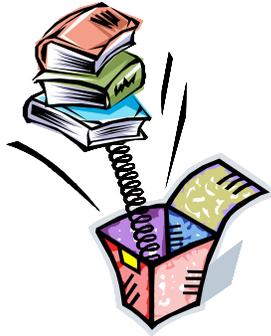


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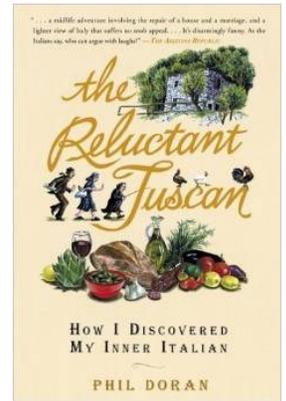


# Book Club in a Box

## LIKE WATER FOR CHOCOLATE

### About the Book

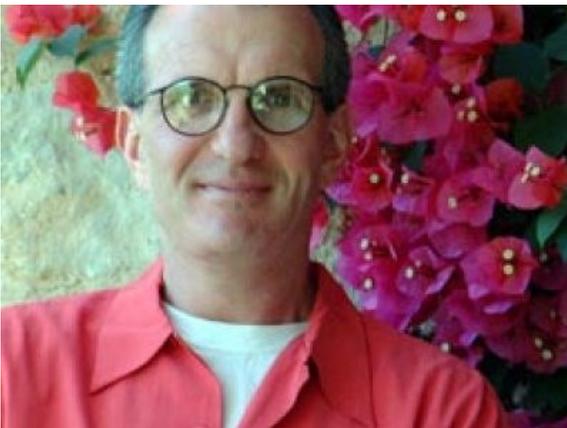
In the witty tone that made Phil Doran a success as a writer in Hollywood, "The Reluctant Tuscan" will captivate a wide audience, from those who simply love a captivating travel narrative to anyone who loves the quirky humor of Bill Bryson, Dave Barry, and Jerry Seinfeld. After years of working on a string of successful sitcoms, Doran found that just as he and his peers had replaced the older guys when he was coming up, it was now happening to him. And it was freaking him out. He came home every night burned-out, angry, and exhausted. But even if he hadn't had enough, his wife, Nancy, had. After twenty-five years of losing her husband to Hollywood, Doran's wife decided it was finally time for a change--so on one of her many solo trips to Italy she surprised her husband by purchasing a broken-down three-hundred-year-old farmhouse for them to restore. "The Reluctant Tuscan" is the author's transition from a successful but overworked writer-producer in Hollywood to someone rediscovering himself and his wife while in Italy, finding happiness in the last place he expected to. Doran finds himself navigating through the maddening labyrinth of Italian bureaucracy just to get a road paved to their house; dealing with the foibles of their neighbors and the tangled drama of the family who sold them the home; coming to accept that the Italians live with a million laws and no rules--all while he becomes slowly seduced by the inexhaustible beauty and tactile pleasures of Tuscany.



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### About the Author



A TV producer for more than twenty-five years, Phil Doran worked as a writer-producer for such shows as *Sanford and Son*, *Too Close for Comfort*, and *Who's the Boss?*; as a writer for *The Wonder Years*; as well as writing episodes of *The Bob Newhart Show* and writing for such variety-show stars as Tim Conway, the Smothers Brothers, and Tony Orlando. He received an Emmy nomination, a Humanitas Award, and the Population Institute Award for his work on *All in the Family*. He has also written for the *Los Angeles Times*. He and his wife divide their time between Tuscany and their home in California.

# Q & A with the Author

## I know the *Reluctant Tuscan* isn't the first book you've completed. What happened to the others?

RT is actually the third. The first was one that everybody liked and nobody wanted to publish, the second was one that nobody liked, and the third was rather well accepted. I think it took some time for me to figure out the market place and to determine that yes, after years of doing TV, I did want to write what I wanted to say, but a bigger yes was, I did want to get published. It doesn't take a genius to determine that they publish a lot more non-fiction than fiction, so then, in the non-fiction genre, what was going on in my life that I could write about? Well, I happened to be fortunate enough to have worked in show business and I was now living part-time in Tuscany. So I felt that if I could combine those two facets and do it with humor I would have something that publishers would be interested in.

## Will you bring those other books back, now that you have this one out?

Yes, I am in the process of dusting them off, re-reading them, and wondering what I was thinking to have written down what I did. On the plus side, I think those books were written when I still had my TV writing habits and if I may say so myself, my prose style is much more polished now than it was when I started.

