

Pizza According to Mario

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I found the article "Pizza Passion" to be good, but you left out a lot of information about pizza's history. The following is some information that could have been added.

My name is Mario A. Gualtieri; I was born in Chicago, IL, at West Grand Ave in 1927. Which means I go way back. My mom and father, my oldest brother, and all of my aunts and uncles were born in Calabria, Italy (Southern Italy.) I know more about the start of Pizza then you can imagine.

When my Dad came to this country, he worked at the Rite Die Co., until one day the doctor told him that he had to quit that job because of his health. This is way back in 1932. At that time, the house we lived in needed a heating system. So he contacted a man name Mr. Bosso of the Crane Co. that sold heating equipment. Mr. Bosso sold Dad a cold-stoker-furnace and also showed him how to install it. Mr. Bosso said that he did such a good job, that he helped Dad start a heating business. He needed a job, so he started the Harding Heating Company, on Chicago Ave. He became one of the largest heating contractors in the City of Chicago at that time.

My Mom, Grandma and Aunts would all make their bread and spaghetti sauce on a Monday, as would many Italian families. Like many Italians, when my brothers and sister would come home from school hunger and Dad from work, it would be time for supper. While Mom was busy finishing the bread & spaghetti gravy, she would give us a snack. We would have what Italians called 'Pizzajel', That was a slice of freshly baked bread with the sauce, graded cheese and crushed pepper on it. Some times we would have it with sausage & bell peppers also. Then later in time, we would take some bread dough, roll it out and put spaghetti gravy on it and then bake it. After more time passed, we started adding mozzarella cheese, sausage, and bell pepper, or what we had and liked at the time. (When we started doing this, it was referred to as just Pizza). My Mom would sometimes make bread and put a little coating of spaghetti gravy, cheese or anchovies in the middle, she said that was what her mother did in Italy.

In 1934 there was a old man that lived 4 doors down that street that had no job and had his wife make Pizzjel about 5" square, and he would have them in a big pan, and carried it on his head and going down the street yelling "PIZZJEL, PIZZJEL" and would sell them for 5 cent each.

Then in 1935 'Surlados' a tavern at that time on Chicago Ave. started to sell Pizza in his tavern.

In 1944 my Dad gave up the Heating Bus, & turned it over to my brother Sam. Then Dad moved to Dallas City, IL. A friend told him about a large 2-story building called 'Burg Building' that was for sale. So Dad bought it and remolded it. He made a restaurant on the 2nd. Floor and called it the 'Italian Village'. On the 1st. Floor he started the 'Dallas City Packing Co.' Where we made bottled spaghetti gravy, Italian dinners and frozen Pizza and shipped them all over the country. We were one of the first companies to use "boil-in" pouches.

One day Ron Santo (Cubs) & Mike Buckes (Papa Bear) of the NFL of the Chicago Bears was there to taste the Pizza and helped Dad start selling the 5" round Pizza to the Cubs Ball Park. I Mario Gualtieri delivered the first pizza to any Ball Park. The first delivery was made, June 10, 1957. Yes the first Pizza was at the NL-Ballpark, Wriggle Field.

When we sold Pizza in Dallas City, IL, people there never heard of Pizza. People from over 100 miles away would come there to buy Pizza. I don't know of any person that didn't love it. And they kept on coming back. Later in time other places started to opening, like 'Pizza Hut'" and other names. These are the facts.

Mario A. Gualtieri
