

# Bartolo “Bert” Cutino

1939

CHEF, RESTAURATEUR, BUSINESSMAN, PHILANTHROPIST

WRITTEN BY BERT CUTINO

When it comes to the history of Monterey--how it began and evolved when the Sicilians immigrated here--there are many rich stories to be told. Descendants of those immigrants have carried forward the legacy of their families and have made Monterey what it is today. In earlier times the fishing industry provided immense opportunities for success throughout the years, but then the sardines all but disappeared one day, Cannery Row went silent and the fishing boats began to be sold. For some fishermen, as well as their children who might have become involved in the sardine industry, it was a hard scramble to find other means of employment, and many families have stories of how they survived and thrived. Most notable is that of Paul and Rose (Aiello) Cutino’s four children—Pete, me, Bartolo “Bert”, Rose Marie, and Josephine--who took their parents' words to heart and lived them.

Our story begins with my father’s birth in a small Sicilian town called Isola delle Femmine in 1899. As did many others from his village, Paul Cutino emigrated and came to Monterey in 1921 to join the burgeoning fishing industry here.



**Front row: Peter, Rose and Bert Cutino.**

**Back row: Rose Marie Cutino & Josephine Cutino O'Neill.**

One day, my father spotted Rose Aiello working in a cannery and thought, “She is the one!” They got married in February of 1928 and had a great life together.



There were many times when my parents said, “Do what you love, and you will never work a day in your life.” They were both hardworking people: My father was the captain of his own boats, first the *Peter Boy*, and then in 1948 he built the *Santa Rosalia*. My brother, Pete, and I fished with my father on that boat, and I can tell you for a young boy of 13 it was quite an experience to see all those fish being caught in a net, rather than by hook and line. My mother continued to work in the canneries. All aspects of the fishing industry were important to the family’s support, and we all had to work.

**Bert’s parents, Rose Aiello & Paul Cutino, on their wedding day, February 1928.**



**1933 on the *St. James* in Coos Bay, Oregon. Albert Mangiapane is in the short-sleeved black shirt with fedora, and to his right is Paul Cutino.**



**Paul Cutino's boat, the *Santa Rosalia*, 1948.**

During this time in Monterey, of course, the sardine industry was a big thing. Another big thing that many people did not realize was the squid. Also known as calamari, squid was abundant and plentiful. When the sardine industry collapsed, squid became the prominent catch, and it was processed locally. So, the men could continue fishing, the women went on working in the canneries, and the switch to squid made up for the devastating loss of the sardines. Calamari became a popular featured item on restaurant menus such as in my restaurant.

Growing up in Monterey was a wonderful experience: We were in the midst of history being made during the sardine industry's halcyon days, the thriving operations on Cannery Row, the gradual changes brought on by economic necessity and the development of tourism as a major draw for the community.

The mantra for both my father and my mother was "You have to show that you work hard, and you will be successful in whatever you want to do. It is up to you." Being a commercial fisherman with no set schedule allowed my father the flexibility to do other things. When he wanted to build our house, when he wanted to construct apartments to rent out, he made up his mind and did it (whether my mother liked it or not). He was smart, strong-willed, and ambitious. His profession gave him the freedom to do as he pleased.

I remember once talking to my father about reinvesting the equity from his apartments, since they were paid in full. After I left the house, he commented, "Yes, Bert was here. The chicken is not dead yet, and he's plucking the feathers." My father never changed in his ways any more than my mother. My father had in his mind to

buy property and build apartments, but my mother was always concerned that we would never have enough to keep the family going.

Most important is that we were a close family. We were always together, and we all supported each other. We did not have a lot of money, but we never lacked for love, food and shelter. As we were growing up, there was no pressure whatsoever, but that was pressure in itself. I was left to figure out my own path. We, of course, went our own ways. My brother, Pete, did his thing, coaching water polo; my sister Rose Marie was the top graduate of Monterey High School in 1948 with an IQ of 160 and belonged to the Mensa Society, and my little sister Josephine was very smart, too. There were a few brains in the family.

You may wonder how my first name, Bartolo, became Bert. I am named after my grandfather Bartolo Aiello. My mother started calling me Bert because there were just too many Bartolos called Bart in the family--but then we ended up with too many Berts! Now I am Bartolo again, as I have to be for my passport.

When he was 19, my brother got a job at Holman Guest Ranch in Carmel Valley--naturally, in the pool area where he got to see all the girls! There was an opening for a dishwasher in the restaurant, and when Pete said, "Look, do you want a job?" I said, "Yes! Anything to get away from fishing or the paper route." He then said, "They pay 30 cents an hour," and I said, "Great! I'll take it." He did not tell me everything. As it turned out, I had to sleep out there and wash dishes by hand for three meals a day. I was 13 at the time and took the job without my mother's or father's approval for staying out there during the summer. I found it a wonderful experience, because I got the chance to work with a great chef who was heading the kitchen there at the time. He encouraged me to cook.

