

Jennifer Nobile

## **My Italian Culture**

Culture to me is not just the type of food someone eats or the occasions they celebrate; it is a lifestyle. This lifestyle encompasses many aspects, including: memories, trips, family, recipes, and celebrations. Learning about a culture is an ongoing task and one that takes a lifetime to learn. To learn about a culture, you must embrace the different components and always be eager to learn. At a very young age, I began learning about my Italian culture. Even today, every time I visit my Nonna, she always has a new story, a new recipe or something about our culture that she wants to share with me. Learning about my Italian culture started with a trip and continued with living on the same street as my Nonna and Nonno.

One of my earliest memories of my Italian culture and background is from when I was about five years old. As a family of five, plus my Nonna and Nonno, we travelled back to our roots in Montescaglioso, located in the Province of Matera. This was the first time that I had the opportunity to visit my extended family. This trip lasted for an entire month and was filled with tourist stops, but was also filled by spending time with family. During our trip we visited Rome, went to our family's small vineyard and celebrated my great-grandmother's and sister's birthday. Our trip to Rome was very memorable to me, as I was amazed at the architecture and different structures that we saw. The leaning Tower of Pisa and the Colosseum are two structures that fascinated me both with the structural integrity and the amazing detail that was visible. I believe this started my fascination with structures and architecture and is one of the many reasons that helped me decide on my future career as a Civil Engineer. One day we went to the beach and rented a boat. During the boat ride, my uncle grabbed a jellyfish from the ocean, just to show us. The jellyfish was amazing to see and it was even more amazing that my uncle did not get stung. Even after seventeen years I still remember the beautiful views from the roof of our relatives' house, the big lunch at noon and how all the shops would close for lunch. I remember the after lunch naps, the street festivals and of course the one time that we fit eight people into a Fiat. To this day, these memories still bring a smile to my face. The trip to Italy was a huge milestone in learning about my Italian heritage.

Another important milestone in my life that allowed me to learn about and immerse myself in the Italian culture, was having my Nonna and Nonno live on the same street as us. My parents felt the best way to stay close to our family, and for my siblings and I to learn about

being Italian was to live on the same street. This allowed us to learn about and expand our understanding of the culture. It started with small things like helping plant the garden or pick beans or other fruits and vegetables from the farm, together. As I got older, it turned into helping make tomato sauce, lasagna, pickled eggplant, pizza, bread and other foods. It then expanded to coffee visits, grocery shopping trips and of course lunch or dinner with my family. A very fond memory I have is about all the celebrations including Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, birthdays and Sunday lunches that we have as a family at my Nonna's house. In my family, spending time together is the most important part of our culture. I believe that my Nonna's house is the house where our family comes together, usually for food and the good wine but mostly to spend time together. I have the great privilege of living ten houses away from my grandparents and I am extremely grateful for my parents' choice to live so close, as it has allowed me to expand and learn about our culture.

Over the numerous years, along with the trip to Italy, there were two qualities that really stuck out to me: the generosity and strength of my family. My Nonna always tells me the story about how she and my Nonno used to work hard and long hours, at a factory and as a roofer respectively, so that they could afford to move to Canada to give their three sons a better life. This allowed my dad to pursue new goals and give his family the same opportunity that my grandparents gave him - a life full of opportunity and success. This story, along with the many others shared by my Nonna, inspired me to pursue a career that allows me to show my strength, not only as her granddaughter but also as a woman in STEM, and to make other people's lives better. For this reason, I chose to study Civil Engineering at Ryerson University in Toronto. I am currently one year away from completing my undergraduate degree in Civil Engineering and I look forward to making a positive impact on people's lives throughout my career and my life. If I win this scholarship the money will be put towards paying for my upcoming school year. I will be commuting to Toronto four to five days a week, which consists of a 30 to 40 minute drive to the closest GO station, where I then will take a 40-minute train ride to Union Station and finish with a 15 to 20 minute walk to Ryerson University. This scholarship will help reduce my transportation costs substantially.

Learning about my Italian heritage has impacted my life by showing me the sacrifice, determination, strength, generosity, adaptability and positivity that will allow me to strive and succeed in my future endeavors. In addition, my culture has taught me so much – not only how to make the best lasagna or the secret to my Nonna's amazing tomato sauce; it has also taught

me about the importance of family. Family is what makes a house a home and what makes the relationship between my relatives so strong. My culture has taught me to be open-minded, generous, strong and hard working. When I am older I hope I have the luxury of showing my own family where their great grandparents came from, explaining the sacrifices that they made, and introducing them to the rich culture that has become such a large part of my life.