stories, this one begins with love: a young woman named Mafalda (affectionately called "Murph") married a man named Ferdinand ("Fred") DelGrosso in the small, rural, Pennsylvania town of Altoona, and the rest is pasta-lovers' history.

In 1943, Fred and Murph opened DelGrosso Café in downtown Altoona, serving what soon became known as "the best spaghetti in town," largely due to the passed-down tomato sauce recipe from Murph's mother, Marianna. The sauce was so popular that customers brought home extra jars after dining at the restaurant.

Three years later, the DelGrosso couple sold their café and purchased an amusement park just down the road, where they continued to serve their popular Italian dishes to park patrons.

Danielle DeSimone

It wasn't easy. Fred and Murph had seven children—many of whom still work in the family business. The family of nine lived near the back of the amusement park property in a red-brick cabin so small that their kitchen was in a different building. And, since the DelGrossos, even then, had a habit of helping those in need, at one point more than 11 people squeezed into the tiny house, taking in orphans and priests from the local parish.

"My grandparents really didn't have much," Carl DelGrosso, president of the DelGrosso Amusement Park, said recently at the park. "But they always found room to give."

The DelGrosso children spent their childhoods running wild through the amusement park—their own, rollercoaster-filled backyard. When they weren't playing, they were working, assisting their parents in running the park's rides and concession stands.

From the cramped park kitchen, the DelGrossos began making and canning their own tomato sauce commercially, with the children pitching in, typically working 10-hour days. In the 1950s, the family expanded its factory, and the team effort paid off. "DelGrosso" quickly became a household name in central Pennsylvania. Today, its classic DelGrosso labels are recognized nationwide.

Nowadays, the amusement park and sauce factory would be unrecognizable to Murph and Fred. Once booming with turn-of-the-century railroad business, these rolling Rust Belt hills have since quieted—except for the burst of life along that stretch of land just outside of Tipton, Pa., where delighted squeals of children and the whirling music from the roller coasters can be heard before you even see it.

And, what was once just a small, humble family amusement park in the 1940's has expanded to include the DelGrosso Amusement Park, the Italian-themed Laguna Water Park, and the DelGrosso Sauce Factory. Although the park is much larger than it once was, the small town carnival feel is still everywhere. From families with small children riding an antique carousel, to the park employees greeting guests by their first names, you can't help but immediately feel comfortable at the tree-lined park.

And of course, there's the food. True to ➤

Above: The Lazy River at Laguna Splash Water Park.
Below Left: Murph's Kitchen
Below: Vintage 1970s DelGrosso family photo

Courtesy of the DelGrosso family

Courtesy of the DelGrosso family

Left: An early photo of Fred and Murph at their sauce factory.

Right: Aunt Mary Ann Crider and Michael DelGrosso, vice president of Global Sales & Marketing at DelGrosso Foods.

Below: The DelGrosso Sauce Factory today

Danielle DeSimone

Danielle DeSimone

tradition, the DelGrossos have incorporated their family sauce and recipes into all of the food menus here. Amusement parks are not normally remembered for their stellar food, but DelGrosso's is. Park guests enjoy everything from homemade meatballs smothered in the DelGrosso signature Aunt Mary Ann's Sunday Marinara sauce to fusilli twirled in Uncle Joe's Vodka Celebration sauce.

Behind the kiosk windows of Murph's Kitchen, one of the park's 14 eateries and snack bars, located near the Kiddie Carousel, the Gift Shop, and the Rock Star and Paratrooper rides, is a bustling kitchen where a crew chops vegetables, stirs bubbling sauces, and builds stacked sandwiches like an assembly line. Even the potato salad here is special, made with Murph's secret recipe, and eaten with a cult-like reverence.

Obviously, Murph's Kitchen is named after the DelGrosso matriarch, Murph, so it seems appropriate that everything cooking there now falls under the watchful eye of Aunt Mary Ann herself, a self-proclaimed "retired working woman" and Murph's daughter. She exudes a certain Old World charm as she fusses around the kitchen, inspecting the Bolognese sauce, offering constructive criticism here and there with her personal adage, "If it's the truth, you can say it!"