Of course, cooking was not a big deal and nothing new for me, because I had been doing that with my mother growing up. In our basement we had a table for 30 people

like a lot of other Italian families had, and we never knew who was coming to dinner. Families were tight--my grandparents were alive, and my uncles and aunts and a lot of other relatives and friends came over to our house for my mother's dinners, because she was a great and talented cook. I often had the opportunity to cook along with her for the expected crowd. Good food and good times were firmly ingrained in my heart and mind. I learned a few culinary things from my mother, and later on I learned even more and some of those techniques are still being used today at the Sardine Factory Restaurant.



**Bert's grandfather Pietro Cutino & grandmother Rose Seeno Cutino.**



**Bert and Chef Bill Wyland--Bert's first apprenticeship working at Cerritos on the Monterey Wharf. Photo of Baked Alaska Bert was taught to make which served 100 people.**

In 1955 I began working for Sal Cerrito, who owned three restaurants on Fisherman's Wharf at the time and later went on to open more establishments in other locations. I eventually became the general manager and operations manager for all of those restaurants. I had great experiences that led to my desire to build a career in the restaurant business. When I had the opportunity to do a three-year apprenticeship program certified by the American Culinary Federation under the chef at Neptune's Table (one of Mr. Cerrito's restaurants), I learned a lot from him. I was driven equally by the desire to be a chef and an owner. I figured working as a chef would help me understand what an owner should know; I wanted to do both and do them well.

Experience in both the culinary and management aspects of the business would be a plus for my chosen career. My parents had wished for me to do something else--a job where I wasn't required to work weekends or holidays--but they supported me and wanted me to be successful at whatever I

chose to do. My father would often say, “Whatever you want to do is okay with me. As long as you are happy, I am happy.” I thought his philosophy was a great one, and it eased the pressure of having any expectations placed on me.

As I trained and worked my way through various courses and kitchens to ultimately become an American Culinary Federation certified executive chef, I never let go of the idea of owning my own restaurant. In 1968 I founded The Sardine Factory with Ted Balestreri, whom I met in an economics class in college. We became instant friends, and in time we went into business together. Our first partnership venture was the purchase of property. Ted had trained in hotel/restaurant management and was working in the produce business at the time. I had also studied management as well as the culinary arts, so the blending of our talents and abilities created the perfect recipe for success. The name we chose for our restaurant was a nod to our hometown and the industries that formed its rich and colorful heritage.

After 54 years of being in business, I can safely say that the restaurant has been successful. My two sons worked with me for a time. Marc, the older one, is a great wine enthusiast; he became a certified sommelier and was the cellar master at The Sardine Factory for six years. My younger son, Bart, was terrific at the front door, greeting people and filling the role of general manager. I loved having my sons working with me, but they decided to leave and follow their own paths. I am very proud of the two of them: Marc went to work for Talbott Wines and is applying his knowledge of enology now with Morgan Winery; Bart, is a financial advisor, and has opened his own company, Central Coast Financial Management, with a business partner. My sons are both college graduates; they followed their dreams and did what they wanted to do, and I support them in all they do.

The other half of my success I credit to my wife of 49 years, the former Bella Mangiapane, daughter of Albert and Nancy Balesteri Mangiapane, a terrific and beautiful lady whom I have known since she was a young girl because her father and my father were friends. At Italian weddings we used to dance together. In

college I got at least one A grade in dancing, and Bella was also a terrific dancer and could follow me. Later on, she came to The Sardine Factory for a dinner event, and that is when we decided to go out dancing together. Hanging in our house is a large framed photo from 1933 of our fathers, taken when they fished together in Coos Bay, Oregon. We love to look at it and reminisce about how those two fishermen came here, hardly speaking English, but were able to accomplish what they did for their families. My father-in-law, Albert Mangiapane, married a beautiful lady named Nancy Balesteri; interestingly enough, it is close to my business partner's name: Balestreri. They had three children, and our families met often, celebrating many holiday events.



**Bella's Mother,  
Nancy Balesteri  
Mangiapane.**



**Bella's Father,  
Albert Mangiapane.**

Bella and I raised a loving family--our two sons, Marc and Bart, and daughter Michele. Unfortunately, Michele passed away too early, but we still keep her alive in our hearts and think about her all the time. Bart married a beautiful lady named Kim, a local girl, and together they have a daughter, Bella Michele, named after my wife and late daughter, and a boy named Tony. Our extended families meet often, celebrating many holiday events at my house, where I prepare a seafood buffet with the help of my wife.



