

The Travel Chronicles of NANCY & JOHN PETRALIA

DISCOVERING ITALY BEYOND THE BROCHURES

“Nancy and John Petralia, a retired couple turned travel writers, share their unexpected journey from a year in Italy to Amazon bestsellers with their first book, “Not in a Tuscan Villa.” Their unique approach combines personal anecdotes, historical figures, and dual perspectives, offering readers an immersive experience that transcends conventional travel writing.”

Meet Nancy and John Petralia, an inquisitive and spirited retired couple whose love for adventure led them to an unexpected career in travel writing. Their journey began after spending a year in Italy, an experience that ignited the spark for their first book, “*Not in a Tuscan Villa*.” Much to their surprise, the book soared to Amazon bestseller status in the Travel Italy category, marking the inception of their travel writing endeavors.

Driven by a passion for purposeful travel, the Petralias go beyond the conventional travelogue. Their writing delves into the heart of each destination, offering readers not just a mere account of places but a profound understanding of the country, its culture, and the compelling narratives that draw them there. Their approach is unique, providing insights that transcend the surface, weaving together a rich tapestry of experiences.

The couple has authored two more travel memoirs, with each book inspired by a different influential figure in Italian history and culture. From Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Unifier of Italy, to the groundbreaking painter Caravaggio, the Petralias explore the depths of their subjects, bringing their stories to life through the lens of their own adventures.

What sets their books apart is the engaging narrative style, presented in alter-

nating chapters—his perspective intertwined with hers. This dual viewpoint not only offers readers a dynamic and immersive experience but also captures the essence of the unique and undiscovered aspects of each place they visit. The Petralias have a knack for uncovering surprising, embarrassing, poignant, and laughable moments, creating a connection with readers who often find themselves saying, “I was there with you.”

In the literary world curated by Nancy and John Petralia,



every journey becomes a shared experience, and every destination reveals its hidden gems through the lens of their compelling storytelling.

What’s your favorite book no one else has heard of?

The Last Whales by Loyd Abey

Are there any classic novels that you only recently read for the first time?

The Winter of our Discontent by John Steinbeck

Which writers — working today do you admire most?

Eric Larsen, Bill Bryson, Barbara Kingsolver, Jodi Picoult, Jeanine Cummins, Delia Owens

What books and authors have impacted your writing career?

Bill

Bryson is curious, adventurous, and a hilarious travel writer. He’s also incredibly skilled at tying seemingly disparate observations together. We try hard to emulate him.

Have you ever changed your opinion of a book based on information about the author, or anything else?

A person in our book group lobbied hard until we selected *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond. Everyone thought it sounded awful. We learned so much about the history of mankind that it’s now one of our favorite books.

Travel writing often involves a balance between personal anecdotes and providing valuable information for travelers. How do you strike this balance in your writing?

Our books really are about what happens to us wherever we are. Many of our stories include the challenges we face with logistics, bureaucracy, misunderstanding, and bad timing. But they also include serendipitous discoveries and encounters with locals who became friends. It’s the honest experience that our readers say they love about our books.

Can you tell us more about your journey from living in Italy for a year to becoming a best-selling authors in the travel genre? What inspired you to start writing about your experiences?

We had no intention of writing a book. But when we returned from our year, we found ourselves

