

Book Reviews

Sicily: A Heart's Journey, by Mary Tolaro Noyes, New York: Legas Publishing, 2018, \$18.00

Reviewed by Catherine Accardi

The title of the book says it all, *Sicily: A Heart's Journey*. A more appropriate title is difficult to imagine. Author Mary Tolaro Noyes takes the reader on a heart-felt journey, an adventure, one might say, into her heritage and the island that is Sicily. The book is a series of stories, first-hand accounts of Mary's journey to find and explore her roots.

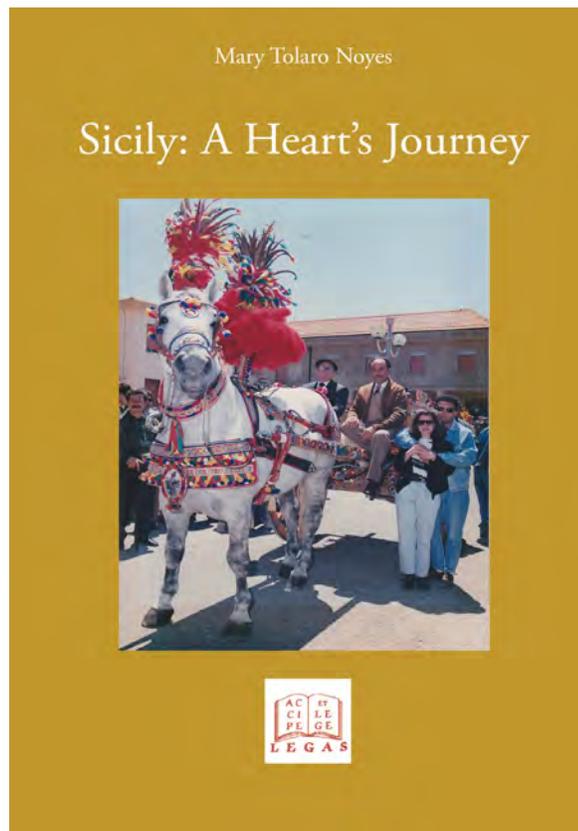
Mary was raised in Vermont, the place where her Sicilian grandparents settled in 1913. Her story begins further back in history, in Sicily, the largest of the Mediterranean islands, separated from the continent by the Strait of Messina. It is to this land Mary takes the reader.

This journey was not without some apprehension, especially at the beginning. This hesitation is clearly illustrated in the first paragraph of the first chapter, "My Journey (she uses a capital 'J') began with both excitement and trepidation." And again a few lines later with, "If

I could have gotten out of it I would have." That was on June 14th, 1989.

With passionate enthusiasm, Mary sets out on an odyssey that embraces many people and places in such an affectionate and engaging way that the reader looks forward to the poems and photographs depicting the scenes of a life's journey.

Among the many passages, poems, and images that resonated with me, was the following introduction to the poem titled, "On Reaching." It perfectly describes a universal life lesson. "Sometimes fear has kept me from reaching out, looking beyond the confines I have often created for myself. . . . However, in spite of my trepidation, I did reach out to our Sicilian family and learned the



value of taking a chance." Stronger than the trepidation was the yearning desire to face her family and heritage headlong.

At one point, Mary shares, "I grew up believing, at least just a little, that Italy's reputation in the world depended on me. I was proud to be Italian: I had to behave and do my best because I had a responsibility not only to myself and to my family, but yes, to all of Italy." That says a lot, actually reflecting a sense of this reader's own "Italianness" but also instilling a sense that can be applied to anyone's cultural identity.

I must also point out the choice of cover photograph. What better way to convey the spirit of Sicily than the iconic *carretto Siciliano*! And even more exquisite in this case, is the fact that one of the occupants is Mary's Zio Rocco on the day he was Grand Marshall of the Cart Drivers' Procession. The event is described in the section titled, "One Saturday in May", which reads, "Zio Rocco was especially pleased at the honor bestowed on him. He would be on the most beautiful lead cart, pulled by an exuberant, prancing white stallion festooned with brilliant red, yellow, blue, and green feathers and ribbons to match the colors of the painted cart."

Clearly Mary's narrative puts the reader right into in the center of the scene.

Just as the *carretto* on the book's cover conveys the iconic culture of Sicily, so does Mary's book convey the love of family, of tradition's unique to that family but yet quite understandable and relatable to every family of every culture. It left this reader longing for a similar heart's journey. It has been said of *Sicily: A Heart's Journey*, that the author tells a personal story, personal but one that reflects a universal story of family, tradition, and discovery. And so it does.

Mary closes the book with an Epilogue that ends with a clear understanding. "I have realized the world that comforts my soul, quickens my passion, and inspires my life." Interestingly, I, as a reader, felt the same way about my own heritage. Thanks to Mary, I finally had the words to express my own life-long connection to my roots. Mary's fondness for family is contagious. And so it should be!

Marianna Biazzo Randazzo, *Images of America: Italians of Brooklyn*, \$21.99

Reviewed by Louisa Calio

Images of America: Italians of Brooklyn by award winning author, Marianna Biazzo Randazzo is a collection of short narratives with photos of Brooklyn Italians that conjures many memories for Italians like me who grew up in "Bruculinu" in the early 1950's, published by Arcadia for an amazing price of \$21.99.

The striking cover photo of girls receiving their first holy communion, white missals clutched in hands covered by white gloves, veils of varied types and lengths, fluffy white dresses like brides, calls us to awaken memories, as does the Sister looking straight into the camera,