

## Italian-Immigrant Foodways in Post-Second World War Toronto

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### **Preface<sup>1</sup>**

Imagine that you are a jogger following a meandering route through an Italian-immigrant neighbourhood in Toronto. With each changing season, your senses would be inundated with the sights, sounds and smells of a community hard at work growing, processing and consuming its traditional foods. In late winter and early spring, for instance, your eyes would catch glimpses of home made, temporary structures, resembling crude green houses, framed with miss-matched pieces of wood and covered with cast-off windows or plastic tarp. As you deviated from your course to examine these hot houses more closely, you would see that they were filled with earthen laden containers, made of various materials and taking a diversity of shapes and sizes. Each, in turn, had protruding from it a variety of tomato, pepper, lettuce, zucchini and cucumber seedlings, to name but a few.

Weeks later, during a morning jog on the late May Victoria Day weekend, you would notice that the green houses had been or were being dismantled, and that the seedlings, now sturdy and plantable, were being transplanted into neat rows in back yard gardens. As spring sprung into full flower, you would become aware, during your ongoing jogging regimen, that the blossoms of sweet and sour cherry, apricot, peach, plum, pear and apple trees were painting the neighbourhood canvass in patches of white, red and pink, while their honeyed fragrances filled the air. Eventually, the hot, humid days of summer restricted you to early morning roadwork. During one such daybreak run, you slipped and crashed onto the pavement. What had caused you to lose your footing? Fruit. In particular, over ripened apricots, peaches and plums that had fallen to the ground from laden branches that overhung the roads, sidewalks and paths on which you journeyed. Suddenly, you became conscious, as never before, to the fact that the neighbourhood was, in essence, one gigantic fruit orchard. And what was becoming of the fruit? A serendipitous visit to stores in the area, in search of new laces for your running shoes, revealed the answer. Virtually every store was stacked, from floor to ceiling, with mason jars: the fruit was being transformed into preserves, jams and jellies.

While in the stores, one particular sale item caught your attention: stand-alone propane burners. The burners, you were told by the stores' proprietors, were used by the Italian immigrants to heat the water needed to give the mason jars the hot bath required to pasteurize their contents and seal their lids airtight. Throughout the late summer and early fall, your senses became more astute to the processing of foods that was now taking place in full swing in the neighbourhood. As you jogged past corner grocery stores, you saw displayed bushels

full of tomatoes, egg plants, peppers and beans, which supplemented similar crops you observed being harvested from the back yard gardens. A familiar sound, during your runs, was the humming of electric motors that drove the machines that reduced firm, ripe tomatoes into paste. More often than not, you trotted by open garages in which men and women were talking loudly and working feverishly at dicing-up the tomatoes and forcing them into mason jars. On the roads and sidewalks, one sight became all too familiar: the crooked streams of tomato juice, which you had at first mistaken for blood, that flowed out from the garages to the nearest street drain. And the smells too became more pronounced. As you plodded through the byways of the neighbourhood, your nose whiffed the acidic odour of the tomatoes; and, later in the season, it sniffed out the mouth-watering, smoky aroma of peppers being roasted on outdoor grills.

Late in the fall, on the October Thanksgiving Day weekend to be precise, as you rambled by home after home, you could not help but notice that activity was at a fever pitch within the households: winemaking time was at its zenith. For the past few weeks, as you strode by stores and empty lots in the neighbourhood, you noted skid upon skid supporting wooden cases filled with white and black wine grapes. Now, once again chugging by open garages, you watched with fascination as the grapes were at first crushed and then pressed into juice that would eventually ferment into wine. And, once more, the air was filled with an acidic smell – not of tomatoes, but of fermenting grape juice.

As autumn ends and winter begins your trek through the neighbourhood continues, but all industry seems to have come to a standstill. Yet looks are deceiving. Shortly after New Year, during a revealing visit to a neighbourhood grocery store, to purchase the grapefruit juice that refreshes you after your jogs, you notice that pork shoulders and legs are in great demand. The store's owner informs you that the Italian immigrants are busy making and curing *salsiccia* (hot and sweet sausage), *soppressata* (dry, pressed salami) and *prosciutto* (dried ham).

By now, after a year of jogging in the neighbourhood, you can quickly distinguish between an Italian-immigrant and non-Italian-immigrant home: the Italian-immigrant residence, more often than not, has a unique architectural feature known as a *cantina*, an enlarged fruit cellar. As you lumber by homes, dressed in your winter running garb, you glance at one *cantina* window and your eye catches something unusual: hanging from its ceiling are chains of *salsicce*, rows of *soppressata* and the occasional *prosciutto*. You decide to approach the *cantina*'s window for a closer look. Once you peak through the glass, you come to see the true function of the *cantina*: its walls are lined with shelves holding countless numbers of mason jars filled with tomatoes, tomato paste, fruit preserves, jams and jellies, and roasted peppers and egg plants preserved in olive oil; and its floor space, you discover, is taken-up by demi-johns (glass jugs) and barrels full of wine. But one last thing attracts your attention: directly beneath the window are several wooden grape cases being recycled as potting containers, and beginning to burst forth from the earth are tiny vegetable seedlings. The cycle of food production and processing within the Italian-immigrant neighbourhood is about to start anew.