Aunt Mary Ann has her quieter moments as well, such as when she hands half of her uneaten sandwich to a park guest she doesn't know saying, "Here, I'm not going to finish this, do you want it?" Or when she quietly approaches park guests who look like they might "need a little extra help" and offers free strips of tickets to rides, just as her father famously did before her.

Italian American traditions live and breathe here—not just in the food passed down and shared with others, but in the generosity and sense of community.

Across East Pleasant Valley Boulevard is the DelGrossos' newest attraction: the expanded and renovated Laguna Splash Water Park where you can slip down a Venetian gondola slide, run under a 25-foot-tall leaning Tower of Pisa fountain, or cruise along the River Lazio. It's America's only Italian-themed water park!

Here, too, is all of DelGrosso's delicious Italian American food, with regional influences evident in the hoagies, and sausage and peppers. And, next door, the sauce factory continues to churn out the old family recipes into, on average, 240,000-270,000 polished jars daily, even meatballs, all made with fresh ingredients and with an emphasis on quality and flavor.

Meanwhile, the DelGrossos remain close-knit. Most of the family members work, or have worked, in the park or the factory at some point during their lives. It's almost a rite of passage for teenage DelGrossos to work concession stands or ride-ticket counters. They all still come together on Sundays for a family meal, and the Feast of the Seven Fishes continues to be a crowd favorite.

When asked whether younger generations of the DelGrosso family will carry on the traditions of the park, Carl DelGrosso smiled. "When you grow up from the ground level and you see the amount of work that is put into building a place like this by your grandparents, and then your parents, and you've seen their vision and the risks that they took to build it," he said, "You're far more invested in making sure the place survives because you don't want all of their hard work to fail."

The DelGrosso Amusement Park is more than just a collection of roller coasters and carnival rides, and food stands with incredible meatballs and Italian sandwiches. It is a family place that has contributed to a tight-knit community here.

There is no better evidence of this than the park's Spaghetti Wednesdays, the weekly, moderately priced, pasta specials the DelGrossos serve from mid-June to mid-August, which attract hundreds of locals.

The line can sometimes be hours-long, but the wait is worth it. Not only do guests get to dig into a dish of DelGrosso's homemade recipes with their signature sauces, they come together, sitting on long, extended benches, pausing in their busy lives to dine across the table from family, friends, neighbors or strangers, sharing a meal filled with raucous, joyful conversation. It's Italian American culture at its best. It's a legacy the La Famiglia DelGrosso's Italian ancestors would have been proud of. ▲

Danielle DeSimone is NIAF's Social Media Manager and Assistant Editor.

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Aglianico

THEN & NOW Tasting the Wine of Ancient Roman Legionnaires

By Dick Rosano

Terredora Di Paolo vineyard in Montefalcione in Campania

Courtesy of Terredora

The Acerenza Cathedral in Basilicata about 55 miles southeast from Vigneti del Vulture

Farnese Vini

The scene would be appropriate for the cinematic genius of Francis Ford Coppola. A Roman commander stands on a slight rise at the edge of a field. He stares off toward the sun that has touched the horizon, lighting the sky and pastures in the distance in an orange blaze. He turns slowly on his heel to face his legions of war-weary troops encamped on the outskirts of the Imperial City.

All are tired from the march, but all are invigorated by the prospect of marching into Rome the next morning bearing the captured combat flags of a conquered enemy. Rome will reward them; Caesar will be pleased.

The commander casts a satisfied glance at the soldiers drifting between lighted campfires. He tells the lieutenant who approaches him to serve the men some wine to go with boar that he smells roasting over the fire pits.

"Ellenico," the commander says, identifying a wine that was introduced to southern Italy by the Greeks centuries before. "The best should be served to these brave legions."

Ellenico was well known in ancient Rome. It was considered one of the best wines of the Empire, and it traveled with the Roman armies

The cellars at in Basilicata

Farnese Vini

Wine cellar key at Vigneti del Vulture in Basilicata

Farnese Vini

on the march. The name tags it to its history, connecting to the Hellenic culture that accompanied those invaders more than 500 years earlier with the vine.