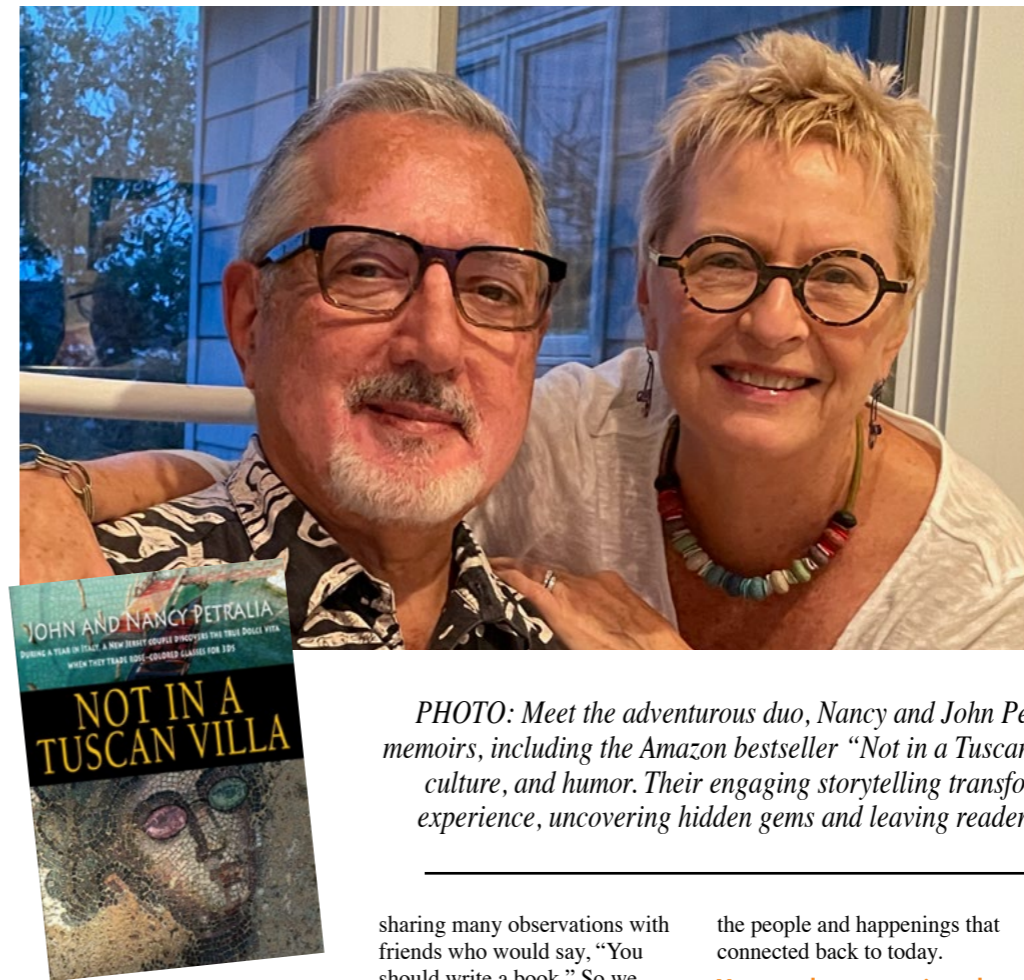


PHOTO: Meet the adventurous duo, Nancy and John Petralia, whose captivating travel memoirs, including the Amazon bestseller “Not in a Tuscan Villa,” weave together history, culture, and humor. Their engaging storytelling transforms every journey into a shared experience, uncovering hidden gems and leaving readers saying, ‘I was there with you.’

sharing many observations with friends who would say, “You should write a book.” So we found a writers’ group at our local library where the participants helped us hone our style. *Not in a Tuscan Villa* was birthed in that group. To our great surprise, it became a bestseller in its category on Amazon. People enjoy the authentic experience we share—the good and challenging—and can live vicariously through our two voices.

“Not in a Tuscan Villa” focuses on travel with a purpose. Could you elaborate on the concept of traveling with a purpose and why it’s essential to your writing?

There’s a famous quote about how the tourist sees what he came to see while the traveler sees what he sees. Our purpose has always been to look beyond the obvious, to see what’s happening around us, and to look for the connections to our own lives and what’s happening in the world. With both *Looking for Garibaldi* and *Without Provenance* we started with a goal—exploring the places Garibaldi lived and fought, and then going to where Caravaggio’s paintings are while investigating the art of forgery. But in each, we still looked for

the people and happenings that connected back to today.

Your readers appreciate the insights into the country, culture, and the story behind your travels. How do you go about researching and incorporating these elements into your writing?

First, we’re curious. Whether in a foreign country or planning an extended stay, we want to know more about the place we’ll stay or visit. We got interested in Giuseppe Garibaldi while living in Italy. Every city, town or village we visited had a statue, bust, or plaque to the Unifier of Italy and it was fun to ask where that was to break the ice with locals and find our way around a new locale. Back home, we read about his life in Italy and South America, the Risorgimento, and his place as the world’s most famous man in 1860. Looking for Garibaldi grew out of that research as well as our visits to all of his homes in Italy, Uruguay, and Staten Island. In that book we also tell the stories of other war veterans, both Italian and American and how each country honors their heroes.

Our third book, *Without Provenance*, originated from an observation of recent news articles about “rediscovered”

Caravaggio paintings, as well as those by others, thought to be long lost. We’d always liked his work, but the recent resurgence of interest in him, plus the multi-million dollar prices they were bringing—even for works with no real authentication—peaked that curiosity, about Caravaggio, and the potential of modern forgery. We’d seen his work around Italy

but before returning for a more in depth study, we read many books about him, his work, and the art of forgery. Then, we scrutinized more than 60 of his paintings up close before writing.

Travel often leads to unexpected and sometimes amusing situations. Could you share a particularly funny or embarrassing moment from your travels that left an impression on you and your readers?

Our books are full of embarrassing moments! One happened while we were visiting Venice during December. Nancy had taken a tumble the day before and her white winter coat was smudged with dirt. We were wandering the back alleys and had gotten separated across a piazza as we looked for a particular street sign. A well-dressed local woman approached Nancy and asked in Italian, “Are you looking for work?” She understood the words, but not the context and was groping for a reply. John, who had heard the query, hurried to her side. “With your dirty coat and blonde hair, she thinks you’re a Russian cleaning woman!” The woman scurried off when she heard our English, but we had a good laugh.