## Introduction

The experiences described in the above preface depict an Italian-immigrant foodway in Toronto that is not traveled by most epicureans who delight in Italian gastronomy. This is so because food corporations, the media and restaurants have cleansed Italian foods of their *Italian immigrantness* – or, more precisely, of their *ethnicity*<sup>2</sup>. The hard, labour intensive work endemic to the preparation of ethnic food – as dictated by a group's traditional, social and cultural methods – has been assumed by a third parties: corporate assembly line workers, food writers, and restaurant and television cooks. As a result, ethnic foods have become easily available to all. But in so doing, these foods have become «homogenized» losing the distinctive preparatory socio-cultural traditions and tastes that defined their ethnicity<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the only thing that remains truly ethnic about a given food is its anthropological antecedents and nomenclative origins.

Nowhere is this more the case than with food described as being in someway Italian. Indeed, Italian food has become a ubiquitous food. Large conglomerates mass produce Italian foods such as frozen *lasagna*; magazines, food or otherwise, are replete with Italian food recipes; television cooking programmes either specialize or dabble in Italian cooking; restaurants, more often than not, list some Italian food on their menus; and even that icon of the modern communications age, the Internet, provides hundreds of *sites* to the query «Italian food». Yet, the food endemic to these sources would not be comparable to the food enjoyed by the Italian immigrants encountered by our jogger. For instance, the November 1999 issue of *Canadian Living Magazine* contains a «cooking lesson» for the preparation of grilled *polenta* with *shitake* (Japanese) mushrooms smothered in a *Maderia* (Portuguese) wine sauce<sup>4</sup>. Those Italian immigrants our jogger observed reducing tomatoes into paste in their garages, however, would not recognize this *polenta*, especially its call for the *Maderia* vintage. To them *polenta*, depending on the region of Italy from which they hail, is a corn meal porridge topped with a tomato sauce, or a hardened, fried pan cake – a simple, hearty meal of labourers and agricultural workers. Yet, thanks to mediums such as magazines, it has now become a part of the Canadian *cuisine*. Nowhere in the *polenta* cooking lesson did the word «Italian» appear. Only the name *polenta* and some of the ingredients (parsley, *parmesan* cheese, olive oil) hinted at an Italian identity, but the other components (*Maderia* wine, *shitake* mushrooms) pointed to other national affiliations. This *polenta*, therefore, is an example of an Italian (ethnic) food that has undergone cultural (or, more precisely, a multicultural) homogenization to become a part of the «Canadian living» experience.

As the *polenta* example illustrates, food is the means by which a particular ethnicity is shared with the broader society. An ethnic group, in other words, can directly or indirectly gain acceptance into the broader society through its food<sup>5</sup>. But when this occurs, the ethnic food deviates from its «authentic» ethnic culinary form<sup>6</sup>. The foodways practiced by the Italian immigrants encountered by our jogger, buttered by everything from agriculture to architecture, are *authentically Italian immigrant*, but those advocated by such outlets as *Canadian Living Magazine* are *somewhat Italian*. Lost in the transformation from Italian immigrant to Italian are those socio-cultural aspects of culinary preparation that give a food its ethnic heart and soul. Consequently, as ethnic foods make inroads into mainstream

society, they begin the process of their own demise.

Authentic ethnic cuisine, therefore, becomes the preserve of the immigrant generation that continues to practice the foodways of the old country, modified somewhat to deal with the market and climatic conditions in the new<sup>7</sup>. For immigrants, food is a primary means by which they socialize, worship, shop and do business – in short, by how they live their lives daily as ethnics coping with the alien culture that surrounds them<sup>8</sup>. It is through their foodways, then, that immigrants retain aspects of their old world culture, adapt them to new world realities and thus develop an ethnic group identity<sup>9</sup>. Their children and grandchildren, on the other hand, who are assimilating, acculturating or somehow coping with the larger society, do not need to practice distinctively ethnic foodways<sup>10</sup>. They, instead, can partake of their group's food with the ease and accessibility afforded by an article in *Canadian Living Magazine*. Yet how many would realize that the *polenta* offered them by *Canadian Living Magazine* is a far cry from that consumed by their parents and grandparents? Authentic ethnic foodways, therefore, are being lost. And our jogger is a witness to Italian-immigrant foodways that will not endure past the immigrant generation.

### **The Transformation of Italian-Immigrant Foodways in Toronto**

When a people immigrate to a new land, they bring with them their foodways. Italian immigrants were no exception. The city of Toronto experienced two primary waves of Italian immigration: the first occurred during the pre-Second World War era and numbered in the tens of thousands, and the second took place during the post-Second World War period and numbered in the hundreds of thousands<sup>11</sup>. During both phases of immigration, one thing remained constant: nativist hostility. Toronto's Anglo-Celtic residents, who dominated the city, viewed the Italian immigrants with dread and trepidation. From the 1950s to late 60s, for example, Italians were regarded as «ethnic (read foreign) intruders» who ate spaghetti, pinched girls' behinds and stole jobs from Canadians<sup>12</sup>. The Italian immigrants were far too «exotic» for most Anglo-Celtic Torontonians<sup>13</sup>.

