



SONGS FOR ASCENDING

Joseph K. Corrado
27 September 1999



**The songs in this humble book are dedicated to
the people who first taught me how to sing.**

My Mother Margaret

My Father Victor

and all my Brothers and Sisters—

Pamela

Michele

Rosalie

Kevin

Margaret

Kieran

Warren

Baby Victor

Maria



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IN THAT FIFTH DECADE OF THE DREAM

(For Victor and Margaret at a Surprise Party Celebrating Forty Years of Dreaming and Becoming Themselves)

In that fifth decade of the dream,
He is himself;
She is herself.

He is hobbit-happy—full of food and peace,
He is Victor;
He is himself.

She is mother-full—joy in speech and touch,
She is Margaret;
She is herself.

In that fifth-split stage for their dream

They surprise us all,
And sell the house and all,
Buying an RV to tour the country and all,
With mom at the wheel, blowing scarf, touring goggles and all,
Dad at his digital compass, in Star Trek cap, microfiche maps and all,
While all of us watch with adult dismay and all,
As they post us jaunty cards and photos and all,
Of escapades and mysterious trips on the Orient Express and all,
And not only that, they never call!

In that fifth time-smile on their dream,
Victor and Margaret are simply who they seem.
They dance where they may—to a true enduring theme.
Now sing valor and vanilla for this wholly winning team.

25 June 1983



HANDS IN JOY FOREVER

Her hands have been in many bubbles
That floated amid gray scum troubles.
Over dishes piled like war-zone rubbles,
Her hands still move like white foamy shovels.

Liquids and powders and sprays, they say,
Will tag all the grimes of our modern day.
Pink labels pretend that her hands won't pay
With redness and soreness from the suds' rough play.

In buckets and bathtubs and basins and bowls,
Her hands have plunged after microscopic trolls--
Which, but for her, would have taken their tolls
By trapping us in beast caves and other disease holes.

Then here's a tribute: "A Detergent Award"
To this valiant woman and her bravery which poured
Drainward trillions of villains slain by her sword
Of surfactants and phosphates and a dream that ever soared.

25 June 1983



SONG FOR SHARPNESS

He trades with sharpness, this man does.
Coded and stacked are his blades for fuzz,
And knives and scissors and sturdy keen wedges,
Plus a myriad of other micro-thin edges.

He speaks with sharpness, this man does.
He's not one to diddle and say "Just because."
Precisely gentle are his words and views—
A far finer cut above the blunt evening news!

He loves with sharpness, this man does.
His true mettle forged the care that was
The beginning for me and my sisters and brothers.
So I now sing for a sharpness—bright past all others.

25 June 1983



JOYFUL ELEGY OF MARGARET MARY

For long now, my name has been Mother.
I bore Kim and Pam and Michele and Rosalie
and Kevin and Margaret and Kieran and Warren and Maria
and yet another who is already with me
in the bosom of Our Father.

For long now my words have gone away.
I spoke with my hands and heart and chores
and tasks and smiles and tears
and other small ways which covered my days
like the autumn leaves quietly.

For long now my song has been full.
I sang with the birds and soared with them
to the sun. And now they fly through me
like my husband and my children and my friends
and all the sweet flowers in the sunshine of my joy—
that even in the winter when the plants say nothing—
is spark for my secret hymn of love.

2 October 1984



MOON DOG

A dog is howling
at the floating
moons on the waters.
He does not know why
they will not flee him
or even fight now
while his hormones surge.

Can the stray dog purge
his instinctive vow
urging him to win—
if the moons would vie?
Listless marauders,
wet moons are toting
their own lone scowling.

19 March 1985



MOTHER AUTUMN SONG

A song is lifting on a
Wind from far away—
Long ago cooings and murmurs
Wing like migrating flocks
Past brief glimpses of
Love and laughter fresh and supple
As spring roots in giving ground.

Now the sirens of summer are
Silent, and now I hear you
Singing again sweet and cool
For my tired ears mostly hearing
Jingles for another winter of ulterior motives.

