

## MORNING STORIES TRANSCRIPT

*Chicken a la Padulese: Chef Franco Onorato mixes chicken, cream and a car dealership into a dish you'll never forget.*

**Tony Kahn:**

Hi everybody, this is Tony Kahn, the producer and director of *Morning Stories*, from WGBH in Boston.

**Franco Onorato:**

My name is Franco Onorato. I born in Padula, small town in south Italy, near Salerno.

**Tony Kahn:**

Meet Franco Onorato, a chef with a talent for blending not just fine ingredients, but human connections – the spice of life - into new and exciting combinations. Just listen to how he cooked up the recipe for his current career as a world-class chef in southern California.

**Franco Onorato:**

The owner of a large restaurant took me to southern California to work for them. I don't like because it was frozen food – frozen potatoes, frozen hash brown – it's like a sponge.

I meet this businessman, with a car dealership, Oldsmobile/Chevy. But he had a little kitchen inside this dealership, for his personal breakfast. I was inspired and I say, "Let me use your kitchen and I can bring all my customers and we open an Italian restaurant inside the dealership! I'm from the old country. I can do anything. I only need a knife and a oven." And they were not sure that I was, like you say..., "This guy is crazy!" [Tony chuckles]

They used to call me the chef that cook with motor oil.

**Tony Kahn:**

Who said that?

**Franco Onorato:**

[Laughing] All these journalists, they used to come to see me, you know – all television stations, the Associated Press. Everybody was coming see me. It was after September 11. You know, everybody was down. I think the press was trying to say, "Look, this is America. We can still do things even if we have a major problem. There is always hope."

**Tony Kahn:**

An Italian chef, in a California car dealership, with a population that's probably 50 percent Hispanic, coming up with something that makes people happy.

**Franco Onorato:**

It's America – what the mind can conceive, it can achieve it. I made a *Chicken alla Padulese*, in honor of my hometown – an instant hit. And I meet a wonderful lady from Mexico, born in Cuernavaca. And we been married for fifteen years. She was telling me, "You gotta see this special place, Cuernavaca."

**Tony Kahn:**

So, what does an Italian see about Mexico, or Cuernavaca, that you think is really special?

**Franco Onorato:**

We all say that our country is better than yours, your country is better than mine, you know. [Tony chuckles] I didn't want to believe, you know. I'd say, this is just another place, but when there out there – the best weather in the world. You don't get the influenza out there, you know?

**Tony Kahn:**

Yes, right. [chuckling softly]

**Franco Onorato:**

And second, the flowers – the city of the flower. And also historically, all these intelligent people from around the world, and they create a very sophisticated and intelligent society – in Cuernavaca. There is an *ener* – , a special energy there. I mean the Queen of Italy used, used to live in Cuernavaca also [laughing]. The city of eternal spring, right?

**Tony Kahn:**

Yes! When did you realize that I had a connection with Cuernavaca?

**Franco Onorato:**

I browse on the Internet and I saw your production.

**Tony Kahn:**

About Cuernavaca and the Hollywood blacklist?

**Franco Onorato:**

I loved your tape!

[Sound of rainstorm]

**Tony Kahn:**

[Excerpted from WGBH special six-part podcast, *Blacklisted*]

Late every spring, like clockwork, the rains came to Mexico, starting at midday and pouring for hours. From the patio of our home in Cuernavaca, you could hear the water pounding on the flagstones and the roof...

**Franco Onorato:**

It's so realistic, you know, the rain and the, the, the recording is very very precise about what Cuernavaca is about, you know...

**Tony Kahn:**

You know where I recorded that part of the show?

**Franco Onorato:**

Where?

**Tony Kahn:**

Cuernavaca!

**Franco Onorato:**

Ah, that's very realistic!

**Tony Kahn:**

That's the rainy season in Cuernavaca that you hear.

**Franco Onorato:**

Yeah, yeah yeah – it's impressive!

**Tony Kahn:**

It's like cooking. You only use the best ingredients, right?

**Franco Onorato:**

Right! In Mexico is magic things. You know, Tony, Charlie Mingus, the famous jazz musician?

**Tony Kahn:**

Charlie Mingus, yes.

**Franco Onorato:**

He used to live in Cuernavaca.

**Tony Kahn:**

I didn't know that!

**Franco Onorato:**

He lived, he used to live it off Humboldt Avenue.

**Tony Kahn:**

No! I knew people who lived on Humboldt Avenue.

**Franco Onorato:**

Tony, you know Tony, I went to your street and I walk in the street by your house, by *La Casa de la Mora* – that was about two years ago. I knew exactly the street –

**Tony Kahn:**

At the top of the hill...

**Franco Onorato:**

– up there used to live Sam Giancana, the famous...

**Tony Kahn:**

Oh, no.

**Franco Onorato:**

Italian mob...

**Tony Kahn:**

Really?

**Franco Onorato:**

When you were there.

**Tony Kahn:**

Oh, my -- ! Sam Giancana, the man who murdered for “murder incorporated”?  
[laughing]

**Franco Onorato:**

He lived there for ten years!

**Tony Kahn:**

Oh my gosh...

