
La Voce della Dante

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Ciao a tutti!

Somehow it has become (nearly) December as I write this. Where does the time go? As promised, here is the rest of my little “job description” for the next Presidente di Dante. What I will loosely categorize as the “showing up” duties...” etc.

Help to Plan all Dante meetings, both in person and online. Settling dates with our venue(s) and coordinating ideas from what the Program Chairs bring forward is one important job of the president. Historically this has been pretty easy work as our dates are consistent and our Program Chairs excellent. Included in organizing live meetings is getting the online banquet license and, occasionally, other purchases. Online meetings involve setting up the zoom and either hosting yourself or designating someone to do it.

Attend as many meetings as possible. This is actually the fun part of the job – SEEING PEOPLE AT DANTE EVENTS!! As your club presidents, I and my predecessors have made it a priority to be onsite at nearly all meetings, to help set up, oversee events, welcome people, make announcements, and clean up as needed. While we do have volunteers and other board

members who routinely dedicate their time to help with this, “getting the party rolling” is one of the things the president should commit to as often as possible. If the new president can’t be onsite as often, then he/she must be sure someone else can act as host for each meeting. Also, since we reopened to live meetings at St. Clement’s Church, I have been the liason between that venue and Dante, making the rental agreements and confirming dates. This was an obvious connection because I happen to be a member of that church; the liason does not have to be the next president.

Encouraging new volunteers with personal contact. Our Festa Italiana Booth, meeting set-up, and a few other events, as well as new board membership, are areas we always need folks to help with. Most of the people I have emailed directly to ask them to consider helping with something have said yes. (It isn’t like telemarketing where they hang up on you!!) The president should take an active role in encouraging people to be active themselves.

That’s actually IT. Nothing much more to it than is described above and last month. Easy job! Give it a try! And, caro futuro Presidente, whoever you are, I will still be in the wings as Past President (stop gloating, Dan, just because this means you won’t have to be Past President anymore !!!!) ready to help you get your feet on the ground and start running.

BLESSINGS TO ALL IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON AND MY GRATITUDE FOR ALL THINGS DANTE!!

A presto, Joyce

JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN DANTE!

Soon it will be time again – January is when we ask you to renew.

Individual membership for 1 year = \$40.

Family membership for 1 year = \$60.

[RENEW OR JOIN DANTE HERE](#)

Would you also consider making a donation to Dante above your membership dues? Donations help meet the costs of our presentations, including speakers, equipment purchases (such as the much improved screen!) and other expenses. Your extra “precious metal” will be put to good use and much appreciated! You may add your gift when you renew.

Donor Categories

Bronzo up to \$25

Argento \$26 to \$50

Oro \$51 to \$100

Platino—over \$100

Mille Grazie!

FESTA DI NATALE POTLUCK AND TOMBOLA GAME

**The Dante Society's annual
FESTA di NATALE
POTLUCK and TOMBOLA GAME**
will be held this year in collaboration with
Il Punto on
Wednesday, December 13, 2023
6:00-9:00 PM

at Jefferson Park Lawn and Bowling Club

Reservations are required this year! Current Dante and Il Punto members have been sent the reservation email; non members welcome to attend as space available. Email joyce@danteseattle.org for information.

Congratulations to Giuseppe Tassone on 25 Years as the Dante Language School Director!

Congratulations on 25 Years as the Dante Language School Director!



The advanced students in Giuseppe's class organized a surprise party for his *onomastico* on March, 19 1998.

The Dante Alighieri Language School here in Seattle has been in continuous operation since 1984. And for the last 25 years it's been guided by its competent and loving director, our own Giuseppe Tassone. Giuseppe has led the Language School (LS) through many changes, molding it into the successful and dynamic institution it is today.

Giuseppe was born in Gioiosa Ionica, a small town in Calabria that goes back to at least Roman times. His father was an elementary school teacher there and Giuseppe has vivid memories of his father, usually surrounded by young students in their school uniforms.

