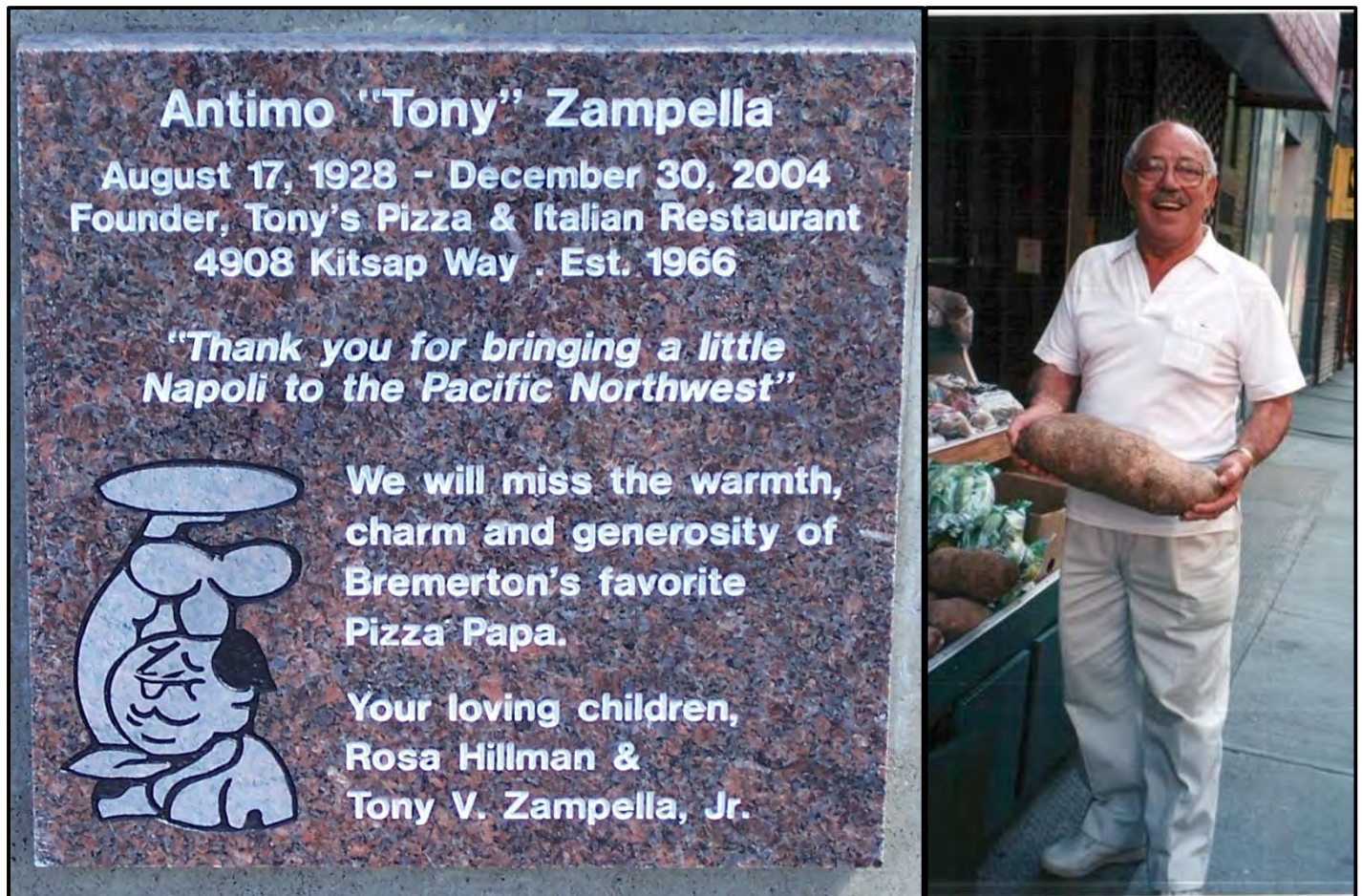


# **TONY'S PIZZA:** *from Filippi's to Malane*

BY TONY V. ZAMPELLA JR.  
(tonyzampella@gmail.com)

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With current owner, Mike Malane  
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## Antimo's World

Antimo Zampella was an immigrant from the farmlands and small villages in old Southern Italy, the village of Caserta just outside of Naples, to be precise. I only knew him as Tony Zampella, however. You see ... Tony Zampella was my father and namesake. I never fully appreciated the many facets that made the man, or his journey to a new world. Then, after his passing on December 30, 2004, I began to investigate his journey to becoming the man that many in Bremerton so loved and enjoyed. The journey from Antimo to Tony involved a detour through Filippi's. This is that part of the story.

