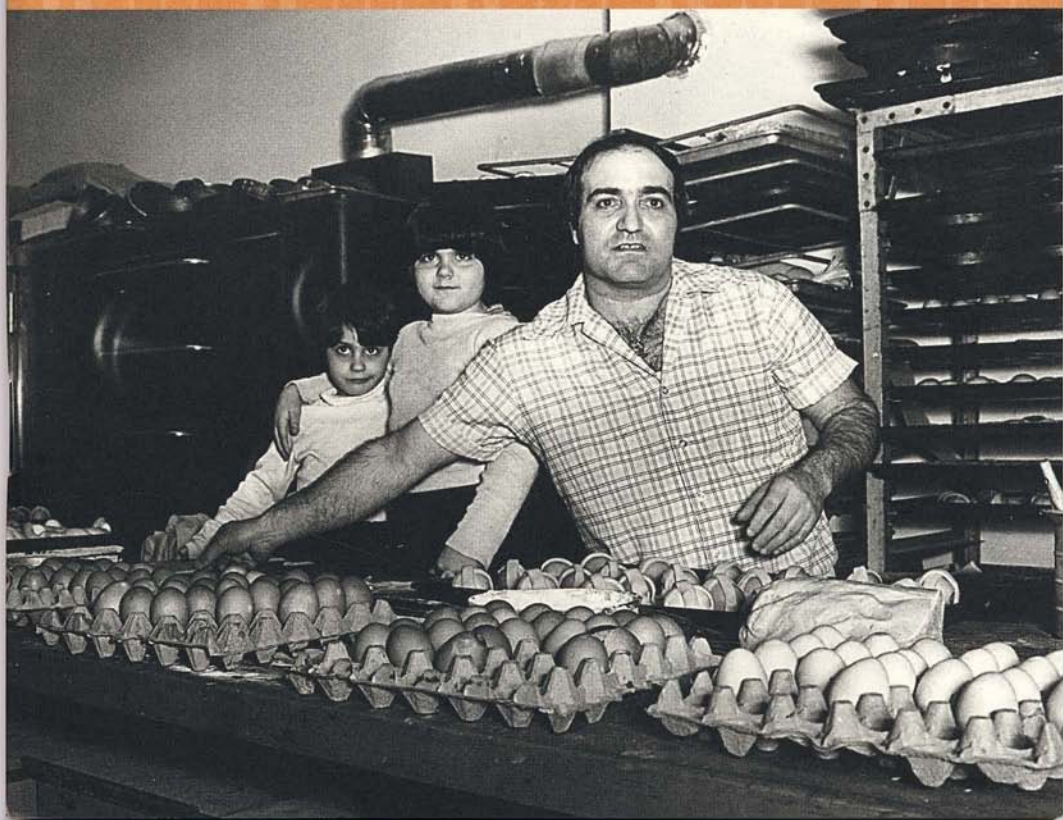


IT TAKES  
*Fifty Years*  
TO BE  
*A Chef*

RECOLLECTIONS OF  
GIORGIO CASTIELLO, PASTRY CHEF  
and one of his daughters, Mary Grace Castiello





*Basil Sahan*



*wheat pie*



*sesame*



*rum ball*



*quaresimali*



*il Blob*



*grandmother's fingers*



*orecchi di elefanti*



*brutto e bello*



*pignoli*



*casatiello*



*susamelli*



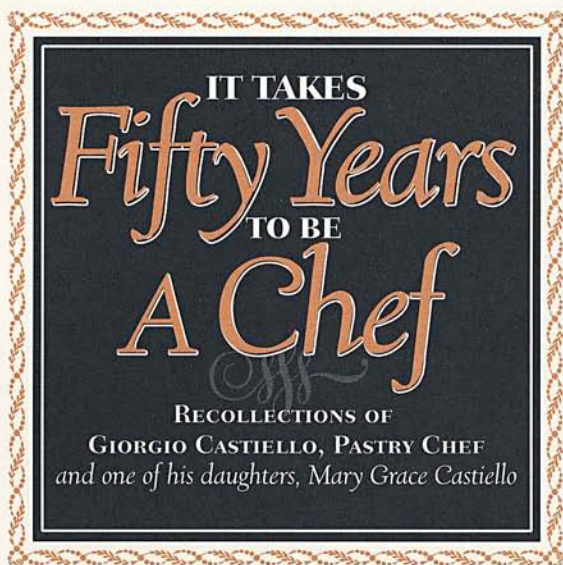
*bow tie*



*sfogliatellei*



*amaretti*

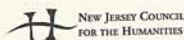


A chapbook from the "Vanishing Hoboken" series of the  
Hoboken Oral History Project

## Vanishing Hoboken

*The Hoboken Oral History Project*

A Project of The Hoboken Historical Museum  
and the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library



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Cover: Giorgio Castiello and daughters Jo Anna (first from left) and Mary Grace in the pastry shop's workroom, circa 1975.  
Back Cover: Giorgio Castiello in the pastry shop's workroom, 2006, photo by Robert Foster.

All images are courtesy of Giorgio Castiello, unless otherwise indicated. Contemporary photographs of Giorgio and Mary Grace Castiello in the pastry shop are by Robert Foster, 2006.

I GIVE YOU THIS [RECIPE FOR AMARETTI], because it's the easier one to do. The other ones can be complicated. Sometimes the flour is not as responsive, and I've got trouble myself. That's why even a mix from a book don't respond the ways it says in the book.

Sometimes the people see me working, and I don't count the number on the oven. They say "Why don't you put the alarm over here?" But I watch the oven. Before, when you cooked, there was no thermometer in the oven. In the Old Country, we used to cook with wood. There was no thermometer to put inside, and the way you check when the oven was ready, it's just from the whiteness of the vaulted oven. [When we'd do this macaroon paste, we'd] boil the almonds, take the skin off; then when they were ready, pass [it] in this machine four times, without egg whites, cranked by hand. Believe me, the heart was coming out, by hand.