October 1986



EULOGY FOR ISABELLE MILBURN

(29 December 1895 - 5 November 1986)

Remembering Isabelle Betourne—Mrs. Isabelle Milburn—will be easy. She was so alive when she was with us.

We all have been graced by her *joi de vivre*. It was infectious. Her energetic style—her pluck—her fortitude—her steadfastness, demonstrated that she was in love with life.

Sometime—long ago—she made a decision—perhaps when her husband Warren died suddenly—leaving her to her wits with four young children.

She did not make time for "Why mes?" She did not fret over "Things I should have done but did not do. She did not nourish questions about the apparently random loneliness and pain and even absurd quirks of our human condition.

She decided to receive each day as a gift from the Lord of Life. She unwrapped each of her gifts as best she could. She was in the race, and she decided to run to win.

She possessed no secret understanding—no special insight—no extraordinary grace—other than the amazing grace that continually suffuses us all—the grace that eludes our eyes—as we now see through a glass darkly. Isabelle decided to see that the world is charged with the grandeur of a love that passes understanding.

Now—oh Lord of Life—let your handmaid Isabelle be a spirit guide for us. Let our dearest Isabelle—our mother—our grandmother—our sweet friend—help us along this twisty path we find ourselves still on.

And now—oh Holy Spirit—let us hear her new sweet song as she nuzzles your warm breast, under your bright wings.

8 November 1986



A BIRTHDAY GIFT

(A Tale for a Day of Independence wherein some Disjointed Recollections and Wild Conjectures are recounted with Affection for Victor)

When Victor was born, he was very, very small—like all babies. He had wee, wee toes and a tiny pink nose. Altogether, he was as cute as a pair of bee’s knees. Soon he started traveling around on his hands and knees—an excellent way to go, as all little people know. Every day he discovered strange objects and odd bits of food—like runaway peas and odd bits of cheese.

When Victor got older, he started walking and talking. And he had to be fast because he had big brothers and sisters who grabbed for the dinner bread in the blink of an eye. Sometimes, to hold onto his food, he had to hide it under the table—squeezed between his knees!

One day, when he was still a tyke, Victor got a trike—a tricycle that is. Fast, fast, fast, and free, free, free—ride, ride, ride. “Watch where you’re going! Oh, look out for those trees!” Boom goes Victor—bruises on his elbows and scrapes on his knees.

Well, the days passed quickly. Soon, Victor was in school. He mastered the numbers and the A-B-Cs (and collected a few more scrapes on his knees). And even though he grew taller and smarter, he still crawled around on his hands and knees. Except now he was weeding in his father’s garden and picking pods of peas.

Then, just a few years later, (not far from Decatur) there was Victor driving his first car. He was on his way to college when the radiator made a horrible wheeze. He had to pull off the road—fearing the engine might seize. He had to crawl under that old buggy—very hard on the back—not to mention the knees!

Not long after, Victor learned photography. Before computers and even before TV (if you can imagine that), he was working with lenses and films and chemical baths. In his zoot suit, he was quite the shutterbug. And all those pictures had to be developed in a dark room with a tiny red light. Now imagine how easy it was, in this tiny dark room, to accidentally spill beer in his ear or, after a big sneeze, to knock his knees!

Soon, Victor invented the Comp-Right (an adjustable parallelogram that would have tickled Euclid). But more inventive still, he went on a blind date that proved first-rate. She was the Lady Margaret—his beautiful soul mate. So, on a balmy summer night, with flowers on the breeze, and stars in the trees, he fell to his knees and said, “Marry me please.”

After the war, they settled in Oak Park in a tidy apartment with a cozy little fireplace and noisy neighbors upstairs. In the middle of the night they would make such a racket that Victor would beat on the radiator with his jacket. When the noise was really loud, he would knock on the ceiling with a broom. Now, banging with the handle of a broom is like a circus act—maybe on a trapeze. You need steady feet, strong shoulders, and of course, nimble knees.



A Birthday Gift continued

Finally, enough was enough; besides, their kids were getting bigger. They needed a larger house, something quieter and clean—like a little country cottage in Mundelein, on Midway, at 217.