Part of the exoticness of Italian immigrants was their foodways. In their book *The Sandwich*, which tells its story through rose-coloured spectacles, Ian Wallace and Angela Wood illustrate this point by recounting the experiences of young Vincenzo, who is forced to confront his exoticness in an elementary school cafeteria. Vincenzo is at first ridiculed and then accepted by his classmates for eating a sandwich made not of the standard peanut butter and jam framed by a soft-crust bread; but of a strange, «stinky meat» called *mortadella* (baloney), accompanied by an unfamiliar *provolone* cheese, that were wedged between slices of a peculiar, thick-crust bread<sup>14</sup>. Informants, however, tell of similar experiences, only their sandwiches rarely, if ever, gained acceptance. Instead, they described an uneasiness and even shame at having to face, each day in the school cafeteria, the fact their foodways made them different<sup>15</sup>. One interviewee told of a grade two teacher who, during a nutrition lesson, used the *mortadella* sandwich as an example of an «unhealthy foreign food» that was not to be eaten<sup>16</sup>. Many attempted to convince their parents to make them peanut butter and jam sandwiches, but to no avail<sup>17</sup>. *Mortadella*, *provolone* and Italian bread were the foods parents knew, trusted and ate for lunch, too.

The *mortadella* sandwich was and remained a fixture in the lunch bags of Italian-immigrant children because, thanks to the efforts of ethnic meat processors, grocers and bakers, its ingredients were easily obtainable. As Italian immigrants settled in clusters creating ethnic neighbourhoods, they established their own system of food production, importation and marketing<sup>18</sup>. The myriad of vegetables and fruits observed by our jogger represented the harvest of Italian-immigrant farmers and truck gardeners who either sold their produce directly to street corner vendors or established their own local fruit markets. In the late 1950s and throughout the early 1960s, the truck gardeners sold their crops house-to-house, but eventually many settled in the ethnic neighbourhoods becoming full-time grocers<sup>19</sup>. Those who chose to remain strictly farmers were able to prosper by planting ethnic specific crops, which they sold directly to Italian immigrants who traveled to them. These farmers would establish farms just outside the boundaries of Toronto so that the Italian immigrants could reach them with ease. The Italian immigrants, in turn, would travel to the farms and pick their own crops, everything from apples to zucchini. Many Italian immigrants preferred this approach to food acquisition because they could select more and better quality produce, and because it was cheaper than buying from storeowners. For their part, the farmers were spared the costs of going to market and of hiring crop pickers; however, ready picked fruits and vegetables were also for sale<sup>20</sup>. Without these entrepreneurs, therefore, the Italian immigrants of Toronto could not have maintained their foodways. These small businesspersons, for instance, provided Italian immigrants with sheppard and bell peppers for roasting and preserving. The peppers would be roasted on outdoor grills until their skins turned a crispy black in colour, the blackened skins would be peeled off the peppers, and the remaining flesh torn into strips and preserved in olive oil in mason jars. When required for a meal, the peppers would be seasoned with salt and pepper and minced garlic and parsley<sup>21</sup>. The niche that ethnic food dealers carved out for themselves endured because of the symbiotic relationship between themselves and their customers: they understood the foodways of their customers, and their customers knew that their food needs (domestic such as tomatoes or imported such as olive oil) would be met by their neighbourhood Italian-immigrant grocer, butcher and baker<sup>22</sup>. As a result, few of Toronto's Italian immigrants frequented the host society's food stores that belonged to chains such as *Loblaws*, and *A&P*. For in those stores, there would be no *provolone* and *mortadella* with which to make a sandwich.

According to cultural anthropologists, ethnic foodways, such as the *mortadella* sandwich, are a cultural «symbol» through which ethnic groups define and *maintain* their distinct cultural identity<sup>23</sup>. These cultural symbols, anthropologists have argued, serve to separate *us* (the ethnic group) from *them* (the rest of society). For instance, a given groups «strange» food habits, *a la* Vincenzo and his *mortadella* sandwich, can serve to separate a group's members from the rest of society, while acknowledging their membership within the ethnic community. Thus, food reinforces and transmits identity to its members. As well, it allows the outside society to discern an ethnic group's identity and place. For example, our jogger's encounters with *cantinas*, which marked the architectural distinctiveness of the homes, left no doubt that the neighbourhood was ethnically Italian. The ethnic hearth and home and neighbourhood are defined, in part, by cultural symbols associated with foodways<sup>24</sup>.



Business ventures dependent on foodways, such as grocery stores, helped to separate the Italian immigrants from the host society. Sociologist Raymond Breton has postulated the concept of «Institutional Completeness» that maintains that the greater the diversity of institutions, which cater exclusively to the needs of an ethnic group, the less the group's members have to deal with the outside society<sup>25</sup>. Thus, an ethnic community with a high degree of institutional completeness affords its members the opportunity to retain more of their indigenous attributes and ways by lessening their contact with others not of their group. For example, food has to be purchased weekly, if not daily; and if ethno-centric food providers did not exist, the Italian immigrants would have had to purchase their foods in places in which Italian customs were non-existence and the Italian language was not used. Bakery stores, grocery shops and other food related business, therefore, too are institutions which help Italian immigrants retain their ethnic identity by providing those goods and services, such as *mortadella* and *provolone*, which distinguish them from the rest of society.