After high school, Giuseppe went to the Università di Siena to study Scienze Economiche e Bancarie. The administrative expertise he learned there he has put to good use in running the LS.

While at Siena, Giuseppe was introduced by his best friend to a student from Seattle, studying at the Università per Stranieri di Siena. He came to Seattle on a visit and ended up moving to Seattle permanently. He enrolled at the University of Washington and received a BA in

Economics and a MA in Italian Studies from there and later on became a lecturer in Italian and language coordinator in the UW French and Italian Department.

While at UW he started by teaching Italian at the Experimental College there, one of the many "Free Universities" run by students with non-credit courses on subjects that the University did not include in its traditional course offerings. Giuseppe's L'Italiano per Tutti was a very popular course. At the same time he taught Italian at Shoreline Community College. His reputation as a dynamic young Italian teacher brought him to the attention of Paola Martini who was then the Director of the Dante LS. And so in 1996 Giuseppe was brought on to the Dante LS faculty to teach the Italian advanced course. In 1998 Paola left as Director and the Board offered Giuseppe the job after Paola's high recommendation.



Giuseppe with Dante students at Seattle University. Among them are Gini Harmon (past president) and long-time member Mary Beth Moser.

There have been many changes at the Language School since there. Classes were held, for example, on the Seattle University (SU) campus and for a time Giuseppe taught Italian at SU. Registration then was by mail and the primary marketing tool was the LS flier and posters which Giuseppe, with the help of the Board and the teachers, delivered in person primarily to Italian restaurants, coffee shops and libraries.

In 2002 the first LS website was built by a LS student in exchange for free Italian lessons. That changed everything. Giuseppe took advantage of our online presence, gradually porting the registration and marketing online. As well, he started using the web to host class exercises and teaching material. A few years later Giuseppe put the LS on Facebook. That online experience paid off when COVID hit and in-person classes were a non-starter. The LS was able to pivot quickly to online classes, thanks to the efforts of Giuseppe and the LS teachers. All of our classes are now online and Giuseppe introduced CANVAS, an on-line teaching environment used by UW among other teaching institutions, as a way for teacher to distribute and students to access course material.

As Director Giuseppe has made significant administrative changes as well. One of the first things he did when he became Director was to strengthen our relationship with the headquarters of the Dante Alighieri Society in Rome. He aligned the LS course structure with CEFR, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which gave us the A1, A2, B1, B2 etc. divisions and course objectives the LS still uses. These changes and the fulfillment of the qualifications required made it possible for our LS to be approved as a PLIDA test site, one of only 4 such sites in the US.

Finally I should note that Giuseppe is the author of *Un Buon Affare*, a textbook for teaching Italian for use in Business, adopted in several American Universities and now available as well as an ebook.

As you can see, Giuseppe has had an exceptional career in fostering Italian language learning and in so capably directing our LS over these last 25 years. Thank you, Giuseppe, from the Dante Alighieri Society of Washington Board, from the members and especially from all the students you have helped.

Mille grazie da noi tutti

Language Program

by Giuseppe Tassone

On the occasion of the holidays and Christmas, I am dedicating the five sections of my news to the presence of religious traditions and Saints in the Italian language and culture. I hope you will enjoy reading them as much as I enjoy sharing them with you. Don't hesitate to contact me for comments, questions and/or suggestions.

The main news about the language program is the approaching end of fall quarter. Students are about to complete their first 10 weeks of Italian and after winter break another exciting quarter will wait for them. Learning a language takes some time, but eventually, in a structured program like ours, everybody will achieve their goal. So the message to students is to be patient, work hard and enjoy what you do. Buon Natale e Buone Feste!

• COSE CHE TUTTI SANNO. Religion and Saints.