It was the 50s and TV was becoming more popular than radio. Victor ran his photo studio to feed the growing brood. But it wasn't all work and Santa Maria del Popolo shuffle—on weekends there were parties and games of Pinochle. Now in case you don't know, this is a card game played on small folding tables. So picture this: four grown adults around a small tipsy table—space for the cards and a small bowl of peanuts, but underneath a very tricky squeeze for the—you guessed it—the knees!

Then there were summer days at Devil's Lake. There, Victor climbed boulders carved by an ancient glacier. Big stones, of course, are hard on all bones and joints—in particular the articular at the middle of the leg. And did I mention the structure he built high in a tree? It had a door, and rope ladder—quite a sight to see. It was a grand construction—a fort in the leaves. But for Victor, as he learned, building in trees is rough on the knees.

Later, with a plan for more space, Victor moved the clan down Midway apace. And he started work in the cutlery store—a major commute to daily sharp edges. There was the long walk down Adams, twice every day. Then there was the standing and stooping behind the gleaming counters. And in these long days of retail monotonies, there was precious little rest for Victor's hands or Victor's knees (except a lunch burger at Wimpy's or some fried rice at Wing Yee's).

Then one year, this guy drove up to the 411 house—said he'd spray the roof for a small price. He had a special mixture guaranteed to kill moss, a deal it seemed—losing shingles is a big loss. So Victor paid him his fee and we watched as he sprayed what smelled and looked like old tea. But with this very foul liquid, after a very fast spray, we were all in dismay. The guy made a fast getaway, and Victor got angry—needless to say. And smacking his quivering, quaking knees, I remember him saying "No more thieves on my eves!"

So the weeks came and the weeks went. This is the way of our lives and how they are spent: the small things, the daily things, the little moves of care that gather to greatness and mend every heart's tear. For example, there were Victor's Sunday night sweets—when he served all his family cool ice cream treats. In the background Ed Sullivan boasted of his "reeeally big show" —but little did he know! With bowls of cold ice cream balanced in our laps, the really big deal was the thoughtful freeze on our knees.

Now, after 80 years of crawling and walking and running and balancing and lifting and climbing and stooping and standing and smacking and bending and serving and kneeling, wouldn't your weary joints be a bit tired feeling? Well, that was exactly the case with Victor, you see. So, for his 80th birthday—for more movement with ease—he got some shiny, new, modern, and fancy-free...knees.

4 July 1997



EULOGY FOR VICTOR CORRADO

Dear brothers and sisters, you have asked me to say a few words at the end of our celebration today—even though no words can speak all of our feelings or the weight of this moment.

Victor, dear father, dear grandfather, dear friend, thank you for bringing us together in this moment—in love.

In the side yard of the house on Midway, next to your old garden shed stands an Oak tree. Unlike most other Oaks whose trunks grow straight as their leaves stretch toward the sun, this old tree leans at a precipitous angle over the side yard. Its limbs reach out like protective arms that overarch the yard and many small plants below. Also, this meek Oak is a dry home for many happy sparrows.

Victor, thank you for being such a brave and sturdy Oak.

All of the love you and Margaret planted now bears wonderful fruit in the love that surrounds us now. All know that you have been a diligent gardener—your handiwork now blooms all around. But you have come to the end of your path in this garden while we continue on our own paths of holiness—of wholeness. So our weeks will come and our weeks will go. And as you know, this is the way of our lives and how they are spent: the small gestures, the daily tasks, the little moves of care that gather to a greatness as our days increase, as our bones diminish.

Victor, thank you for showing us how to keep our footing—even on a narrow path.

Under that old Oak next to the garden shed, you had that old wooden boat waiting patiently for repair on saw horses. It was a big repair job, and for many years, the old Oak watched it sit. Then, one day, you put your hand to it again. You cut out the rotting wood, you stripped the old varnish and brushed on the new. You polished the old fittings. Finally, she was ready to sail again: one of Diamond Lake's finest craft. Not the biggest, not the fastest. But there was a stout heart in the wood that made it sail like no other. Ahead of us now, you have already come into port. Home indeed is the sailor—home from the sea, and the hunter home from the hill!

