

**CDC:** Congratulations on your latest release, *Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy*. Where and what does the 'heart of Italy' mean to you? And what can the reader/cook find there?

**LMB:** This book is an homage to the first Italian immigrants that came from what I call the 'heart of Italy', such as Le Marche, Basilicata, Calabria, etc. Everyone thinks of Tuscany, Rome or Venice when they think of visiting Italy. I wanted to seek out these lesser known regions, uncovering where no tourist has gone before and where the core or 'the heart' is revealed. This is where you find the village farmer raising goats and chickens, where the artisan is mastering bread, cheese and wine. It permeates the unique beauty of Italy.



**CDC:** Where are you from in Italy?

**LMB:** I am from Friuli Venezia Giulia. It is northeast near the island of Sardinia.

**CDC:** Does the heart of Italy also mean the core of Italy gastronomically?

**LMB:** Yes. Food is a slow evolution. Food evolves in a slow fashion. We, in America, often take the liberty of moving faster than nature is designed. In doing so, we are doing harm to ourselves. Food comes from the earth and should therefore begin and end there. With no preservatives or shortcuts. Whole foods -- God's food -- whatever you want to refer to it as, should always be respected. Eat seasonally, eat locally and eat foods as close to the source as possible. And cook them with simplicity.

**CDC:** As a tourist, what should our expectations be when visiting Italy?

**LMB:** Embrace Italy as it is -- without dictating how it should be. The Italians respond to what the Americans want. But the American tourist should totally surrender to Italy's culture, since after all that is what they went to Italy to experience in the first place. If you can't get cheese on your clam sauce -- so be it.

**CDC:** As chef and owner of 6 restaurants, producer, vintner, TV host, author, and owner of a product line, what special ingredient do you bring to each enterprise to achieve success?

**LMB:** First and foremost, I bring my passion. Then comes my knowledge and validity. If my name is on it, I stand by that. Next is great collaboration. I have my daughter and son helping me. My son helps with the restaurants. My daughter does the research in art and production. Her husband helps with my product line. Behind that I have a tremendous staff that believes in what I do and they have their personal passion that they bring to each project.

**CDC:** This month, [ciaodc.com](http://ciaodc.com) is giving special emphasis to family during the holiday season. What does family mean to you and how do you incorporate it into your work and life? How has family influenced you and your life's work?

**LMB:** Family is at the base of everything. Everything I have become and everything I do is with and because of my family. My mother is 88 and still lives with me. She makes coffee for me every morning. My granddaughter lives two blocks away. I do not think I would have a peaceful existence if I did not communicate with my family. They are everything that I am. Family gives me so much and I give the same in return.

As for my show, I tape it in my home. My mother lives upstairs and the grandchildren come by. For Italians the family is everything. It is such a comforting feeling to share both the burdens and joys of life with others. This sense of family has translated to my fans who often share stories of cooking and eating together.

**CDC:** I love your quote or philosophy, "It's not only the food on the table that makes a meal, it's the people who join around the table who bring the meal to life."

**LMB:** Food is really nothing if not shared. Food is the basis of our existence. We want to live life together and food is a conduit for that. It opens us up. When you dine at the table, your senses open up and you immediately connect with each other. The table is very forgiving. Food should be revered. Eat it right and treat it right.

In Italy, we have an old saying: "*Tavola e letto non porta rispetto.*" *The table and the bed should be a place of respect...a place to relax and to be open.*

**CDC:** You often end your show with, "*Tutti a tavola a mangiare.*" *What does that mean?*

**LMB:** The literal translation is, "Everyone come to the table to eat." Figuratively, it means everyone needs to be at the table at the same time. Since everything with Italians in the kitchen is timing, when you are called to eat, it's because the pasta is ready, and being late could risk it being *al dente* or not *al dente*!

**CDC:** Why are food and the art of dining so revered in the Italian culture?

**LMB:** The Italians realize that food is the basis of living well – for nourishment as much as for enjoyment and connection with one another. For example, the espresso break is still prevalent today in Italy -- which is really a break to relax, communicate and an opportunity to connect.

**CDC:** Are there specific holiday traditions that you and your family celebrate?

**LMB:** Christmas Eve is fish only. One fish dish in particular is *bacala montecato*. My Dad loved Christmas Eve, and this dish was his favorite. Whenever we prepare the *bacala*, Dad is with us. I encourage your family to do the same this Christmas Eve in honor of your

**father and all loved ones that are no longer with us. It's a very healing way of celebrating the holiday.**

**CDC: Is there a favorite holiday meal or dessert that we can share with the [ciaodc.com](http://ciaodc.com) community?**

**LMB: Yes, Chocolate Bread Parfait. It's very rustic and typifies the heart of Italy regions I speak of in my book. It uses all recycled ingredients and requires no baking!**



**CDC: Have you frequented Washington, D.C.? What about D.C. reminds you of Italy?**

**LMB: Yes, I come to town 4 to 6 times a year. My daughter attended Georgetown University, so I am very familiar with it and I like the city a lot. I think that the Palladian architecture in Washington, D.C. resembles Italy. There is an Italian saying that I think of when I think about Washington, D.C. – "Una citta a il museo duomo" -- A city is like a museum. It is not overwhelming but harmonious and pleasing to the eye and soul. That's what I feel when I walk in D.C.**

**CDC: As I mentioned, my father recently passed away from cancer. We will be spending this holiday honoring him by preparing his favorite dishes, song and cheer. How will you be spending your holiday?**

**LMB: We typically spend the entire day of Christmas cooking and resting, but this year we would like to do for others. My family and I will be spending the afternoon of Christmas in my home for lunch and then for dinner we will go to one of my restaurants in New York and open it for the families of children being treated in the city for cancer. Our goal is to have recovering children and their families spend their holiday outside of the hospital and in our home (of restaurant staff, volunteers and family) with a homemade meal, Christmas gifts and togetherness.**

**CDC: Grazie Lidia e Buon Natale!**

**Ciao!**

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