Whispering Tides: a Glorious Love Story

Natasha Lardera (October 17, 2012)



In American novels, characters go to Italy to find themselves, in Whispering Tides things work the other way around. 50something Italian journalist Alberto Landi, following his wife's death, leaves everything behind and heads for Savannah, a city they'd both loved. A chat with author Guido Mattioni on what inspired the novel and its its success in the US

"When his beloved wife Nina suddenly dies - after 23 years of life together - Alberto Landi understands he has to leave Milan Italy, where he has always lived and worked. He leaves his friends, colleagues, a good job and the polluted big city he has never loved which has now become even more intolerable to him.
He is fifty, he is totally alone and he is confused, but he definitely knows that he has to escape very far away, across the ocean to the only place he and Nina had always loved together. He lands in Savannah, Georgia. There, in a natural paradise governed by the breath of the tides and with the help of many dear friends - colorful human characters as well as wise animals - he starts to rebuild his new life. His dream is coming true until the day he wakes up one morning and discovers that…"

(Amazon)

This is the outline of Whispering Tides, a a shining love story written by Italian journalist Guido Mattioni that is taking the US by storm.

Born in Udine, Italy, in 1952, Guido has lived and worked in Milan since 1978. Writing has always been his job and his life. During his working years as a journalist he has worked for daily newspapers as well as weekly and monthly magazines while holding almost every professional title possible, from reporter to editor-in-chief and deputy editor to special correspondent.
Guido is also an avid traveler, indeed he has been all over the word but especially in USA, where he has visited 36 States. When he was younger he wrote two non-fiction books. Whispering Tides is his first novel.

Guido decided, the reason why is explained in the following interview, to self publish the book using Smashwords. The novel first came out in its English translation, 24 hours before being released in Italian.

We were able to reach Mattioni in Italy to ask him a few questions. He will be in the US soon to attend several cultural events featuring his work.

What inspired you to write this novel?

I believe it was the combination of several different factors. First of all my love for the beautiful city of Savannah, GA, where the story is set and where I totally feel at home: I have been going there every year since 1991, and I am proud to say that in 1998 I became an honorary citizen.

Still the story was inspired by, or rather born from, a tragic personal life experience that dates back to 10 years ago. However, the novel is not autobiographical, I really wish to emphasize that. The story develops from that event and takes a form of its own, as, I believe, it happens with the most part of fictional stories. I believe that a good novelist is such when he/she is able to take a personal experience, even a most intimate one, and mold it into a universal circumstance, something anybody can relate to. I hope I succeeded in doing that.

How was your love for Savannah born and how did it become a character of your novel?

Thank you for asking me about this. I really appreciate the fact that you called Savannah a “character.” Indeed, Savannah is not the trivial backdrop of the story, a set where the other characters act. It is much more: it is a loving creature that thinks, reasons and feels. Most likely other authors don't live it this way and they just see it as what it objectively is: a breathtaking city to be used as the backdrop of their story and it all ends there. It just has an aesthetic meaning. In my eyes, Savannah was a character even before I started writing my book, even before I decided to humanize it in it. It was a character when I first set foot in it and fell in love with it.

I equally humanized other elements, who after all, really are living creatures – I am talking about the tides, the trees, Mother Nature and some animals. They “speak” to whoever has a heart that can be called such. I have done even more; I have humanized and given flesh and bones to a bronze statue, that of Lord Oglethorpe, the city's founding father. This is probably why someone has written that Whispering Tides is a fairy tale for grownups. Clearly, I see it as a compliment, not as something that belittles my book. Fairy tales exist in real life, we are the ones who, busy looking for who knows what, do not catch that. Maybe I am wrong, but I believe that now more than ever people need fairy tales and dreams.

How is the story developed and what are the main characteristics of its characters?

Mine is not one of those novels featuring big happenings like homicides, intrigues or conspiracies.

I write about a normal, real life. About the succession of the every day events of Alberto Landi's life. He is not and he does not intend to be a hero. He is an Italian man who, devastated by the death of his wife, leaves everything behind with the scope to rebuild his life. He leaves his world, his job, his material possessions and the city where he lives to start a new existence in a “far away land,” somewhere on the other side of the Ocean, a place that he and his late wife had really enjoyed together.

The other characters are figures of the every day as well: people you run into at the bar, at a gas station or at the supermarket. I believe there is nothing more extraordinary than normality. I could not even write in my head, let alone on paper, a fantasy story, a tale of gorgeous fairy creatures with sharp teeth. And I seriously loathe all tales of bespectacled wizards.

