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Essay

For most of my life, I have lived on the opposite side of the country from my extended family. This distance makes it difficult to spend lots of time together, but when we see each other in person, we savor and appreciate every minute. My parents always made sure that my sister and I understood the importance of connecting with our family and learning about our heritage. I grew up always knowing that I was Sicilian and Portuguese on my dad's side and Norwegian and Irish on my mom's side, but that was the extent of what I knew. Then, a few years ago, my dad started to look deeper into his Sicilian ancestry. Through a DNA test, we learned that he is 28% Italian, with ancestors from the Sicily, Campania, and Calabria regions. As my dad learns more and more about his ancestry, he has shared stories about his mom and grandmother and how they were all about family. Sadly, they passed away before I was born— but their memories live on through my dad and now through my sister and I. Learning about my Italian heritage has unlocked a new world of interest and curiosity.

I am currently a Junior in college studying Nutrition and Dietetics. A large part of Dietetics is learning about food, cooking, and eating in different cultures and understanding the impact those things have on family and traditions I have always been fascinated by cooking and food, which was a big factor in choosing Dietetics as my career. In many of my classes, we learn about how in most cultures, mealtime is a way for families to come together and spend quality time with one another. My family has always shared at least one meal daily; during that time, we can talk about our day and share what is happening in our lives. The Sicilian culture places extreme significance on family and having a strong support system. My family has always made sure to be there for each other and show support for one another. Now, after learning more about my heritage I can see how these values my immediate family keeps today come from a long line of extended family.