But now, with almond paste and fondant, and all that stuff, you can buy good, commercial, ready-to-go—You don't have to do it. Thank God, and yet, with the machine, the fondant never comes out the same. [Doing it by hand, I can control the consistency.] That's the difference. That's why it takes 50 years to be a chef.

—GIORGIO CASTIELLO  
MARCH 9, 2006



GIORGIO CASTIELLO, 2006, PHOTO BY ROBERT FOSTER

## introduzione

# INTRODUCTION

Giorgio Castiello, who was born and trained as a pastry chef in Torre del Greco, Italy, has been the sole proprietor of Giorgio's Bakery, 1112 Washington Street, in Hoboken, since 1974. Giorgio's is known for traditional Italian pastries and cakes, many of which were originally meant for special holidays and feasts, but which Hobokenites have managed to cajole its namesake into making at other times of the year, including for American holidays like Thanksgiving.

Mr. Castiello was interviewed at the bakery on March 9, 2006, by Holly Metz and Robert Foster. He was accompanied by his oldest daughter, Mary Grace Castiello, who has been learning about pastry-making from her father since she was a teenager, and who also works the counter. A customer visiting the bakery is just as likely to meet Mary Grace as Giorgio, and the editor of this chapbook thought it only fitting to include some of the insightful comments she made while her father was being interviewed.

Everyone in the Castiello family has helped out at the bakery over the years—Giorgio's wife, Anna Marie, his second daughter, Jo Anna, and his son, Giorgio (known as George). George, explains Mary Grace, "got here in an unusual way—he took a plane. He's adopted. He was born in Korea and we adopted him when he was three, almost four." George currently lives in Seattle (the rest of the family is still in Hoboken) but Mary Grace notes that George "misses Hoboken a lot."

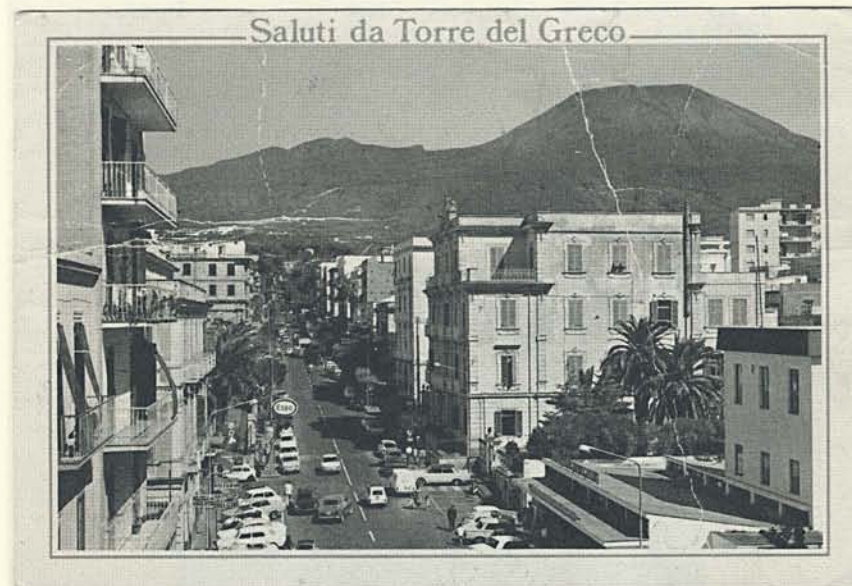
A final note: English is not Giorgio Castiello's native language, and the transcript of his interview, on which this publication is based, reflects this. But it also reflects Mr. Castiello's approach to his life and work, and his willingness to try new things—including being interviewed. The transcript of the original interview has been deposited in the Hoboken Public Library.



*l'inizio: dall'altra lato*

## BEGINNING: ON THE OTHER SIDE

I was born in 1935 in Torre del Greco, Napoli, right under the Vesuvio. The region is Campagna. Both of my parents were born over there—Maria Grazia Inno and Giovanni Castiello. My father was born in Cercola. Their parents—my mother's father (I never met the father of my father) was Raffaele Inno. He was born also in Torre del Greco.



POSTCARD OF TORRE DEL GRECO, NAPLES, ITALY, WHERE GIORGIO CASTIELLO WAS BORN.

[I learned my trade] over there. Well, it was a little hard, because it was just after the War. So there was not much to work with. There were no supplies. There was no food for eating. Imagine. When the war was finished, that's when it started, the Marshall Plan, and they're sending [supplies.] Mostly they gave to organizations like the church. And always [someone] finds a way to switch to the other side, to sell on the black market.

Mostly I go to work because I don't go no more to school. I don't know for what reason, but I tell Mama, "I don't want to go no more to school." That's the way I started.

There were six in the family, three boys and three girls. I am the oldest on the men's side. In the beginning, [I was] just to stay put in one place—this way my mother knows where I was, because [for] a very long time I was romping around in bad company, and she wanted to know where I was. So I went to this *pasticceria*. They had no flour or sugar. I just was there all day, cleaning.

Then they start the black market. From the Marshall Plan—sugar, flour, all the goods were coming in. There was another bakery not far from the area, and they started to pick up this stuff, because it was in the market. And it was more easy to get to, to get to work. So that's where I go, in the mornings, for two or three hours. I go there to work.

## *dieci ore per dieci centesimi* TEN HOURS FOR TEN CENTS

[To get the job] we just go and ask. I went. The first day was not bad. In the beginning, we just worked for some scraps, then ten hours for ten cents. Ten hours we worked. I sit because I never worked [before]. I was a little kid. I didn't want to work. The boss tell me, "This job is not for you." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you sit." It was from 10:00 in the morning to 10:00 at night!