Whispering Tides is also something else: it is the story of a great love, a real love, the kind of love that needs no handcuffs and no shades of gray or any other color. It is also an ode to friendship and a celebration of memory. Lastly, it is my heartfelt declaration of love to all women, as well as an invitation - I don't like to send messages, who am I to send messages - to be positive. Because life is a wonderful gift even when it painfully puts you to the test and it is a real crime to waste it by rejecting hope and giving in to pessimism.

Some of your characters are fictional, others aren't. Who inspired you?

As I mentioned earlier, I simply looked around me and I searched into the files of my memory. It is a large storage place made of travel memories collected during my 35 years as a journalist. These travels were not just work related but for pleasure as well. I love to travel more than anything else, I even enjoy the long waiting hours at the gate when your flight is delayed. Those are the moments when you are given the opportunity to mentally photograph faces, note personalities and study them.

Orbiting around Humanity is the travel I enjoy the most, the one that fulfills me the most. So, some of my characters are real, they already worked for my story, I simply changed their identities. While others are fictional, although they are the cocktail of real memories.

Alberto, the protagonist, is a journalist. How much of his story is autobiographical?

I can say that Alberto Landi is like me in the way he sees and feels things, in how he looks at the world. That's why I decided to write Whispering Tides in first person narration. I felt that was the only way to emotionally involve the reader completely.

After so many years of writing, how was the experience of self publishing and why did you decide to do so?

I did it because I had no time to waste in never ending waits, because I had a story to tell and I wanted to write it no matter what. I also did it because self publishing, either in ebook or in printed on demand form, has zero cost for the author. And I mean zero, you don't even spend a cent. At first I had sent my synopsis to two important Italian publishing houses. But instead of getting a simple “no” as an answer - which would have been totally acceptable – I got two rude “no answers,” meaning I heard nothing from them. I call them rude because there should always be an answer, especially to a professional with a rich journalistic history as mine and, needless to say, to a man of my age.

Who knows, maybe today, among other things, we have also forgotten good manners. Anyways, in the end I did get my revenge: a small publishing company of great quality and reputation, well known in the non-fiction sector, has contacted me and asked to launch their upcoming fiction branch with my book. So, starting in March, my book, in the Italian version, will be available in all the bookstores of the Italian peninsula. I would really like to get the same opportunity in the United States. I would love to find a small publishing house of great quality that would embrace my book. I take this opportunity to send my message out there.

How was it to see your words translated into another language?

Reading my story in English was extremely beautiful. I found the chosen words coincided perfectly with the original version. I am really grateful to William Marino and Daniela Zoppini, both mother tongue, who delivered a flawless translation. I received really positive feedback in the USA. I must say that maybe the most beautiful compliment, given to me twice by two different people, Mr. Giancarlo Pirrone, the president of Ciancia, the club of Italian culture in Atlanta, and by a journalist of the site Gay Savannah. They don't even know each other but they both wrote that my book appears to have been thought directly in English, and even by a Savannah native. They stressed the fact that I was able to get into the heads and the way of feeling and being of the local southern population.

Your book is having great success here in the US, how do you explain this?

Maybe it's because of the aforementioned reason, or maybe because by reading it my love for this great country, a place with its merits and faults, clearly emerges. I love it for its pros and cons, I accept it and embrace it the same way you do with your soul mate.

Yes, sales are starting to go pretty well, but I never expected this outcome especially in regards of the appreciation of its quality. Whispering Tides is a finalist at the Global eBook Awards in Santa Barbara, CA, the only book by an Italian author among a thousand written by representatives of 16 countries. I received rave reviews by important literary magazines such as the Annali di Italianistica published by the University of Chapel Hill, NC. Furthermore, the book was bought in both languages by the libraries of important universities, such as the New York State University of Albany and is even been used as reading material at the Department of Modern and Classical Languages of the Georgia State University in Altanta.

Locally, the book will be presented at Learn Italy, a language school located in Midtown Manhattan on October 29th. Massimo Veccia, the school's director, selected Wispering Tides as teaching material for the school's American students and he is also planning a book tour through several American universities scheduled for 2013.

In Italy I see some books become best sellers for no apparent reason. They are badly written but they are backed by impeccable marketing just because the author is a sports star, a singer or a TV personality. They can sell millions of copies as far as I am concerned, I don't really care. But once their work will be used in a University, just the way mine is, that will be the day that I will stop writing... forever.

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