**Franco Onorato:**

And he had the guest Frank Sinatra. A lot of famous people used to go to visit him.

**Tony Kahn:**

I went back to Cuernavaca many many years ago. I went to the old neighborhood, just to see what had changed. It had changed a lot. [Franco exclaims, “Oh yes!” ] You know, the – the streets were all paved. All of the shacks had been replaced by little

concrete houses and I couldn't see my old home, my *Casa de las Moras*! Didn't even know if it existed any more. This old guy who was sitting outside one of these houses – I went up to him and I said, "Excuse me, do you know this area?" He says, "Oh, yes, of course I do." I said, "Well, could you tell me if – if there still is a place called *Casa de las Moras*? I used to live there as a child." And this old man looks at me and he says, "...Tony?!"

**Franco Onorato:**

Wow!

**Tony Kahn:**

Chills went down my spine. He said, "Your brother Jim, you had a dog Mimi, you had an aunt Janet." I said, "Who are you?!" He was one of the kids I used to play with in Cuernavaca!

[Recording of Pedro Infante singing a love song, in the background]

He said, "After you guys left Mexico, they didn't rent the house for a while, so they used it as a set for Mexican feature films." He said, "And they made *Tizoc* there." *Tizoc*, I'd never heard of *Tizoc*. But it turned out that it was the last movie made by my childhood hero, the singing cowboy, Pedro Infante!

**Franco Onorato:**

Pedro Infante, wow.

[Music continues, alone and then under the narrative.]

**Tony Kahn:**

Pedro Infante had been in my house!

**Franco Onorato:**

Oh, that's big! That's major, really!

**Tony Kahn:**

And it was his last movie before he died – mysteriously – and it was the first cinemascope big deal feature film in Mexico. I said, "Do you happen to have a copy of *Tizoc*?" He said, "Sure!" [Tony laughs]. So he gives me this videotape and on this videotape, thirty-five years after I've left it, on the screen, is my house, with Pedro Infante in it!

**Franco Onorato:**

I mean the greatest, Pedro Infante! This -- Only in Mexico, Tony! Maybe we can talk each other – sit on a tableside, have an Italian meal, in Mexico and have a good, you

know, wine! You know and we talk about you know, nostalgic, about you know, [Tony agrees, "Absolutely!"] the time that was.

**Tony Kahn:**

You'll make me *Chicken alla Padulese*.

**Franco Onorato:**

*Alla Padulese*, yes!

**Tony Kahn:**

And I will make you the best guacamole that you have ever had.

**Franco Onorato:**

Ha ha ha!

**Tony Kahn:**

From a recipe that I got from the woman who used to do cooking for us, named Simona.

**Franco Onorato:**

I thank you, Tony.

**Tony Kahn:**

Bye-bye.

**Franco Onorato:**

Bye-Bye

**Tony Kahn:**

Chef Franco Onorato with today's *Morning Story*, *Chicken alla Padulese*. It tastes wonderful, just in the name. And let me tell you Gary, if you haven't met Franco Onorato yet, you probably will.

**Gary Mott:**

That's the kind of interaction that we all just crave – somebody who has some level of shared experience.

**Tony Kahn:**

Oh yeah!

**Gary Mott:**

Sit down with them and eat a lot of food!" [Tony chuckles]. And drink wine, and laugh! [Tony agrees, "Yeah!"] I was in L.A. last week for a conference and I met this

lovely woman. Found out that she used to live in Boston and she went to Emerson College. [Tony murmurs in agreement]. I went to Emerson.

**Tony Kahn:**

There you go.

**Gary Mott:**

And then we just immediately formed sort of a bond, or an ease with each other. We leaped beyond the superficial, very quickly.

**Tony Kahn:**

And I, I bet, just two degrees of separation away from her is Franco Onorato and his *Chicken alla Padulese*.

**Gary Mott:**

There's a video, Tony.

**Tony Kahn:**

He actually gave me the recipe for *Chicken alla Padulese* while we were talking. I put it on a video, just like Julia Child only without the production values! [Tony chuckles]

**Gary Mott:**

If your mouth is not watering by the end of this video, you're not human.

**Tony Kahn:**

Just sniff your way to our website WGBH dot org slash Morning Stories. <[www.wghb.org/morningstories](http://www.wghb.org/morningstories)> and you will find the video there waiting for you.

I do have a little bit of news and it's both good and bad news. The good news is that our transcription project is almost complete. The bad news is that our transcription project is almost complete [Tony and Gary chuckle] which now includes about twelve people who have been doing transcripts of every episode for us and who have also been leaving wonderful comments.

**Gary Mott:**

Kate Magovern transcribed our podcast, *Two for the Road* ...

**Tony Kahn:**

Right.

**Gary Mott:**

...which included Ravi Jain.

**Tony Kahn:**

The guy who does his own show – drives around in his car and interviews people in his car. Everyday.

**Gary Mott:**

Right, it's called *DriveTime*

**Tony Kahn:**

*DriveTime*.

**Gary Mott:**

You should definitely check it out.

**Tony Kahn:**

Great show.