Then I went to the other place. I was twelve years old. It was a common age to stay home. It was a hard time. Very hard time. My grandfather got a little farm, so the fruit never was missing [from our family's table.] There was fruit, there was bread, vegetables. But the meat was missing. And that was not just for me. That was a general situation. Though not for the black market: if you had money, you had meat.



A SIGN FROM GIORGIO'S.

*La vita durante la guerra: l'occupazione*

## LIFE DURING WARTIME: THE OCCUPATION

[My family wasn't in the baking business.] My father was working with Sub Appolt for the state railroad. At the time, when I was born, when he was working, that was wartime, so it was very, very difficult. I see very little of my father.

*Giorgio's oldest daughter, MARY GRACE CASTIELLO, who works with him in the bakery, INTERJECTS: My grandmother used to tell stories about how the Nazis would come into the house, looking for the men —the boys—to go send them to the labor camps. They would have to hide them in closets. Meanwhile, the Nazis would come and steal the potatoes — because they didn't have anything. They'd steal the potatoes that she had to feed them. "They took the potatoes that were supposed to feed the family!"*

I remember hiding. I was less than nine years old. There was a big garden in the back of the house. Sometimes I go there, other times I go on top of the roof. I didn't know whether they would come on top of the roof. That was in the course of the war, all these things.

The worst thing I remember—once they stop a train. The train was passing not far from me, about 200 yards; it was across the way. They come with the truck; as soon as the people came out of the train, they put them in the truck. Destination, I don't

know. They put the machine guns on the side, right in the middle, and all the men, they were in the truck. As soon as I saw this thing, I run away. They took them away.

*una famiglia a lavoro: torte, caffè, cammei*

## A FAMILY AT WORK: CAKES, COFFEE, CAMEOS

I was about ten years in the same place [at a pasticceria.] It was hard because all the hard work—like *sfogliatelle* and *fondant*— everything was by hand.

And my brothers? Well, when they started to grow up, things got a little better, and they also were working in a bar, taking coffee outside, like we used to do in Napoli. If you go over there, they still have coffee outside, in the village.

[My sister, the oldest of the girls], Luisa, she did the *cameo-bijouxteria*. It was all false stuff, like costume jewelry. They used to make it for the troops, Americans—in Napoli—to send back home. It was a new thing. She learned that across the street, from somebody who was in that professional trade.

*MARY GRACE: I'll add this: The town that my father is from—Torre del Greco—they are the world's foremost makers, creators, of cameos. So the tradition of cameo-making is very big there, as well as a kind of coral jewelry.*

sulla nave  
**ON SHIP**

Then my father went out of the house. He had a heart attack, so he didn't come back no more. I was still working in the same place.

My sister got engaged with somebody working on a ship, who introduced me to the company where he was working—it was a passenger ship—and I started working there. I was twenty-two years old. A helper. Because I don't have enough knowledge.

First I was on a cruise for Canada. That was about '57 or '58. It was a Neopolitan ocean liner, the *Irpinia*. They used to call this line the Rose Line, because it was supposed to be beautiful. [It started at] Palermo, the biggest town in Italy, all the way in the South. From there we went to Genoa, and then we went to Canada. That was the line. All the voyage was about a month. It would take about two weeks to go to Canada with the ship [and then two weeks back.]

But it was straight across the Atlantic. I was sick. The ship was dancing like a ball in the water—ka-boom, ka-boom. I was thinking I was dead. The chef, he look at me, he was telling the head baker, "But this guy—how does he live? Because he don't eat nothing." When I was working on shore, my mother, she cook for me when I go home. I don't like pasta and food warmed up; everything must be fresh. When I go on this ship, I see them boil water to cook pasta, to do soup, there was [such a] large quantity. You had to feed 1,000 people. The quantity



ON BOARD THE *Ascania*, 1958. (IN BOTH PHOTOS GIORGIO CASTIELLO IS AT FAR LEFT WEARING A CHEF'S TOQUE.)

and the smell makes me want to throw up: the smell, the meat, the fish.

Finally, I get [used to it], and I say it is better to work the ship. I was cleaning, baking, helping the pastry chef. The baking in the ship is separate from the kitchen.

I started to do two or three cruise ships coming over here, coming to America—a cruise from New York to the Caribbean, or all around the islands. But there was a negative side; you go home after ten or twelve months. I was always working. And there were five people in the bakery on the ship. That was the time I said, “I don’t want to work no more on ships.” That was 1969, the last New Year’s cruise.

How many years did I work for the ships? I started at twenty-two. I finished at thirty-five. [I took care of my family.] It is a custom on our side, the man take care... So my mother, she was a poor woman. She was desperate after the death of my father. “I gonna help you.” Honoring their memory. I promised to help them. [Everyone in the family helped.] Just to make the boat go ahead, it takes the participation of everybody. But I was the one taking the flag in the hand.

## *L'arrivo a Hoboken* **COMING TO HOBOKEN**

Then I started this other life.

How did I get to Hoboken? Accidentally. I was working in a bakery in Brooklyn. They used to do bread and baking. The boss didn’t speak too much English. He was Sicilian. Most of the time there was a girl answering the telephone, and there was me working by the telephone. This guy called, and I answered the telephone. He said, “You know, I’ve got a bakery I want to sell.”

I was already working in three places when I come to America: two in Brooklyn and one on Long Island. I tell my wife, “If I kept working in these conditions, I’d go back where I came from.” I was working with no benefits, nothing at all. Till today there are better benefits in Italy than over here. That’s what I told my wife.

So this chance come. I come with him. Around this time, in March, he was doing *zeppole*, everything from the can. So he [the owner of the bakery] said “Let me give you a nice *zeppole*.” Not to make it look bad, I ate the *zeppole*. I almost throw up everything when I go out. That’s the truth. The cream was so bad.

