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Throughout the years my family has gone through many changes, but one philosophy remains a staple: "Each generation gets a little stronger." It was this mantra that brought my grandfather to Canada in 1950. Seeking a safer and brighter future for his wife and daughter in the aftermath of the war, he arrived only to find out that the job he was promised here would no longer be available to him. Downtrodden and disappointed, he hopped on a box car eastward bound. The ride to the coast left him heartbroken when thinking about his family. He'd come all this way with the promise of a better life for them, but instead he would be returning empty handed. When recounting his tale to some fellow travelers they offered him sanctuary in what, unbeknownst to him, would come to be his new home: Thunder Bay. He began working on the local railway with many Italians from across the country. Although he was surrounded by other Italians, he still felt homesick. While his wife and daughter were now with him in Canada, he frequently found his mind wandering back to his home in Basilicata. Instead of letting the homesickness get to him he decided to act.

Along with a few other Italians from his neighbourhood he would go on to found a collective of Italians devoted to keeping the old country's traditions alive in the new world. They worked tirelessly to make sure that no one had to feel that same homesickness that they once had. It was the result of their hard work that made Thunder Bay a beacon of Italian culture in an otherwise confused landscape of people. To this day the impact of their work is clear, whether it be the Italian picnics celebrated every Sunday in the park (with traditional singing, dance, games and of course, food), or be it the Italian names that are ever present in the names of charity events and parks, demonstrating their devotion to helping others. Though the future remains uncertain, the Italian culture will live on, and that's something I can personally attest to. On that note I'd like to shift away from what my heritage has done for my community, and talk about what my heritage has done for me.

For as long as I can remember my Italian heritage has been an integral part of who I am. Some of my fondest childhood memories consist of Tuesday nights at my nonno and nonna's house. Though much of my family was often busy, they would always make time for our weekly pasta night. For my grandparents, family was always a priority. It made them both so happy to see everyone gathered together over a steaming bowl of noodles and juicy tomato sauce. Though I've since moved away for school, I can still recall the smiles on everyone's faces and the happy

air that filled the house (although I may be confusing that with the scent of biscotti in the oven). Returning to that house is by far the best part of coming home when school allows it.

But to stop there would be doing my heritage an injustice. Alongside the food and family are many other things I love about my background; Things like the music (un disco dei platters is a personal favourite of mine, as well as many more traditional folk songs), the dances, and the games. One of my favourite memories comes from one special Sunday in the park. What made this Sunday special was the grease pole competition that took place that day. My team had tried it many times before but never came close to winning. This time, as we'd soon come to see, would be different. The first few teams took their crack at it to no avail. Many got close and we were nervous we wouldn't even get a shot at it. Finally our turn came and what was once anticipation turned to liquid adrenaline. As I mounted that pole with my teammates below me I knew this would be it. We started climbing and about halfway up my teammates dropped. It was just me and the salamis now. I don't know whether it was the adrenaline, the cheers of the crowd, or just the smell of that cured meat but I managed to will myself all the way to the top of the pole and claim my prize. The crowd was all cheering for me and I got to go home with a bucket of salami and a memory I will always cherish.

This brings me to my last point. I believe that all these memories and experiences are what shape my future and the person I'll become. Though there are some painful experiences that I've lived through, the memories and traditions of my Basilicata background are something I can look toward to bring me joy when I'm feeling down. The thought of forming new memories when I have children of my own always brings a smile to my face. That's why I always do my best to help out with Italian community events in any way I can. Though there's no shortage of volunteers. I take immense pride in giving back to the community that has given me so much, and continues to give to me. Furthermore I believe my background has helped me to make the right decisions in many tough situations where I otherwise might have strayed. My culture and my community act as a backbone in my day-to-day life. Though I may not have realized it at the time, not all the crazy advice my Nonno gave was really so crazy after all. Many things my culture has taught me will be carried on for the rest of my life. There will be a few additions of my own that I will pass it on to my own children, and they to their children, because as the greatest of all the advice and traditions of our family states, "Each generation gets a little stronger!"