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Born into Mussolini's fascist Italy in 1928, and growing up during the Second World War, Tony sought out that elusive goal: to control one's destiny. He was one of a family of seven. The hard conditions of his early years—poverty and the struggle to survive in a war-ravaged country—forged a determined, immigrant's work ethic.

Understanding his life in the farmlands in Caserta, just outside Naples, would be hard for most Americans today or for those many decades ago. These were primitive conditions, even as compared to the most rugged and impoverished conditions in

America.

My father<sup>1</sup> took my sister, Rosa, and me to visit his village for three weeks during the summer of 1969. The little "hut-like" buildings where his family lived had dirt floors, makeshift doors and entryways, and *limited* outdoor plumbing – and these were the better conditions. The narrow alleyways between the humble dwellings were lined with scooters; people whizzed through these tight spaces, carrying housewares, groceries from the market, and fresh vegetables from their gardens. Families and kids gathered in the open spaces – rocky

and uneven courtyards between the buildings – to eat, cook and play. Just outside the alleyways were fenced-in animals, and fields where vegetables grew.



**Tony Jr., (at 4 years) and Rosa (at 2 years) enjoying family time at Tony Filippis Pizza. (1967)**

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<sup>1</sup> To properly tell this story I have moved between monikers that refer to the subject, Tony Zampella as either, "Tony," "father" or "Dad" in specific instances, in which each moniker conveys a more immediate context.

Dad was part of a family that embraced this culture and a heritage. They lived as farmers, peasants. Something deep within my father moved him to see beyond that existence, even in the face of a war that pitted Italians against the Allies. Dad hardly ever talked of that period; rarely did he speak of his childhood. But those few times that he did, he revealed a day-to-day struggle, not only for food and shelter, but also to venture beyond the limitations of that life.

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During the war when fuel was in short supply, Tony's Uncle asked him to go to the hills to cut firewood and sell it for cooking fuel. He loaded the wood onto donkeys, and brought it down to the village to sell it to villagers. He used the money from these ventures to buy fuel, food, and family basics. Even then, Tony, the entrepreneur, took on responsibility for the family's economic survival.

Other times Tony witnessed the brutality of war.

Tony's father, conscripted by the Nazis into a labor bloc, was forced to build defenses against the invasion by General Eisenhower's troops. His father managed to escape the harsh work and return to the family, which placed the family in a fix. For a time, they had to hide him out in one of the pigpen coupes until the American armed forces arrived. Tony swears that living that way affected his father, and caused severe and persistent medical conditions.



**Tony's family back in Sothern Italy. His small village, Truro, is located outside Caserta, which is located just outside of Naples. The two arrows point to Priscilla (our mom) and Tony. (1970)**

These conditions also affected Tony in basic human ways. I recall stories in which Dad confessed his ignorance of American ways. He admitted that he'd never heard of a bedtime story, never experienced such a ritual, and had never known anyone in his childhood who had. He was unable to understand why parents read these stories to children at night, or even why kids had teddy bears to cuddle before each night's sleep.

Tony also spoke of a time in the middle of the war when he and a cousin were in the farmlands around the U. S. Army camp. A U.S. Army jeep passed with American military men, who looked right at them, and asked if they were hungry. A teenager probably 14 or 15 years old, Tony nodded. He was eager for food. Tony's family grew or bartered much of their food, killed animals, and learned to save what they could to feed their family of seven, as there was rarely enough food.

The Americans tossed over a five-pound steel canister. Tony and his cousin rushed over to grab the canister with the Americans looking on. Prying it open they began to scoop out the gooey contents.