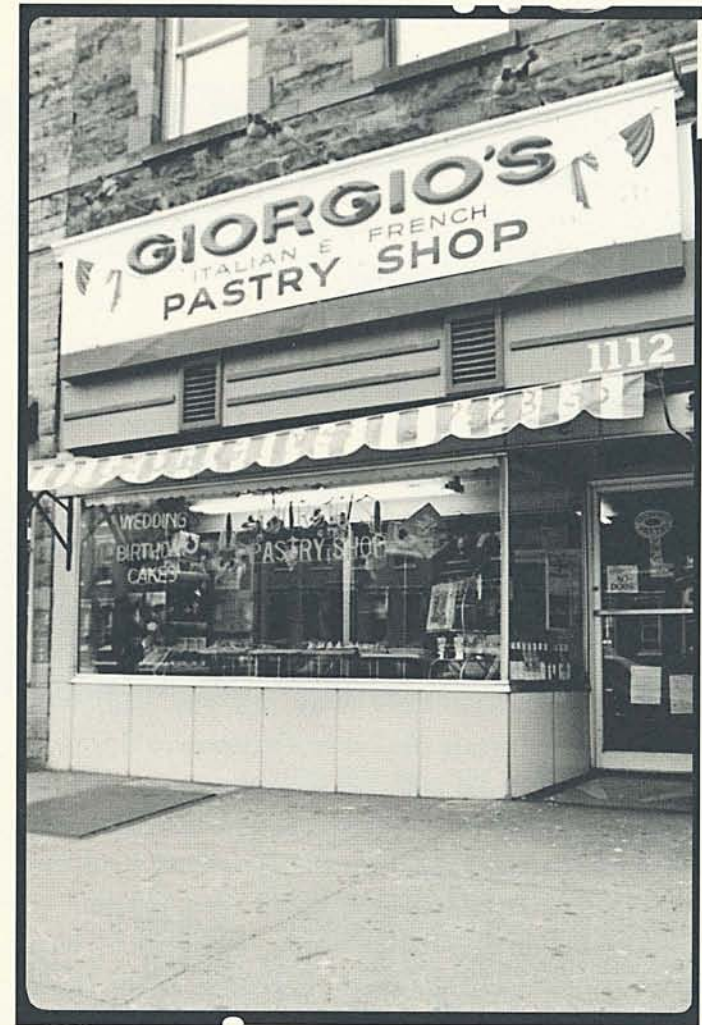
So we talked. He said, “For real, you want this bakery?” I said, “Yeah, for real.” I had no money. I said, “How much you want?” \$8,000. He tried to sell this place, but nobody wants it because at the time everything was changing over here. And the place [the bakery that was at the location before] was so

bad in Hoboken. It was so bad nobody want to come over here. I don't know all this business. I wanted to change. I took a chance.

And that's what I did. Luckily, God wanted it in some way. This guy was supposed to go back to Italy—the one who owned this place. He said, "I've got to go back to Italy." "If you go over there, you can take the money in Italia." I tell one of my brothers-in-law, Gigi, "Do me a favor. Give this money to this guy." So he paid the money there [and my loan was to Gigi.]

But the main thing, when I got a chance to come over here, I ask my wife, "Do you want to come over there?" She said "no" right away. She don't want to come because we were living in Brooklyn. I say, "You don't want to come, I'm gonna go back and forth. I'm gonna go." At 10:00 in the morning, she say, "Okay. I gonna come, too." She was praying to some saint that everything be smooth and nice. That's what she said.

But when she come over here, she was a little—the way it was in Hoboken, you know... [A lot of buildings were vacant in the seventies, with windows boarded up.] For me, I already see Hoboken before I was coming over here. Once I was in the shipyard. But she said, "I was praying, saying the rosary." So here we are. It's thirty-one years that we're here.



EXTERIOR OF GIORGIO'S ITALIAN & FRENCH PASTRY SHOP,  
HOBOKEN, 1979

*La pasticceria di Giorgio*  
**GIORGIO'S BAKERY**

It had been "Uptown Bakery." Because in town there was two brothers. Schoening was downtown, and this was the other brother. They were here, I think, at least from the beginning of the 1900s. The oven and the refrigerators [I still use] were from [the former owners]. This machine is still the same, and the tables, too. This stuff is Deco, these cabinets, about the '30s and '40s. All the cabinets are the same ones.

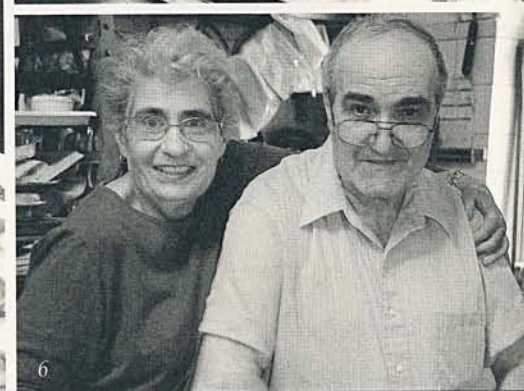
I do [then] what I do today. And some things, they don't take. Well, they start to like it, because everything I do at the time, I change every day, in the window. But I was asking myself why the people living across the street, why they don't come and buy. Then I know. The people, they wasn't coming because whatever it was before was so bad. You start to hear the whole story, why this guy [fail] with three people [trying the bakery business at this location], and then he take the money and go, and the probability was they thought it was the same idea with me. So lucky me, I got the experience I got, and was in a different way. You know what I mean?

[Baking on the ship], it's more like the hotel business, but I learned the basics of baking on the shore. That's what helped me a lot, too — the knowledge, linking the things together. And the knowledge of the Spanish language helped me, because I was going around all the Spanish places [on the ships.] When we come, as a family, most of the people were speaking Spanish [in Hoboken, in the 1970s.]



