

Growing up Italian American

C: Hi Maria! Welcome back! How are you?

M: Hi Carla! I'm great. How are you?

C: I'm good, I'm good. You know, last time we talked about the different languages in the USA. Could I ask you about your Italian-American background? I'm so curious about that!

M: Absolutely!

C: Thanks!

M: So, I'm third generation Italian American. And so my grandfather came over from Italy and the discrimination against Italians was quite strong. So he did not teach his kids to speak Italian.

C: Not at all.

M: Not at all. Because if you're discriminated against as an immigrant, you feel like if your kids don't speak the language, they won't be discriminated against.

C: You want to protect them.

M: Yeah, it's not the case, unfortunately, but that's what a lot of parents did. So you'll see a lot of people in America who are second generation or third generation and don't speak the languages. And usually they come from an immigrant background that was discriminated against. If not, like Norwegian is still spoken in Minnesota and North Dakota.

C: Yeah, yeah.

M: Year, you know, three, four generations afterwards because they didn't experience...

C: They were not discriminated against.

M: Not that I know of, they might have been, but yeah, not like Italians.

C: Ah, I understand. So what was it like to be Italian-American when you grew up?

M: So I grew up in a tiny town of a thousand people. And my family and my grandparents and the priest, because most Italians are Catholic, were all New York Italians. So we were so different from the rest of the village.

C: Ah, because you didn't grow up in New York.

M: No, my father did. And my grandfather's from Italy. So New Yorkers are... We're loud, we interrupt a lot. So we show we're interested. If you're saying something and I interrupt you and talk over you, that's showing interest. Although it is really hard for a lot of people. We also have a different accent. So my father, all my uncles, all my aunts, they talk like this, a little bit more like Brooklyn. And I don't talk like that. Sometimes my friends say when I'm angry, I talk like that. They speak very quickly and they're very direct. So they're not nice and they don't talk around it.

C: Well, I mean, in their environment, they are probably just fine because everyone else expects that.

M: Right.

C: But in a different environment, that might be difficult. So you didn't grow up in New York, but you grew up in the community of Brooklyn Italians. Where did you grow up?

M: It's a little town in California.

C: I understand. And there was a crash with the Californian culture.

M: Absolutely. They actually one time put Californians and New Yorkers at a Thanksgiving dinner to see what would happen. And the poor people from California, the New Yorkers would not stop interrupting them. They felt like they couldn't talk. But that's how New Yorkers show that they...

C: Of course, that's their way of showing that they are interested.

M: Right, right, right.

C: Wow, but this is hilarious.

M: I know.

C: Imagine all the misunderstandings between people just because they communicate differently. So much trouble could be avoided! This was a fascinating chat, thank you so much, Maria!

M: No problem, my pleasure!

C: Thank you!