



Courtesy of by Biagio Fortunato

Family From Scratch

In New York City, neighborhoods are constantly changing, and many Italian American areas have lost their identity. Thanks to the Fortunato family, one corner of Brooklyn has remained familiar to Italian immigrants since 1976.

In the early 1970s, Michael, Mario and Salvatore Fortunato traveled to the United States from Naples and settled in Brooklyn. Mike was the only brother who was a baker by trade and was specifically talented in crafting *sfogliatelle*.

“When he first came to this country, Mike used to make *sfogliatelle* for bakeries across the tri-state area,” says Biagio Fortunato, who is Sal’s son. “During that time period, most bakeries were Sicilian owned and there weren’t many that knew how to make *sfogliatelle*, which is a Neapolitan pastry.”



Courtesy of by Biagio Fortunato

The three brothers quickly realized that Mike’s baking talent was in high-demand, and they decided to start a business of their own. In the early days, Mike was the only member of the Fortunato family who knew how to properly craft *sfogliatelle* from scratch. As their family and business grew larger, Mike began to share his secrets with other family members.

“Until this day, there are few places that can make *sfogliatelle* from scratch,” says Nino Coniglio, a close friend of the Fortunato family, which is still proudly in business 45 years since its opening.

— Anthony Sciaratta



Courtesy of Derek Casari

Engineering Loose Threads

It’s the course of nature for descendants to become gradually torn from the fabric of their ancestors’ cultural identity. But for Derek Casari, this separation has led him on a rewarding journey to reconnect with his Italian heritage, one thread at a time.

“I see my life through the lens of my grandfather’s trials and tribulations,” Casari says of his grandfather Silvio Giovanni Casari, who hailed from the Trentino Province, which was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire when he emigrated to the United States.

When Derek’s request for dual citizenship was stymied by this historical technicality, he petitioned on behalf of Italian descendants in the same position and is awaiting the result of a legal challenge in Rome.

Strong work ethic is another thread keeping Derek tethered to his Italian patrimony. “My dad would often stress that education and hard work were the keys to success,” he says of the work ethic that stuck with him throughout his professional life. He became a prominent engineer at 20th Century Fox with two decades of experience on renowned films. Even in retirement, he isn’t slowing down. He’s working on a film about the Pope and complex issues the Catholic Church faces today.

When he’s not digging into family history or working on creative projects, Casari is learning Italian and making Italian wine...his father’s recipe. ➤

—Stephen Gadaleta



Courtesy of Derek Casari

Persons of Interest