Victor, thank you for helping us learn how to sail with a steady hand—even in the storm.

That old Oak, leaning against the base of it, almost hidden by surrounding plants, is an old grinding stone that was once used for sharpening blades. The iron frame is now rusted beyond use—but the heavy stone itself is ready for another turn.

Victor, thank you for being the steadfast stone that helped us hone our dull edges.

And still he loves with sharpness, this man does. And we will not forget that his true mettle forged the care that we now share—all of us dear sisters and brothers. So now let us sing for a sharpness—bright past all others!

26 June 1998



THROUGH GREEN AND GOLDEN VALLEY

To Warren

Through green and golden valley
My brother walks with birdsong and silver sound
In emerald fountains in his soul
On an inner journey designing and building
The electro-magneto quark emulsifiers that hymn
To the God-glory of the already trod
Future paths of man.

Waging war in shadow areas
Against the corrosive sulfide-clone fungus
Just discovered last year by the FDA
My brother figures a way to make
An efficient fungus trap gizmo
In the finest tradition of happy solutions
With vanilla consequences for the floating leaves.

So the green laughing sunshine advances
Against the receding gray ignorance
Of the invisible mushroom madness
Because his happy hands fashion happy reasons
And delights and knights of light
Surround my brother with smiles
Of peace and strength and courage
That reflect in the thousand prisms
Of the ergone antenna he just finished building.

June 1980



ROSALIE'S GARDEN

(Iambic pentameter for Rosalie on her 50th birthday)

A lady I know so full of love and light,
Her heart as soft and gentle as a rose,
Now like a bloom that into fullness grows,
She is a gift of grace—a wondrous sight.

Take care to walk in her garden with peace.
No guile or strife can find a hold there—
No ivy envy—shadows small even cease!

True beauty flowers, as everyone knows,
When love shines through (like stars in dark night),
From deeds and words that set everything right.
Oh joy! That I'm touched by this golden rose!

20 May 1999



TO MY VALENTINE

For Basha

To renew the ardor of our love's start

I need but question my forgetful heart.

Who is my truest friend in the spirit and flesh?

Who the one I cherish as I do myself?

Who the axis of my pole?

To renew the ardor of our love's start

I need but question my forgetful heart.

Who is my dearest companion on this changeable path?

Who the brightness for my night?

Who the might for my weakness?

To renew the ardor of our love's start

I need but question my forgetful heart.

Who will dance with me in my step's tempo?

Amid the meekness of the flowers?

Amid the bowers of hot entanglement?

To renew the ardor of our love's start

I need but question my forgetful heart.

Who is the most beautiful from my heart's garden?

A distant rose in a golden gloom?

A Valentine bloom so near?

To renew the ardor of our love's start

I will always remember your heart.

St. Valentine's Day, 1992



TO A BEAUTIFUL PSYCHOLOGIST

I like the way you laugh.
I like your ready smile.
I like the way you whisper and
Your beautiful beguile.

I like the way you pout.
I like your naughty style.
I like the way you sooth and
Your beautiful beguile.

I like the way you hope.
I like your gentle wile.
I love as we touch awhile in
Our blossom of beguile.

15 November 1986



TO A LADY NOT YET MET

My love for you is like prairie grasses—like wild flowers.
Daily I find new soil to link—new sun to drink.
My longing flourishes—expectation nourishes.
I weave filaments of future care—just as the hours our days.

9 March 1976



AT FIRST LOVE

Like walking on water lillies
I violate the logic of the universe
Being with you.
If caring is holy sunshine
Then certainly I glow
In your eyes
and you in mine.

With laughter amid the floating leaves
And vanilla smiles
I bypass the foolishness of Archimedes.
For my denseness does not sink—
There is a buoyancy to your delicate deep.
Oh fair pool of delight, this water fly will
Tease your sparkling ripples
drop by drop.

