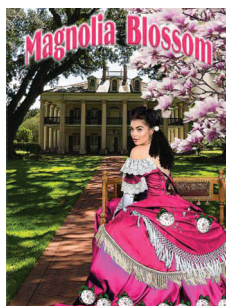


reviews



MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM

By Joanne Fisher

Published by Joanne's Books
Available at Amazon.com

Italians have always liked the American South.

The reason has mainly to do with the warmer climate where palms and fruit trees thrive the same as they do in Italy. Add to that Southern hospitality, good

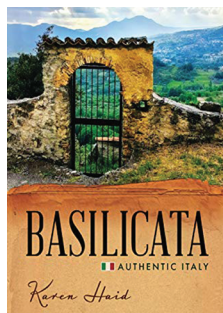
food, fine living and the zeal for family tradition, and Italians are won over in Dixie.

Joanne Fisher is an Italian woman who relocated to Canada and then on to Florida. She spent many years in the Deep South and knows well the area's history and culture. Joanne is one of the busiest writers out there today. She has written a number of romance novels set in Italy. The time has come to set a new story closer to home, albeit the antebellum South.

"Magnolia Blossom" contains the ingredients for a romance novel, in the tradition of "Gone With The Wind." The story transports readers to a whole different time and place. The setting is Valdosta, Georgia, in the years of the Civil War. Southern belles take residence in glorious mansions with handsome men in gray uniforms to escort them to banquets and dances. The main character is the beautiful Magnolia Mae (Maggie) Terry. In the beginning of the novel, she mourns the death of her parents from dysentery. She turns for comfort to her best friend Flora, a slave the same age as her. Together, they face the changing times brought on by the war. Maggie must run the plantation when her husband is called to fight for the Confederacy. In treating her slaves humanely, as taught by her parents, "Magnolia Blossom Plantation was a perfectly-oiled machine. The Terrys had been firm believers that if you treated your slaves with compassion, understanding, and friendship, the Lord would reward you twofold, and that's exactly why the plantation was the most envied and sought-after estate in the all of Georgia. Even without the head of the household present, Magnolia Blossom was flourishing."

Joanne's love for the South shows well in "Magnolia Blossom." She conveys the majesty and flamboyance of the era with great vigor. As the novel progresses, Maggie realizes the defeat of the Confederacy is imminent. An abolitionist at heart, she frees her slaves and only allows them to work her estate as hired hands. Soon, the land is occupied by the North and Maggie finds herself in a forbidden romance with a Northern officer, Lieutenant Wesley Jenkins.

"Magnolia Blossom" is a gem of a novel that mixes the delights of romance with well-researched history. The Italian touch appears throughout the novel with the details of fashion, food and romantic passion. "Magnolia Blossom" is the perfect novel for anyone with loves romance novels, Southern living and Italian style.



BASILICATA: AUTHENTIC ITALY

By Karen Haid

Hiller Press, Las Vegas
Available at Amazon.com and
www.karenhaid.com

Karen Haid loves Italy but not necessarily the Italy of travel agents.

Her first book about the peninsula was not set in Florence, Rome or Venice, but rather, Calabria, an entire region few people, not of Italian blood, visit. "Calabria: The

Other Italy," was heartily praised when published some years ago. Karen took readers on an incredible tour of the most obscure villages and communes of Calabria.

Karen takes the same approach about a land that is even more remote and mysterious than Calabria, in her new book, "Basilicata: Authentic Italy."

When students of Italy try to name all 20 regions, they usually miss one - Basilicata. The region is at the heel of the boot, wedged in between Campania, Apulia and Calabria. Basilicata lies alone in so many ways. The other regions are more famous for large numbers of Italian immigrants to the United States. Ask any Italian American where her family came from and the answer is unlikely to be Basilicata.

As Karen points out, the original name for the region was Lucania but changed to Basilicata "around the 11th century. The Normans are generally accredited with naming the region in honor of the majestic basilica in the town of Acerza." Karen writes: "...the great Lucania never went away entirely and even today, the region is commonly referred to as Lucania." Indeed, during the reign of Mussolini, the region reverted back to its origins and was named Lucania. After World War II was when the name Basilicata returned.

Made up of 10 extensive chapters, "Basilicata: Authentic Italy" conveys an incredible amount of in-depth research. Karen's first-person narrative captures the area's sights and sounds. She visits key sites such as the region's capital, Potenza, the massive landmark of Matera and the castle of Melfi. She also describes places that few, if any, tourists will ever visit. Her unique excursions extend to Craco, for instance, a ghost town once "known as paese del grano (town of wheat)." She explains that the village regained its lost population only to succumb to a massive landslide. "The last straw came in 1971 with the construction of a new containment wall...No sooner had the work been finished when the village collapsed...the hill of clay couldn't support indiscriminate modern technology."

Karen is a natural writer with a smooth, crisp style. Each page flows seamlessly with in-depth information and provocative insight. "Basilicata: Authentic Italy," is much more than an educated traveler's visit to an Italian region. Rather, it is a love letter for a land and her people by a writer whose soul now belongs to Italy. "Basilicata: Authentic Italy" is awesome.