La tradizione religiosa ha lasciato molte tracce sulla lingua italiana. Dalla Bibbia, se qualcuno è molto paziente, si dice che *ha la pazienza di Giobbe* e se qualcuno è molto vecchio che è *un Matusalemme*. Dal Nuovo Testamento vengono espressioni quali *essere la pecorella smarrita*, *dare a Cesare quel che è di Cesare* e *la carne è debole*. Numerosissimi sono i riferimenti ai Santi e come si sa ogni giorno del calendario è dedicato ad un Santo o una Santa. Nel giorno dedicato al Santo o alla Santa di cui si porta il nome, si festeggia l'onomastico. Ci sono Santi molto noti di cui tutti conoscono il giorno della celebrazione: San Giuseppe il 19 marzo, San Pietro e Paolo il 29 giugno, Sant'Anna il 26 luglio, San Francesco d'Assisi il 4 ottobre e San Martino l'11 novembre. Altre volte il nome dei Santi è ricordato a vario titolo: San Silvestro è l'ultimo dell'anno, Santo Stefano è il giorno dopo Natale e San Benedetto è il primo giorno di primavera. Le città e i paesi italiani hanno per protettore un Santo o una Santa: San Marco a Venezia, Sant'Antonio a Padova, Sant'Ambrogio a Milano, San Gennaro a Napoli e Santa Rosalia a Palermo. San Rocco è poi protettore di un centinaio di paesi tra cui Segrate in Lombardia, Pitigliano in Toscana e Gioiosa Ionica in Calabria. Anche le professioni, le arti ma anche altre cose e situazioni hanno chi li protegge: Santa

Cecilia protegge la musica, Santa Lucia la vista, San Biagio la gola, San Giuseppe gli artigiani, San Cristoforo gli automobilisti, i Santi Cosma e Damiano i medici e farmacisti, mentre Santa Rita aiuta nelle situazioni impossibili e Sant'Antonio a trovare gli oggetti smarriti. Coi nomi dei santi si chiamano chiese, basiliche, cattedrali, strade, piazze, quartieri (San Lorenzo a Roma), cittadine (San Remo, Santa Marinella), ospedali (San Camillo, San Giovanni, San Raffaele), carceri (San Vittore), teatri (San Carlo), stadi (San Siro) scuole, banche (Intesa Sanpaolo), vini (Sangiovese, Vinsanto) e perfino il prosciutto (San Daniele).

• PAROLE DEL MESE

ecco, avv. int. *here, there (it is)*.

“- *Un etto di San Daniele, per favore. - Ecco, signora vuole altro?*”

“- *Scusi, dov'è l'ospedale San Camillo. “Eccolo, è qui davanti!”*”

“*Stavo passeggiando in piazza San Pietro quand'ecco che ha cominciato a piovere.*”

“*E alla fine Pilato disse: ecco l'uomo (ecce homo).*”

festa, s. m. *holiday, party*

“*Quale festa preferisci, Natale o Pasqua?*”

“*Per il tuo onomastico facciamo una bella festa, che ne dici?*”

“*La banca Intesa Sanpaolo domani è chiusa perché è festa.*”

“*Stasera Marinella va al teatro San Carlo di Napoli e metterà il vestito delle feste.*”

• ESPRESSIONI IDIOMATICHE DEL MESE

Non sapere più a chi Santo votarsi.

Used in a difficult situation when you don't know how to deal with it, what to do, who to turn to for help or at least for advice.

“*Abbiamo in tutti i modi cercato a risolvere il problema ma a questo punto non sappiamo più a chi Santo votarci!*”

Avere qualche Santo in paradiso.

Having some powerful recommendations and support.

“*Sono sorpresa che tra tanti tanti candidati hanno scelto proprio quell'imbecille, avrà di certo qualche Santo in paradiso.*”

Da Natale a Santo Stefano

When something lasts a very short time.

“*Peccato che la storia d'amore tra Rita e Antonio sia già finita, è durata proprio da Natale a Santo Stefano.*”

• PROVERBI DEL MESE

Natale con i tuoi e Pasqua con chi vuoi.

You must spend Christmas with your family but you can spend Easter with who you want.

Tutti i salmi finiscono in gloria.

At the very end the conclusion is always the same.

Morto un papa se ne fa un altro. No one is irreplaceable.

