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Susie Q's

1981

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Biography of Susan Righetti

Susan Righetti was raised on a family ranch in the Santa Maria Valley, growing up amid regional culinary traditions that would later inspire her to establish Susie Q's Brand.

Susan's parents hailed from the Minetti and Maretti families, both of which belonged to the region's extensive Swiss-Italian ranching community. This community was instrumental in the evolution of Santa Maria Style Barbeque, a culinary experience distinguished by its own unique methods, cuts, seasonings, accoutrements and native ingredients.

As a young girl, Susan remembers that "food was the center of all social gatherings." Traditional and regional dishes and ingredients were the mainstay—barbeque, risotto, polenta, artichokes, ravioli, duck, venison, wild mushrooms, figs and more.

Susan's maternal grandmother, Adeline Maretti, was a major influence on Susan's culinary education, as was her mother Rosalie. "I can still recall the aroma of my mother's beans simmering on the stove," Susan says. "Her beans and fruit pies were the best. She had a great orchard, and she kept us busy harvesting the crop."

The Minetti family's love of good food took an exciting turn when Susan's parents established the Far Western Tavern in the historic Santa Maria Valley town of Guadalupe. The restaurant opened in 1958 and endures today as a landmark regional dining experience.

"It was fun to see my parents' enthusiasm for creating the concept and bringing it to life, from the décor to the recipes," Susan says. "My father hired a Hollywood set muralist to decorate the walls. My mother shared her recipes with the chefs."

Susan studied Agricultural Business Management at California Polytechnic State University in nearby San Luis Obispo. She remained in the area and later married Paul Righetti, a local rancher. As Susan and Paul raised their own family, they became increasingly aware of the importance of preserving and celebrating their culinary heritage.

With Paul's encouragement, Susan thus pioneered the idea of exporting the wonderful flavors of Santa Maria Style Barbeque to households around the world. In 1981, she established Susie Q's Brand as the original maker of artisan foods capturing the authentic flavors of Santa Maria Style Barbeque.

"As with our family restaurant, I really enjoyed being able to take the concept from daydream to reality, and to perpetuate the culinary heritage of our family and our region," Susan says.

Another inspirational time in Susan's business life came when she pursued culinary studies in Northern Italy with Italian cookbook author Pamela Sheldon. This experience further connected Susan to her family's culinary heritage while inspiring new product ideas.

Susie Q's Brand remains a family affair, and Susan is joined by her daughters and even her grandchildren in the daily business. Today, Susie Q's Brand foods are available at many fine retail outlets, and are also sold directly through the Susie Q's Brand web site.

"I love hearing from our customers, getting their feedback and learning about their unique uses for our products," Susan says. "It is very gratifying to carry on our family culinary tradition and to share the wonderful flavors of the Santa Maria Valley with customers around the world."

