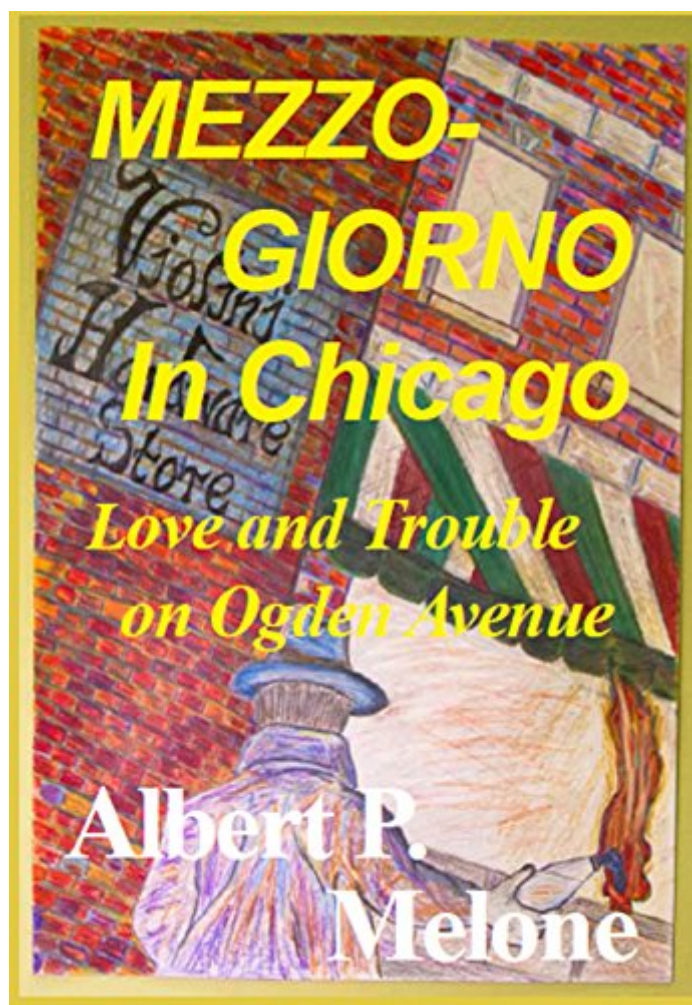


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Mezzogiorno In Chicago: Love And Trouble On Ogden Avenue



Synopsis

This novel is a tale of a family that immigrates at the turn of the twentieth century from Italy's Mezzogiorno to Chicago. It features the struggles of Rachela who jilts her betrothed in favor of a new found love ushering in a wave of violence and revenge while also creating opportunities for personal happiness and family success in the new world. As a work of historical fiction, it details the dramatic personal travails of the Russo and Violini families through sixty-six turbulent years of American history within the larger panorama of important national and international events that influence how Rachela and her family meet the demands of living in a foreign land. Inspired by actual events, the author treats the reader to a host of life's lessons fermented first in the warm soil and gentle mountain streams of southern Italy and then spread however unevenly to the cold brick and concrete of Chicago streets and the bone chilling winds blowing off Lake Michigan. Rachela and her family struggle to live by a moral and religious code that is ill-suited and yet awkwardly workable for the challenges of the new world. Viewing themselves as law abiding, they must cope with violence, death, prejudice, extortion, kidnapping, corruption, war, economic depression, and ignorance to share in the promise of a better life. As a matter of pragmatic survival, the cross-pressured characters sometimes blur the line between law and order, and self-defense. This compelling American story portrays a recurring theme of tension between individual attainment and community well-being, including the meaning of what is love beyond mere Eros to its more inclusive and broader applications of love of community and God. It is a tale of both the bright and dark sides of the American dream while representing little understood views that are contrary to the conventional wisdom and stereotypes surrounding the Italian immigrant experience.

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Customer Reviews

This is a very enjoyable and easy book to read. It is written in a straight forward style so you can just sit back, relax and enjoy it. The book is universal in that the struggles of the Italian immigrants were similar to other groups who immigrated to the U.S. However, if you are fortunate enough to have come from Italian ancestry you are going to love it.