It was peanut butter. Tony had never seen peanut butter. So starved and grateful, he gorged himself, eating it by the handful. Then after a couple of handfuls he started to choke. Without any liquid to wash it down, the peanut butter stuck in his throat. He began to lose his breath until he gagged, and was forced to spit it out.

All the while as he was choking, Tony recalled, the Americans sat in their Jeep pointing at him and laughing before they zoomed off to their camp. While it is likely that the Americans were simply trying to help some poor Italians – assuming that everyone knew of peanut butter – Tony thought otherwise: it seemed a ploy by the Americans to make fun of the poor farmers.

Tony never forgot that moment. The dense, rich peanut butter wreaked havoc on his system, later causing vomiting and diarrhea. He would never eat peanut butter again. That experience was seared into his psyche. He would get to America. He would make it. That experience formed a peanut butter chip on his shoulder, to prove to everyone that a poor Italian farmer could make it in America, or more precisely – no one would stop *him* from making it.

## **The Navy Cook**

At 18, in 1946, Tony enlisted in the Italian Navy and became a cook. That experience shaped three facets of his future: a way to charm customers with food and humor, a glimpse of the world outside his tiny farming village, and a pathway to America, his ultimate dream. Tony had a plan, and the memory of that canister of peanut butter was proof of both what was possible in America and of the hard struggle yet to come.

By 1953, Tony would fulfill his desire to get to America by way of Brooklyn, New York. In New York he learned the American Way from his cousins, the Petrillo's, who had

emigrated a generation earlier, and who had opened an Italian bakery in upstate Rochester. For that first year, his education included business in Petrillo's Bakery, speaking English, taking in baseball at the ballpark, and learning about family from the Petrillo clan.

America was more an ideal than a destination; and he believed in her ideals with his intense Italian passion.

Later in life, puffing on Winston cigarettes, and sipping coffee-black, Dad shared tales with me of how easy it was to make a buck in America, if you "wanna worka worka work," he'd say in his rhythmic trademark accent. I was amazed at his singular compulsive-like focus and facile financial dealings.

Tony didn't shy from a struggle, and wasn't bothered by risk. He admired plainspoken, common sense over educated eloquence. He eschewed any sense of entitlement, whether by lineage, education, or station; such talk irked him from those born in America. Grit, hard work, and self-reliance were his calling cards.

After moving to San Diego in 1954, broke and alone, Tony took up tuna fishing and in three trips earned \$5500 – his down payment on a little restaurant and deli, the Mona Lisa, in the Little Italy area of San Diego.<sup>2</sup>

Whether fisherman or restaurant worker, Tony got through the day with the help of Dago Red, a gallon of Gallo that affectionately become known for its heritage; that too was the culture back then. Journalists, carpenters, plumbers, off duty cops, fishermen, and government workers relied on their favorite ale or cocktail to get them through the day. Guys bonded over such rituals. In this way Tony fit right in – as long as he remained focused on the pizza pie in the sky.

Tony determined exactly how much English he needed to order ingredients, how much Italian he needed to charm the customers, and how much Dago Red got him through the day. Certain things worked in America. Quality ingredients and homemade food were important but so was "personality." A shipboard cook in the Italian Navy for seven years, burnished Tony's Irish blarney and Italian Bolognese.

Tony realized that Americans liked their immigrants served up with a decent work ethic. Here, he fit right in, willing to do whatever it took to succeed: Cleaning bathrooms, washing dishes, baking, or "bullshitting" the customers.

Watching those who succeeded and those who failed, Tony strung together a practical work ethic that combined his immigrant values with American can-do optimism.

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<sup>2</sup> The restaurant currently exists on India Street in San Diego, (Little Italy area). From its web-site: *The first Mona Lisa Restaurant was established in 1956 in downtown San Diego by Grandfather Stefano Brunetto. Since then, Mona Lisa has become an institution for Italian food and culture in the Little Italy area...* The restaurant's website lists a story that matches the years both Tony and our aunt Muffie shared with me about Tony's role in this restaurant. It is likely Tony may have sold it, or part of it, to this or a the previous owner prior to this family's ownership.

