

## Chapter Seven

Written by Dan Martino

Thursday, 27 September 2018 17:38 - Last Updated Wednesday, 03 October 2018 08:15

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# Martino's Pizzeria – Lafayette, CO



In August 2018, Carol and I ticked another “Martino’s” box when we visited Estes Park, Colorado for a few days. I had long known about Martino’s Pizzeria in the Denver suburb of Lafayette and I also knew one day we would get out there for a slice of pie and another slice of this Martino saga.

For the first time, we flew out of Lambert International Airport in St. Louis, finding a direct flight to Denver on United. We had an early morning flight on Tuesday the 28th so we headed down on Monday afternoon and did a park and fly at the Quality Inn Airport. All that worked out very well and our flight on Tuesday morning was on time. We arrived in Denver around 11:00am and found that we were able to get into our Airbnb apartment ahead of the normal noon check-in time. After freshening up, we started a little exploring.

The first thing we did, was drive the one mile to Martino’s and since it was after 12:00pm in Illinois, we were hungry, so we thought we’d have a light lunch and spend a bit of time with the owner, MJ Vacco while he wasn’t too busy. It worked out well as we were MJ’s only customers for the first hour we were there, and we did indeed get a lot of information for this feature.

We learned that Martino's was founded in May of 2010 by MJ who moved his family to Colorado with the specific goal of bringing his unique take on Midwestern, thin crust pizza to a locale where it didn’t previously exist. MJ told me he explored many other options before landing on Lafayette but that he was very happy things worked out the way they did. I can see why...Lafayette is a really nice town...clean and extremely eco-friendly with bike paths and walking paths throughout. Carol and I took full advantage and did miles and miles of walking that afternoon.

As we found at previous restaurants in this quest, “Martino’s” in this case is a given name, not a surname. The “M” in MJ is for Martin and as I’ve previously pointed out, Martino is simply the Italian version of that name. MJ’s great-grandfather, who emigrated to this country in 1914, was named Martino Giuseppe Scornovacca. When the US became involved in World War I,

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Grandfather Martino joined the US Army to serve for his new country. While stationed in Arkansas, a sergeant approached Martino asking him his name and became responsible for shortening Scornovacca to Vacca. Over time, the abbreviated new last name Vacca transformed into Vacco. I love learning about how these restaurants got their names and this story is one of my favorites.



After the war, the Vacco family slowly found its way across the eastern half of the country, eventually settling in Des Moines, Iowa. There, the family found many other first-generation Italian immigrants who had settled the area to work in the coal mines. When my own Grandpa Martino arrived at Ellis Island in 1908, I imagine he followed a similar path, ending up working the coal mines of Central Illinois.

We came back Tuesday evening and had dinner at Martino's and got to spend even more time with MJ. As I've said in previous chapters, I'm always amazed at the diversity we've found at the restaurants on this journey. This "Martino's" does very well and it's very easy to see why. The pizza was great and MJ treated us to a homemade cannoli for dessert after the evening meal.



We said good-bye to Lafayette on Wednesday morning and spent a wonderful few days in Estes Park, exploring and hiking Rocky Mountain National Park. And I suspect that on our next visit to Colorado, we'll find a way to stop in for pizza at Martino's. If you're ever in the area, stop in for a slice or two yourself. Tell MJ hello for us!

For more information about the restaurant including the menu, click [HERE](#) .

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