

A Mother's Tongue

Maria Laurino (September 30, 2008)



Don't be a mooshamoosh -- share those southern Italian dialect words!

I once asked an Italian-American psychologist why women often seemed more preoccupied than men with passing along their cultural inheritance to their children.

"Culture is mother's milk," she replied.



What began with mother's milk quickly moved to parmiggiano and pecorino romano. I remember taking our son Michael to Sardinia when he was four and asking what was his favorite thing about the hotel at which we stayed. I was expecting to hear about the pool or the beach or the playground. Instead Michael told me, "It has the best cheese."

After food, we moved on to a few of my favorite southern Italian dialect words. My self-descriptions must have sunk in. When Michael was in kindergarten he once told his (Italian-American) teacher that sometimes his mother could be a little "stunod."

So now that Michael is eleven and loves to post video clips of his favorite Italian cars on YouTube (perhaps culture is less mother's milk and more a Ferrari), I asked him if he could make a short video of my discussing dialect words on a San Francisco cable show some years back.

I thought I would share this short video primer of Italian-American dialect words. Our Yiddish, as I like to think of it, but unlike Yiddish, rarely used outside of Italian-American circles.

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