Nevertheless, by the 1970s *Loblaws* and *A&P* stores did carry *mortadella*, *provolone*, thick-crust breads and other foods ethnically Italian thereby too joining in the institutional structure of the Italian-immigrant community. Yet in so doing, they began the demise of the local food stores and enterprises that catered exclusively to the culinary needs of Italian immigrants and their families. Toronto's Italians represented a large market, and large food conglomerates attempted to reach out to them. In essence, Italian foods had «crossed over culinary boundaries» into the mainstream<sup>26</sup>. The process of the homogenization of Italian foods had begun. More and more mediums such as restaurants, print and the visual media continued the advertisement and spread of Italian foods to the broader society, and these foods soon became commonplace for other ethnic groups as well. For example, one elementary school teacher, in describing the multicultural and multiracial classroom in the late 1990s, noted that one of the few things students had in common was the *mortadella* sandwich<sup>27</sup>. An informant from South-East Asia related the following: «Abdul [son] insists on eating *Canadian* [emphasis mine] foods such as *Calabrese* bread, *prosciutto*, salami, and pasta. He refuses to eat our food, and this has become quite a concern to my husband and me. Even the Master [spiritual leader] has remarked alarmingly at this development among our children»<sup>28</sup>. Eating a *mortadella* sandwich with its ingredients bought at the local *Loblaws* store had now become a part of Canadian living. Indeed, even the children and grandchildren of Italian immigrants purchased their Italian foods at the neighbourhood *A&P* store rather than at the corner Italian grocer<sup>29</sup>. These stores, interviewees noted, offered greater selection, provided meals ready for immediate consumption thereby removing the need for time-consuming preparation, and offered a milieu that was modern and Canadian as opposed to being traditional and ethnic<sup>30</sup>. A generation «palate gap» emerged: «The first generation wanted basic, raw ingredients to make foods according to traditional recipes, but the second wanted old-style sauces to put on [meats] and vegetables, and the third wanted fully processed convenience foods with an Old World aura that could be supplied with a few spices and a picturesque package»<sup>31</sup>. *Loblaws* and *A&P* stores, with their appeal to a broad populace that wanted ethnicity and homogeneity in its foods, were perfectly positioned to sell *mortadella* to all – except the immigrant generation.

In the 1990s, however, the *Loblaws* Corporation discovered how to lure Italian

immigrants and not just their children and grandchildren into its stores to purchase *mortadella* and other Italian foods. First, it dropped the name *Loblaws* from its stores in Italian-immigrant neighbourhoods, and replaced it with the name *Fortinos*; its associated lower-end «no-frill» stores carried labels such as *Rocco's Nofrills*<sup>32</sup>. Second, *Fortinos* worked to close the «palate gap» by providing each generation with the products and foods it wanted. In the case of the immigrant cohort, it supplied the «basic, raw ingredients [needed] to make foods according to traditional recipes». For instance, In January and February Italians could purchase the pork shoulders and hind legs (ham) required to make *salsiccia* (hot and sweet sausage). In addition, they could buy the sausage casings that gave form to the sausages; and the hot pepper flakes, the sea salt and pepper, and the anise, fennel and rosemary seeds that seasoned the sausages to taste. In fact, the meat department at *Fortinos* would even grind the meat into the pieces required for stuffing into the casings. Once taken home, all the parts would be mixed together, and further seasoned with ground apples, figs and orange rinds. After the sausages were assembled, they were hung to dry in the *cantina*, where the cold weather of winter combined with the spices to prevent them from spoiling<sup>33</sup>. To those who did not want to go to all the time and trouble of making *salsiccia*, *Fortinos* would sell ready made. Third, the slow demise of the corner grocery store accelerated *Fortinos* penetration of the immigrant generation market. Like all members of the immigrant category, the owners of the local stores were reaching retirement age, and they were subsequently closing their establishments. Moreover, the local stores found that in order to maintain profitability they had to attract the second and third generations by expanding product selection, but few could match *Fortinos* in the economies of scale needed to make product diversification possible. Consequently, the number of these stores has declined, and those that remain serve a very specific and limited clientele: the original and aging immigrant class, and those seeking «authentic» Italian-Canadian ethnic ingredients and foods which are too obscure or unprofitable (for instance, wine grapes) for *Fortinos* to stock. The *Loblaws* Corporation, therefore, spanned the generation gap by re-inventing its stores in name and goods offered within the Italian-immigrant neighbourhoods thereby making customers of all generations. A successful strategy that *Loblaws* noted in its *2000 Annual Report*: «The variety of our banners [store names] and store formats allows us to harmonize with every geographic [locale] and demographic [ethnic] variable across the country. As a result, we have a unique national presence and the flexibility to offer consumers more tomorrow»<sup>34</sup>.

Other food companies followed *Loblaws'* lead in using Italian foodways to expand their customer base. Such businesses merged Italian ethnic foods with their own products as a means of selling more of what they produced. For example, they developed recipes that were enticing and easy to follow, and that were distributed using everything from pamphlets to post cards. The Canadian beef industry, for example, advertised its «healthy living» with beef lifestyle through a post card instructing consumers on the preparation of a «Hearty Beef Pizza» that could be made and baked within thirty minutes<sup>35</sup>. Such a pizza was a far cry from the pizza of the Italian immigrants that was nothing more than a flattened dough covered with prepared tomatoes, sometimes garnished with peppers. Pizza, the quintessential Italian-immigrant foodway, has become, thanks to its usurpation by food firms, a ubiquitous food enjoyed in many forms by many people.

