

RETAINING ITALIAN WEDDING TRADITIONS

by Prof. Philip J. DiNovo

In the past Italian-American weddings were very special and steeped in tradition. Starting from birth we Italian-Americans celebrate all the milestones in one's life. One of the biggest celebrations are weddings. We received, from our Italian ancestors, beautiful and memorable wedding traditions. In Italy, in the past, the wedding day began with the bride and groom receiving communion together at a morning Mass, (the bride is not dressed in bridal splendor). Even today most Italians are married in a church ceremony and at a Mass. Great importance is placed on the blessing of the gold bands or *FEDE* (faith). The bands are usually very plain, solid gold, with no diamonds or jewels adorning them. I think it is quite a unique custom to see the bride walk to the church, rather than be driven.

Many of the wedding customs we see around the Western world were first Roman customs. If it is a small town, the entire community after the Mass wish the bride good luck (*Auguri*). In some areas the bride and groom go directly to the groom's family house where the groom's mother welcomes the bride into the family by giving her a *PALMA* made out of confetti (Jordan Almonds). Arranged in a leaflike formation, the almonds are covered with colored cellophane.

The *Pranzo* (sit-down dinner) later on is served to many wedding guests. Hard feelings occur when relatives and friends are not invited. We certainly have had that problem in our family; no wonder we had close to 400 people at our wedding. The Wedding feast is just that! The feast begins with cocktails and Italian hors d'oeuvres and then appetizers (usually melon with prosciutto ham) and then the wedding soup (little meatballs and spinach in a delicious chicken broth). Then three courses of pasta are served (varioli, lasagne, cannelloni, etc.) Then comes the three courses of meat (veal, poultry, and pork). Sometimes a course of fish is served with, of course, cheese and fruit. *Asti Spumante* is offered for the wedding toast and coffee is also served. Then comes the cutting and eating of the elaborate wedding cake.

After the dinner, the *Bomboniere* are given. The *Bomboniere* are given one

per family and a fluff is given to each guest. The Fluff is a very elaborate adornment of the confetti candy; it includes a disc, circles of tulle, confetti candy, with colorful flowers and bows. It is attached to a gift of silver or ceramic items. In Italy it is called a "*bomboniere*", in America it is called a favor. A *confetto* is an almond protected by a shell of hard sugar. The Italian custom is to distribute *confetto* (the candy) for all occasions. Only white *confetto* is used for Weddings, Christenings and Confirmations, as white is the color of purity and innocence.

Bombonieri are cherished in Italy, and if you go to an Italian home, you often will find a credenza filled with beautiful ceramic pieces that were given to the family and are a reminder of a wonderful celebration. Finally trays of Italian cookies are passed among the guests. Many take a handful to take home.

In rural Italy you still will see Italian folk dancing at weddings. Recently I went to an Italian-American wedding where 90% of the music was rock and roll and about 9% slow music. Only 1% of the music was Italian. When the Italian music was played, young and old had a ball. Who is going to teach our young our customs? Of course the answer is, we must do it! We had an Italian band at our wedding and everyone had a wonderful time. Oh, how I miss those memorable Italian weddings of the past. Even when sandwiches were served in a rented hall. I still can see my grandfather dancing the *Tarantella*. The dance floor was crowded when it was time to do the *Tarantella*. What a happy dance it is, and a must at an Italian wedding. Once our weddings were steeped in tradition. I am sure our young people would carry them on once we expose them and teach them the beauty and value of our traditions and customs. For example, their Italian Wedding Serenades, in some places a newly-wed's bed is decorated, while they are away, with confetti in a heart-like design with coins in the center. In southern Italy women are invited to bride-to-be's home to see the wedding gifts on display. There are many more beautiful and unique customs, but I am limited by time and space. Keep our weddings steeped in tradition!