



American Opportunity

I'm no 'anchor baby,' I'm Jim Melo -- an Ivy League-educated lawyer

by Octavio Blanco @CNMoney

October 15, 2015: 1:26 PM ET



Advertisement

For Jim Melo, being an American is a huge responsibility.

His parents and siblings came to the United States in the early 1970s without papers from Mexico. To survive, they picked fruit in Northern California, where Melo was eventually born.

As the first person in his family to be born in the U.S., Melo put a lot of pressure on himself to succeed.

"I was the physical embodiment of my parents' American Dream," says Melo.

That drive spurred Melo to work hard in school, attain an Ivy League degree, graduate from law school and eventually open his own law firm in Durham, North Carolina.

"My parents told me 'you can do anything you want and be anything you want,'" said Melo, now 44. And from a very young age, Melo knew what he wanted.

"When people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I never said 'fireman'... I never said anything but 'lawyer,'" he said.

He knew that a good education was the key to this dream and set his sites on getting into an Ivy League school -- either Harvard, Princeton or Yale.

"But no one was correcting my English at home, because my folks didn't speak English very well," he said. So he learned English from watching TV, particularly Sesame Street. And he read - a lot. "I have a voracious appetite for books."

Personal Finance

Mortgage		Credit C.	
Rate		API	
2.38%		2.56	
2.00%		2.10	
2.13%		2.54	
APR		Paym	
2.54%		\$846/	
2.19%		\$1,292	

Get Personalized Rates

The Motley Fool P

You Can Still Buy This "Million Maker" Stock

Bitcoin Up 30,000X -- Here's Backdoor In

Motley Fool Issues Rare Triple Alert

This Stock Could Be Like Buy Amazon for \$3.19



Melo's parents were migrant farmers in Northern California. Here he's pictured with his dad and sister.



Melo's family moved to Ferguson, Missouri, when he was a toddler. And, in the late 1970's, they gained their U.S. citizenship through President Carter's amnesty program.

Even though Ferguson has become the epicenter of [strained race relations](#), Melo says his early years there were idyllic. His father worked a union job building Corvettes at the nearby General Motors plant. His mom built military tanks at Sunbeam Corp.

After elementary school, the family moved to Albany, Georgia because his father got a job at a Delco Remy auto parts plant.

Once they arrived in Georgia, "I quickly realized that the schools in the black neighborhoods were the bad schools and the ones in the white neighborhoods were the good schools," Melo said.

He also realized that if he wanted to get accepted into one of the Ivies, he would need to go to one of the good schools. So he asked his parents to buy a house in a good school district -- and they did.

Paid Content

by 1



The 2021 Maz
Lineup Is Turni
Heads. And Fii
Mazda On Yahoo



Food Items Yo
Never Buy At C
Here's Why
BETTERBE



How to order
DoorDash with
paying DoorDa
Capital One Shoppin



Before you ren
Amazon Prime
this
Capital One Shoppin

JIM MELO

LendingTree

P1

503 Service Temporarily Unavailable

Newsletter

BEFORE THE BELL

Sponsored by **E*TRADE**

**Key market news. In your in
Every morning.**

Start your day right with the latest
driving global markets, from major
movers and key economic headlin
important events on the calendar.
newsletter, Sunday through Frid

Sign up >

Priv



CNNMoney Sponsors

SmartAsset

P

These are your 3 financial advisors near you

This site finds and compares financial advisors in your area

Check this off your list before retirement: talk to an advisor

Answer these questions to find the right financial advisor for you

Find CFPs in your area in 5 minutes

NextAdvisor

P

An Insane Card Offering 0% Interest Until Nearly 2020

Transferring Your Balance to a Card With 0% APR is Ingenious

The Top 7 Balance Transfer Credit Cards On The Market Today

Get \$300 Back With This Outrageous New Credit Card



Melo's middle school class.

Fortunately by then, Melo's parents were earning a good living. His dad had a good job in the auto industry and his mom was running several successful Mexican restaurants.

It was a good life, but as Melo entered his teen years, he grew rebellious. "I was drinking and smoking pot," he said. And after getting pulled over by police while driving home from a party one night, he knew he needed a change in environment.

Melo's brother was attending Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah and Melo asked his parents if he could live with him and attend high school there.

"The minute I walked [into my new high school in Utah] it was a world of difference," he said. "I took every AP class I could take, I got involved in student government and ran cross country."

He was so determined to go to Harvard, Yale or Princeton, that he only applied to those schools - no safety school needed, he thought. He second-guessed this decision when he was wait listed at Harvard and Yale. Finally, he was accepted at Princeton.



During his teen years, Melo was on a rebellious path. "I was drinking and smoking pot," he says.

After his first semester of college, however, Melo left for a two-year Mormon mission in Chile. While he was abroad, his father passed away and he began to question his religion.

"Religion was telling us that you couldn't do or be whatever you wanted to be," he said.

Advertisement

It was the opposite of what his parents had always told him. "The American dream won out," he said.



Melo is big mountain climber, skier and surfer. "I ran the climbing club at Princeton," he said.

Melo returned to Princeton, graduated and then moved to San Francisco. He had taught himself HTML computer programming language and landed jobs working for various start ups as a programmer in the early days of the dot-com bubble.

And while he didn't become a millionaire (none of the companies he worked for went public), he says he made a very nice living. He stopped working just before the bubble burst and decided it was time to go to law school. "But first, I traveled the world and enjoyed my money," he said.

At 32, Melo embarked on getting his law degree from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

After he graduated in 2006, Melo practiced criminal law, but he eventually found himself taking on more and more immigration cases.