By also manipulating Italian-immigrant foodways, some businesses worked at establishing a *Loblaws* – like presence and flexibility within Italian-immigrant neighbourhoods so that they could offer their goods and services to *Italian-Canadian* consumers, rather than just Italian-immigrant ones. For these enterprises, a pan-Italian-Canadian ethnicity – and the promotion thereof – was vital because their market encompassed all Italians; and not a specific generation, such as the immigrant class. For instance, in April of 1995 the Canadian Wheat Board imposed an embargo on the importation of Italian pasta because the European Union subsidized the export of pasta, especially from Italy. Such a subsidy, maintained the Wheat Board, was detrimental to Canadian durum wheat farmers<sup>36</sup>. In response, importers and wholesalers of Italian pasta, known as *The Italian Pasta Importer's Council*, lunched a bilingual media campaign entitled: *Fermi la Guerra della Pasta* or Stop the Pasta War. The *Council* argued that pasta was both business and culture: «Our customers and our customers' customers are not going to stand by and let a product which is integral to their business and culture be denied them»<sup>37</sup>. In an effort to mobilize Italian-Canadian foot soldiers into the war, the *Council* supplied thousands of post cards that were to be signed by individual Italian Canadians who would then mail them directly to the Canadian prime minister. The post cards spoke to the economic and cultural attributes of pasta, but they also proclaimed the importance of pasta to the Italian-Canadian family and community: «I purchase pasta because I and my family prefer its taste, its many varieties, the assortment and diverse ways in which it can be cooked, and because Italian businesses play an important role in my community... Please, do not deny me, my family and my community Italian pasta!»<sup>38</sup> The business of food, in particular pasta, therefore, had political implications: it could mobilize Italian Canadians into a communal force determined to right a wrong being perpetrated against the dovetailed interests of Italian-Canadian enterprise and culture

Ironically, as the pasta war demonstrated, the interwoven interests of enterprise and culture made their appeals to a pan-Italian-Canadian ethnicity by addressing the lowest common denominators of that ethnicity: the neighbourhood (store) and the family. Other business firms refined this process by appealing to those things in which the family took pride. As our jogger witnessed, the Italian-Canadian families in his neighbourhood took great care of their fruit and vegetable gardens, tending the crops from seed to harvest<sup>39</sup>. For the gardens provided the families not only with nourishment; but with bragging rights, as well. Families boasted about the overall health, size and appearance of their garden plants, vegetables and fruits to other members of their extended families, to friends and to neighbours<sup>40</sup>. A car dealership, in conjunction with an ethnic radio and television station and two garden centres, decided to increase car sales by rewarding the gardening expertise of its Italian-Canadian customers. Advertised on the radio and television station, was the dealership's «Great Zucchini Growing Contest». Participants in the contest had the opportunity to win two cars: one car would be awarded to the grower of the longest zucchini and the other car would be awarded to the grower of the heaviest zucchini. If they so desired, participants could obtain a zucchini seedling free of charge from one of the two garden centres. And, of course, the winners would be publicized on the radio and television station – gardening braggartism at its zenith<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, nowhere could the families bragging rights



about its gardening prowess be more paramount than when dealing with the omnipresent staple of the Italian-immigrant table, the tomato. Consequently, one house ware store established and promoted the «Great Tomato Hunt» contest: the proud owners of the three heaviest tomatoes, weighed-in at the store, would win in-store shopping sprees ranging from \$500 to \$3,000 dollars<sup>42</sup>. The contest ran from August to early September, the height of the tomato sauce making season. Naturally, the store sold all of the accessories needed to make the sauce: manual and electric tomato squeezing machines, heavy duty aluminium boiling pots, mason jars, propane gas burners, and so forth. And for those who did not know how to make the sauce, the store carried a «How To Make Italian Style Sauce Video»<sup>43</sup>. Companies such as the car dealership and house ware store, then, could use the family's devotion to its foodways, in this case gardening, to attract customers.

Even the Italian-Canadian family's devotion to its popular religion was used by local concerns interested in expanding their customer base. Almost all hamlets, villages, towns or cities in Italy have indigenous, patron saints or *madonnas* (Mother Mary) that are venerated throughout the year and feted on their individual feast days. The adoration of these saints and *madonnas* is, for the most part, a form of popular piety, free of formal clerical guidance. For example, on a saint or *madonnas* feast day, celebrations of a carnival nature take place that are marked by processions carrying aloft a statue of the saint or *madonna*, music concerts, fireworks and the consumption of speciality foods in honour of the saint or *madonna*. When Italians immigrated to Toronto, they brought with them their saints and *madonnas* and the associated populist religious practices<sup>44</sup>. With the help of local businesses, some of these saints or *madonnas* became the patrons of all of Toronto's Italians, and not just of the immigrants who had facilitated their migration. One saint who underwent such a transformation is *San Giuseppe* (Saint Joseph). Immigrants from Naples and *Calabria* would eat *zeppole*, ring shaped cakes, on *San Giuseppe's* feast day, 19 March. Italian-Canadian bakeries adopted the *zeppole*; producing their own calorific versions, filled with custard and cream, which they baked especially for sale on *San Giuseppe's* feast day. A great deal of *zeppole* advertising takes place in the bakeries' windows and on the Italian language media in the days preceding 19 March. As a result, the Italian-Canadian community as a whole venerates *San Giuseppe* by eating *zeppole* on his feast day. A practice that can be shared by all, even those whose religious foodways did not include *zeppole*, because *zeppole* are easily accessible from neighbourhood bakeries that are seeking to attract more and more customers<sup>45</sup>.

