



Leaving Pico (Hardscrabble Books-Fiction of New England)

Frank X. Gaspar

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In the tradition of Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* or Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, poet Frank X. Gaspar has crafted a beautifully written coming-of-age-in-ethnic-America novel set in the Portuguese community of Provincetown, Massachusetts. For narrator Josie Carvalho, a single summer brings great loss and abrupt change, but also a new understanding of his place in the world.

In the insular Portuguese fishing community of the Cape, Josie's life has been shaped by the annual influx of summer tourists (who are largely oblivious of the locals), and his great aunt Theophila's fervent if idiosyncratic Catholicism (she has visions and keeps a private shrine to the saints). The community is also sharply divided between the Picos like himself (whose ancestors hailed from the Azores) and the Lisbons (whose forebears came directly from the old country). The counterweight to these forces has been the boy's relationship with his grandfather John Joseph, a drunk, clam-poaching old man who is nevertheless a sly and tricksterish master storyteller.

Josie's shaky religious faith receives a jolt when he prays that his unwed mother might find a husband, and a stranger named Carmine arrives from New Bedford and begins to call on her. His mother's relationship with the Lisbon Carmine soon disrupts the family's equilibrium and throws their lives into conflict. Josie finds himself divided in his loyalties and upset over what he fears is his responsibility for the trouble.

His grandfather comes to his aid with a healing narrative, a magical act of storytelling that lifts him out of the present and into a heroic past. Over a series of nights, John Joseph, Scheherazade-like, spins the colorful and adventurous story of their ancestor, Francisco Carvalho, a Portuguese explorer who just may have beaten Columbus to the New World. With the guidance of his grandfather's obscure but inspired stories, Josie begins to find new ways of understanding his relationship to his family and to the world.

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