



Grandparents & Grandchildren: A new Italian American Story is Coming!

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I-Italy's "Grandparents and Grandchildren in Italian America" project documents the Italian presence in the United States by way of a series of conversations between grandparents and grandchildren. We have only just begun this new adventure with our first TV and Web series made in collaboration with ANFE and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Now our hope is to continue the project in a truly "social" vein with your help.

Let's talk about generations. About generations who talk to one another. Who don't talk. Who would like to get to know each other better. Everyone is aware that the close quarters parents and children share can, on occasion, lead to major misunderstandings and conflicts. But we're skipping a generation, since grandparents and grandchildren have always shared a rare kind of bond.



Paradoxically, distance facilitates communication, almost by magic, and understanding trumps time. A suspended relationship, almost shielded by a cloud.

Add to that an era of immigration, the gap between the old world and new – further augmented for Italian Americans by the language barrier – and the situation becomes more peculiar. Grandparents really do become the “roots,” the element anchoring grandchildren to their fascinating, mysterious ancestral identity. In fact, as has been noted, third generation Italian Americans are much more interested in rediscovering their Italian roots and studying the language than their parents. In many cases, that interest is due to their relationship with their grandparents.

This isn't merely about affection or the search for stability or a need for meaningful landmarks – however important those things are in our historical moment, when every certainty seems to be going up in smoke. There's a genuine connection between grandparents and grandchild in Italian American culture. Having been born in America, the parents have lost their linguistic ties to Italy and cannot explain “where we come from.” Grandparents can. Whether they were born in Italy and came here with their own parents or whether they were born in America, grandparents represent the connection to our cultural identity, a connection that is vital for grandchildren to face the present and envision their future.

Out of these considerations came the idea to launch our series of conversations between grandparents and grandchildren of Italian ancestry. The term “conversation” is central to the project, which grew out of a wonderful collaboration between i-Italy and ANFE, with special thanks to their director and our friend Gaetano Calà, who has dedicated a lot of energy to the subject of immigration. Conversations then, not interviews. The format is neither journalistic nor documentarian.

There are no interviewers posing questions, no professors giving critiques, no experts interrupting to “explain” things. There is a reason behind this decision. We want to allow grandparents and grandchildren to tell their own story and ask each other questions, penning another page of their relationship together, even if they happen to be on camera. The magic of their relationship is the star of the show.

Of course we directed the conversation. But we did so in hands-off fashion, trying not to intrude, allowing each grandparent-grandchild pair to let their guard down, to talk as leisurely as possible in the comfort of their own homes. The intensity and ease of family, rather than sociology, set the tone of our Italian-American story.

Did we succeed? Our audience will have to judge for themselves. They can follow us this summer, as they have for the past four years, every Sunday at 1 pm on NYC Life, New York's public TV channel, as well as online. As always, we will also publish some of the most appealing extracts of these conversations in the magazine.

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