"It's not something I ever really wanted to do. Immigration law is mainly paperwork," he said.



The team at Melo & Hurtado PLLC

But a growing number of his Latino clients were getting picked up by police and then disappearing or being held longer than the 48 hours that the law allowed.

By 2008, Melo was taking on immigration cases full time.

"Wake County was holding people for longer than the 48 hours, and a lot of my clients were being deported," he said. "So I sued the county under a writ of habeas and won."

Wake County now observes the 48 hour limit.

Melo has since returned to criminal law. One of his associates now handles the immigration cases.

CNNMoney (New York)
First published October 15, 2015: 7:48 AM ET

PAID CONTENT

Can you pay off debt and save money? Find out.

Sponsored: NerdWallet

New Program in North Carolina Pays Homeowners To Go Solar +...

Sponsored: Solar Power Programs

[Photos] Man Saves Her Baby Then Mama Elephant Does This

Sponsored: The Primary Market

[Pics] Dolly Finally Took Off Her Wig, Fans Weren't Prepared

Sponsored: ZenHerald

North Carolina: Say Bye To Expensive Solar Panels If You Own A Home In Durham

Sponsored: Energy Bill Cruncher



CNN

1980s siren Tawny Kitaen of music videos and 'Bachelor Party' dies...

CNN

How the Nigerian star of 'Bob Hearts Abishola' is changing the...



CNN

Rebel Wilson got 'some bad news' and feels those struggling with fertility

CNN

Billie Eilish is talking about the reaction to that Vogue cover

CNN

Rita Wilson explains why she and Tom Hanks haven't been vaccinated yet



sponsored by Doggykingdom
NO PULL Harness

Dogs deserve better than an unsafe collar

Order Now

This dog harness is extremely comfortable.

Order Now

I'm not going to pull on my dog anymore

Order Now

Worst Colleges: Make Sure You Don't Go Here.."North Carolina Takes The Cake"

[Photos] Jeff Bezo's Jet Costs A Billion Dollars, See Inside

[Gallery] Outrageous Red Carpet Mishaps That They Tried to Cover Up

Sponsored: Bon Voyaged

Sponsored: Your Money Magic

Sponsored: HeraldWeekly

Paid Content

If you're going to shop at Target, read this *Capital One Shopping*

One Simple Method To Keep Your Blood Sugar Below 100 *world-health-wellness.com*

North Carolina Homeowners Can Get Paid To Go Solar + Generac Battery For No Cost At Install *Power Bill Relief Program*

Cable TV is Dying. Here's What We Think Is Next (and It's Not Netflix!) *The Motley Fool*

More from CNN Money

Seth Rogen says he has no plans to work with James Franco again

Bucknell University condemns 'horrific incident' against LGBTQ student community and orders investigation

Actress Tawny Kitaen dies at 59

New images of Jupiter reveal some of the planet's mysterious features

Recommended by

Paid Links

GRANTS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR OLDER WOMEN

APPLY FOR PELL GRANT

APPLY FOR GRANTS NOW

STUDENT GRANTS FOR MOMS

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DOCTORAL

USED POOL TABLES

POOL TABLES FOR SALE

Comments

Search CNN...

Sea

U.S	World	Politics	Business	Opinion	Health	Entertainment
Crime + Justice	Africa	45	Markets	Political Op-Eds	Food	Stars
Energy + Environment	Americas	Congress	Tech	Social Commentary	Fitness	Screen
Extreme Weather	Asia	Supreme Court	Media		Wellness	Binge
Space + Science	Australia	2018	Success		Parenting	Culture
	Europe	Key Races	Video		Vital Signs	Media
	Middle East	Primary Results				
	UK					
Tech	Style	Travel	Sports	Video	Shop	More...
Innovate	Arts	Destinations	Pro Football	Live TV	CNN Underscored	Photos
Gadget	Design	Food & Drink	College Football	Digital Studios	-Explore	Longform
Mission: Ahead	Fashion	Play	Basketball	CNN Films	-Wellness	Investigations
Upstarts	Architecture	Stay	Baseball	HLNTV	-Gadgets	CNN Profiles
Innovative Cities	Luxury	Videos	Soccer	Schedule	-Lifestyle	CNN Leadersh
	Autos		Olympics	TV Shows A-Z	CNN Store	CNN Newslett
	Video			CNNVR		Work for CNN



Most stock quote data provided by BATS. Market indices are shown in real time, except for the DJIA, which is delayed by two minutes. All times are ET. Disclaimer. Morningstar: © 2019 Morningstar. All rights reserved. Factset: FactSet Research Systems Inc.2019. All rights reserved. Chicago Mercantile Association: Certain market data is the property of Chicago Mercantile Exchange Inc. and it is not to be distributed, reproduced, or retransmitted. All rights reserved. Dow Jones: The Dow Jones branded indices are proprietary to and are calculated, distributed and marketed by DJI Opco, a subsidiary of S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC and have been licensed for use to S&P Opco, LLC and CNN. Standard & Poor's and S&P are registered trademarks of Standard & Poor's Financial Services LLC and Dow Jones is a registered trademark of Dow Jones Trademark Holdings LLC. All content of the Dow Jones branded indices © S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC 2019 and/or its affiliates.

© 2020 Cable News Network. A Warner Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
CNN Sans™ & © 2016 Cable News Network.

Newsletters | Contact Us | Terms of Use | Privacy Policy | Do Not Sell My Personal Information | Accessibility & CC | AdChoices