**Gary Mott:**

Kate writes, "What we reveal really is different when sitting in a car, journeying someplace, and... if you can 'strip' (so to speak) a little easier in a car, well, it's a breeze – on a scooter. [Tony and Gary chuckle] I've had some of the most direct and meaningful conversations with my husband while buzzing along on a scooter together. Perhaps it's that fear which accompanies every ride, which pushes the truth out of you, loud and fast. Bonking heads – or helmeted ears and cheeks together, needing to practically yell out your thoughts to be heard over the noise of wind and traffic – all very cathartic."

**Tony Kahn:**

I'll tell you what else is cathartic – having one of those scooters in Italy come right at you! [Tony laughing]

**Gary Mott:**

No traffic lines in Italy, yes?

**Tony Kahn:**

Let's say that there's a fascinating conversation going on about where the traffic lines should be.

**Gary Mott:**

I see, I see.

**Tony Kahn:**

Just one other that I wanted to read to you: Georgia. She was responding to one of the stories called *Family Ties*, the story of somebody who came from a very well known family. She was moved by that to write:



"My maternal grandfather's sister, she was ancient and had long been institutionalized by the time I was big enough to capture memories. We went to visit her in another state, only once. It was like entering a prison, and I was terrified to my bones to be walking among the insane, who reached out their hands to me, grabbed at my clothing, talked strangely, and looked so sad and so wild, as we made our way to sweet Lida Mae's locked room. I have never forgotten how she looked, sitting there, the sun streaming in through the window, illuminating her from behind, a million wrinkles of anguished confusion and age in her skin. Her mind was gone, I suppose, but her heart was not.

"When my mother passed away, I inherited her family photographs, and there is one, of my Aunt Lida Mae, in her dark-haired, dark-eyed prime, a brooding beauty. Beneath a grey sky she is standing perfectly erect in a cemetery, near a stranger's grave. I learned years later that as she began to lose her mind, Lida Mae would disappear late some nights and my grandfather would go out searching for her through the dark dangerous town. He would inevitably find her somewhere in the graveyard, wandering alone and unprotected, giving her madness some moonlight.

"Grace, a delicate beauty – none of that could save her. I felt an incredible connection to her, like our hearts were the closest of friends. It was my great pleasure later to perform some special religious rites for her that are deeply meaningful to me. This was my way of honoring her and finding the means to give her a gift of respect and love. She was no longer the old wizened woman disfigured by mental suffering who had frightened me as a child. She was my dear aunt, and my sister, young and smiling and beautiful, and very very well. In my mind I could hold both her hands and we could stand together and gaze into the pains of life and say to them, 'You, you are nothing.'

"Happy Valentine's Day 2008 to my *Morning Stories* friends."

And that was from Georgia, responding to one of the transcripts that members of the Transcribers' Club provided so amazingly to us. Georgia has also gone ahead and done something wonderful to keep that kind of conversation going.

**Gary Mott:**

Georgia has created a blog.

**Tony Kahn:**

Mmm-hmm.

**Gary Mott:**

Out of whole cloth.

**Tony Kahn:**

A place where you can continue the conversation. We're certainly going to be checking in as good neighbors to Georgia's blog and we'll have a link to her blog on our website.

**Gary Mott:**

And email us – Morning Stories at WGBH dot org. <morningstories@wgbh.org>

**Tony Kahn:**

We'll see you soon. Take care.

[Recording of Pedro Infante singing, begins again]

Oh, you know, Gary, I neglected to mention one more detail about today's *Morning Story*. In that movie called *Tizoc* that I got, Pedro Infante played the role of a Mixtec Indian who by his kindness and his decency wins the heart of the most beautiful lady in the country. And sitting next to me, while I watched that movie was my little son, Andrew, whom we'd adopted in Mexico eight years before, almost to the day. And guess what? He's a Mixtec Indian, and at that moment, as we both sat there making our own connections to Pedro Infante, the world between us got so small, we could have held it in the palm of our hands.

[Recording fades out to the sound of rain falling]

[End of Recording]

Transcribed by: Kate Magovern

Notes from the Transcriber:

I had not heard of Padula, so I looked it up on the Internet and located the town's official website: <<http://www.comune.padula.sa.it>>

Under the section "figli illustri" (famous sons), I wondered if Franco would be listed. He is not, but maybe he will be one day, pictured with a knife and a (h)oven and a big smile. I was, however, delighted by the lively English translation of the biography of another famous *Padulese*, Giuseppe Petrosino, who made his second home New York city and was a brave and dedicated fighter of the Mafia.

<[http://www.comune.padula.sa.it/figli\\_il/petrosin.htm](http://www.comune.padula.sa.it/figli_il/petrosin.htm)>

Notes from Liz:

I'm sending this along, having had the pleasure of dining on Chef Franco's chicken dish last night, created by the chef in my own family, my dear husband Tom. It was delicious, and we'll have (purposefully created) encores of it by means of the four extra pieces he cooked at the same time. YUM!! [Tony, Tom used the recipe from the video. He notes these helpful extra bits – the “slow oven” is good at 350°F. and for the oven-part of the cooking, he cooked all six breasts for 25 minutes, total.]