



olives from calabria with love

a conversation with giulia



About The Author

My name is Maria Timpano and I am embarking on a journey to document methods of food preparation by people who lived in villages and off the land, people such as my parents. This article is one of many that I will share with you.

The following article is based on a conversation that I had one day with my mother Giulia Timpano. My mother recounted the days of her life back in the village and she told me her story. I was so inspired by this that I began documenting further into her life and into a book which I will be sharing with you all very soon!



Table of Contents:

*piminoro - olives from calabria with love
a conversation with guilia*

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My parents Giuseppe Timpano and Giulia Ligori were both born and raised in Piminoro in the province of Reggio Calabria. My father migrated to Australia in February 1951 aboard the ship *Assiminia* and my mother two years later, in March 1953 aboard the ship *Australia*.

Piminoro, the village from which my parents came, was and essentially still is one of shepherds and farmers. As far back as they can remember olives and the production of olive oil, was a staple product. There is much I could share with you about these goods, but there is one particular story that I believe to be important.

During the inter-war years and immediately after the end of World War 11, the villagers of Piminoro had very little money as such. Their `wealth` lay in the land and the products they could derive from it. Traditionally, the area had been used to grow olives, among other things and most villagers had plots of land where they grew their own trees, or had to access to olives so they could press their own oil. Those villagers who had an abundant crop often sold part of it to others who then pressed the olives for their own use. There was also opportunity to sell some of the fruit and oil to large companies which then shipped the products out of the province to sell throughout the country. Larger olive farmers employed workers for the harvest and they could often trade part or all of their wages for the equivalent in olives. In this way, people were always able to obtain olive oil, an essential commodity used by all. For those who had little or no money, olives were traded not only for their oil, but for the cost of the pressing as well. Thus olives helped the villagers sustain a living and were also used to barter for other necessities: the olive was a better asset, than money.

My mother had always said that when she grew up in Piminoro, she remembers the existence of three olive presses made of huge stone boulders which were situated on the side of the valley`s river. This area was also home to a *mulino* (mill) grinding wheat and corn seeds into beautifully textured flour. My mother remembers the first electrically operated press arriving into town in 1948.

In 1951 and 1952 the area sustained major flooding and subsequent landslides: many of the water-powered riverbed presses were destroyed. The electrically operated machines were not affected and therefore the old presses were never rebuilt. Ruins of the old stone press survive in the nearby town of Bovalino and I believe that somewhere in those mountains, someone is still pressing the old way.

With my mothers memories at the back of my mind, I began searching for any information about the `old` olive pressing techniques. I even rang some of the olive oil producing companies but they appeared to have no knowledge of the subject . It was as if my mother`s memories had been a product of her imagination: they didn`t exist at all. What would a stone press have looked like? I just couldn`t imagine anything so big sitting on a riverbed.

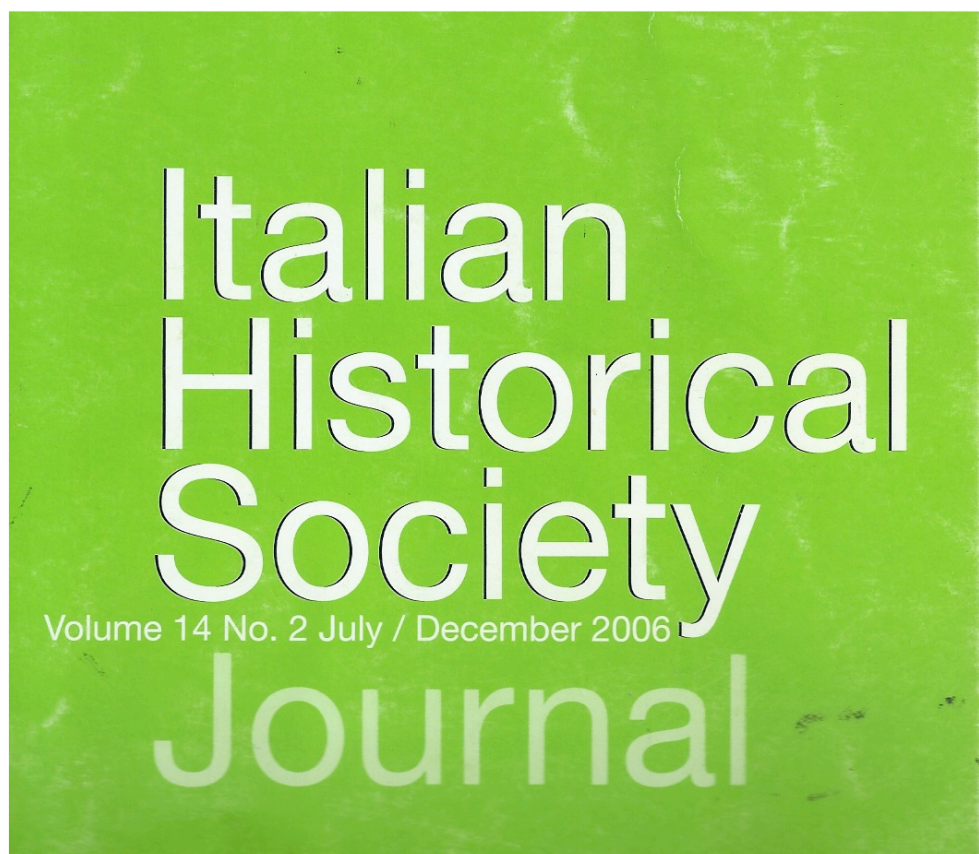
My discouragement grew until my brother gave a a wonderful book call *Wog Food: An Oral Histroy and Recipes` by John Newton*. Within its pages was a story of Giuseppe, an Italian man from Varapodio, who migrated to Australia at the age of twelve and who brought with him the sill of pressing olives. He remembered growing up in the south of Italy in an olive-growing village where the stone presses used to produce oil were eventually destroyed by a flood. Here is was: my mother`s story! I screamed with delight! I could`t believe it!

After searching through the phone directories I found Giuseppe. Some months later my mother and I went to meet him in South Australia. We watched him press his olive harvest. My mother even knew some of the people he had worked for in Italy and they had many conversations about what used to be.

This is what my parents and migrants such as Giuseppe brought with them to Australia: their knowledge of ingredients, of fresh, pure produce and that of unique flavours.

May everyone enjoy good food!

Maria





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