

What my Italian Heritage means to me

When thinking about what my Italian heritage means to me, there are many things that come to mind. One thing I often think about is how my ancestors came to America with little to nothing to their names. It was not only hard for them to leave Italy, but many of them found that being accepted in America was an even greater challenge. While they brought very little in the realm of material possessions, they did bring along their strong traditions of family and religion; along with a never-ending ethic of hard work and pride in their Italian roots.

From a very early age, I was taught that family was of the utmost importance, and that they, unlike many others, would always be there for me no matter what. With that in mind, family was to always come first. In order to develop such a strong family connection, the children of my family were taught many essential core values such as effort, perseverance, respect, compassion, and responsibility. Many of these values played a significant role in shaping me into the person that I am today. They were there during the greatest and toughest times of my life to hold me true to who I am.

When I think of how these values may have impacted my Italian ancestors, I think that through their hard work and a willingness to help each other, they were able to create a stable life and flourishing family in a country foreign to them. I believe that one of the main purposes to the formation of lodges and societies, like the Sons of Italy, was to develop a framework where my immigrant ancestors, as well as countless other immigrants, would not have to overcome prejudice, poverty and illiteracy by themselves. It has caused me to greatly appreciate the opportunities available to me today that my ancestors did not enjoy, and to embrace the value of hard work passed on to me in my studies, jobs, activities and daily life.

About 90% of Italians are devoted to the Catholic faith. And many still worship in the churches that they and their ancestors helped build. It is very important to me, my parents and grandparents that religion remains a strong focus of my life; and it is a big reason why I am currently attending Merrimack College. Merrimack is a Catholic university that embraces the community of scholarship and service with their Augustinian values. After three years of being a student, Merrimack now feels like a second home for me and I could not imagine myself at any other school. I consider myself incredibly blessed to have come across the people I have been able to build lasting relationships with, as well as the many opportunities I have been able to take advantage of to further advance my personal and career goals. I have been able to learn countless new things about myself and pursue many newly discovered passions.

One of these passions, which plays a very large role in my life, is reading. I strongly believe that I inherited and developed this passion from my Italian grandmother. My Nonna was a librarian who loved books, stories and learning new things. Although I was very young, I remember when I was very young driving with her and my grandfather in Fall River passed the library where she used to work. She was constantly encouraging me to read. Often by giving me books and bookstore gift cards. She stressed that my reading and education would open up new worlds for me and so far she couldn't have been more right.

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