

Italian Canadian Foodways 0:00

Oh, and this is also my first in person interview. Oh, so that's also exciting. They've all been over zoom.

Dominic Colangelo 0:05

COVID

Italian Canadian Foodways 0:06

Yeah, exactly.

Dominic Colangelo 0:07

Do you come from an Italian background?

Italian Canadian Foodways 0:09

Yes. I'm Northern Italian. [And we'll get to where you're from]. So who is the founder of your business? And when was it founded?

Dominic Colangelo 0:19

Okay, so the original original, my uncle Tony, would have been--it started as a convenience store. So just he lived here, had the convenience store kind of attached. And then there's a huge demand in the area to have more stuff. So then all the brothers, there's five brothers. So my father and his four brothers. So Angelo is my father. Then there's Rocco. Mike, Tony and Joe.

Italian Canadian Foodways 0:51

Okay, that's just like all the men's names in my family.

Dominic Colangelo 0:56

So they did so they all came, came came on in 1965. So that's what opened up as, as "Brothers Colangelo Fruit Market," because of the direct, you know, translation. So that's the way they put it up. That's the way it was registered, still registered like that. We do go kind of by Colangelo Brothers now. On a lot of our stuff but it's still registered, yeah. So. And, yeah, they just started and the big thing was to bring obviously, a lot of Italian products, to get as much as they could. And at that time, there was only there was more limited. Now, there's, you know, there's so much more. And they just served the community, I mean, they started off literally by picking up customers with the van because a lot of people didn't drive.

Nina Colangelo 1:43

Many of the women didn't drive, yeah.

Dominic Colangelo 1:45

There was no buses that came past the, I think it was Ellesmere.

Italian Canadian Foodways 1:49

Okay.

Dominic Colangelo 1:49

So they would, you know, get people, bring them, they do a huge shopping, and then they will deliver them, you know, bring them back [home].

Italian Canadian Foodways 1:56

It's crazy. Yeah. And I'm assuming--what part of Italy are you folks from?

Dominic Colangelo 1:59  
Puglia.

Italian Canadian Foodways 2:00  
Cool. Yeah, so I was talking to another grocer. And they were saying that oftentimes like the regional people (so from whatever region you were from, where you immigrated, that's what grocery store you would go to).

Dominic Colangelo 2:09  
Yeah, like, oh definitely.

Italian Canadian Foodways 2:10  
For example, "I'm going to go to a pugliesi store"

Dominic Colangelo 2:10  
Yeah, yeah, for sure.

Italian Canadian Foodways 2:13  
That's pretty cool. And then, when did they immigrate here? Do you know like, roughly?

Dominic Colangelo 2:18  
See dad was... '61, '62...my father. But first one was Tony.

Nina Colangelo 2:25  
But yet he emigrated...he was in BC for the railway

Dominic Colangelo 2:28  
So they went railway first and then into cook like chefs like cooking because they knew how to cook. And the railway obviously, wasn't good, so they got into cooking. They ended up coming to Toronto, right. My one Uncle Joe worked at a lot of the main hotels and restaurants downtown [Toronto]. Then they actually--it's funny--they actually ended up--all five of them--ended up working at Knob Hill hotel, at Bellamy and Lawrence.

Italian Canadian Foodways 2:58  
Yeah, my mom has spoken about that.

Dominic Colangelo 3:01  
A big thing. It got very, very busy. The bar there, you know. So they actually ran that first. And they were head chef, sous chef, bartender, busboy. You know? Between the five brothers.

Nina Colangelo 3:14  
All five brothers

Dominic Colangelo 3:15  
Yeah. So they actually ran that. And when they opened the store, they were still doing that for a while. They didn't know obviously, how busy the store. Yeah, so they actually have both things going.

Nina Colangelo 3:26  
Work here during the day, kind of working there in the evenings, because they just couldn't afford what they got.

Italian Canadian Foodways 3:32

Why did they join the grocery industry? Do you know, by any chance? Just maybe like, obviously, if they're trying to make money, maybe for survival?

Dominic Colangelo 3:41

Well, it was opportunity. Right? I think being here and I guess he kind of, you know, mimicked those typical downtown stores, right, like houses and stores kind of, you know, together, with the convenience. But they just saw a big demand. And then, you know, obviously, they want to cater to the Italian community, especially,

Nina Colangelo 4:01

I think beside here, there was a convenience store. And I think there was I think a laundromat? It was broken up into three. And then they saw something anyway, there was the store.

Italian Canadian Foodways 4:14

Has it been here the whole time? Yeah.

Nina Colangelo 4:15

[to Dominic] Yeah, it has. There was three, three.