Businesses, therefore, originally served as communal institutions that helped to give the Italian-Canadian immigrant community some degree of institutional completeness. They provided the Italian immigrants with ingredients needed to keep alive the foodways that separated the immigrants from the rest of society. But as the non-Italian-immigrant society became more and more interested in Italian foods, businesses began the process of homogenizing Italian-immigrant foods into an ethnic cuisine that could be enjoyed by all. Indeed, even those businesses that still operated within Italian-immigrant neighbourhoods engaged in the creation of uniform, inter-generational, pan-Italian-Canadian foodways.

## Conclusion

As our jogger observed, however, within his neighbourhood Italian-immigrant foodways were still persevering, despite business forces acting as a catalysts of change. Nevertheless, both the immigrants and their children know that change will triumph in the end. For the immigrants, this is clear when they consider the long-term survival of their culture, such as foodways associated with religious practices. For example, immigrants from the Sicilian town of *Salemi* have transferred to Toronto their veneration of *San Francesco di Paola* (Saint Francis of Paola). As part of the worshipping of *San Francesco*, the *Salemese* of Toronto construct an elaborate wire-framed altar topped by a cupola that houses a wooden statue of *San Francesco*. The edifice, in turn, is decorated with hanging oranges and lemons that are a remembrance of Sicily. As well, the entire structure is covered with dangling statuettes and figurines, made of bread, depicting *San Francesco*, the Virgin Mary, the Life of Jesus, crucifixes, chalices and other religious symbols. The religious icons are moulded and baked by the *Salemese* women, who take over a neighbourhood bakery days before the celebration of *San Francesco* is to take place. The using of bread in this fashion, known as the *simbologia del pane* (Symbolism of Bread), has been a practice of the people of *Salemi* since the sixteenth century. In Toronto, of course, the longevity of the *simbologia* is dependent upon future generations; but in their private and public discourses, the immigrant *Salemese* are not at all certain that their descendants will continue this – or any other – of their centuries old traditions<sup>46</sup>. The children of the Italian-immigrants too have questions about the survival of their parents' traditions, such as foodways. A columnist in Toronto's largest newspaper devoted one of her columns to almost biblical description of her Italian-immigrant parents' fruit and vegetable garden:

And what of the lettuce cribs – the romaine and radicchio and endive – that thrive through the winter within their own prism-shaped greenhouse, a low-rise structure that looks as if it could have been designed by I. M. Pei? The beanstalks, as tall as a man, the rows upon rows of tomatoes, the onions, carrots, cucumbers, eggplant, zucchini, raspberry bushes, the fruit orchard, the grape arbour – it's a veritable Eden back there<sup>47</sup>.

In fact, according to the journalist, there is a biblical plant thriving in the garden, a fig tree. The fig, of course, is not native to or winter hardy in Toronto. Nevertheless, the author informs her readers that thanks to her father's tireless efforts in building a greenhouse that expands constantly with the fig, it has survived to become two stories high. The writer, however, also questions whom besides her father would lavish so much love and attention on an exotic tree belonging not to Toronto but the Mediterranean? And she ends her contemplation with this provocative, if not rhetorical, query: «But of late I've started wondering: "Who's going to take care of you when he's gone, fig tree?"»<sup>48</sup>.

In the gardens of Toronto's Italian immigrants, the fig tree has become almost as commonplace as the grape arbour, but the sad reality is that the fig tree and the gardens are doomed to extinction once the immigrant generation is no more<sup>49</sup>. Will the children and the grandchildren of the immigrants devote the time, effort and care required to cultivate gardens? Will they process the gardens' harvests? Will they stock their *cantinas* with home-made *salsicce*, *soppressata*, *prosciutto* and wine? Will their houses even have a garden

or a *cantina*? Or will they become a part of the homogenized *Canadian living* experience in which their *Italian ethnic* foodways needs will be met by food businesses and related industries?