Scherza coi fanti e lascia stare i Santi.

Important things should not be taken lightly.

Aiutati che Dio ti aiuta.

Nobody can help you until you help yourself.

• SCIOGLILINGUA DEL MESE

Tre preti pigri pregano con tre pigri preti

Three lazy priests pray with three lazy priests.

Pratica. Now let's practice some Italian by [listening to La Ballata di Renzo](#) in which the *cantautore* Rino Gaetano refers to two Saints. Try to identify them and understand what their names refers to. In bocca al lupo!

Robert Joffrey and the American dream



Photo credit: The Joffrey Ballet

Robert Joffrey, founder of the Joffrey Ballet, was a dancer, teacher and choreographer. A Seattle native, his father was Afghani and his mother was born in Lucca, Italy. Although he was small as a child – even fully grown, he was only 5’4” – he had been taught that, with sacrifice and hard work, the American dream was within his grasp.

At the age of 10, he was cast as an extra in a production of *Petrouchka*. For any other child, this might have been simply a lark, but for Joffrey, the drama and thrill of performing spoke to his soul. He decided that someday, some way, he would start his own ballet company.

By the time he reached his mid-teens, he was done with school and with Seattle. All he wanted to do was move to New York and become a professional dancer.

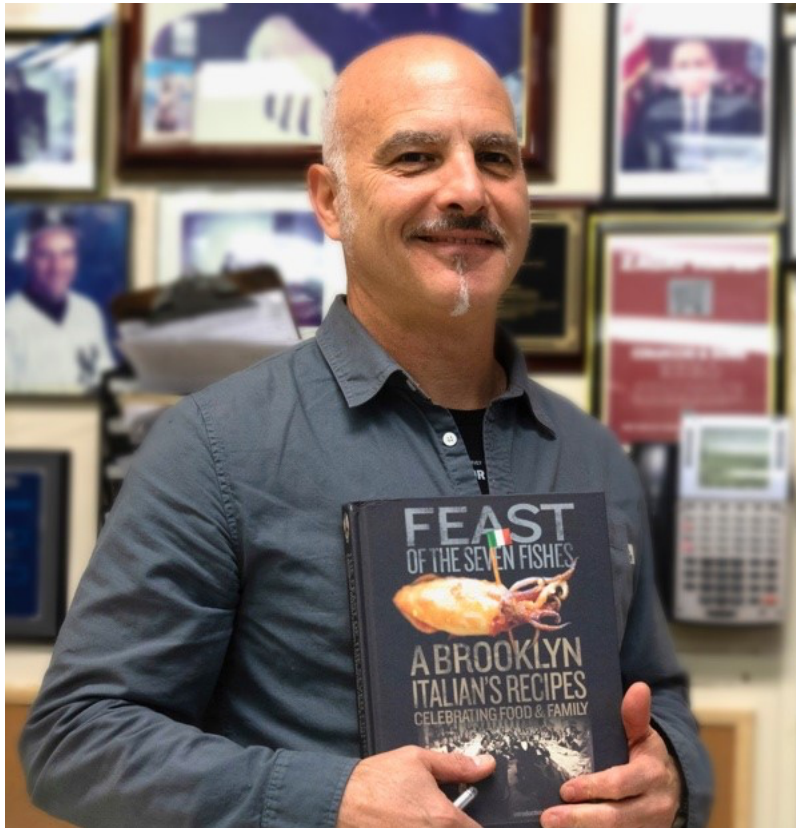
[Read the full story here.](#)

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Octopus Sauce, Becoming Italian-American, and The Smell of Christmas Eve by Trevor Keaton
Pogue

Talking With Daniel Paterna, Author of *Feast of the Seven Fishes: A Brooklyn Italian's Recipes Celebrating Food and Family*

Unlike Daniel Paterna, I didn’t grow up with *The Feast of The Seven Fishes*. Seafood stew, or you might call it by its San Franciscan nomenclature, “cioppino,” was my family’s Christmas Eve tradition. It was only after my Grandma Alyce died that I began looking for some foothold into my SicilianAmerican roots. Like so many hyphenated Americans, I wanted to know where our story began.



