

Don't Ever Forget Where You Came From

Franko Landini's father imparted these wise words to him many years ago, and he has never forgotten them.

Born during WWII in the Tuscan port town of Santo Stefano, Landini was given a poor prognosis of survival by the doctor who delivered him. His father was a member of the Italian resistance movement, and times for the family were tough.

Seventy-some years later, Landini has defied all medical odds and has a fascinating and adventurous life story to share.

At 14 he began working as an Assistant Butler in the Italian villa of a wealthy American woman. He attended hotel school in Siracusa and after graduating at the top of his class he went to work in St. Tropez.

By 16 he was the youngest crewmember of an Italian ocean liner called the Leonardo Da Vinci. He developed his language skills, learning French, English, German and Spanish in addition to his native Italian.

At 20 he was drafted into the Italian Navy. After he completed his military service, he returned to the merchant marine; a few years later he was hired as the Maitre D' at a restaurant on the Italian Riviera.

It was there he met a young American woman and the rest, as they say, is history. They married in 1971, and a year later she sponsored him for a green card and they immigrated to the US.

Landini's first job in the US was waiting tables at Portofino in Crystal City. The next year, he was hired as the opening chef at Il Porto in Old Town. Following that was a stint as garde manger at King's Landing (now Union Pub), also in Alexandria, and then chef at a local dinner theater serving 1000 meals per night.

After that experience, Landini



promised himself he would never work for anyone other than himself.

He searched *The Washington Post* classifieds and found a restaurant for sale on the corner of Columbia Pike and Walter Reed Drive in Arlington.

He persuaded the bank to give him a loan with no collateral and soon the phenomenally successful Italianissimo Restaurant was born.

The US bicentennial in 1976 was a big year for Landini — in addition to opening a second restaurant, Pelicano, with a group of investors on King Street, he was sworn in as a US citizen in a massive ceremony with 3,000 other new Americans at Mt. Vernon. The ceremony was presided over by Vice President Mondale and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

In 1979, Landini sold his shares in Pelicano and opened a steakhouse in the current Landini Brothers space on King Street. He sponsored his brother Piero to come to the United States and the two brothers ran the business together for more than three decades until Piero's retirement a few years ago.

Next was a restaurant on Wisconsin Avenue called Roberto's that operated in the early 80's, and the short lived La Lampara on King Street.

After a brief (two year) foray into the freshwater eel export business, Landini returned to the restaurant world with Landini Ballston and the massive Caracalla in the Renaissance hotel in downtown DC.

In 2007 Landini's son Noe, a former Ritz Carlton area manager, joined the family business.

In 2010 the private cigar bar CXIII REX opened on the top level of the Landini Brothers restaurant.

Today, Landini — along with Noe — own and operate Landini Brothers, Fish Market and Pop's

Old Fashioned Ice Cream in Old Town Alexandria, and the brand new Bar Deco in downtown D.C. A commercial bakery in Del Ray is soon to follow, and we anxiously await its arrival!

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