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Tony's first wife, Irene, 20 years his senior, set him up in business to support his learning curve as owner of the Mona Lisa, in the Little Italy area of San Diego.

San Diego was a natural for Tony. At the time, its fishermen reminded him of back home, its military presence, close to downtown San Diego, foretold a natural built-in clientele that he connected with in Bremerton. In 1957, he sold Mona Lisa, and began Tony's Corner Café at 1104 South 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, in a seedier side of San Diego. His business card from that time lists "Italian and American Food, Beer and Wine." The Italian immigrant of 1953 was becoming a pragmatic businessman: in just a few short years he had included American fare along with his Italian cuisine in a mix of food, liquor and "food to go"—the beginning of a recipe he later exported to Bremerton, Washington.

In 1961, Tony closed down Tony's Corner Store, and moved to Temple City, a small suburb of Los Angeles. By this time Tony had honed his persona: the Italian cook, clever businessman, and Neopolitan novelty. He scouted out a Temple City liquor store with a coal pizza oven in back. There he twirled pizza dough into profits for the owner, and soon ran his own corner of the store.



**Priscilla and Tony Zampella with son Tony Jr. (1964)**

That's when, in 1962, Tony met my mom, Priscilla Pellegrino. She came into that small Temple City liquor store with its novel Italian pizza twirler to pick up the daily newspaper. Tony dated Priscilla, an Italian woman twelve years his junior. Then in December 1962, they married and that following November 1963, I was born.

On June 1, 1965, Tony had fathered my sister, Rosa. Just months after her birth, he moved back down to San Diego to work at the original Filippi's Pizza Grotto. With a wife, a young son, and a toddler, Tony needed a break.

## Becoming Tony “Filippi” Zampella

Vincent DePhilippis<sup>3</sup> and Madeleine Stefani came to America in 1922, Vincent from Italy and Madeleine from France. They met in New York, married in 1925, and settled in Philadelphia. In 1950 they moved to San Diego where they opened a deli grocery on India Street – in the “Little Italy” part of San Diego – called Filippi’s Cash and Carry. This was four years before Tony originally first set foot in San Diego, and this was the beginning of what was to become a successful line of family restaurants. Today Filippi’s Pizza Grottos are owned and operated by family members of the original founders.

Filippi’s provided Tony with a model of success in America, and an established business by 1965. The DePhillipi’s, Vincent and Madeleine, provided Tony much more. Until this point Tony had worked hard to “become an American citizen.”

Tony’s charm, determination and persistence won him friends with Vincent and Madeline DePhillipi’s both of whom emigrated to America. Madeleine or “Mama Filippi” as Tony called her, came to like Tony and included him as her fifth boy. With a similar stories from the Old Country, Tony had found in Mama Filippi more than a familiar employer, he’d found role model, a trusted guide, someone who believed in him.

The DePhilippis had branched out and opened restaurants in several locations for their sons to manage. Italian boys have a special, rare, relationship with their mamas. At this time Vicente had passed away leaving Mama Filippi to run the chain of restaurants with a watchful eye on her sons.

Peering 1200 miles north to Bremerton, a small Navy town across the Puget Sound from Seattle, Washington, Mama Filippi was troubled by her son, Richard, who operated one of the family’s “Filippi’s Pizza Grottos.” San Diego and Bremerton shared similar Navy clientele, and it made sense that those Navy boys would love good, low-cost, homemade pizza and pasta.

Soon, Mama Filippi shared her “Bremerton concerns” with Tony. She bemoaned Richard’s playboy habits. He ran a good business when it was open; but it wasn’t always open. Tales of Richard’s trips to Vegas had become legendary, according to several business owners and local suppliers. He’d earn a few bucks, party, or gamble it in Vegas. Once the money evaporated, Richard reopened Filippi’s, paid suppliers, and flipped enough pizzas to return to Vegas.

Mama Filippi needed a dependable *paisano* to help her son manage the restaurant. At 37, Tony was her boy. Ambitious, determined and ready, Tony leapt at the chance to run Mama Filippi’s restaurant, and so ... he moved his family to Bremerton.