Nina Colangelo 4:18

Yeah, there was a convenience store. There was the grocery, like, what our uncle opened up. And then there was, I think it was like a laundromat. I think it was three stores or something anyway. I'd have to ask my father, but I remember him, and then he ended up taking over the other.

Italian Canadian Foodways 4:35

So are all of the brothers still here or is it?

Dominic Colangelo 4:39

No, no. So one passed away very, very young. Tony actually started with the convenience, he passed away in 1970?

Italian Canadian Foodways 4:48

Oh, no. So he didn't get to see it in its prime.

Dominic Colangelo 4:52

They had opened the second store on Wilson and Jane. That was 1969 they opened there. He passed away in 1970.

Italian Canadian Foodways 5:02

So he knew it was successful.

Dominic Colangelo 5:03

Yeah. Oh, that took off very well. So that's why the second store really quick after and that store actually became--it was even busier than this store. So right on Wilson near Jane and that was--

Nina Colangelo 5:16

A lot more Europeans

Dominic Colangelo 5:18

Yeah in that era--people [were] kind of moving right from from College, St.Clair, kind of moving North and then yeah, from there they went to Woodbridge, right, like that was the next kind of--

Italian Canadian Foodways 5:29  
which is pretty much what we're studying

Dominic Colangelo 5:30  
--West end, then one here where people from the Danforth were coming up and coming through Scarborough and then eventually, a lot of them went to Markham or they went east to Pickering, Whitby, Ajax, you know, kind of overall, they've kind of--and we still actually have a lot of customers from there. [We have] a lot of customers who travel, they are very, very loyal. They lived in the area, or their parents lived there, and they moved out, but they come back.

Nina Colangelo 5:44  
We've seen like, first, second generation now, even third coming through, so...

Dominic Colangelo 6:02  
Well we're sort of third generation in the sense that my uncle--my father was so young, when he started in the business, he was only 18 when they when they started. So he was the youngest out of the five brothers. So the oldest brother was almost like--

Nina Colangelo 6:09  
--the dad--

Dominic Colangelo 6:20  
Yeah, so he so he, yeah, he retired and well, he passed away in '99. So he passed away in 1999. AAnd he was the eldest of the five. And then we're off. And then my uncle Rocco, who just a year and a half ago, passed away. And he's the second youngest.

Italian Canadian Foodways 6:52  
And then your dad would be the youngest?

Dominic Colangelo 6:53  
He's the youngest, yeah.

Nina Colangelo 7:03  
Big Family Tree.

Italian Canadian Foodways 7:04  
Yes! Okay, so obviously, the significance of your business's name, it's a namesake. Did you have an original mission statement? Or like vision? And how has that changed from then till now?

Dominic Colangelo 7:18  
I think the vision was always, or it was, their, their goal was always to just provide the best possible quality they could at an affordable price, at a fair price. I think that was always there was all you know, there was always I guess, about being affordable, kind of for everybody, you know, they always tried to give give, you know, the best pricing they could on everything.

Italian Canadian Foodways 7:43  
That's hard when it's authentic.

Dominic Colangelo 7:46  
We don't you know, they never really treated any, like even even though we don't treat like an imported product as a specialty and it's doubled, tripled. And, you know, it's always it's sold as

you know, I mean, we bought, you know, like a set margin on it. And, you know, whatever. And it's and, you know, we try to always keep everything very affordable.

Italian Canadian Foodways 8:05  
That's awesome.

Dominic Colangelo 8:06  
I think that was where they're always they're always there. Yeah, you know, you give them you know, and they always do promotions. Like, we're just looking at pictures actually have one they did at the time with Bravo. What was it was it Bravo Lun-?

Nina Colangelo 8:21  
Lancia.

Dominic Colangelo 8:23  
Oh, bravo. So they did in 1970, they gave away a flight to Italy with Bravo Lancia, it was a promotion. We actually have a picture with the person that one it's it's a beautiful, it's really nice. So that was their promotion. That was when they had opened the second store. You know, that was a few years and things were in the especially for the time and products--

Nina Colangelo 8:44  
We were booming at the time--

Dominic Colangelo 8:46  
--Like we had, our square footage, was considered pretty big in the '60s, '70s.

Italian Canadian Foodways 8:51  
For sure

Dominic Colangelo 8:52  
Compared to you know, downtown, right downtown. They were all smaller. Right? So the Wilson store was a little bigger than this one. Not much bigger, still very cozy, you know. But yeah, so the volume was was really you know, was was pretty good at the time.

Nina Colangelo 9:13  
I mean, now you can find Italian products pretty much anywhere.

Dominic Colangelo 9:17  
A lot. Not some maybe not some.

Italian Canadian Foodways 9:18  
Maybe not of this variety, or selection.

Dominic Colangelo 9:22  
Yeah.

Italian Canadian Foodways 9:24  
Do you have a best selling item or maybe a best selling department?