Today, ancient Rome's vinous treasure is called Aglianico, the name of the grape and the wine that is made from it. And while only lightly marketed in the United States, this elixir still deserves the accolades that the ancient legionnaires bestowed on it.

Aglianico grapes are grown throughout central and southern Italy, principally Campania and Basilicata, although some small vineyards of this varietal can be found Puglia, Molise and Lazio. It hits the market under a variety of names, from the simple moniker Aglianico to Aglianico del Vulture, depending on the locality of the grapevines and the labyrinth of Italian regulations.

The Italian wine laws, called *Denominazione di Origine Controllata,* or DOC, recognize Aglianico as a superior wine, according to the strict rules set by the Italian government. In past decades, achieving DOC status was a mark of distinction and, while such an award still merits honor, most of the production of Italian wines has progressed to the point that nearly any wine—other than country plonk—deserves the merit. In the case of this grape, DOC recognition is awarded to Aglianico del Vulture (from Potenza) and Aglianico del Taburno (from Benevento).

Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita, or DOCG, which is DOC adding the word "guaranteed," recognizes additional Aglianico-based wines. The two mentioned above—Aglianico del Vulture Superiore and Aglianico del Taburno—can also be awarded DOCG, based on a vintage-specific quality that raises these bottles above the standard DOC level, including fruit selection, vineyard practices, vintage conditions, and aging.

The most talked-about version of the wine is bottled as Taurasi, a DOCG blend of grapes which emphasizes a high percentage of Aglianico. With intense ripeness and bold flavors, Taurasi is made both for the cellar and for tonight's dinner table. Higher prices also attend this wine, but the reward more than outweighs the cost.

Aglianico has been marketed in the United States for about 40 years, and while it remains slightly hidden from common stores, it is eagerly sought by the wine cognoscenti. And, as its reputation for quality continues to grow, some producers are affixing proprietary names to the finished product, as can be seen in the section on tasting notes below. By adding these proprietary names—names that indicate the winemaker's creative motivation, not just the varietal in ➤

Label of an exceptional Aglianico wine—the 1999 Terre Degli Svevi Aglianico del Vulture Re Manfredi.

Frederick Wildman and Sons, Ltd.

Courtesy of Terredora

Daniela Mastroberardino from Mastroberardino winery and co-founder of Terredora di Paolo winery in Campania

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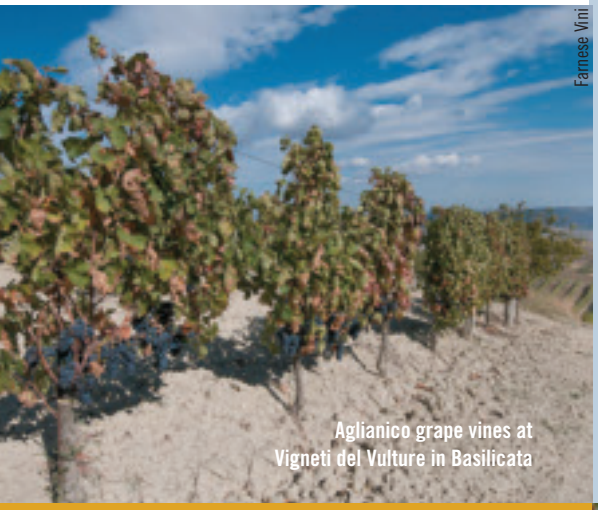
the bottle—they are following the wisdom of the wine world: The more specific the region and name, the more individualistic the wine is expected to be. Higher prices follow the same formula.

You may find a rosé wine called Aglianico del Taburno. It should not be confused with the DOCG red noted above, but it might prove an interesting discovery. If you stumble across a bottle, try it! ▲

Dick Rosano is a wine, food and travel writer whose columns have appeared here in Ambassador magazine, as well as The Washington Post, Wine Enthusiast, and other national magazines. He is the author of the three mysteries set in Italy: "The Secret of Altamura: Nazi Crimes, Italian Treasures," "Tuscan Blood" and "Hunting Truffles," as well as a history book "Wine Heritage" on the influence of Italian-Americans on wine.



