



► I AM Books

Your Italian American Cultural Hub in Boston

Come discover the very first Italian-American bookstore in the US, founded by Italian journalist Nicola Orichuia and his business partner Jim Pinzino.

by **Tommaso Cartia**

“I’m into simple names,” says Nicola Orichuia, “a name that sticks. I AM Books is actually not only a simple name but it’s an acronym for ‘Italian American Books.’ Some people don’t understand the play on words, but once they do, they’re blown away.” That’s how the Italian-born journalist describes the idea behind what can be considered a little cultural miracle—the very first Italian American bookstore in the US.

I AM BOOKS: a simple name with a great concept, clever and effective. Like a piece of writing by Italo Calvino, it is ingenious in its lightness, and rich with meaning.

From Journalist to Bookstore Owner

Born in Rome, Orichuia moved to Chicago in 2008 to pursue a master’s degree in journalism and later started working for the Italian American magazine *Fra Noi*, which he still writes for. Then he moved to Boston with his wife, and that’s where, in 2010, he found personal and professional stability. In December 2012, the journalist launched a new website and magazine, *Bostoniano.info* - Boston’s Italian-American Voice. The online network also turned into a print magazine, the *Bostoniano Magazine*, which, along with Orichuia’s experience with *Fra Noi*, laid the groundwork for his most ambitious project to date: the Italian American bookstore, which he opened in 2015.

An Italian-American Bookstore

“The bookstore is not specifically an Italian bookstore,” Orichuia clarifies. “It is rather an Italian-American bookstore. And there is a big difference in my opinion. My partner in this adventure, Jim Pinzino, and I didn’t think it



would have been a successful business if we had focused just on Italian books.”

In fact, in order to reach as large an audience as possible, Pinzino and Orichuia had to have a lot of English-language books.

“Around 90% of the books and literature here are related to Italian culture,” continues Orichuia. “The genres vary from fiction to history books, cookbooks, and so on. We also have books related to specific Italian areas, from the north to the south. There’s a wide range of topics and authors that are available. Some are less known than others, but we carry a lot of classics, like Dante and Calvino. We also carry contemporary authors that are translated every year, and we try our best to promote them and introduce them to the public.”

A Specific Market for a Specific Mission

A big challenge for a big mission is to share and promote Italian culture and literature in a city like Boston, already renowned for its fertile university life and sensitivity to themes of cultural exchange and education. But is there a specific demand for Italian culture? I AM BOOKS proves that the answer is “yes,” especially in the historical Italian neighborhood of North End where the bookstore is located.

“We have a specific niche market,” underscores Orichuia. “We know exactly what we’re looking for. But, sometimes it feels like we’re looking for a needle in a haystack. Every year, there are dozens of titles that come out, from big publishers to small printing companies. And there are many different



kinds of customers. Thankfully, we are in a tourist area. But the North End is also an area where most Italian immigrants from past generations settled. We offer events on a constant basis. The events are also a part of our mission because we believe that by offering events, discussion topics, and presentations, we can be a part of a larger discussion on what it means to be an Italian or an Italian American today.”

A Point of Reference for Schools

The bookstore’s impact on Boston’s Italy-loving community has grown over the years, thanks in part to its interaction with various local school activities. True, the US Department of Education has not yet officially introduced bilingual English/Italian programs in American schools. Just recently, a program was launched in Brooklyn, New York City, but there’s still a lot of work to be done. So the relevance of spaces like I AM BOOKS is particularly significant for the community and becomes a space to preserve and nurture the Italian language and culture, so it can be passed down to future generations.

“We are always looking for new opportunities,” says Orichuia, expanding on this last point. “Here in New England, there is an institution that promotes teaching Italian in schools. We also help with schools that are looking for books for their classes. With that said, we’re also open to partnerships across state lines. We have had teachers from NY, NJ, FL and CA, and we are more than happy to ship books across the country. It is one of our objectives

L to R: Nicola Orichiu, the I AM Books headquarters in the North End



» An I AM Books' Project
IDEA Boston; A Festival of Italian American Culture

Organized by I AM Books in collaboration with several local organizations, IDEA Boston is an Italian-inspired cultural festival, celebrating literature, history, art and many other aspects of Italian and Italian-American culture.