*INSIDE GIORGIO'S PASTRY SHOP, LOOKING OUT TO  
WASHINGTON STREET, 1979.*

The first year I used to come down at 4:00 a.m., just for [baking] bread. To do bread was not my business, so I just kill myself, and the people don't buy, because there was so many groceries around, that they could buy over there. Then most of the bread I had to throw out, even if I was selling five cents or less, because the people, they don't come and buy here.



MARY GRACE interjects: We had a lot of people from Maxwell House coming here.

Once in a while somebody from the back come [the west side of Hoboken.] If they don't have to go uptown, they don't go. They always go downtown. Then someone say, "How long you over here?" Thirty-one years. "We never know." You know what I mean? That's the way it is. You don't believe, but they don't move from where they live. You know what I mean?



HANDMADE SIGN ADVERTISES  
SOME OF GIORGIO'S SPECIAL TREATS.

## *Dolce tradizionali* TRADITIONAL PASTRIES

Special pastries and cakes? There are different ones at different times of the year. Right now [we are doing]—*zeppole* and *sfinigi*. As a matter of fact, I started St. Joseph when I come over here. Yes, there are two kinds. One is *Napolitano zeppole*, and the *sfinigi* is Sicilian. The cream is a little heavy, with ricotta, diced fruit [for the St. Joseph's *zeppole*.] So that's the difference, the cream inside. But even the base of the *zeppole*, the dough, it comes like a ball. To cook this ball, it takes more time, than to cook the *zeppole*. There's more dough. This one is for St. Joseph, it's more like a *beignet*. This one is a sophisticated *zeppole*; they take more attention. The kind that the feast has is more like a dumpling. It just has a little yeast inside, salt, and oil and fat or whatever they put inside, and it's nice because it's always warm with sugar on top. You can't go wrong. So everybody like.

And we make the wheat pie, or "Italian grain pie" for Easter. It's supposed to be for Easter, but now we're doing Christmas too; we're doing Thanksgiving sometimes, when it is requested. If I can do, I do.

What is the tradition? Well, because in old time there was not too much to do and not too much money to spend. So the sophisticated ones, they do an Easter pie, and the ones without the money make *pastiera*, which is made just with the pasta, a crême caramel inside with a nice, grated orange inside—flavor—a little cinnamon, a little vanilla. They cook—how you call it? Angel hair. It cooks fast. And

instead of putting on sauce, they put a little crème caramel—sugar on top.

MARY GRACE: But also at home they do like the rice pie. Instead of doing grain in the pie, [in another region], they'll do rice. The other one, during Lent—which we don't do anymore because only three people wanted it—is the Sanguinaccio, which is chocolate pudding that's made with (traditionally, in Italy) pig's blood. And for the longest time we couldn't get pig's blood, so we were doing it with beef blood. If you didn't know that the magic ingredient was in there, you wouldn't know. Because I think that was used as a thickener.

You can do it like a cream. You don't taste the pig's blood. As a matter of fact, you cook it on the side, and then you do a syrup and thin it out. You thin it out with the sugar, and you can eat it in this way, with a biscuit. In Italy, they used to do *savoardi* [like a ladyfinger].

This is the second year I miss this *sanguinaccio* because it is a pain in the neck to do. There are people still asking for it. The ones who ask for it know. But for the new ones, they hear about the blood, and they get scared. Yucky. It's just like a pudding. It's healthy.

Also there's sweet *casatiello* pastry, with colored eggs on top, for Easter.

MARY GRACE: And there's another one—*scarcello*. The sweet one, with eggs, that's for Easter, too, [a kind of bread with colored eggs wrapped inside.] There are different versions.

People at home— they'll make it differently in each family.

Oh, you mean the rustic one—the *casatiello* with cold cuts. One is made with lard inside. In Italy, it is a tradition—the first day after Easter, one day in my town—I don't know what they do in other towns—they go for a picnic in the mountains on the first day, and the second day they go to the beach. They do all these things to carry outside the house and do a picnic with the friends. Especially at the time is fava beans with a nice glass of wine, a piece of *pastiera*, eggplant *parmigiana*, and, of course *casatiello* (the bread with the lard.) I did most of the time. Most of the time I did.



INSIDE GIORGIO'S SHOP, CIRCA 1975-76



INSIDE GIORGIO'S SHOP, CIRCA 1975-76

MARY GRACE: *The lard bread is more like a "puff" pastry. So instead of using butter—because that's another thing in southern Italy, they do lard more than butter.*

Otherwise it's not *casatiello*. It has to have a taste, there's no sugar inside. Also, you can put some prosciutto, salami, romano cheese, bacon, pepper. Just cut a little piece and put inside, one little piece. Mostaccioli (mustaches) we make at Christmas. That's Christmas stuff.

MARY GRACE: *The long ones, quaresimali—that's all the time. Sosamelli—those are the other*

*hard ones, shaped like an "S." That's really a Christmas cookie. Now we make them all year-round.*

These are cookies without "eggs," without fattening—

MARY GRACE: *Only egg on top. There's an egg wash, for a little "crackling." But nothing inside.*

*Cibi favoriti della Madre Patria*

## FAVORITE FOODS FROM HOME

My favorite meal that my mother made? Tomatoes and basil. It was the main thing. *Ragu*, not too much, because we couldn't afford meat at that time.

The fruit had a different taste, too. Where I come from there was a little farm all around town. Now it's no more this farm, because mostly it's all cement. Like they import fruit over there, they import over there, too, because the request is too much. They can't do it. So everything, all around, wherever you go. Before, you could go into market, and you could smell all the peaches, the apples, the pears. You could smell the fruit, the freshness. Without even talking about fresh figs in the summer. On the other side, they grow the same oranges, they have a different taste.

[Even more,] if you're in my town, one in the middle of town does a dish one way, another one, five miles away, will put something in it in a different way. You're going Sorrento and find the *parmigiana* with the chocolate inside. They have a sweet taste. In Torre del Greco, they do it without the chocolate.

