

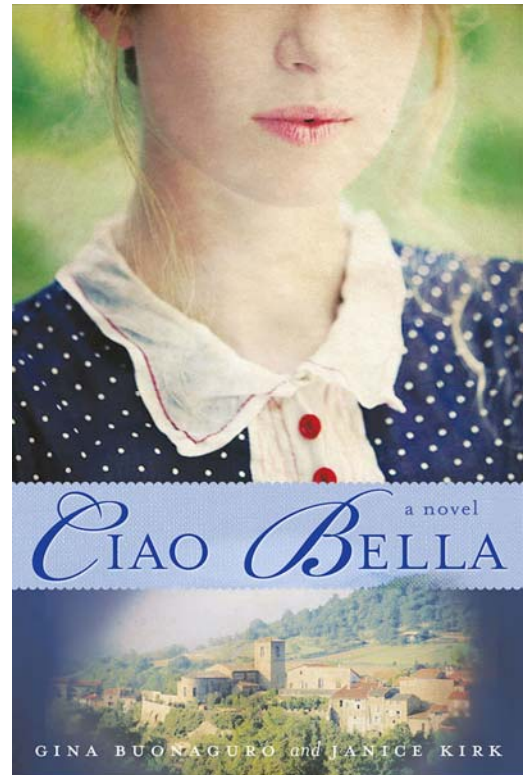


Ciao Bella

By Gina Buonaguro and Janice Kirk

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Ciao Bella* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Ciao Bella*.

About the Book

For Graziella, the quiet, cultured life she lived in Venice with her musician husband, Ugo, was everything she could have hoped for. But when Italy allied itself with Nazi Germany in 1940, her world changed forever. Ugo, trading in his violin for a gun, joined the Resistance, while Graziella was forced to seek refuge at his family's farm in the nearby Euganean Hills. "Just until the war is over," Ugo had promised, but it has been months now since the Nazis retreated, and no one has seen him since.

With Ugo gone, it seems as if she will be trapped forever on this remote farm with her lost husband's difficult family. So when an American soldier named Frank is stranded on the mountain, Graziella embraces this unexpected chance at being happy again. But as tempting as it is to leave behind this war-torn country and her painful memories for a new life in America, can she go without learning her husband's fate?

With quiet grace and humor, *Ciao Bella* explores the possibilities of love and redemption in the wake of war, showing that some of the hardest decisions come only after the fighting has stopped.

Praise for *Ciao Bella*

"When her husband, Ugo, joins the Italian Resistance, the Canadian Grace becomes Graziella and goes to hide with his family in the countryside. When Ugo fails to return, even after the war is over, Grace begins to feel stranded and isolated, especially since Ugo's family has never approved of his marriage. The arrival of a young American soldier makes her remember her long-lost life as Grace, and she begins to dream about leaving Italy. Are love and loyalty permanent, or does the horror of war remove certain obligations? A compelling combination of romance, adventure, and serious thought, this slim novel is sure to appeal to many audiences."

--Booklist

"Corelli's Mandolin meets The Bridges of Madison County in this WWII tale of a love affair between an American soldier and the wife of a member of the Italian resistance. . . . A wistful story about the difficult decisions people must make in both love and war, *Ciao Bella* is drenched in Italian sunshine. The authors have penned a sweet, nostalgic story about how good people struggle to do the right thing, even when there are no good choices at all."

--Historical Novels Review

Praise for *The Sidewalk Artist*

"*The Sidewalk Artist* is an inventive semihistorical romance as well as a story of artistic and emotional self-discovery."

--The Boston Globe

"Nifty plotting has the main story pause for passages from Tulia's book and the travelogue she's reading, keeping this entertaining novel from becoming a sentimental romance."

--People

"The book has floated across the country on the wings of a love dream for half a year. Now, as summer reading lists start to grow, it's a likely contender for anyone looking for a fancy, contemporary fable that's smart but not jaded, innocent but not naïve."

--Toledo Blade

"A charming, Hollywood-ready romance."

