

In 1968 when our family moved to Ithaca, food choices were limited. Bagels meant frozen, pre-sliced from the case at the supermarket. Lox meant waiting for our pilgrimages to visit relatives on Long Island. Gourmet take-out meant, well, nothing. Take-out was Chinese or pizza. We yearned for these things and so, with a penchant for small business, decided to make it happen for our cosmopolitan little city. It was a roundabout route to the Ithaca Bakery but ultimately a logical one in retrospect. Though my father, Ira, was a professor by trade, his father was a small business owner and so he grew up in and with the business mentality. My mother, Anne, worked for a time in my grandfather's store before marriage, kids, college and a career teaching college herself. My brother Gregar was always a business-person, running his own printing business from the school print shop as a young teenager. My sister-in-law Mimi worked her entire life in hospitality growing up in a New England tourist town. And then there was me. In elementary school I made money selling Shrinky Dinks I had made at home. In case you haven't heard of these they are small plastic objects baked in an oven after being traced on thinner bigger plastic. Additionally I made money selling seeds and metal social security cards. So while we joke that we have grown our business by the seat of our pants, it is true. But it is also true that we all grew up in business and by pooling our resources, we have made a fairly good team.

My brother was the first in the family to enter the bakery business, starting as a counter person at Collegetown Bagels. He was soon promoted to a bagel baker. As he graduated from college and began to think about a career, the logical thing to consider was the bagel business. Being relatively young and with no capital or credit to speak of, my parents offered to help get things rolling. I came along for the ride. We began looking in Syracuse for commercial spaces but the owner of Collegetown Bagels caught wind and offered to sell us his two Ithaca shops. With a love for our hometown we were easily convinced. Soon after, Gregar joined up with Mimi, who was managing the shops for the previous owner and our motley crew of five became the proud owners of the best bagel shop in upstate New York. Looking to grow and diversify we soon looked to New York City for inspiration and found it at Zabar's, Dean and DeLuca and Balducci's among other places selling a variety of high quality prepared foods in addition to appetizers (cheese, smoked fish, etc.) We opened Collegetown Bagels and Appetizers and introduced Ithaca to a slew of delicious foods not previously available.

Fast forward to 1989. I was about to graduate college having worked part-time in the business since we bought it in 1981. My family was on vacation together when we received a message from the Zazzara family, the owners of the Ithaca Bakery. They were looking to sell and retire and wished for the place to remain a bakery. We couldn't resist the idea of a flagship store on the busiest street in the city. While once a busy retail bakery, it had become a predominantly wholesale operation with a few stray customers coming in from the street. Most of the bread went out the back door to the delis, restaurants, supermarkets and schools. My family agreed to pursue the project if I dedicated myself to it for two years. I would graduate and go full-time into the renovation and development of the Meadow Street store into a full-scale

gourmet delicatessen (now called a bakery-café.) So it went and twenty-one years later I am writing this from the offices above the bakery, which used to be the apartment of John and Jenny Zazzara who, as was typical of the day, lived on the same site as the business they ran.

While we don't live on-site anymore, it does sometimes feel as though we eat, breathe, and sleep the food business. Wherever we go, we study the displays, the menus, the seats, the tables, the service. We watch the flow and the faces of the customers whether in our own stores or in others. When I see a cooler door left ajar someplace, I can't help but give it a nudge as I pass by. Whenever we travel, we bring back bags of things we enjoyed from other places to share with our talented chefs and bakers.

And so the cycle continues. Where the Zazzara's brought back their expertise from Italy and showed Ithaca what freshly baked bread could be, so too we have brought our experience to the bakery serving up breakfast, lunch and dinner to hungry Ithacans seven days a week.

It is an honor to be the family running a business that has only been in the hands of two other families in its 100-year history; an honor and a responsibility. Too often these days, getting food means plodding through the aisles of a chain supermarket picking up goods which can be bought in almost every other supermarket across the country. Too often, going out to eat means going to a chain restaurant, just like hundreds of others serving generic food from factory farms in far-away places.

Now, one hundred years after its founding, not only is the Ithaca Bakery still producing artisan bread on a daily basis mixed from scratch on site every single day, but we have committed ourselves to sourcing ever-more ingredients from local and regional producers and considering the source and impact of everything we buy from a piece of cheese to a paper plate. Our commitment to community has never been greater.

Here's to the next hundred.