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<sup>3</sup> The DePhilippis owned Filippi’s Pizza Grotto, with a different spelling of the name.

By this point, Tony learned that money was like water, seeping through your fingers alongside a few bad choices, or cupped in one's hand to nourish his future. Fatherhood focused his mind, creating an urgency to act on his ambitions.

It was 1966 and Filippi's had just moved into its Kitsap Way location, from downtown Bremerton; and Tony was working alongside Richard to keep it open. Tony's work ethic, Italian accent, and flare for homemade fare, turned the erratic eatery into a booming business.



He became so dependable that Richard felt comfortable resuming his old routines, leaving Tony alone to watch the store.

During that first year, Tony saved up enough cash to buy in as Richard's partner. Still, partnerships didn't work for Tony. Take charge. Control. Freedom.

"I no trust no one... I'm-a 'the boss,' 'the king,' 'numero uno,'" he'd declare.

Tony would survive a partnership until he'd find a way to sail solo. Richard's playboy ways and gambling habits provided Tony with an opening.

While Richard was away, Tony managed the restaurant during its normal hours and stayed open later, until 10 pm midnight, even later, serving up shipyard workers and young Navy boys who enjoyed late night pizza, pasta and beer.

Tony's routine included working as many "extra hours" to create more profit to squirrel away his share. Indeed, according to Joe Shoemaker, a Captain on the Bremerton Police Department, Richard "gambled all his profits, while Tony filled his kitty." The more comfortable Richard was, the more he left Filippi's for Tony to manage.

With Richard's profits squandered in Vegas, Tony made his move.

Later in 1968, he tendered a cash offer – a deal you can't refuse – to Richard and Mama Filippi. Either he'd buy Richard out or Richard would buy



**Rosa (center) with Tony and an officer during the annual Patrol Boy's Pizza Day.**



him out. In the end, Mama Filippi convinced Richard to sell to Tony. In that instance, Tony not only achieved his dream; he had *become* American.

Years later he added his name to the sign out front that read, *Tony's Filippi's Pizza*.

The agreement with Mama Filippi was that Tony could keep the family name alongside his own name – Tony Filippi's Pizza – as long as Tony Zampella owned the business.

The name Tony Filippi's Pizza adorned the sign alongside Kitsap Way until 1996 when Tony sold the business to Mike Malane.

## **Malane Continues Tony's Pizza**

Mike Malane arrived in Bremerton in 1980 to manage the Holiday Inn. He soon met Tony Zampella for the first time, as a customer at Filippi's. They both participated in activities at the Bremerton Chamber of Commerce. It was through these activities, and as a weekly customer at Filippi's, that they became friends and kept in touch through the years.

In 1988, Tony told Mike he had an opening for a head cook. He confided in Mike that this might be a good opportunity, as he was thinking about retiring. As a cook for Tony, Malane learned the homemade recipes, traditions, and preparations.

Seven years later, in 1995, Mike recalls, "Tony offered to sell me the restaurant business, and I jumped at the chance.

Tony Zampella announced his retirement in 1996, at age 68. Tony Jr. remembers those days: "My sister and I had our own lives, and Mike Malane had been in Dad's life as a friend and trusted business colleague for nearly a decade. Dad saw in Michael someone who was committed both to serving the community he cultivated, and in honoring the traditions that he brought over from Naples."