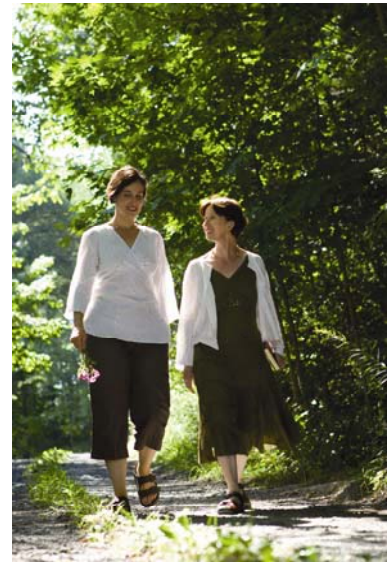
--Kirkus Reviews

"Full of beautiful, sensual language, *The Sidewalk Artist* will touch anyone with a romantic bone in their body."

---The Kingston Whig Standard

About the Authors

Gina Buonaguro was born in New Jersey and now resides in Toronto, Ontario. Janice Kirk was born and lives in Kingston, Ontario. Their first novel together was *The Sidewalk Artist*. Please visit Gina and Janice's website for updates and information: <http://www.CiaoBellaNovel.com/>.



Discussion Questions

1. Discuss Graziella's role in the Nevicato family as both an outsider and a binding force. How would life be different for the family if she had never come to Italy?
2. Graziella's role as a healer is a somewhat reluctant one. Would you say she is ultimately successful?
3. Pippo the plane, known only in Northern Italian oral history, was one of our greatest discoveries in the course of researching the novel. Ask anyone in the north of Italy about their wartime experience and they will inevitably mention Pippo. It had a distinctive buzz, was never seen from the ground, was suspected of dropping bombs, and only took wing at night. No one ever knew if it was friend or foe, its allegiance changing from village to village. Many years later, scholars surmise that it was a British surveillance plane and that the pilots who flew the model never had any idea they were terrorizing parts of the Northern Italian population. What role does Pippo play for the characters in *Ciao Bella*?
4. Before writing *Ciao Bella*, we held many preconceived notions about World War II. Yet in the course of research, we learned that its events and people were not quite as black and white as often presented in school. Note where these nuances of right and wrong, of heroes and villains, of good and evil, come through in the story.
5. How does Enza's story fit with the ideas presented in Question #4?
6. What decisions does Frank the American soldier make in the course of the story and does he make the right ones? Could different decisions have radically changed the novel's outcome?
7. Discuss various issues of fertility and infertility throughout the story. How much do these issues sway the course of events?
8. How do you feel about the ending? Are you satisfied? Does the epilogue influence your feelings at all?

A Conversation with Gina Buonaguro and Janice Kirk

How did you come to write *Ciao Bella*?

How we came to the ultimate plotline was a long journey. Gina went to the Euganean Hills of Northern Italy for a wedding about five years ago and visited Arqua Petrarca, the final resting place of Francesco Petrarca. We had been toying with the idea of writing about the poet but weren't getting very far. In the course of our research, we found this fascinating fact that the skull in Petrarca's tomb was in fact not his! Scholars have several theories as to who stole it, one of which was that the Nazis took it during World War II. That led to a whole lot of WWII history research and then finally a story that took place in the region during that era. Petrarca's skull being stolen boiled down to a small mention in Chapter 7. And, oh yes, our American soldier bears the name of Frank.

How did you research the novel?

We of course started reading anything we could get our hands on in English that pertained to the Northern Italian experience during World War II. It turned out to be surprisingly little. An avalanche of books and articles have been written about the Italian Campaign further south and west but almost nothing on the Veneto region and Venice. Indeed, the few mentions Venice did get claimed absolutely nothing happened in Venice during the war – that more people died from falling into the canals during blackouts than anything else. Luckily, Janice spends a month every two years in Venice taking Italian lessons. She seized this opportunity to interview one of her Italian teachers on the subject, and Rosanna's knowledge and research skills proved invaluable to the writing of the book. It was from Rosanna we learned the fascinating role Venice played in the Italian occupation, none of which involved falling into canals. From Venice, Janice went back to the area where Gina had attended the wedding and interviewed several residents of the Euganean Hills. The story then emerged from there.