*I Biscotto di Basil Tahan ed il "blob"*

## BASIL TAHAN COOKIE AND THE BLOB

MARY GRACE: [We've used the names given by customers for some pastries and named some after customers.] Well, the customers named that cookie "The Blob." But now we have coined the walnut cookie "The Basil Tahan cookie," as a joke, though. Because Basil, [a customer], loves the walnut cookies at Christmas, so, as a joke, I decided to call them that. Now it's sort of the Basil Tahan cookie, because he's taken a little card, and carries it with him.

This guy, we know each other from the time I am over here, almost, over twenty years. He's faithful.

MARY GRACE: *Do we have eccentric customers? It's Hoboken. We have lots of eccentric customers. I think it's more personalities than requests. People like their things their own, certain way, but I think it's more the personalities behind.*



A SIGN FROM GIORGIO'S

*una ricetta spontanea: gli amaretti di Giorgio*

## OFF THE TOP OF HIS HEAD, A RECIPE FOR MACAROON AMARETTI BY GIORGIO CASTIELLO

All the recipes are in my head. Thank God it still work, the head. I just make whatever is enough for—you talk about cookies or biscotti for a week or five days. That's all. I just work for people [who come to the bakery.] I don't take too much outside. Whatever I sell, I sell for the customer, they come. So for me, there is no necessity to do a hundred pounds of flour in one mix, then I can go away on vacation. No. I'm going to do a ten-pound mix, and if I need another ten pounds, I'm going to do it again, in one week—or in two days, three days, if that's necessary. That's the difference between now and thirty-one years back. The freshness. And details. Whatever you do, you have to do good, constantly. People can tell.

MARY GRACE: *Can I add my two cents? My father is very concerned about doing the right job, whatever it is, so he can't really—he can't bear, I think, the thought of not putting out something that is a good representation of whatever it is, and whoever he is as a person, too—if that makes any sense.*

[Giorgio smiles and continues.] The macaroon amaretti. It's very easy to do. This one is just almond paste. I make about fifty pounds. About twenty pounds of

sugar, granulated sugar, and about a gallon-and-a-half egg whites. This is one thing—buy the almond paste. You can buy the almond paste in the supermarket, whatever you want— $\frac{1}{10}$ ,  $\frac{1}{15}$ , this amount, whatever they want to do, they do. Split and divide it in the way they like.

What else? You can put it in the machine, add the egg whites a little at a time, break the almond paste, then start to add the sugar, too, add a little more egg white, adding still more sugar until they blend together. Otherwise, they get all crumbly. To break it, it comes out smooth. After this process, it is ready to work. You can make about an inch and a half [each piece] with the pastry bag, [piping by hand.]

You can put it on parchment paper [on the tray.] The oven is about 350 degrees, 375, depending on how it works. It spreads a little bit. Not much. Sometimes the almond paste is more dry than other times, and you have to add a little more thing. But this comes with experience, of course.

After that, just put a little powdered sugar on top, before you cook. This way, it expands into in the cracks, the sugar. You know the *amaretti*, no? About fifteen minutes. You have to control it, because in the house it's not like this oven.

I give you this one, because it's the more easy to do. The other ones can be complicated. Sometimes the flour is not as responsive, and I've got trouble myself. That's why even a mix from a book don't respond the ways it says in the book.

Sometimes the people see me working, and I don't count the number on the oven. They say "Why

don't' you put the alarm over here?" But I watch the oven. But before, when you cooked, there was no thermometer in the oven. In the Old Country, we used to cook with wood. There was no thermometer to put inside, and the way you check when the oven was ready, it's just from the whiteness of the vaulted oven. You can realize it's about 400-500 degrees.

So you prepare whatever you have to prepare, put the stuff inside—first the things that need a hot oven, then the ones for low temperature. There was no thermometer. You cook the sugar for the fondant, there was no thermometer. Then, when they start to do the thermometer inside, and you cooked the sugar to 220 degrees temperature, you [still] did everything by hand, checked by hand.

[When we'd do this macaroon paste, we'd] boil the almonds, take the skin off; then when they are ready, pass them in this machine four times, without egg whites, cranked by hand. Believe me, the heart was coming out, by hand.

In Italy, to do the job this [machine] does, in the corner was a table, with a big stick of wood, with a triangle. You put the dough on top and start to work all around and then you do it again. Yes, you can pound it, because the dough starts to get mature for whatever you want to do. Otherwise, it stays hard and you can't do anything.

But now, with almond paste and fondant, you can buy good, commercial, ready-to-go—You don't have to do it. Thank God, and yet, with the machine, the fondant never comes out the same consistency.

MARY GRACE: I think, on the flip side, what he means is that you would think—like a commercial place, with an almond or macaroon paste or something, because they have all the machines to control everything, they get a much more consistent product. Whereas, he was able to have a more consistent product by doing it by hand.

That's the difference. That's why it takes fifty years to be a chef.

MARY GRACE: Again, so much of what we do is so by-hand, that we have more control over what comes out. You can taste the difference.

Everything is Italian stuff. You can't learn these things in American baking. Traditional. As a matter of fact, when I came here, I was surprised to see everybody [in America] called a chef, younger people. Over there, [in Italy] before you become a chef, you have to be fifty years old. You know what I mean? Long, long, long. You have to wash a lot of pots. That's the way it was. That's not the way it is now. Everything change, even over there. That's how it was then. Now I don't think it's the same way.

MARY GRACE: Am I being trained? Yes, I guess so. And yes, I'm not fifty!. But at the same time, I have to put my time in. I learned the work ethic young. I know I'm in a unique situation, and I appreciate it. But that unique situation has good sides and bad sides.

She's right.

