



I AM BOOKS - Your Italian American Cultural Hub in Boston

Tommaso Cartia (April 02, 2018)



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

"I'm into simple names, a name that would stick. I AM Books is actually not only a simple name but its an acronym for "Italian AMERICAN BOOKS." Some people don't understand these play on words but once they do, they're blown away by it." That's how Nicola Orichuia, the Italian born journalist, describes the idea behind what it 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 an Italo Calvino's piece of writing, ingenious in its lightness and rich with meaning.



From Journalist to Bookstore Owner

Born in Rome, the Italian journalist moved to the United States in 2008 to do a master in journalism in Chicago and later on he started working for the Italian American magazine *Fra Noi*, which he still covers. Then he moved to Boston with his wife and that's where he stabilized both his personal and professional carrier since 2010. In December 2012 the journalist launched a new website and magazine *Bostoniano.info* - Boston's Italian American Voice. The online network turned also into a printed magazine, the *Bostoniano Magazine* that along with Orichuia's experience with *Fra Noi*, prepared the terrain for his most ambitious project to date, the Italian American bookstore that he then opened in 2015.

An Italian American Bookstore

"The bookstore is an Italian-American bookstore," likes to specify Nicola Orichuia, "it is not specifically an italian bookstore - and there is a difference in my opinion - me and my partner in this adventure, Jim Pinzino, didn't think it would have been a successful business if we would have focused just on Italian books."

The store in facts exists to sell books about Italian culture and Italy, and in order to reach out as many people as possible, Pinzino and Orichuia had to have a lot of English texts based books as well to relate to a broader audience in Boston.

"Around 90% of the books and literature here are related to Italian culture." Continued Orichuia, "the genres vary from fiction, non-fiction, historical books, cookbooks and so on. We also have sections of books related to a specific Italian area, from the north to the south. There is a wide range of topics and authors that are available. Some are less known than others, but we have many classics like Dante or Calvino. There are also 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, to share and promulgate the Italian culture and literature in a city like Boston, already renowned for its fertile University life and sensitive to the themes of cultural exchange and education. But was there a specific demand for Italian culture? I AM BOOKS proves that the answer would be a positive one, specifically in the area where the bookstore stands, the historical Italian neighborhood of North End.

"We have a specific market," underlined 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 and dozens of titles in Italian from big publishers to small publishing companies. There are many different kinds of customers. Thankfully, we are in a tourist area in Boston. North End it is also an area where most of the Italian immigrants settled. I attract them by offering events on a constant basis. The events are also a part of our mission because we believe that by offering events, topics to discuss and presentations we can be a part of a larger discussion on what it means to be an italian immigrant and an Italian-American."

A Point of Reference for Schools

The bookstore impact on the Boston's Italian-American community has been growing through the years, intersecting also with schools educational programs. Bilingual programs - English/Italian - haven't been officially introduced in American schools by the United States Department of Education yet. Just recently a program was launched in New York City but there's still a lot to do. So the relevance of realities like I AM BOOKS it is particularly significant for the community, and becomes a space to preserve and nurture the Italian language and culture to be passed down also to the future generations.

"We are always looking for new opportunities." Said Orichuia elaborating on this point. "Here in New England there is an institution that helps Italian to be taught in schools. We also help with schools



who are looking for books for their classes. With that said, we're also opened to partnerships across the border. 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 to become a point of reference for schools."

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