Great read lots of detail about life in Chicago

After working hard all day at back-breaking jobs, the Italian immigrants crowded into their living quarters where lack of space forced a togetherness that they might have preferred not to have... So when Dominic was feeling a bit lonely and pulled out the picture of his sister Rachela, it was bound to draw attention of the, perhaps, ten men who sat on the floor after dinner. One of them was close enough to see Rachela's beauty and grabbed the picture to get a closer look. Dominic became angry and the two men almost came to blows until Frankie apologized and returned the photo. As simple as that interaction was, nobody would have known what it would bring about... Dominic had declared that he did not mind talking about his family as long as it was respectfully done. And so Frankie asked more and more about Rachela, finally after time had passed, asking Dominic about the possibility of Rachela joining with Frankie in marriage! As Frankie became persistent, they talked about the money necessary to make that happen and Frankie agreed, finally, to pay for passage of Rachela and her mother to come to America...and also to not expect the normal dowry, which the family could not provide. So it was that Dominic would go back home to talk about

Frankie's proposal. Pleasantly surprised by those who lived in his village at their recognition and welcome home, he realized how wonderful it was to be around so many people he knew and cared about...After they had all caught each other up with news, Dominic explained what he had to present to Rachela. It happened at a time when she was willing to listen--the boy she was in love with had become a priest! His love for God had come first, leaving Rachela confused and in turmoil. So, after much discussion, it was agreed that Anthony would stay at the farm and Rachela and their mother would travel back to Chicago with Dominic...If only this arranged marriage would have gone as so many others had...First when they arrived, Frankie was back in Italy because his mother was seriously ill and not there to greet his intended wife. Months went by and Rachela had gotten a job at a local store where the owners were kind to her and she was able to help financially. Both she and her mother were staying with Dominic and space was limited. Still, her mother was there to fix meals and work to adjust to their new home, learning as much as she was able. They quickly started to the Holy Guardian Angel Church, meeting Father Pasquale Turano and warmly being welcomed there. This was so important because he was there later when all the trouble started! Rachela had started taking a class and met a young personable man. Nothing about the return of Frankie had been available and these two young people soon grew close and fell in love. Soon things became complicated because Frankie had come back and was ready to wed Rachela... This might have happened no matter about Rachela now loving Pietro Violini, but they discovered that Frankie, although now much more wealthy, was a member of the mafia who "provided protection" to neighborhood businesses. None of the Russos was willing to have her marry into this situation! Rachela and her mother sought comfort from each other in trying to figure out how to get out of their commitment. Because Frankie was not willing to take this as the final answer... and it would not end until blood was shed...This historical novel is an excellent look at the immigrants who were coming to America seeking a better living. The work was, for many, harder than what they may have done back home, but the pay provided was able to keep them living and even, often, sending some back to Italy. There is much geographical, cultural and political information as merged and presented from the perspective of the Russo family. Readers are able to experience what it was like during early years of the century into the 70s...Historians--those interested in the time period, immigration activities, and/or those interested in the Chicago early development or Italian immigrants, Italian Americans, are just the major groups who will find this a valuable and impressive novel. For myself, the life of Rachela proved to be the dominant draw as we think about those times when marriages were arranged by families. And love sometimes just didn't happen. The intrigue of criminal actions and family ties is certainly a drawing point. I wish I could say that it was an easy life,

but that was not the case. And I wondered, was part of that due to the issue of not "understanding who we are together with the ability to develop an authentic community," no matter where we are and our background. There is much to ponder because, after all, we still have the challenges of prejudice, criminal corruption, economic depression, etc., to pressure the lives we now live daily... Highly recommended. GABixlerReviewsPaperback provided by Publisher

reviewed by Joe Kilgore "We make do as best we can, trying to stay as close to our understanding of justice and truth as life permits." It is often said that the story of America is the story of immigrants. That's certainly the case in Melone's novel. From 1909 to 1973, readers share the hopes and dreams, joy and sadness, triumphs and tragedies of an extended Italian family in Chicago. The central figure is Rachela, a young woman whose passage to America, along with that of her mother, is paid for by a fiancé she has never seen. When she arrives in Chicago, he has been called back to Italy to care for his dying mother. By the time he returns and the two finally meet, she has fallen in love with another. While violence ensues, the brutal ending to this episode is just the beginning of a multi-generational tale that plays out over decades. Melone intersperses monumental events of the time with interpersonal relationships of the immigrants involved in them. Abysmal living conditions in unsanitary and unsafe tenements, oppressive working conditions and the rise of labor unions, prejudice toward and among different nationalities, support and opposition to world wars—all are explored within the context of how they affect the lives of Rachela and her family. The author's prose is more journalistic than literary. His dialogue and use of Italian words and phrases are occasionally more so than the exposition that surrounds them. Yet there is an unmistakable sincerity in his examination of major themes such as devotion to homeland, appreciation for opportunities the new land provides, and the difficult but necessary need for assimilation. He is most at home when detailing the love and strength that the family shares—attributes that continue to nurture all immigrants in search of a better life.

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