The two-day event will be held at the **Dante Alighieri Society** of Massachusetts, located at 41 Hampshire Street, Cambridge, MA 02169. The festival will be inaugurated Friday, Nov. 2, 2018, and continue through Saturday, Nov. 3. below is the full schedule of the events; to purchase tickets, please go to ideaboston.com/schedule

November 2, 2018

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
Right You Are (If You Think So): Luigi Pirandello's Relativism of Perception and the Break with Traditional Theatre Form
 With: Marco Remo Zanelli

2:45 - 3:45 p.m.
Memoir Writing Workshop
 With: Lisa Romeo

2:45 - 3:45 p.m.
Why Study the Italian Classics?
 With: Mattia Acetosio, Laurie Shepard, Chiara Barni, Alessio Tognetti

2:45 - 3:45 p.m.
Autism: Towards a Future of Social Understanding
 With: Marina Viola, Michela Fagiolini

4 - 5 p.m.
Creating and Sustaining The Capacity to Innovate
 With: Gary Pisano, Francesca Gino

4 - 5 p.m.
Vittoria Colonna: Renaissance Woman
 With: Ramie Targoff

5:15 - 6:15 p.m.
Italian Parents, American Children: Cultural Differences, Relational Bonds, and Negotiating Identities
 With: Marisa Labozzetta, Lorraine Mangione, Marianne Leone, Lisa Romeo

5:15 - 6:45 p.m.
Assunta Spina: 1915 Silent Film with Live Musical Accompaniment
 With: August Watters, John T. La Barbera

5:15 - 6:15 p.m.
Workshop: L'Italiano Attraverso l'Opera (Italian Through Opera)
 With: Maria Felicita Fichera

6:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Against the Grain: The Story Behind TV's Longest-Running Cook Show
 With: Mary Ann Esposito

6:30 - 7:30 p.m.
The Brain: A User's Manual
 With: Marco Magrini

8 - 10:10 p.m.
Questi Fantasm (Oh, These Ghosts)
 With: ImproNati

November 3, 2018

10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Tomie dePaola
 With: Tomie dePaola

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
Italian Jewish Writers: Emancipation, Persecution, Memory
 With: Sergio Parussa, Nancy Harrowitz

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.
From Italy to the North End - Photographs and Stories from 1972-1982
 With: Anthony V. Riccio

2:45 - 3:45 p.m.
Getting Italian Americans Into Print: Publishers and Editors Talk
 With: Fredric Nachbaur, Peter Covino, Nicholas Grosso, Michelle Reale, Julia Lisella

2:45 - 3:45 p.m.
The Benefits and Challenges of Dual Language Education
 By Marialuisa Di Stefano

4 - 5 p.m.
From Ellis Island to Boston's North End: Tales of Italian Immigration
 By Vincent Cannato, Alex Goldfeld

4 - 5 p.m.
Italian American Poetry
 With: Laurette Folk, Mary Bonina, Carla Panciera, Jennifer Martelli, Julia Lisella

5:15 - 6:15 p.m.
Workshop: Preserving and Retelling Local Culture and Traditions
 With: Stephanie Longo

5:15 - 6:15 p.m.
My Brilliant Friend: The Elena Ferrante Phenomenon
 With: Michael Reynolds, Danielle Oteri

6:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Masks in Motion: The World of Commedia dell'Arte
 With: Chiara Durazzini

6:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Our Ancestral Roots and America's Immigration Crisis Today
 With: Diana Lynch, Michelle Reale, Anthony V. Riccio, Olivia Kate Cerrone

8 - 11 p.m.
Grand Finale Party
 With: The D'Agostino-Marchese Ensemble