Farnese Vini

Aglianico grape vines at Vigneti del Vulture in Basilicata

Tasting Notes

Vigneti del Vulture 2014 Pipoli Aglianico del Vulture ($17)
Elegant approach, fine yet evident tannins, soft mouthfeel, focus on blackberry and mocha flavors. *Score: 91 (Empson)*

Donato d'Angelo 2012 Calice Aglianico del Vulture ($23)
It comes across as closed at first, but the aromas open slowly with floral highlights; mouthfeel is lightly tannic, with concentrated fruit, and chewy mouthfeel. *Score: 90 (Vias)*

Nativ 2013 Aglianico ($23)
This is a hearty wine from start to finish. The scent of black fruit and coffee open quickly, followed by flavors of blackcurrants and blackberries, held aloft by hints of brown spice and smoke. *Score: 90 (Montcalm)*

Re Manfredi 2012 Aglianico del Vulture ($35)
Aromas and flavors of blackberry, raspberry, anise, and tobacco smoke; a finish that is beautifully finessed. *Score: 92 (Wildman)*

Terredora di Paolo 2014 Aglianico ($18)
This wine is fragrant and forward, with intense flavors of raspberry and cherry, with supple tannins and a velvety smooth finish. *Score: 89 (Vias)*

Terredora di Paolo 2009 Pago del Fusi Aglianico ($56)
With medium ruby red color and a light approach on the palate, this wine features soft fruit flavors of cherry and blueberry, with cinnamon accents on an elegant frame. *Score: 92*

Terredora di Paolo 2010 Taurasi Fatica Cantadina ($36)
Tangy and fruity, this wine is a nice combination of raspberry, cherry and allspice. *Score: 90*

Despite its relative obscurity on the American market, there are many Aglianico wines to choose from in our stores. In addition to the wines reviewed above, others to look for include Macarico, Bisceglia, San Martino, Tormaresca, Feudo di San Gregorio, and Paternoster, to name just a few.

You may encounter a grape called Aglianicone, which appears not to be directly related to Aglianico and has been scientifically proven to not be a clonal variation of Aglianico. It is assumed by some ampelographers (botanists who specialize in identification of grapevines) that the two grapes might be related by parentage—which may explain why it is occasionally referred to as Aglianico Bastardo. Both grapes are grown in Campania, but Aglianicone produces fruit inferior in character and flavor profile to Aglianico. Don't worry about getting them mixed up though, at least not in the States. Aglianicone's poor reputation means that little or none of it leaves Italy.

Farnese Vini

Aglianico grapes

Aglianico has many names. Ellenico is the popularly considered original name dating to ancient times. Some theories say the name comes from Apulianicum, the Roman name for all of southern Italy; or from Falernium, which the Romans attached to the wine once they abandoned the Greek moniker.
Today, there are white wines called Falerno, produced from a grape called Falanghina, not the red grape that the Romans were referring to. Yeah, unraveling the evolution of names requires an advanced degree in linguistics.

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The Spring Italian American Reader

With winter in the rearview mirror, and the budding arrival of springtime trumpeting a new lease of life, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that spring is a good time to settle down with a good book when suddenly there are so many other things to do. But, science tells us that spring's positive effects on our minds suggest otherwise:

For instance, research has found that most people feel an increase in liveliness, energy, optimism, excitement, alertness—the "spring in your step" also known as "spring fever." Not bad for turning pages. Some people also experience restlessness and sleeplessness in spring, so ditto if you need to reach for a book and reading light….

Purely logistical, spring brings longer days. The first day of spring, also known as the vernal equinox, achieves perfect balance of 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness. Plus, studies show that seeing longer days of sunshine after months of wintry, gloomy captivity uplifts mood and makes us mentally sharper.

Finally, one study determined that spending longer hours outdoors on clear, warm, sunny days measurably improves memory and expands "cognitive style," as in feeling smarter and more creative and mentally receptive.

Seasonal take away: Bring a book outside, sit in the sun, and seed your literary garden.

Benvenuti primavera! And buona lettura!

Santo, Donatella and Gianni Versace; photographed at Villa Fontanelle, Moltrasio, Lake Como, 1987
© Archivio Alfa Castaldi

© VERSACE by Donatella Versace with Maria Luisa Frisa and Stefano Tonchi; Rizzoli New York, 2016.