If that is to be the fate of Italian-immigrant foodways, the best that can be hoped for them is that they assume the status of folklore in the memory culture of succeeding generations. A future that is quick becoming reality as the children's book *The Summer My Father Was Ten* makes clear. The book is set in an immigrant neighbourhood within a seaside town. The main character, a ten-year-old boy, destroys the garden of his neighbour, Mr. Bellavista, by tossing and smashing its tomatoes and vegetables. Full of remorse, he befriends Mr. Bellavista, and comes to share in Mr. Bellavista's love of gardening. And that interest in gardening may represents a spark of hope for the garden and the foodways it represents: the boy, now a man, recounts the story to his young daughter, the book's narrator, each Spring when together they plant their garden, filling it with tomatoes, peppers, onions, marigolds and zinnias – just as did Mr. Bellavista<sup>50</sup>.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This preface is compiled from the author's personal experiences
- <sup>2</sup> Gabaccia, Donna R., «Ethnicity in the Business World: Italians in Italian American Food
- <sup>3</sup> Gabaccia, Donna R., «Ethnicity in the Business World», pp. 2 and 12-16; and Belasco,
- <sup>4</sup> *Canadian Living Magazine*, November 1999, pp. 145-46.
- <sup>5</sup> Gabaccia, Donna R., «Ethnicity in the Business World», p. 2; and Hooker, Richard J.,
- <sup>6</sup> Gabaccia, Donna R., «Ethnicity in the Business World», p. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Levenstein, Harvey, «The American Response To Italian Food, 1800-1930» in *Food &*
- <sup>8</sup> Levenstein, Harvey, «The American Response To Italian Food, 1800-1930», p. 2; Raspa,

- Tennessee Press, 1984, pp. 38-39, 46 and 54.
- <sup>9</sup> Raspa, Richard, «Chapter 9: Exotic Foods among Italian-Americans in Mormon Utah: Food as Nostalgic Enactment of Identity», pp. 188 and 193; Goode, Judith G., Curtis, Karen and Theophana, Janet, «Chapter 4: Meal Formats, Meal Cycles, and Menu Negotiation in the Maintenance of an Italian-American Community» in Mary Douglas (ed.), *Food In the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities*, New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1984, pp. 146-47; Kalcik, Susan, «Chapter 2: Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity», pp. 37-38, 46-48, 54-55 and 57; Mennell, Stephen, Murcott, Anne and van Otterloo, Anneke H., *The Sociology of Food: Eating, Diet and Culture*, London, Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 79-78.
- <sup>10</sup> Kalcik, Susan, «Chapter 2: Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and Performance of Identity», p. 40; Gabaccia, Donna R., *We Are What We Eat*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 176-77; Goode, Judith, Theophana, Janet and Curtis, Karen, «Chapter 3: A Framework for the Analysis of Continuity and Change in Shared Sociocultural Rules for Food Use: The Italian-American Pattern» in Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (eds.), *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States: The Performance of Group Identity*, Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1984, pp. 68-69 (although the authors maintain that no definitive statement about the generational disappearance of ethnic foodways can be made, p. 84).
- <sup>11</sup> Iacovetta, Franca, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*, Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992, pp. 208-11.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 103..
- <sup>13</sup> For a good description of the exoticness of the Italians see: Iacovetta, Franca, *Such Hardworking People*, Chapter 5.
- <sup>14</sup> Wallace, Ian and Wood, Angela, *The Sandwich*, Toronto, Kids Can Press, 1975.
- <sup>15</sup> D.C., Interview by author, 14 June 1999; E. A., Interview by author, 6 July 1999; C. B., Interview by author, 20 July 1999; and B. T., Interview by author, 4 August 1999.
- <sup>16</sup> J. S., Interview by author, 25 July 1999.
- <sup>17</sup> D. I., Interview by author, 11 July 1999; S. B., Interview by author, 27 July 1999; and D. D., Interview by author, 13 July 1999.
- <sup>18</sup> Goode, Curtis and Theophano, «Chapter 4: Meal Formats, Meal Cycles, and Menu Negotiation in the Maintenance of an Italian-American Community», p. 153.
- <sup>19</sup> FA. F., Interview by author, 10 August 1999; and D. D., Interview by author, 13 August 1999; and M. C. Interview by author, 14 August 1999.
- <sup>20</sup> The following interviewees spoke of the experiences travelling to the farms and picking the produce they needed: P. V., Interview by author, 15 July 1999; and M. D., Interview by author, 16 July 1999.

- <sup>21</sup> The following interviewees confirmed the roasted pepper recipe: O. P., Interview by author, 16 June 1999; and J. F., Interview by author, 2 July 1999.
- <sup>22</sup> Gabaccia, Donna R., *We Are What We Eat*, pp. 73-77.
- <sup>23</sup> Muhleisen, Susan, «Eating Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Food Today - Call For Papers», Online posting, 10 November 1999, <http://h-net.msu.edu>
- <sup>24</sup> Information for this paragraph was taken from: Kalcik, «Chapter 2: Ethnic Foodways in America: Symbol and the Performance of Identity», pp. 45-47; and Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat*, p. 73.
- <sup>25</sup> Breton, Raymond, «Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and the Personal Relations of Immigrants» in *The American Journal of Sociology*, 60:2, September 1964, pp. 193-205. Breton did not directly name food stores as institutions he studied.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 120.
- <sup>27</sup> G. V., Interview by author, 1 August 1999.
- <sup>28</sup> S. V., Interview by author, 12 August 1999.
- <sup>29</sup> Conclusion reached through interviews with the owners of Italian grocery stores and the managers of *Loblaws* and *A&P* franchises.
- <sup>30</sup> B. B., Interview by author, 20 August 1999; T. D., Interview by author, 25 August 1999; C. I., Interview by author, 26 August 1999.
- <sup>31</sup> Belasco, Warren J., «Ethnic Fast Foods: The Corporate Melting Pot», pp. 7-8.
- <sup>32</sup> In other ethnic neighbourhoods, *Loblaws* named its stores accordingly. For example, in Jewish areas *Mira No-frills* can be found.
- <sup>33</sup> P. M., Interview by author, 23 July 1999; M. C. Interview by author, 14 August 1999; and J. S., Interview by author, 25 July 1999.
- <sup>34</sup> Loblaw Companies Limited, 2000 *Annual Report, Geographic Divisions*, p. 16, <http://www.loblaw.com>
- <sup>35</sup> Post Card, «Healthy Living With Beef: Hearty Beef Pizza», Canadian Beef Marketers, personal collection of author.
- <sup>36</sup> «Curb on Italian pasta has importers boiling» in *The Toronto Star*, 2 May 1995.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Post card, «Stop the Pasta War/*Fermi la Guerra della Pasta*», The Italian Pasta Importer's Council, May 1995, personal collection of author.
- <sup>39</sup> For another example of the Italian-Canadian family's devotion to its garden, see: DiManno, Rosie, «How my father stays in touch with his root» in *Toronto Star*, 27 June 2001, p. A2.
- <sup>40</sup> D.C., Interview by author, 14 June 1999; E.A. Interview by author, 6 July 1999; C.B., Interview by author, 20 July 1999; A.F., Interview by author, 10 August 1999; and B.L.,