MARY GRACE: Is there something I particularly like to make? I don't think one thing more than — no, I'm kind of mood dependent, as with everything else in life. I have to say, yesterday we were making sfogliatelle and I've just started making them, helping him actually form them. They're a pain in the neck to make, I think, because you have to be very careful. He doesn't like to waste things.

I waste nothing. This is another quality of the chef.

MARY GRACE: See. He doesn't throw out anything. So for a long time, I would just shy away from that. Because better he does it and makes it the way he likes, because he has to have things the way he likes. But now, with the resurgence of its popularity— let's put it that way—I help make the little ones. So yesterday afternoon, that was the whole afternoon, I was making the sfogliatelle, of which I was very proud, because this was a second, whole, complete tray, that I completed by myself. And it just took forever. To do a tray? It takes him about forty-five minutes. It took me about two hours to do a tray.

*Una torta per la signora Libertà ed i suoi  
3.000 ospiti*

## BAKING A CAKE FOR MISS LIBERTY AND 3,000 GUESTS

That was 1986. It was the big "bash," the restoration of Miss Liberty. That was a cake I did for the Port Authority, for 3,000 people.

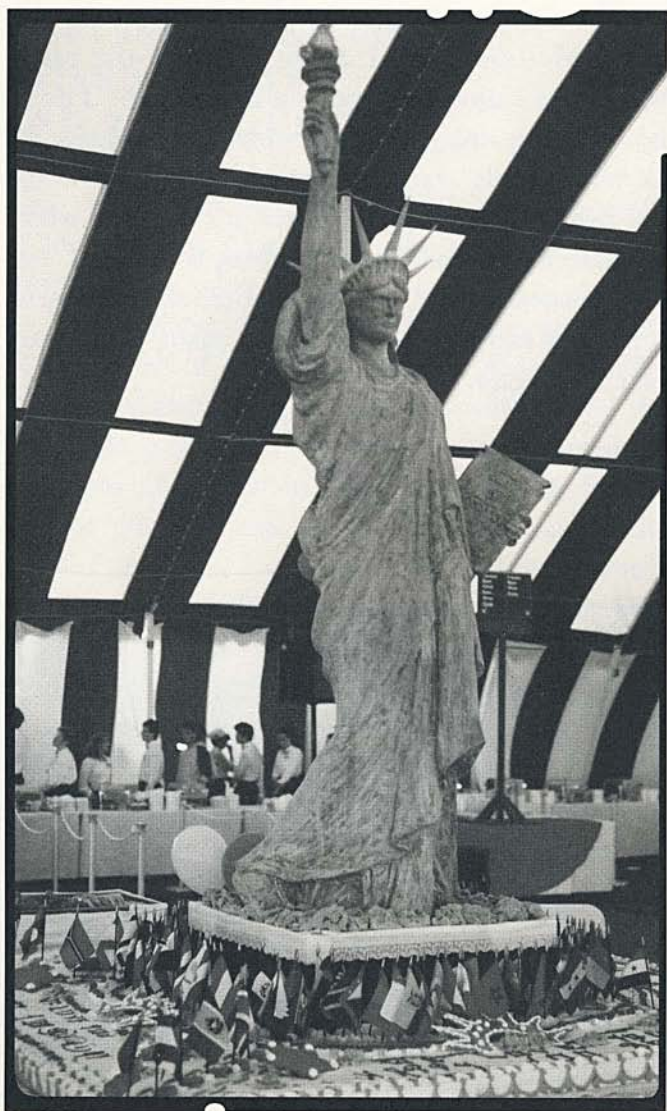
They tell me, Port Authority, before, [it used to be that] even if somebody sneezed they ordered a cake. Now everything is tight. But when I did this cake, this guy called me who always ordered the cakes, for all the stations. And he said, "We have to do this thing so and so. Are you able to do this cake?" I say, "Yes, I am able to do this, but there is just one problem, I am not organized for this work, big scale. I just have one freezer. You need a lot of room in the freezer or refrigerator. It's not a thing you can do in one day." He said, "OK, just for this you have no problem. Start to do the cake. We are going to send a freezer truck every day. Whatever is ready, they put in the truck, and the day of the feast, we're gonna go downtown and you'll put it together there."

A cake of vanilla and chocolate. I did the sheets one by one, which was about forty sheets. The day before, I have to get the cream, and all the instruments for work all around, whatever I needed for work. Then I put it together over there, finish the top, and do the decoration. That's why it take me so long. The cake was big, like half of this store.

I was almost all day over there, [working.] The Tall Ships, they were passing, and I didn't see nothing. They gave me the ticket for the night for the party, and I didn't go. I wasn't there for the party. Well, it was a time I've "got a lot in my head." I don't know English today; imagine when I come here. To talk with people, think of things all around. It's not easy. Even in the proper business, it's not easy when you go to a new country. Everything is different. But I like whatever I did, the experience, new life, new things. If I had to start everything again, I can start everything again.



GIORGIO CASTIELLO DECORATING A CAKE FOR 3,000 ON SITE,  
BATTERY PARK, NEW YORK CITY, 1986.



LADY LIBERTY ATOP THE CAKE MADE BY GIORGIO CASTIELLO FOR  
3,000 CELEBRANTS, NEW YORK CITY, 1986.

## MACAROON AMARETTI BY GIORGIO CASTIELLO

*makes about fifty pounds*

About twenty pounds of sugar, granulated sugar, and about a gallon-and-a-half egg whites. This is one thing—buy the almond paste. You can buy the almond paste in the supermarket, whatever you want—1/10, 1/15, this amount, whatever they want to do, they do. Split and divide it in the way they like.

You can put it in the machine, add the egg whites a little at a time, break the almond paste, then start to add the sugar, too, add a little more egg white, adding still more sugar until they blend together. Otherwise, they get all crumbly. To break it, it comes out smooth. After this process, it is ready to work. You can make about an inch and a half with the pastry bag.

