

Chris Pullano Shake

1956

RESTAURATEUR, BUSINESSMAN, PHILANTHROPIST

WRITTEN BY CHRIS SHAKE

My life and my family growing up in Monterey:

My mom and dad met in Sacramento and made their way to Monterey in the early 1950s along with my grandfather, Samuel Pullano, and my brother Benji who was a year old at the time. My grandfather immigrated to the United States from the Italian region of Calabria.

I was born in 1956 at the Monterey Hospital on Hartnell Street across from the Monterey Post Office. Growing up in the family business, my parents instilled in me the fundamentals to succeed, a strong work ethic and to give back to the community and churches.

I attended Monte Vista Elementary School and one year at Walter Colton Jr. High School. I never went back to school after the seventh grade but chose to work with my dad and learn every aspect of the business/restaurant world so that I could be just like him.

After school I would always end up at the restaurant my parents started in the early 1950s, the Old Fisherman's Grotto. After I was done with my homework, I would always make my way to the kitchen. My dad had hired French Creole chefs that were from New Orleans who took me under their wings and taught me how to cook. When I was 14 years old, I had my own station on the line, and I was cooking the food and dishing it up!

I spent many years in the kitchen before I made my way to the front of the house. During that time, I learned so much from my dad. I would go to the bank with him,

the attorney's office, and the accountants. I always made sure that I surrounded myself with people that I could learn from and people that I respected and looked up to. If there was something I did not know, I would spend hours at the Monterey Public Library reading books to find the answer.

While I was in school, I had many friends who were Italian. One of my memorable encounters was in the sixth grade at Monte Vista Elementary when I tried out for flag football and I was not accepted well by the close-knit Italian boys. The captain of the team was Frank Lucido and I recall him saying to all the boys that I was not going to make the team. Here I am this skinny little sixth grader who was not going to take no for an answer and so I took a swing at Frank who was at least three times my size. Frank looked at me, laughed and turned to his buddies and said, "Shake is on the team." From that moment on I formed a lifelong friendship with Frank and many others.

Growing up in Monterey I had many great meals at some amazing Italian family homes, like Cathy Vallaire's. I remember her starting her sauce at 8 am in the morning following by making meatballs, Italian breaded chicken, her delicious gelatin salads, and the most delicious cannoli I have ever tasted. Cathy always had great fishing stories to share with me about her father, Joseph "Jumbo" Crivello. There were several memorable meals at my wife's grandparents, Josephine & Bricky Crivello's home and some of my favorites were the sanddabs and Italian bread meat dinners. My wife, Lisa, always made sure our son, Austin, and I had plenty of Italian food to eat--pizza from Chicago's Lou Malnati's Pizzeria, to-go orders from Rich Pepe's Little Napoli, Fandango and La Mia Cucina...and she made a great cup of coffee to go with those meals!

Growing up on the wharf with my five brothers, there was never a dull moment. Often, we would all be working in the restaurant helping our parents, and we would fight to see who was going to get off first so that we could go cruise Alvarado Street and Calle Principal. Eventually my two older brothers found a way to not have to

work in the restaurant and learned how to fish commercially from some of the best fishermen in Monterey, like the late Dominic Mineo, Sal Vermi and Paulino Spadaro who took them under his wing and taught my brothers to be successful fishermen.



Shake Family Portrait.

So, I thought to myself, Heck I can do this too! I asked my brothers if I could come along to fish herring in San Francisco. Here I am, a suit and tie guy, going herring fishing with my brother David and Nino Campo. We arrived in San Francisco Bay on my brother's boat, we laid out the nets when suddenly Nino Campo, with a rifle in his hand and cussing in Italian, "*Figlio di puttano*, I'll kill you," to Joeva the captain of a nearby herring boat who was laying his nets over ours. Okay, that was day one. Day two, we were pulling the nets and shaking the herring off by hand into the hatch for eight straight hours. When we were done, I had to use tweezers to remove the herring eggs off my face. Needless to say, I lasted two days and gladly came back to the Grotto doing what I do best.

The Wharf back in the day was full of life--neon signs on nearly every shop, fish markets up and down the wharf as the fishing industry was bustling, restaurant owners greeting guests at the front door of their businesses, and every owner on the Wharf was Italian. They looked like characters from the movie *The Godfather* with names like “Papa Lou”, “Tommy Legs,” and of course Sal Cerrito did not need a nickname as he was considered the Godfather. I never did learn how to speak Italian, but I sure knew how to say every Italian cuss word in the book.

**Chris, Sabu and the statue of Sabu
at the Old Fisherman’s Grotto.**



I was baptized twice. The first time was with holy water at Saint Francis Church in Seaside, and the second time was with my mom’s wooden spaghetti sauce spoon. You all know the wooden spoon....

Monterey Italians are the greatest.

We had the best Mayors--Shedo “Buck” Russo--Peter Coniglio--Chuck Della Sala.

We have our own Congressman--Jimmy Panetta.

The best Restaurant owners.

The best Real Estate companies.

The best MC and radio talk show host--David Marzetti.

The best musicians--the Marotta family.

If you need a lawyer, you have Tony Lombardo and Chris Panetta.

If you need an electrician, you have Mike Bruno and John Battaglia.

If you need to make a confession, you go see Father Peter Crivello.

If you need a bank loan, you see Rich Aiello.

You see, we all have one thing in common, we are Italians...

Just think about all the remarkable things Italians have done here in Monterey besides building one of the largest fishing industries in the world.

There is Bert & Ted who transformed Cannery Row into a world-famous visitor destination.

What Peter Coniglio and his partners did with the Marriott property.

What the Marotta and Davi families did with downtown Monterey.

Mike Maiorana and Bart Bruno who built the boat marina at the Coast Guard Pier.

The Tringalis, Pennisi's and Robbie Torrise who still provide fresh fish from the commercial fishing boats on Wharf #2.

My mentors growing up were my dad who taught me how to be a good businessperson, to be kind and to always give back to our community and my mom for raising me in the Catholic Church and teaching me that family always comes first. Others who inspired me were the late Nick Lombardo, the late John Coniglio as he was a great hospitality teacher, Ted and Bert because they always had great advice, and Frank Donangelo, as he is an incredibly wise man.

When my dad passed away in 1998, my brother Sabu, Jr. and I wanted to continue what our dad had started by giving back to the community, and so we began fundraising in his memory. The Salvation Army is the organization we chose because of what they do for the homeless community and people in need. Our dad never turned away anyone--offering food, shelter, and even a job. Over the years we have raised over \$5.7 million with our annual Sabu Safari Dinner Gala and Holiday Drive.

When I reflect on my journey growing up in Monterey, it humbles me and fills me with extreme pride. It reminds me of how blessed I am to be a part of Monterey's Italian culture and community. My life would not be what it is today without the support of my family, friends, business colleagues, my loyal customers and all my fellow Paisanos.



The Shakes and Friends: Mayor Dan Albert, Sabu Shake, Sr., Chris, JR, and State Senator Bruce A. McPherson.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my wife, Lisa, and my son, Austin, for all their love and support. My son now lives in Los Angeles and is a real estate agent in Beverly Hills with the Altman Brothers Team; and I could not be prouder of him. They understand the passion and dedication I have for the restaurant business, Monterey and the people who live here. I love you both very much.



Austin's Graduation Celebration: Chris, Austin & Lisa.

Last but certainly not least, I am very blessed and fortunate to have my beautiful mom who just turned 90 years old this past May 5, 2022. She is my biggest inspiration and someone I admire more than anything.



Mom's 90th Birthday with all six of her sons.

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