



An Italian Relative Gets a Taste of America

Ciao! You may recall a column I wrote earlier this year about my trip to Italy. While on my culinary journey last September, I found myself in many regions of the Italian countryside where I enjoyed unbelievable foods and met wonderful people. This summer, my young cousin Antonella Greco decided to visit America. She arrived last month for a summer stay with my family and to work in my catering kitchen. Her stay has been extended by two weeks because she is having such a good time and we are all learning so much!

I picked Antonella up at the airport on a hot June evening and though it was obvious she was exhausted after the long flight, she was very excited to finally be in America. We decided a trip to the supermercato (grocery store) was in order. My wife and kids happened to be out of town so the first priority was to fill the refrigerator with flavors of my culture and some of hers. The newly renovated Giant Eagle in Bethel Park is a wonderful place to find generous displays of formaggio (cheese) and even a mini salumeria (specialty deli), not to mention brilliant colors and variety in the produce section. We strolled every aisle and must have picked up 500 different items so we could translate for one another and learn opposing pronunciations. Uova are eggs, uva are grapes, aglio is garlic while olio is oil... It was a fun way to spend three hours, learning new things and catching up.

Twelve bags of groceries later, we made our way home to begin a feast. Soppressata (same in English), Fontina cheese and some good ciabatta (a flatter, denser type of bread, literally meaning "shoe" in Italian because of its shape) immediately found its way to the cutting board. Because Antonella works in the kitchen at the local agriturismo (farm-related bed and breakfast) owned by dear friends Vito and Anachiarra, she is quite skilled with a knife. She began cutting the pomodori (tomatoes), mozzarella fresca (fresh mozzarella) and basilica (basil) for the caprese insalata (salad) while I prepared the pasta, additional pomodori, and fagiolini bianchi (white beans) for the sauté pan. She disappeared momentarily only to return with a smuggled treasure. It was the gift of gifts... some of the exceptional olio produced by the Greco family!

In the last month, we have identified a number of differences between our countries when it comes to food. During my visit to Italy, I became accustomed to eating everything fresh and in season, regionally, as they do. Dolce (sweets) might be biscotti at breakfast or with espresso (coffee) during siesta (afternoon break). In America, we are spoiled with year-round availability of just about anything, and we consume sugar by the pound. Antonella loves the processed foods we eat, especially cereals like Captain Crunch and Trix, and pancakes (though I did supplement mine with plenty of fresh blueberries). She actually prefers our much weaker coffee, devours peanut butter and jelly, Coca Cola, and sour dough pretzels with French onion dip, though I'm convinced her preferences are largely because she's 18, not because she's Italian.

It's no secret that I choose to spend my life learning... forever the student. As a chef and an Italian, most of what I do stems from my love of food and family. This summer I enjoyed the opportunity to bring it all together once again. It's a shame I will have to return to Italy again next year for some further research... arrivederci. •

Jason Capps is the chef/owner of Greco's Gourmet Catering in McMurray and caters for all occasions. In September he will open Bella Sera by Greco's, a newly constructed, full service banquet facility. Feel free to contact him via email or phone with any of your culinary related questions. Visit www.grecosgourmet.com or call (724) 942-9500.

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