Tell us more about Pippo the plane.

Our Italian teacher Rosanna had mentioned a plane called Pippo, which Janice mistakenly transcribed in the plural, Pippi. Back in Canada, we tried to find mention of this Pippi in books and on the Internet, to no avail. Finally, Janice found mention again of Pippo from another interview with a farmer in the Euganean Hills, and eventually we came across a single though very helpful article on the topic in an academic folklore journal ("Pippo: An Italian Folklore Mystery of World War II" by Alan R. Perry in the *Journal of Folklore Research*).

Essentially, Pippo was an exclusively Northern Italian phenomenon, born of the country's conflicting war-time allegiances. When Italy entered the war in 1940, it first sided with the Germans. However, when the Allies liberated Sicily in 1943, it switched sides. But Hitler refused to leave the country without a fight. He poured troops into the Northern regions, sprang Mussolini from prison, and set him up as the puppet leader of the repressive Republic of Salò. And into such a region, crisscrossed with contradictory loyalties to the Fascists, the Nazis, the Resistance, the Allies, and just plain old survival, Pippo flew.

People always describe Pippo quite similarly. The plane had a distinctive buzz, was never seen, was suspected of dropping bombs, and took wing only at night. If you were faithful to

the Fascists, it was certainly an Allied plane. If you were a supporter of the Allies, the plane could be German. Or it could be German, but the Germans said it was American. Or maybe British. Sometimes it was even Italian, flown perhaps by a friend of a cousin from a few towns away. In retrospect, it is evident the Fascists used it as a propaganda tool to turn ordinary civilians against the Allies, though there is no doubt the plane was real.

No one seems to know how Pippo got its name, which could have been a play on the Italian moniker for Disney's Goofy character or alternatively was based on the pip-pip sounds it apparently made as it soared through the night sky. But despite the slightly silly name, people mainly interpreted the plane as something fearful. It was essential to block the lights in your house or Pippo might fire upon it. It might drop exploding pens, poisoned candy, or so-called butterfly bombs. It might strafe the fields where you were working with gunfire. And if you were naughty as a child, your mother would tell you that Pippo was coming to get you. It is interesting too that Janice first transcribed it as the plural, Pippi, for as far as the inhabitants knew, Pippo was the same single plane that flew every night over all of Northern Italy. They personified it as a "he" – the plane and pilot as one. It was only decades later that historians surmised the likely origin of the plane. When the Allies gained a foothold in the north in the later years of the war, pilots began flying tactical night missions to survey and intervene in German troop movements. It never occurred to them they were inadvertently terrorizing the countryside. In particular, the British Royal Air Force used a plane called the Mosquito, famed for its characteristic drone, many of which were built by de Havilland Canada at Downsview Park in Toronto. A fascinating example of oral history, it is not well documented in Italy, and other than a brief mention in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, this is, as far as we know, the first time Pippo has made an appearance in an English language novel. It is just too good of a story to let die!

Are you working on another book together?

Yes! We find that writing together works really well for us. People always ask how it works. We don't, as some think, sit at the same computer together. Instead, it's a lot of talking, emailing, and visiting. It is like having an instant editor to bounce off every idea and sentence and draft. In fact, we are in the very preliminary stages of a third book, where we return to Renaissance Rome and where we just might cross paths again with our favorite Renaissance painter, Raphael Sanzio, hero of our first novel, *The Sidewalk Artist*. We are looking forward to returning to an era where no one is alive to remember what really happened!

Depending on the location, **Gina Buonaguro** and **Janice Kirk** can visit your reading group in person, over the phone, or through free Skype/web cam. If interested, please contact Gina and Janice at janiceandgina@hotmail.com.



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