**Cutino Family 2021: Bella, Bert, Tony, Bella Michele, Bart, Kim and Marc Cutino.**



**Michele Cutino with her grandparents.  
Left to right: Rose Cutino, Michele Cutino, Nancy and Albert Mangiapane.**

Bella's father came from San Vito Lo Capo, Sicily, a beautiful resort area with such breathtaking scenery that it is almost difficult to understand why anyone would want to leave. But he, like so many others, sought a better life in America. What is interesting about my father-in-law's story is that he came to the U.S. in the funnel of a ship as a stowaway. There were a couple of other stowaways with him, and unfortunately one passed away during that journey. I always remember his talking about how he learned to eat pork and beans and he liked it. He couldn't speak English, but he got here to the beautiful Monterey area where he celebrated his life, like my father. They were two great gentlemen who believed family was first, having their own boats and being successful in what they wanted to do. I am proud of both of them, and I am pleased that I am able to be a part of Bella's family as well as her being part of mine.

Growing up in Monterey, I absorbed a lot of the history of the area in relation to the sardine industry and Cannery Row. The area was known as the Sardine Capitol of the World, with thriving operations on Cannery Row; then changes brought on by economic necessity eventually influenced tourism to develop and become a major draw for the community. Cannery Row, which I never thought that one day I would be part owner of, has become a great accomplishment and a remarkable success story for Ted Balestreri and me, and to this day we are still business partners.

Another aspect of my life as a chef is my involvement in a national chefs' organization, where I previously served as vice president of the organization, as well as chairman of their honor society. The American Culinary Federation had about 20,000 members at that time when I was the vice president of the western region, which incorporated many chapters in the western United States. The honor society of the ACF is the American Academy of Chefs; for me, it was an honor and a privilege to be the chairman for four years. Getting to know so many chefs, not only in our country but across the world, was such a plus in my life. Consequently, I had to travel a lot and give speeches, demonstrations and seminars, something I never thought I would do.



**Chef Bert Cutino with friend and actor Paul Newman.**



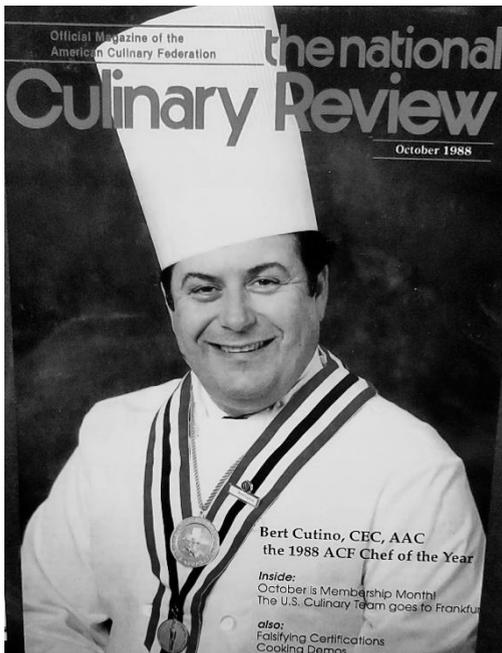
**Chef Bert with Chef Julia Childs at the Downstairs Wine Cellar of the Sardine Factory Restaurant.**

Early on, I realized my responsibilities that came with success: Not only did I want to create a pleasant dining experience for those who enjoy a fine meal in a restaurant, I also felt the obligation to nurture others not so fortunate. To this end, I founded the Meals on Wheels Culinary Classique, an innovative fundraiser that enables the organization to provide meals for about 40,000 people for at least six months. I'm pleased that this concept has spread to Meals on Wheels in other states. I was honored to receive the MOW Giving Tree award in 2003 and 2015.

I am very proud of the fact that together with retired Judge John Phillips, who wanted to open a culinary program asked me to be involved as well as support from my business partner. We made it happen and it is called The Rancho Cielo Youth Campus, located in Salinas, where we have the Drummond Culinary Academy named after a partner of ours as well, the late Judge Ralph Drummond. His wife gave a generous financial donation to start the program and after 10 years, it has prospered. The organization offers diploma education, vocational training, counseling and life-skills development opportunities for underserved youth. There in the dining room we train students for careers in the hospitality industry and have many success stories among our graduates boasting a 90% success rate. The program works with "at risk" young people who would have either been incarcerated or headed for jail. They are given the chance to turn their lives around and enjoy a rewarding career. We are

saving lives, giving them the opportunity to be successful in life and I am proud that we accomplished this.

I said in the beginning that this was the story of Paul and Rose Cutino's four children, so here is a brief rundown on my siblings. My late brother, Pete, who became a famous water polo coach, was named National Coach of the Year the same time I was named National Chef of the Year. An article written about us stated, "One brother swims like a fish and the other cooks them." Our family was elated that we were both recognized for our accomplishments through hard work in careers we loved. My late sister Rose Marie was a natural-born artist, who went into business and owned her own store on the wharf; many still look there for The Little Gourmet Shop to this day. Last but not least, as they say, is my little sister Josephine who, with her husband, co-owned a successful insurance company.



Nowadays I'm retired and taking it a bit easier, but I still love going down to the restaurant and being involved to some degree, and you know, when you love something, it is easier to do and to look forward to. That is why I live by that statement: If you do what you love, you will never work a day in your life.

**Chef Bert Cutino on the cover of ACF Culinary Review, named National Chef of the Year 1988.**

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