Versace
Written by Donatella Versace, Maria Luisa Frisa and Stefano Tonchi
Contribution by Tim Blanks and Ingrid Sischy
Rizzoli; 288 pages; $95 hardcover

Versace, a name so powerful and illustrious that it became synonymous with a way of being. Its symbols, the Medusa and the Greek key, appropriated almost unconsciously from familiar, dignified antiquity, were transformed into icons, driving the beat in the global, cutting-edge rhythm of fashion.

You need not be a fashionista to appreciate this coffeetable-book's history of the globally renowned, legendary, Italian fashion brand Versace, and that's because this is that much of a visual feast. As you might expect.

Of course, if you're no stranger to the world of haute couture, you'll be all the more spellbound by its 288 glossy pages filled with fascinating, first-class photography cherry picked from the Versace archives—photos of the Versace family; of beautiful, sulky skinny models on runways and backstage; Versace-pal celebrities and Versace-clothed rock stars; past Versace advertising-campaigns, stunning, sensual and bizarre; and high-effect, high-concept fashion montages that make your eyes creep closer to the page. Add to that the fact that many of these photos were shot by some of the top photographers of our times, from Richard Avedon and Steven Meisel to Irving Penn and Bruce Weber, and you can understand why the optics here are so captivating.

Scattered into this monographic vision are 20 or so pages of text, not counting captions. Most of that focuses on the story of the Versace empire, specifically the post-Gianni Versace years, and Donatella Versace's emergence and impact on the fashion house following her brother's death in 1997. (Full disclosure: in the past, NIAF has honored Versace designer and founder Gianni Versace, and his and Donatella's brother, the company's president, Santo Versace.)

In fact, this is truly Donatella Versace's book. It has only her image and her name with the title "Versace" on the cover. While she wrote it in collaboration with W magazine Editor-in-Chief Stefano Tonchi and IUAV University of Venice professor Maria Luisa Frisa, among other friends, her byline adorns only one of its "articles," the opening dedication to her close friend and rock legend Prince, who died last April.

But given that it chronicles the Donatella years and her creative perspective at Versace, it makes sense that others wrote the rest—though don't expect objectivity. Indeed, while the narrative proves well-written, informative and insightful into the evolution of the Versace fashion house under Donatella's reign, some of these paragraphs ring of the pretentiousness you'd expect from this industry. The introduction, for instance, refers to the book as "the archetypal journey of a trailblazing brand that came to define and identify objects and people." True, but ….

Back to the remarkable photos—some 250, both color and black and white, with Donatella in about a third of them, including the first photo inside of her naked, except for a ring and a cigarette. Other identifiable faces besides Donatella's include the stunning supermodels Donatella loved to use in ad campaigns, including Christy Turlington, Naomi Campbell, Gisele Bündchen, Linda Evangelista and Kate Moss. And there are the stars who've worn Versace beautifully and illustrate, page after page, these innovative and glamorous designs—including Charlize Theron, Beyoncé, Madonna, Jennifer Lopez, Lady Gaga, Angelina Jolie, Jessica Chastain, Halle Berry, Selena Gomez, Kendell Jenner and Demi Moore.

As Donatella writes in her dedication: "Fashion is part of pop culture. It speaks the language of rock, and connects with art and technology. It is with clothing that our icons create their own unforgettable image."

—Don Oldenburg

Donatella Versace backstage with models for the Atelier Versace Fall/Winter 2012-2013 Collection show at the Hotel Ritz, in Paris.

© Stefano Guindani/SGP

The Girl from Venice

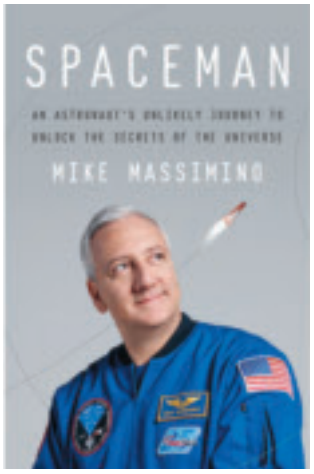
By Martin Cruz Smith
Simon & Schuster
305 pages; $27 hardcover

Cenzo slipped his hand around her waist and kissed her. He expected her to push him away, but he held the kiss like a long drink of water. He felt the heat of her face, the press of her body, and the way her leg overlapped and coiled on his. Then he heard the rhythmic thud of the German gunboat as it approached, and he moved quickly to steer the Fatima out of the searchlight's range.