On the surface, Daniel's "Feast of the Seven Fishes" is a cookbook. Digging a little deeper, I found a great longing in the subtext. Film stock photos of family members, many now passed, fill the pages. But this is a book about more than mere nostalgia for the world that was. Unlike the glory-day reminiscences of a high school quarterback now facing his 6th decade, Daniel's look back into his personal history seems rooted in the quest for something bigger than self-preservation and individual meaning.

What does it mean to be an Italian-American in the 21st century? And can this Italian-American thing survive the inevitable changes that generational progress brings? These are some of the questions I found myself asking as I read through Daniel's book. In the end, I suppose the core theme of "The Feast of The Seven Fishes," is respect. Respect for where Italian-Americans came from, and how that place, its people, and their recipes—though never the same river twice— are deserving of being cherished, documented, and passed on to the future ancestors in us all.

Me: The book begins with profiles of small business owners. Why was it important to start with the food merchants rather than jumping right into the feast and its recipe?

Daniel Paterna: Growing up there was the church and next in line there were the shop owners. In the book, I refer to them as a little tabernacle of food culture, because we didn't have many chances to use authentic Italian products. My grandparents were sort of shunned and scarred by the idea that Mussolini was a complete failure for their nationalism and pride. So when these smaller shops like Coluccio's, which is one of the fifteen vendors in my book, popped up, it was like a renaissance for us. The little shops were depots for us to share in Italian culture. They give us an opportunity, especially for members of my generation, to really scratch that itch for Italian culture and food culture. If the church, and the monsignor, gave us the ritual of the Eucharist, then the shop owners gave us the ravioli, beautiful pasta, and the mozzarella just out of the water. For us, these foods were just as spiritual as going to church on Sunday.

Some people say the "seven" in The Feast of the Seven Fishes comes from the seven sacraments. Others say it comes from the seven days of creation. What's the real story?

I can't say that our family went to church every Sunday but we always understood that the feast was a celebration of the seven sacraments. Ultimately, whether it's sacraments or days of creation, what it really boils down to is a reason to get together.



Is this an Italian holiday or an Italian-American holiday?

When I first went to Italy in the late 1980s I came to understand that The Feast of The Seven Fishes is not really a national thing. It's primarily a Southern Italian thing.



Lillian from Sea Breeze II

Home cooks play such an important part in the feast. How does cooking with and for your family, differ from just going out to eat the feast at a restaurant?

I think cooking for your family is something that gets too easily neglected. It's something that often gets deferred to a third party. Take for example my generation, they'd defer by saying, "Let's go to grandma's house." This was really the inspiration for the book in the first place because a lot of the grandmas who left this earth took a lot of recipes with them.

My mother and father were adapting to the new American lifestyle. 'A more consumerist lifestyle. One with a much larger focus on work and career. Those are all great things, but the result is that you kind of defer a lot to grandparents for things like culinary legacy. And that's why I feel like while cooking for your family might be a lot of work, it's completely worthwhile.

How has your feast changed or adjusted from the ones your parents or your grandparents cooked?

It's the same. The exact same.



Are non-Italians allowed at the feast?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, always. The door is always open. We make enough for twice as many people and plenty of leftovers.

What's it like as a non-Italian coming to the feast for the first time?

Well, it's always remarkable because when you're acculturated into the tradition, you don't realize that most people don't sit down for five or six hours for dinner. You know, it's not 'like here is the appetizer, and here is the main course, now the dessert, and now you're out of there. So for those who aren't used to it, when they see food coming out of the oven at 10 o'clock at night, it can be a little overwhelming. What you learn over time, as you get invited over the years, you learn to pace yourself.

By now I think most people have probably heard of the feast. I mean, there was that episode of The Bear that everyone was talking about. Did you see that?

I need to watch it.

