

Get a Life: Obsessed about food and proud of it

By Loretta LaRoche
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Over the years I have written several books containing anecdotes about my family and in particular my grandmother Francesca and my grandfather Lorenzo.

Both immigrated from Sicily, bringing their five children with them. They settled in Brooklyn in a predominately Italian neighborhood, surrounded by a plethora of other ethnic families.

But my early years were spent living as if I was growing up in a small Italian village. My mother and father worked, so my grandparents became the foundation with which I have built my values and attitudes.

Before I attended school, I spoke only Italian – in particular, Sicilian. One of the most prevalent themes of my upbringing was food. Not a day went by without hours of conversation about what we were going to eat and how it was going to be prepared.

All of this reminiscing is due in part to a book my oldest son gave me for Christmas, “Why Italians Love to Talk About Food” by Elena Kostioukovitch.

I never pondered why my family of origin and everyone they surrounded themselves with were so preoccupied with food; it just was a fact of life. I have been asked why I begin to plan another meal while I’m eating, and I never had an answer that was satisfactory.

Now, having read Kostioukovitch’s book, I finally understand that “Italy is food and food is Italy, literally emotionally, historically and symbolically.”

By American standards, preoccupation with food is considered a problem. We struggle with our weight and week after week put some food source on the most-wanted list.

When the low-carb phase was popular, people who ate bread were at risk to do hard time in an abandoned spaghetti factory.

Perhaps the real secret to staying trim and healthy is to not only adopt the Mediterranean diet but its attitudes, which include enjoying and savoring the experience of food and those with whom we break bread.

I now feel vindicated and will feel more empowered to share the delights of experimenting, creating, cooking and having glorious odors waft through the house. Keep in mind what Miss Piggy said, “Never eat anything bigger than your head.”

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