In Martin Cruz Smith's most recent novel, the author makes a departure from his usual mystery writing and delves into the world of historic fiction, set against the backdrop of occupied Venice in World War II. In "The Girl from Venice," the war is ending, but Venice remains under German control, making life difficult and dangerous for its inhabitants. Cruz Smith's story follows the life of a Venetian fisherman, Cenzo, who finds the body of a young Jewish girl named Giulia floating in Venice's lagoon, and rescues her. Cenzo's decision to hide Giulia from the Nazis rather than turn her in suddenly entangles him in political games between Germans, Fascists, and the Italian resistance movement.

Cruz Smith takes the reader from the muddy shores of Venice to the palaces of Salò with captivating storytelling, but the novel's strength comes from its excellent balance of war and character development. As Cenzo and Giulia's relationship grows from one of happenstance to love, the stakes of their actions and of the war itself become much higher. There have been many novels set in Italy during World War II, but this one offers a refreshing read for those interested in World War II fiction that explores the effects of war on ordinary people, rather than the movements of nations.

—Danielle DeSimone



Spaceman: An Astronaut's Unlikely Journey to Unlock the Secrets of the Universe

By Mike Massimino
Crown Archetype; 336 pages; $28 hardcover

I wasn't interested in the fantasy of space travel. I was interested in the reality of space travel. I was interested in how people got to space here and now, and at that point the only way to get to space was to join NASA…

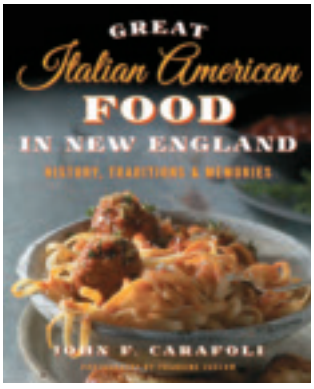
In his memoir "Spaceman: An Astronaut's Unlikely Journey to Unlock the Secrets of the Universe," Mike Massimino recounts his NASA astronaut career from 1996-2104. Why "unlikely" in the title? Massimino admits in his book that "part of the reason I idolized astronauts was because they were everything I wasn't. They were fearless adventurers, and I was an awkward kid."

On his fourth attempt in 1996, he joined the NASA team and the journey begins. Massimino narrates his inspiring voyage with a down-to-earth style that's easy with tech-speak yet still revealing. From his college days at Columbia University and MIT to his camaraderie with his NASA "family," he tells all. Training, spacewalking and traveling at 17, 500 miles per hour—he gives the reader a sense of being there.

Massimino's gifted storytelling describing his shuttle flights and spacewalking (total of four) in 2002 and 2009 to service the Hubble Space Telescope are vivid with doses of humility. Orbiting 350 miles above the Earth during the '09 mission, he was the first person to tweet from space and the last human to work inside Hubble. On the '09 flight, trying to repair Hubble, he describes intense repairs with gripping writing.

Most people will never journey to space, but here's a literary ride to the cosmos thanks to an American "Spaceman" from Long Island, N.Y. A wonderful, insightful and empowering book.

— Robert Bartus Jr.



Great Italian American Food in New England: History, Traditions & Memories

By John F. Carafoli
Globe Pequot Press; 232 pages; $22.95 paperback

Community is what this book is about.

Imagine a six-state, five-spread, often four-generation-inspired Italian American culinary New England road trip. Start with a secret lunganega sausage antipasto recipe in Vermont. Continue to Massachusetts to sample fresh tomato- garlic-and-basil sauce made by the mayor, or "the godmother of Gloucester." Pick up pasta made on 60-year-old vintage machines in Connecticut. Add secondi from the place that brought the first pizza to southern New Hampshire. Choose handmade southern Italian cheeses from a Massachusetts-based Molisano. End with dolci in Maine, with gelati that mix Maine blueberries, Sicilian