You can put it on parchment paper [on the tray.] The oven is about 350 degrees, 375, depending on how it works. It spreads a little bit. Not much. Sometimes the almond paste is more dry than other times, and you have to add a little more thing. But this comes with experience, of course.

After that, just put a little powdered sugar on top, before you cook. This way, it expands into in the cracks, the sugar. You know the amaretti, no? About fifteen minutes. You have to control it, because in the house it's not like this oven.

## The Hoboken Oral History Project

"Vanishing Hoboken," an oral history project, was initiated in 2000 by members of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Museum in response to dramatic physical, social, and economic changes in the city of Hoboken over the preceding twenty years, and to the consequent "vanishing" of certain aspects of public life.

For much of the last century, Hoboken was a working-class town, home to many waves of immigrant families, and to families who journeyed from the southern regions of the U.S. and from Puerto Rico — all looking for work. Hoboken, close to ports of entry in New Jersey and New York, offered a working waterfront and many factories, as well as inexpensive housing. Each new wave of arrivals — from Germany, Ireland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Cuba, and Puerto Rico — found work on the waterfront, at the Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, Lipton Tea, Tootsie Roll, Maxwell House, or in numerous, smaller garment factories. Then the docks closed in the 1960s; and factory jobs dwindled as Hoboken's industrial base relocated over the 1970s and '80s. Maxwell House, once the largest coffee roasting plant in the world, was the last to leave, in 1992. In the go-go economy of the 1980s, Hoboken's row houses, just across the river from Manhattan, were targeted by developers to young professionals seeking an easy commute to New York City. Historically home to ever-changing waves of struggling families — who often left when they became prosperous — Hoboken began in the mid-1980s to experience a kind of reverse migration, where affluent condominium-buyers replaced poor and working class tenants, many of whom had been forced out by fire, through condo-conversion buy-outs, or through rising rents. More recently, building construction has further altered the face of Hoboken, as modern towers are rising up alongside the late-19th century row houses that once spatially defined our densely populated, mile-square city and provided its human scale.

The Hoboken Oral History Project was inaugurated with the goal of capturing, through the recollections of longtime residents, "Vanishing Hoboken" — especially its disappearing identity as a working-class city and its tradition of multi-ethnic living. The Project focuses on collecting the oral histories of residents who can evoke Hoboken's vanished industries through their recollections of employment in the city's many factories and on the waterfront, and those who can capture for present and future generations the ways in which

Hoboken's rich ethnic and cultural diversity was once evident in the everyday life of the city. In 2001, with the support of the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the Hoboken Oral History Project transcribed and edited several oral histories to produce a series of "Vanishing Hoboken" chapbooks. Since 2002, ten chapbooks have been published in the series, with the support of the Historical Commission and the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Vanishing Hoboken Chapbooks

The editor of this series chose to call these small booklets "chapbooks," a now rarely heard term for a once-common object. And so, a brief explanation is now required: A chapbook, states the most recent edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, is a

...small, inexpensive, stitched tract formerly sold by itinerant dealers, or chapmen, in Western Europe and in North America. Most chapbooks were 5 x 4 inches in size and were made up of four pages (or multiples of four), illustrated with woodcuts. They contained tales of popular heroes, legends and folklore, jests, reports of notorious crimes, ballads, almanacs, nursery rhymes, school lessons, farces, biblical tales, dream lore, and other popular matter. The texts were mostly rough and anonymous, but they formed the major parts of secular reading and now serve as a guide to the manners and morals of their times.

Chapbooks began to appear in France at the end of the 15th century. Colonial America imported them from England but also produced them locally. These small booklets of mostly secular material continued to be popular until inexpensive magazines began to appear during the early 19th century.

Although some of the chapbooks in the Vanishing Hoboken series are considerably longer than their earlier counterparts, others are nearly as brief. They are larger in size, to allow us to use a reader-friendly type size. But all resemble the chapbooks of yesteryear, as they contain the legends, dreams, crime reports, jokes, and folklore of our contemporaries. One day, perhaps, they might even serve as guides to the "manners and morals" of our city, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.



PHOTOS, MIDDLE SPREAD (PAGES 16-17), CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

1. GIORGIO CASTIELLO AND DAUGHTERS JO ANNA (FIRST FROM LEFT) AND MARY GRACE IN THE PASTRY SHOP'S WORKROOM, CIRCA 1975.
- 2 & 3. GIORGIO CASTIELLO BRAIDING AND ROLLING PASTRY, 2006,  
PHOTO BY ROBERT FOSTER.
4. GIORGIO IN HIS WORKROOM WITH HIS WIFE  
ANNA MARIE CASTIELLO, CIRCA 1975.
5. GIORGIO CUTTING PASTRY WHILE MARY GRACE AND HIS WIFE ANNA  
MARIE WORK IN THE BACKGROUND, 2006, PHOTO BY ROBERT FOSTER.
6. GIORGIO AND ANNA MARIE CASTIELLO, 2006,  
PHOTO BY ROBERT FOSTER.
7. MARY GRACE CASTIELLO, 2006, PHOTO BY ROBERT FOSTER.
8. WITH TRAYS SPREAD OUT IN FRONT OF HER,  
A VERY YOUNG MARY GRACE CASTIELLO WATCHES AND LEARNS WHILE  
ADULT PASTRY MAKERS CONTINUE WORK BEHIND HER.



*Basil Sahan*



*wheat pie*



*sesame*



*rum ball*



*guaresimali*



*il Blob*



*grandmother's fingers*



*orecchi di elefanti*



*brutto e bello*



*pignoli*



*casatiello*



*susamelli*



*bow tie*



*sfegliatellei*



*amaretti*



*A Project of  
The Friends of the Hoboken Library and  
the Hoboken Historical Museum*