The Joy of Growing Up Italian

The following article, *The Joy of Growing Up Italian*, has been circulating the Internet for a number of years. I have no idea who wrote it, but I'd like to congratulate him or her for a well-written and moving tribute.

Here is the article in parts. The article is written from an East Coast point-of-view but it captures the essence of growing up Italian starting in the 40's and 50's until the present.

If you are not of Italian ancestry, please do not be offended if we identify you as the "other group of immigrants." Although you do not have to be Italian to be a member of the ICF, it really does help. But then again I am the Heritage Chairperson, so my responsibility is to keep those Old Italian stories alive.

Part 1

I was well into adulthood before I realized that I was an American. Of course, I had been born in America and had lived there all of my life, but somehow it never occurred to me that just being a citizen of the United States meant I was an American. Americans were people who ate peanut butter and jelly on mushy white bread that came out of plastic packages. Me?? I was Italian.

For me, as I am sure for most second-generation Italian-American children who grew up in the 40s or 50s, there was a definite distinction drawn between US and THEM. We were Italians. Everybody else – the Irish, German, Polish, Jewish – they were the "MED-E-GONES." There were no hard feelings, just – well – we were sure ours was the better way. For instance, we had a bread man, a coal man, an ice man, a fruit and vegetable man, a

watermelon man, and a fish man; we even had a man who sharpened knives and scissors who came right to our homes, or at least right outside our homes. They were the many peddlers who plied the Italian neighborhoods. We would wait for their call, their yell, and their individual distinctive sound. We knew them all, they knew us. Americans went to the stores for most of their foods – what a waste.

Truly, I pitied their loss. They never knew the pleasure of waking up every morning to find a hot, crisp loaf of Italian bread waiting behind the screen door. And instead of being able to climb on back of the peddler's truck a couple of times a week just to hitch a ride, most of my "MED-E-GONE" friends had to be satisfied going to the A&P.