## Talk about the challenges in writing this book .

There are a lot of books about Tuscany--a lot of very good books--written by people who really know things. Since I don't, I needed to be funny. Also, I needed to find a way not to have the reader think, "Wait a minute--you're living in Tuscany and complaining? I live next to methane processing plant in Bayonne, New Jersey, and you don't hear me complaining!"

So I had to find a way to keep the reader's sympathy and I did that by going deep into the characters and revealing their needs and inner struggles. Also, I needed to make the drama more universal so that anybody who has faced a painful life change can relate to it and not just baby-boomers facing retirement.

## How does writing dialogue for TV differ from writing dialogue for a narrative?

The visual element changes everything. The way an actor gestures or uses an expression both enhances and limits how the line is communicated. In a book, the reader is free to cast each character exactly as they imagine it and hear them say their dialogue in any voice imaginable. In either event, unless someone has stopped to make a speech, and that should be very well motivated, dialogue should be short, crisp, and entertaining. Ask yourself: Is there sufficient reason to do this in dialogue, or could it be better im-

parted by describing the action?

As for the differences between a book and a TV show, there are practical considerations galore. Say you have a scene where a group of people are having dinner ... on TV (or in a movie) the audience can see all the characters who are present, but on the page if someone doesn't speak for a while, the reader can forget that they are there.

## Advice for writers?

There are many fine books on the mechanics of writing (*Pen on Fire* being one of the best). My advice is more about the psychological armor one must don to pursue this profession. This is a very difficult way to make a living. If you are interested in making a lot of money, I would suggest you go into banking or real estate.

Writing is lonely, frustrating, and it will often seem like you are the only one in the world who believes in what you are doing. To this end, I will impart the greatest piece of wisdom I ever heard about either Hollywood or the publishing world. It was said by William Goldman in his book, *Adventure in the Screen Trade*, and he was talking about how your work is judged by those in control of your destiny, that is to say, agents, producers, and publishers.

Goldman said that he is governed by one unshakable law: WHEN IT COMES TO WHAT WILL WORK, NOBODY KNOWS SH\*\*.

The marketplace is a dynamic, quirky, mysterious place and as far as what will sell, one person's guess is as good as another. If all the formulas and theories worked, every book would be a best seller and no TV show would ever get cancelled. We're all guessing here, so why isn't your guess as good and anybody else's?

## Further Reading

If you liked *The Reluctant Tuscan*, you might like:

*An Italian Affair* by Laura Fraser

*The Olive Farm: A Memoir of Life, Love and Olive Oil in the South of France* by Carol Drinkwater

*Under the Tuscan Sun* by Frances Mayes

*Without Reservations: The Travels of an Independent Woman* by Alice Steinbach

## Discussion Questions

1. How is the Piccolo Rustico a metaphor for Phil Doran's life?
2. How is Italy different from America?
3. How would you feel if your spouse bought a house in Italy without consulting you and then invited you to give up your employment in America to come live with him/her in Tuscany?
4. What do you think of the tradition of the passeggiata? Can you imagine Americans following this tradition?
5. Phil Doran says that he cannot get used to certain differences from America, such as the Italians not having doggy bags, Italian men crying unrestrainedly and their stores closing for a 4 hr break etc. Do you sympathize with the author's difficulties.
6. Gradually, Phil is seduced by Italy. What does he find particularly appealing about Italy and the Italians?
7. Phil and his wife discover ways of persuading Italians to do what they want. What are the most efficient techniques?
8. Contrast Phil's life in L.A. with his life in Italy.
9. What makes the author realize that he needs to leave L.A.?
10. What is it like driving in Italy?
11. Phil tells us "A magical friendliness is spread all over the place like pixie dust." How is the friendliness of Italians different from American friendliness?
12. What are some of the frustrations Phil faces while living in Italy?
13. How does Phil create tension and suspense?
14. What makes Phil realize he's becoming Italian?
15. What do you think of Phil and his wife's hilarious way of putting Umberto in his place?
16. What does Phil come to understand about his hostility toward Italians?
17. "Italians have a deep affection for the people of the United States." What accounts for these feelings?
18. The author comes to understand how the "where you are" ultimately becomes the "who you are." How does this relate to the differences between America and Italy?
19. Like many busy couples Phil and Nancy had led parallel lives for many years. Now that they have more time together how do they go about re-discovering each other and re-defining their relationship?
20. In what ways is Phil changed by Italy?