Oh, well, it's extraordinary. They did an excellent job. What about the movie, “The Feast of the Seven Fishes.” Have you seen that?

No, I haven't.

Well, this question doesn't really work then. I was gonna ask what seeing your family tradition from the perspective of Hollywood feels like. But let's just move on to my next question: Can you describe what a seven-fishes home smells like?

When I really knew that it was Christmas Eve was when I came in from shopping with my dad for either last-minute groceries or gifts, and I opened the side entrance to my mother's house, came into the vestibule, and the air that hit me in the face was that of baccala and fried garlic and peppers. I remember there my mother was, standing at the table, arranging the platter, covered with wax paper. She didn't put it in the refrigerator. They put it by the window, because it was cold out, and there was enough of a chill in the air to keep it just above room temperature.



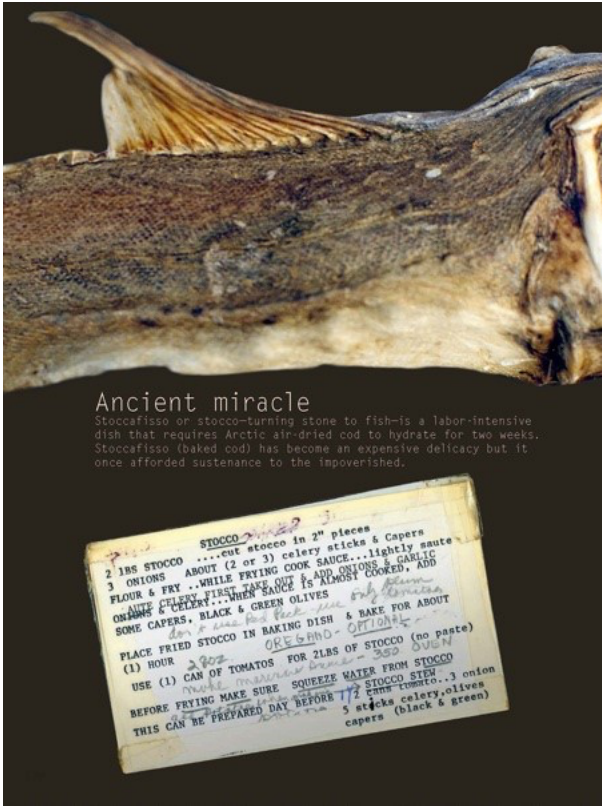
Daniel’s mother, Anne, cooking her first chirstmas dinner for her inlaws

Was your whole neighborhood doing this on Christmas Eve?

I lived on a very industrialized block. So we didn't have a quote unquote neighborhood. Where we lived was originally an agriculturally-zoned area: light farming, greenhouses, horse stables. So we never had a block party because there were barely six houses on the block. But we lived next to my cousins who were doing their seven fishes, and they would come over and my counsin would come over and taste the octopus sauce. So there was always a lot of overlapping and sharing. It was just an open door.

When the doorbell would ring no one would ask ‘Why is the doorbell ringing?’ It was just automatic. There was no pretense. It was Christmas Eve and everybody was cooking. ‘Who's got leftovers? And who's got too much? Come over, take some. Did you have your fish yet?’ They would keep a tally of where everyone was in the feast. Who started early. Who started later. Who plays cards in between.

How did all this help prepare you for Christmas?