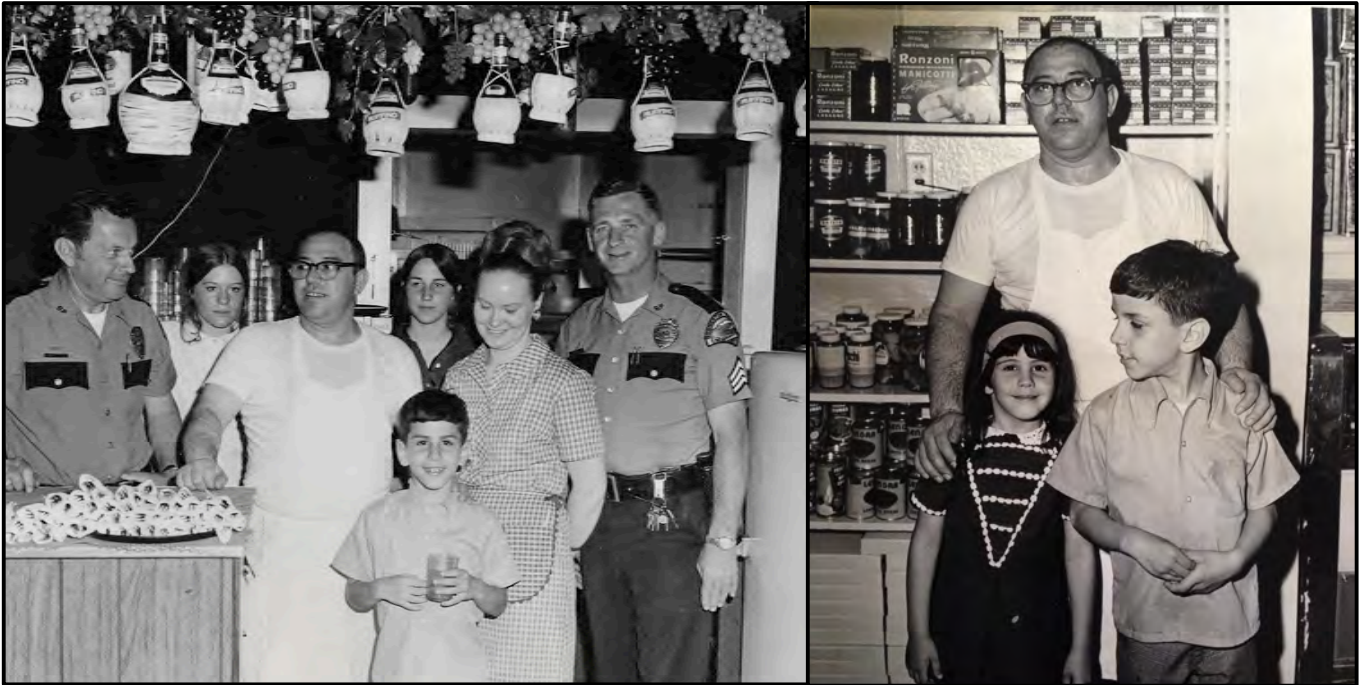
Malane has continued the family business, which comprises its extended family, a long-term staff, which, as of 2016 includes senior server Peggy Davis, who is nearing 38 years; server Dawn Piety, who has served customers for 26 years; and, Eric Branson, who manages the kitchen, and is rounding out 27 years. Malane's son Mike Malane, Jr., joined the staff in 1998 and has worked in every position.

"Since then," Malane continued, "I've worked to honor Tony's traditions."

Honoring traditions finds Malane preserving the business's artisan nature, and upholding its many onsite, homemade rituals to include mixing four batches of fresh dough daily, simmering meat and marinara sauce, and preparing sausage, meat balls, blue cheese dressing, and garlic parmesan bread on site.

Malane has expanded the business to serve lunch, daily, for 20 years, and offers an extensive Italian wine list.

The business has collected several local and regional awards: Best Italian Restaurant (non franchise), 1997, 1998; King 5 TV Evening Magazine Best of West Sound; Kitsap Sun Reader's Choice; Best Pizza and Best Italian Restaurant, 2014 Bremerton Patriot Reader's Choice; Best Pizza, 2014 West Sound Home & Garden Magazine Reader's Choice.



**Clockwise:** Tony Zampella and Tony Jr. at the annual Patrol Boys Pizza, with longtime server Shirley who worked at Tony Filippi's Pizza in the 70s and 80s. Rosa and Tony Jr. with dad, (above and below).



### **Tony's Pizza 1966-2016**

Direct any questions, or any requests for use of material, to **Tony V. Zampella** at [tonyzampella@gmail.com](mailto:tonyzampella@gmail.com) or [tony@zampellagroup.com](mailto:tony@zampellagroup.com)