

JC de Melo's New Book, *I've Got Tickets to Heaven:
Just Need to Call for a Limousine*

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JC de Melo, pen name of John (João) Carlos de Melo, a Portuguese immigrant in California, published his latest book, the novel *I've Got Tickets to Heaven: Just Need to Call for a Limousine*, in 2020. JC de Melo was born in São Miguel, Azores, in 1941. After completing secondary school and serving in the Portuguese Army for four years, including 29 months in Angola, in 1966 João Carlos emigrated with his wife Donalda to California, where he pursued a professional career as an executive at Bank of America for 33 years until his retirement in 1999, followed by 13 years as small business management consultant.

In 2011, JC de Melo's adventurous mind and his search for spirituality led him to participate in a pilgrimage on the Road to Santiago de Compostela, walking 340 kilometers from León to the Galician religious center. He registered his experiences, feelings and thoughts in his first literary attempt, *Simple Wonders & A Memorable Year*, published in 2012. According to the author, "I found myself inspired by the combination of people interacting with each other, with me... I experienced joy on a grand scale."

In 2016, JC de Melo contributed to *Untamed Dreams: Faces of America*, a book on the lives of Portuguese immigrants, published by Portuguese Heritage Publications of California, with the chapter "The Irony of Everyday Life" based on the experiences of two Azorean immigrants.

JC de Melo began his fictional writing with the publication in 2014 of the 465-page novel *Chasing the Dream: An American Immigrant's Elusive Romance*, in which he tells the story of two friends, Ben and Silvio, who are in love with the same woman and emigrate to America, where they make their fortunes and grow apart from each other. In 2019 the novel was published in Portuguese by Edições Colibri under the title *À Procura da Diáspora: Duas Cartas para Margaret*, translated by Dr. Virgínia da Luz-Tarver, formerly of San José State University.

The novel traverses time back and forth, from 1960 to 1997, through the 70s and 80s and different stages of emotional growth and maturity in the characters' lives. Through this chronological zigzagging emerges a juxtaposition of times and situations which help tell the story and explain the characters' motives. For example, in Chapter 11, we find out that, in 1960, Silvio came to America through an arranged marriage. This detail is presented briefly, only with the essentials, in order to pique the reader's curiosity. The next chapter takes place 37 years later, in 1997. On a picnic gathering, involving the main members of the small family (seven adults and two children) we discover, through a lively, colorful discussion, the juicy details of that arranged marriage.

In *Chasing the Dream: An American Immigrant's Elusive Romance*, JC de Melo favors the use of dialogue over long narrations or descriptions. It is mostly through the direct speech of the characters that he tells their story. The extended use of dialogue gives a quick pace, a liveliness, to the novel. The

occasional resorting to letters written by the characters provides a certain “documentation” to the plot and characters, making them more believable. Through the use of real details (places, situations, and customs) of everyday life in the United States as well as in the Azores, particularly on the island of São Miguel, the author manages to present scenes in a manner that is recognizable to the reader and that helps create a feeling of verisimilitude aided by his unpretentious style and use of common, contemporary language.

JC de Melo's latest work, the novel *I've Got Tickets to Heaven: Just Need to Call for a Limousine*, published in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, is a very timely fictional work in these days of reclusion, soul searching, and existential questioning.

In *I've Got Tickets to Heaven* the author succeeds in engaging the reader in a very interesting, varied, open discussion of spirituality as it has evolved in the western world, from the Jewish roots of the Old Testament to the liberating and humanizing message of Christianity from its inception to the present. It follows a genuinely candid discussion and analysis of the Christian world, its gifts and problems. Because it does not attempt to proselytize, the novel allows the reader to follow freely the ideas and beliefs presented and to arrive at his or her own conclusions. It is an inspiring adventure into the mysterious and personal perception of faith, a voyage of discovery of the relationship between Man and God.

From a firm Catholic theological base, the novel explores other perspectives, contrasting agnostic views with the beliefs of the Roman Church, seemingly finding in Pope Francis and Pope John XXIII examples of a liberating approach to religion enunciated in the Second Vatican Council.

The characters of the novel are realistic, natural in their actions and words. They seem to appear from our world, like they could be someone we know. They move in the San Francisco Bay Area as if they were real people. For those living in the Bay Area, the settings mirror their reality. Those readers from other geographical regions can discover with confidence the details of the cosmopolitan location of the novel.

JC de Melo's style in *I've Got Tickets to Heaven* is simple and refreshing. The author creates a sense of intimacy with the reader through the use of familiar language which flows with ease throughout the work. The use of first-person narration contributes significantly to the intimate, personal tone of the novel.

I've Got Tickets to Heaven: Just Need to Call for a Limousine is a novel that deserves to be read and, above all, enjoyed freely as a gift from a man who wants to share with us his journey of soul searching into the complex world of personal belief and its repercussions in the Western world. JC de Melo clearly succeeds in inviting and engaging the reader in the search for meaning during these turbulent times.

Whether focused on Portuguese immigration to America or on the analysis of the role of spirituality in today's society, JC de Melo is a different voice in the understanding of these two themes. Through his adventurous mind and restless soul, he presents us with pleasurable and engaging reading hours.