Dominic Colangelo 9:30  
I would say our our meat departments are [our] strongest department. Our sausages, like our homemade Italian sausages, are probably our number one selling. I mean we sell a crazy amount of sausages a week. That was done early on. Again the when they started with the sausage at the time ('60s, '70s) and even now people/some stores use it as you know you kind

of put all your off cuts, stuff that you, not the top quality stuff into the sausage, it's more of it, you know, [we've] never [done] that from day one. They made it like homemade. You know, we get the pork in, de-bone, clean, make sure it's only the, you know, particular cuts that go into the sausage. And yeah, and like no fillers, no, you know, just spices, seasoning and good quality.

Italian Canadian Foodways 10:23

So that's like what you'd make for your family.

Dominic Colangelo 10:27

Really, Talk about our mode, that's what they're--"if it's not good enough to be on our table, you know, kind of thing, (we're not going to eat it). We wouldn't sell it.

Italian Canadian Foodways 10:35

That's...that's really good. I value that.

Nina Colangelo 10:40

Yeah, basically, their homemade recipe, what they would make back in Italy, they brought here.

Italian Canadian Foodways 10:44

That's so cool. And I'm sure people know that and that's why they keep coming back. Homemade, I love that. Okay.

Italian Canadian Foodways 10:53

Obviously in the beginning (when you first opened) the demographic would have been mainly Italians. Has that really changed?

Dominic Colangelo 11:00

Yeah, especially lately. Yeah.

Nina Colangelo 11:02

[During] COVID especially.

Dominic Colangelo 11:03

A lot of new faces, different countries, different in, different, yeah. If you go back compared to the original clientele, it was mainly [Italians].

Nina Colangelo 11:12

Even the team wokring here [is now diverse].

Dominic Colangelo 11:13

Yeah. It was a mainly Italian area. Yeah. Very. I mean, we still had some because they appreciated the Italian products or knew of them and understood, appreciated the fresh meat, the butcher counter.

Nina Colangelo 11:25

But now, it's just really across the board.

Dominic Colangelo 11:30

Especially as people that travel now. We have a lot of Asian customers that come in and they want the authentic Italian stuff. They want to make a tirimisu and they want the mascarpone from Italy, they want you know what-

Nina Colangelo 11:43

I mean they'll come in here and ask for an Italian product and say it in Italian.

Dominic Colangelo 11:56

It's so fun to serve somebody that, you know, that just loves the culture.

Nina Colangelo 12:02

Yeah, they'll just come in and talk about Italy, they'll talk about this, that...it's nice, right?

Italian Canadian Foodways 12:08

When people have gone to Italy. It's nicer because they actually know, like, what authentic is, and then they expect to see--

Nina Colangelo 12:14

What it's supposed to taste like.

Italian Canadian Foodways 12:18

Okay, okay. This is actually the last question. How has the pandemic changed the way your business operates? So obviously, you guys didn't close.

Dominic Colangelo 12:30

At one point, there was almost nothing [on the shelves]. No, no, my father, because that's what pushed my father into retirement. He's 75. He was 73 and he'll be 75. He had, you know, he has diabetes. I mean, you know, so they were saying, you know, you're high risk, you know, if you're older, you have diab-So we were like, going, we had to fight with him. So that was a big change, right? He's only or even still, we'd call him for advice, or whatever. And even now, you know, all the time, every time there's something we'll call him.

Italian Canadian Foodways 13:09

And he probably loves that.

Dominic Colangelo 13:15

So that was the biggest, that was a huge change. I think at one point, he because he was at home, and we were here, and everything going on. And he literally called on a Saturday. And blank. It was like 12:30. And he's like, "close the doors". I'm like, "What do you mean? It's getting--"

Nina Colangelo 13:30

Oh I remember that

Dominic Colangelo 13:31

He was like, he got you know, and he got worried. And he's like, and I'm like, Okay, let's just finish the day when we get you know, when we're done. Yeah, you know, we'll talk. Well, you know, we'll talk about it, we'll figure it out. I said, you know, there's people here there. It was such a horrible feeling, because evryone was panic buying. And people were like, how can we close? And there's like, yeah. And then they trusted us, right? Like, is that kind of, you know, and I mean, you don't want to close either as as a business owner, there was a you know, so we talked to any, he kind of calmed down and because, uh, you know, he had his kids, he had my, you know, even a couple of our kids were here, our kids, you know, his grandkids. So it was, that was huge.

Connie Colangelo 14:14

But he also wasn't here to see how things were being Yeah, I mean, kind of, it's It was hard for him to watch on the outside and not be a part of Yeah,

Dominic Colangelo 14:24

Well, even ourselves. We're home and watching TV. Yeah, it puts you in a different mindset. When you were here and working, it felt so more like it was normal in a sense, because you kept--I don't know it just but when you're home and you just listen to the news, I found like my mindset was very different. And again, more fearful and more you didn't know at the beginning, right?

