is well known for painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. Last but not least, Raphael's most notable work is *The School of Athens*, which was painted in the Sistine Chapel "the same

time that Michelangelo was painting the ceiling” (Brittanica). Being able to discuss famous artists and their famous works in certain areas such as school and even in museums keeps the Italian tradition of the history of how the Renaissance occurred alive.

Every nationality and religion has different traditions that they keep during the holidays, but I grew up with the Italian holiday tradition that my family kept alive during Christmas. I had never had a Christmas ham in my life because the Italians have a Christmas tradition called the Feast of Seven Fishes. This tradition dates back to early Roman Catholicism times when it was “considered a custom to not have meat during holidays, especially Christmas” (Eataly). However, the official first Feast of Seven Fishes started with Italian American families creating a seven-course fish meal on Christmas Eve (Eataly). The reason why there are seven mostly stems from how the number seven is associated with Christianity, such as how there are seven sacraments, days of creation, and deadly sins. After the death of both my nana and pop, my family continues to keep the tradition of the Feast of Seven Fishes alive even without their presence. This past Christmas Eve, my family was able to combine the Italian tradition with a Slovak tradition, my dad’s side is full Slovak, and it was a nice way to bring both sides of my family together.

The Italians way to communicate their diverse traditions are a very interesting way that I not only get to learn about a nationality that I know about, but to learn about my own culture and traditions that have been passed down from various generations in my family. I learned about different recipes that my mom ate when she was growing up, different arts that were created in Italy and shared around the world, and I got to learn more about a holiday tradition that I have been celebrating with my family since I was little. I hope that as I get older and start my own family that I can be able to take some of these traditions that I can pass on to my own kids when they grow up.

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