

From Harlem with Grandfather and Antonella Rana

L. A. (October 19, 2013)



"Mani in Pasta" and the restaurant, recently opened by Rana in Chelsea on the West Side, is becoming a laboratory and location to learn the Italian language and a little cooking. Antonella and Giovanni Rana are teaching thirty-five students of Italian from the Catholic school Corpus Christi of Morningside Heights in Harlem how to make ravioli

It's a morning like many others, but not for the Giovanni Rana's New York restaurant. It's 9 AM and



it's immediately clear to those eating breakfast that something is about to happen. In fact in a large portion of the room many tables are strangely lined up. The chairs are missing. And on top of the tables are well-equipped spaces for cooking, with flour, eggs, a cutting board...

A man with a friendly and reassuring face is wandering about and talking. Everyone's busy- too busy for a normal morning. A sure-footed and lovely young woman comes in from the entrance, with a dynamic, friendly, and confident air. The first thing one notices about her is her smile- it's sunny, familiar, and warm. Happy.

The man with the friendly face is Giovanni Rana, the famous Italian grandfather. The woman with the lovely smile is Antonella Rana. They are "grandfather" and daughter-in-law, or rather, father-in-law and daughter-in-law.

After only a few minutes we immediately discover what will happen at the Giovanni Rana Pasta Kitchen in Chelsea Market. In fact, thirty-two thirteen-year-olds are now arriving with a cheerful breeze. They're from Harlem, from the Catholic school Corpus-Christi in Morningside Heights. They are students in the IACE program which teaches Italian in American schools.

Little by little the scene composes itself. The kids put on their aprons and they position themselves behind the tables. Their special lesson is now beginning. A lesson in Italian and Italian cuisine that they will not forget.

Their instructors are in fact Giovanni and Antonella- we should all be so lucky to have such teachers!

Grandfather Rana introduces himself, explains the first steps and after a moment closely watches over and advises the children who stand along the tables. The proper lesson is given by a cheerful teacher: Antonella Rana.

And there they are, covered in flour, hands-deep in pasta, some of them already with the dignified air of a grand chef, others a little more playful, making fountains of flour, opening eggs, combining the ricotta and the spinach... They continue until their raviolis take shape. The only moment in which every single one of the children loses control is when the chocolate comes in.

Chocolate isn't easy to resist. There they are, tasting the chocolate while trying to remain composed. But it's irresistible. Chocolate is just too tempting.

The result of the lesson? A few of the raviolis haven't come out so badly. We're looking over the accuracy of their shapes. However one or two words in Italian remain. There is wonder and curiosity in their eyes. Some of them are saying they've already decided to be chefs and yet there are others who admit it would have been nice to find such nice ravioli already finished in the pots.

Bernardo Paradiso and Ilaria Costa from IACE are also helping. They've both worked for years in Italian language education in the Tri-State area. They've always believed in extracurricular activities. Their programs have included the opera, theatre, even Ferraris.

This particular lesson is another great success for the Rana family that brings them to the table and also into the schools. It's only been two years since Giovanni Rana decided to open an establishment in Chicago to produce lines for the American market. And it's only been a year since he's had the restaurant in New York.

The lesson has also come a day after Rana's birthday and the children make the most of it by singing him "Happy Birthday" all together out loud.

It's a great Italian success even outside of Italy and once again it concerns a family enterprise- one which believes in the value of family and tradition.

We leave the children to eat, happy this time to taste Rana's authentic raviolis. There's only one person who, even though she had fun, is protesting: Lucia Pasqualini. The Vice-Consul confesses that she would have liked to cook as well. But let's be honest: who wouldn't have wanted to be in



the place of those children?

And what is more, in the end Grandfather and Antonella Rana have also left a gift for the children: "Fresh Pasta, a testament of participation, ravioli recipes, the ten golden rules of a good pasta-maker, and a special illustrated glossary of the terms used."

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