Italian Canadian Foodways 14:46

And also he would be hearing things about Italy...

Dominic Colangelo 14:48

Well that was a big problem. They were watching what was going on there. And things were so bad there at that time that it made it a big thing. And then I guess obviously we started doing curbside, we started doing a little bit of online stuff that way

Italian Canadian Foodways 15:06

Will continue after [the pandemic] is over or do you think that would increase or...?

Dominic Colangelo 15:10

Well that's that's an avenue we want to explore, but we wanted to set it up like a nice, like a proper, yeah, I guess online format. But we did do some email orders. People would call or whatever, and then they could e-transfer too. Or pay by credit card, you know? Yeah, so we did some of that. What we saw the biggest thing (I think the biggest thing) is our regular older customers, their kids [began] coming in and shopping for them. And we're, you know, we hadn't seen some faces, then we started making the connection.

Nina Colangelo 15:41

It was the parents shopping. So it kind of got reversed where the kids came in and shopped for their parents.

Connie Colangelo 15:57

So people working from home, and I guess having more flexibility. Yeah, they were just tons of new customers. I'd say lots of new

Dominic Colangelo 16:04

Yeah, different faces.

Connie Colangelo 16:05

Yeah. A lot of different faces. People, you know, calling and checking us out online.

Dominic Colangelo 16:09

And a lot of people I want to support a smaller local.

Connie Colangelo 16:12

Yeah, yeah. A lot of people actually coming in and saying that. Would rather support us.

Italian Canadian Foodways 16:19

Okay, I lied this is the last question: what is the future for this lovely establishment? Is it going to keep going down to family? Do you guys know? Obviously, we're going down the avenue of curbside and more online. Do we know what the future is for Colangelo Brothers just yet?

Nina Colangelo 16:44

Yeah, definitely. Definitely continue. Yeah, I want to continue on. 100%.



Italian Canadian Foodways 16:50  
Are your kids into it?

Dominic Colangelo 16:53

Well, they all work here part-time. [Nina's] got the oldest one, Lena worked through through university through all that, worked here part time, and then went off. And now she's doing her own thing. I've got one my youngest two. my daughter's one coming through. Yeah, she's the youngest. She's 15. So she started to come, or she'll be 15. So she's starting starting to come in a little bit. I don't know what happened. You know, we'll see. I mean, we want them to, you know, kind of pick their own, of course, obviously, their own career path.

Italian Canadian Foodways 17:28  
And they have to love it, too.

Dominic Colangelo 17:29

Yeah. Yeah. It's seven days a week so it is a tough business to be in.

Nina Colangelo 17:37

And you do have to be here...

Italian Canadian Foodways 17:40

Is it you three that run it? That must be fun: working with siblings! I don't have siblings so I have no idea.

Dominic Colangelo 17:51

Yeah. Yeah it is.

Connie Colangelo 17:52

Sometimes we kill each other, sometimes we don't...

Italian Canadian Foodways 17:57

I kind of like that it's more open ended for the future. I think it's better to not necessarily have a plan and just be like, "we want to stay open."

Italian Canadian Foodways 18:06

Yeah, definitely.

Nina Colangelo 18:07

We're not giving up, that's for sure. We plan on staying here, so.

Italian Canadian Foodways 18:11

And now that I know this is here, I'm gonna start coming. I will fly to North York for [this place] . I know my mom. I know she's gonna be like, "we have to come here every Sunday!" So you'll probably see more of me.

Dominic Colangelo 18:20

Well, that's the thing, like weekend thing. The Sunday thing, as bad as it was, I guess for us having to work it (like opening on Sundays). 30 years, I guess. 28. But it gave people more opportunity to get here on he weekends would couldn't come during the week, but it makes it tough.

Nina Colangelo 18:39

It's harder for families to get here during the week.

Dominic Colangelo 18:42

But it does make it tough as a business owner to do it. Yeah.

Connie Colangelo 18:47

It was nice.

Dominic Colangelo 18:49

Just everything was kind of just Sunday was just that day of rest. Right?

Nina Colangelo 18:53

Only Becker's was open. I don't know if you even know what Becker's is. Yeah, you know, it was your long weekend, a rest day. It was a family day. Get up, go to church, you have your family lunch at one o'clock and it was just a relaxing family get together.

Italian Canadian Foodways 19:21

But that's okay, more business for you! There's silver linings for everything.

Dominic Colangelo 19:25

For sure.

Italian Canadian Foodways 19:26

Thank you guys so much for meeting with me and talking to me. I really, really, really, really appreciate it. I cannot I can't explain [it enough]. Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>