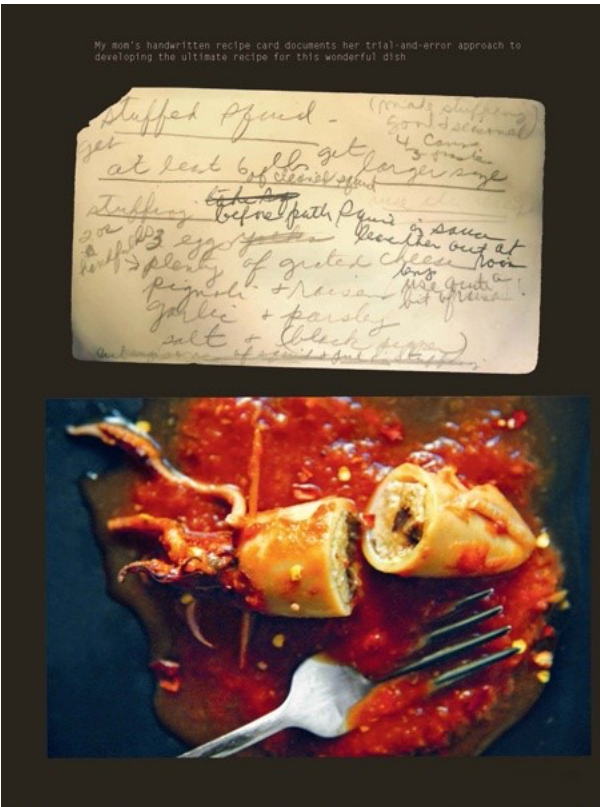
There was no Christmas day. Not really. It was such a confusing thing because after the feast, going back to what I was saying about becoming American, it's like we watched all these TV shows: Scrooge, the holiday shows, The Waltons. To us, it was like ‘What are they doing on Christmas Day?’ Our Christmas day was going out to Long Island to my Uncle Dan's and having some pasta. But it wasn't a big celebration. For us, Christmas Eve was everything.

You describe your dad as maybe the greatest agnostic of his generation. How did he as a non-religious person take to all this religious celebration?

Well, he was a gourmand, so he was the taste tester. He also stood guard for the traditions. And back then when there was more of a gender role, he did a lot of the last-minute shopping. He also enjoyed being the documentarian. He took beautiful eight-millimeter film of us as a family during the dinners. As an agnostic, you just really need to have an opportunity to catch the wave. Then you can't help but get absorbed by the whole event. It's an uncommon thing, unique and special. The timing of it all, the sense of it all, the balancing of it all, the meaning and the photos. It's a crowning moment, no matter your denomination.

Why are you the one to help pass this tradition on?

I was the younger of the two brothers. My oldest brother, Robert, he had more of a proper kid life. Baseball. Football. Hanging out with kids in the schoolyard. Whereas, I gravitated more towards the domestic part of the family. Again, In the context of gender roles, if I had been my mother's daughter, it would have been normal. But as a boy, it felt a little awkward.



I have twins, but my brother doesn't have any children. So it was when I became a father that I started thinking, 'Well, what's going to happen to the legacy? But as the one who had been side by side with my grandmother, my aunt, and my uncle, I pretty much had all this in my back pocket to share with my kids.

There's a photo in the book of my mother's recipe cards. Those recipe cards came out once or twice a year, specifically on holidays. Eventually, she started making addendums on the cards with whiteout, pencil, and pen. And she'd make phone calls to her relatives to make sure about certain things. 'When should the baccala be boiled" How long should it soak? Should I buy the fish from Henry's or should I go over here?'

All of these things got jotted down so that by the time she was finished they were like Mozart's manuscripts. As a kid, I used to stare at that box like it was magic. Those cards eventually became the visual for the book. It was around then that I realized if I don't document this and take up the mantle where my mother left off, then who would?

What's on the menu this year?

Sometimes I feel guilty about wanting to switch it around. But you know how some people go to mediums? Like Houdini went to medium to talk to his mother. Me, I swear when I cook it's

like a reanimation of my family. It's like going back to like the holographic museum. I reminisce, and I see my family in the sensation of the air, and in the pace of the meal.



What piece of advice do you have for people celebrating the feast for the first time?

Make sure you get the bacala in advance and be sure to soak it long enough so it's not too damn salty. And buy the one with the bone in it. I didn't realize until I was talking to an older Italian person that the one with the bone has so much more flavorful. And the last piece of advice I'd give a person trying it for the first time: it's worth the effort. It's work. But it's worth all the effort.



All Photos Courtest of Daniel Paterna

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Dante Alighieri Society of Washington
Società per la diffusione della lingua e della cultura italiana nel mondo

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