Interview by author, 28 August 1999.

- <sup>41</sup> Post card, «Grow the Longest Zucchini or Grow the Heaviest Zucchini», and «Contest rules (verso)». Summer of 1996, personal collection of author. As of the summer of 2001, the Great Zucchini Contest was still ongoing, but contestants now won leases to cars.
- <sup>42</sup> *Consiglio's U-Save Houseware & Stuff*, Advertising Flyer, August 2001, personal collection of author.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> On the populist religious nature of the saints and *madonnas* see: Cumbo, Enrico, «The Feast of the Madonna del Monte» in *Polyphony*, 5:2, Fall/Winter 1983, p. 85; Migliore, Sam, «Religious Symbols and Cultural Identity: A Sicilian-Canadian Example» in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 20:1, 1988, pp. 78-79; and G. Pennacchio, Luigi, «Azione Cattolica In Ontario After the Second World War (1950s)» in *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society*, 62, 2000, p. 104.
- <sup>45</sup> Data for the *zeppole* version of this paragraph was obtained from the author's observations of community activity: and from the following interviews: J.F., Interview by author, 2 July 1999; G.V., Interview by author, 1 August 1999; C.I., Interview by author, 26 August 1999; and B.T., Interview by author, 4 August 1999.
- <sup>46</sup> Ferro, Giovanni and Gucciardi, Michele, *Da Salemi...a Toronto*, Toronto, Frank Rapallo of Royal Printing, 1995, pp. 125, 134 and 145; see also entire book. And personal observations of author.
- <sup>47</sup> DiManno, «How my father stays in touch with his roots».
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> On the growing popularity of fig trees in North America see: «Figs» in *Country Living Gardener*, October 1999, pp. 91-95.
- <sup>50</sup> Brisson, Pat and Shine, Andrea, (illustrator), *The Summer My Father Was Ten*, Boyds Mills Press, 1999, pp. 1-32.

The Immigrant Strikes: Italian Construction Workers and Ethnic Militancy in Post-War Toronto. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Historical Association, 1989. 36 p.Â Buon Appetito: Italian Foodways in Ontario. Willowdale, Ont.: Ontario Historical Society, 2000.Â Profiles Italy: Italian Immigrants in Canada = Les profils Italie : les immigrants italiens au Canada. Ottawa, Ont.: Citizenship and Immigration Canada = Citoyennet  et immigration Canada, 1996. World War II ended unemployment, but it exacerbated the housing crisis. Torontos location as a center of war industry aggravated the grave shelter situation for many workers. First, the rapid increase in population was not matched on the supply side by dwelling construction: the building industry suffered from a lack of raw materials and the priorities of industry and government were focused on war production.Â varied considerably between ethnic groups in post-war Toronto. Toronto was the single largest destination of immigrants to Canada in the post-1945 period. Yet until the 1970s, the vast majority of public housing applicants and residents in English Canada were of Anglo-Canadian origin. Until World War II, Montreal was the Italians' first choice in which to settle. After the war, however, Toronto began to take over as the favourite destination for Italian immigrants. According to the latest census figures (2001) 206,325 Canadians of Italian heritage live in Toronto, compared to 127,190 in Montreal. More than 1.3 million Canadians claim Italian ancestry today - making Canada one of the largest Italian population centres outside of Italy. As Italians settled into their new country, the road was not always easy. During World War II Nazi Germany and its allies systematically exterminated approximately six million Jews during World War II. No more than 450,000 to 500,000 Jews survived World War II in German-occupied Europe. Despite efforts by retreating Nazis to destroy incriminating evidence, meticulous German records allow us to document the number of people killed.Â The curfews on Italian immigrants were lifted in October 1942, on Columbus Day. Approximately 600,000 Italian aliens lived in the United States in 1940. About 1,600 Italian citizens were interned, and about 10,000 Italian-Americans were forced to move from their houses in California coastal communities to inland homes. There were approximately 264,000 German aliens in 1940.