

Benjamin Iannuzzi Italian Heritage

When growing up, one of my favorite things to do on the weekends would be to visit my grandparents, Nicholas and Dolores Iannuzzi. My grandfather would take me and my brother down to the park where we would enjoy a day taking turns going down the big red slide and walking up and down the beach with my grandfather's metal detector. Then he would take us back to the house and tell us his story of immigrating to America from Italy as a twelve year old. He came to America to pursue the "American Dream" when he was so young because his parents wanted their children to have a better quality of life than they would have access to in 1930s Italy. At that time, beginning a new life in America was a difficult task for a young Italian boy. Despite countless obstacles, he graduated from Hill House High School in New Haven, Connecticut and eventually went to pursue a degree at the University of Connecticut where he graduated in the first class of Physical Therapists at the school. Being an Italian immigrant, he lacked the basic foundations of the English language necessary to communicate in society, and thus found hardship in transitioning to American society. He knew the value of gaining an education at a young age, and through persistence and a desire to forge a better life for his own family, he eventually graduated from high school at age 19. Upon high school graduation, he immediately sought to continue his education at a community college as it would become the stepping stone for his acceptance at UCONN. After telling us his story, he would always emphasize the importance of education and perseverance. Because of my grandfather, whenever I think of my Italian heritage, I think of a legacy of hard work and success.

Throughout my childhood and later years in middle and high school, I was able to experience Italian traditions at reunions with my family. We would all gather at our relative's beach house in the summer and share in a lobster boil and enjoy lasagna and caprese salad. But more important than the food, we would enjoy each other's company, thankful for the opportunity to see each other. My grandfather and his brother's would always announce how thankful they were to be in this great country together. As me and my brother grew older, we were better able to understand the impact of our Italian heritage on our lives. It strengthened our family, it gave us the motivation to work hard in school and be appreciative for the life that was given to us.

In the past few years, I had the opportunity to travel to Italy for the first time on a school trip. All of my friends described their experience of being enriched and enlightened by the Italian culture, food, and tradition. My experience was incredible, however I had grown up in this culture and felt right at home as if I belonged.

My Italian heritage is of the utmost importance to me as it has shaped who I am today, someone who is hardworking and thankful for the opportunities I have been given in life. And now that my grandfather, the patriarch of my family has passed away, my brother and my cousins are the future generation for my family. It is our legacy to follow in our grandfather's footsteps and work hard to make our lives meaningful, just as his was. I love being an Italian American by blood, and my heritage motivates me to work hard and persevere in my academics now in high school, and in the future in college and medical school.