Fall - 1970



HYMN FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

A green glow is looming on the cathode tube
Slowly, slowly come the numbers crawling;
Here come the answers, here come the answers!
And like true disciples we all hover 'round the gray pulsing cube.

Inexorably come the green solutions
We have been waiting days and days, waiting
For the golden equations to tell us
How to prick and ease the pain of our intumescent confusions.

The answers are logical, very precise
But results are not quite as expected;
Disproportioned output analysis...
And the programmers are again busy on the input device.

Phone Central Control, tell them to compensate.
Where is the theoreticians' report?
Have you checked the multiple sequencer?
Sorry 13-11 about the rush, but we just can't wait.

Steaming city pavements are gray and empty
(It's only two o'clock right now,
the cake line form at four.)
Where are all the people?
The people are dead...
The time has come
Silent, silent down-drifting soot
Is falling like snow used to fall.
Memories of another day, another way
Are like fairy tales that will not go away when you should know better.
Something is sulking on the corner under the cold light.

There are no more mysteries, but I still ask: "Where? How?"
Was that a man I saw open the door? But no.
Where are all the people?
The people are dead...
The time has come.
Metallic, metallic, unfeeling hand, unfeeling foot
Unfeeling love in a long dark hall
Smooth and polished pearly gray.
(Of course, fluorescent fixtures are optional in some parts of the sepulcher.)



Hymn for the Twenty-first Century continued

And in the gutter I saw a yo-yo that had once been white.

Where, where is green grass for sitting down on now?

Was that laughter I heard? But no.

Just ignore it—for the time has come.

For the ascendance of Lilliput.

And where are the spring-things that have not dried and shriveled up small?

And how can the surging and throbbing keep up day after day

In those subterranean rooms where every man is an idolater?

Very effective way to proselyte!

No more black, no more white.

Looks like egg in my beer.

Taped voices so polite

But for the squeaky gear.

Where are all the people?

Excuse me sir, would you please tell me where you are?

I mean, where you are...

Where you are?

We can solve every problem.

We are specially trained to correlate and integrate,

Analyze and synthesize.

It's simply a matter of translating into our code.

Hey, where are the new solenoids?

But the air-conditioned hum

Stupefies our flaccid brains with ersatz satisfaction.

Actually, our problem is:

Making a mathematical construct for mud puddles.

Would somebody please find those damn solenoids?

And all throughout the caverns

Scamper bloodless little creatures with bulging-vulgar eyes

That peer and stare from behind

A massive maze of gleaming, spinning, flashing non-living.

Hurry! Phone Central Control.

Tell them to recompensate. What's that—they're tired of cake?

No, that's out of the question.

Absolutely no bread at all. But where are the solenoids?



Hymn for the Twenty-first Century continued

Where are the souls that laugh and smile about the simple?
Where are the souls that sing?
So I wander in search for the pools of dancing sun where they live.
Islands of vanilla smiles and laughter in the floating leaves.

Oh let me extol this time for forcing the unextreme extreme.
Let me extol the
Naked men
Eating brains
In their hands
Dripping oil.
And all you people praise
Anxious, furtive things
Under cool porcelain skulls
Now and forever.

Amplify, sanctify
All components.
And all will now admit
That we have reached the summit.
Certainly impressive, so exquisite;
Isn't it fun being ultimate?
(But please, while in progress do no
Smoke, curse, or spit.)

Hard, cold corridors—gray, gray,
Silent but for frightened feet.
The door, must find the door.
Run, run—there will be a light.
Where? Where?
All these doors have gray frosted glass; I can't read the lettering.
Where are all the people? Where?...Where?...

And stopping still
I heard a world of silent voices
Reverberate this question to the stars.

circa-1966



I LOOKED AT A MAN I HAD KNOWN FOR A LONG TIME

For an in-moment I saw
The flame
Buried deep within those dark convoluting caverns
Which lead to the inward man.
There was a loneliness there
Like the dead grays and browns that scrape
Along the winter gutter—
It was saying: "Where? Where?"
He melted to a Van-Dyke
Shade, leaving just an inward shape
Which I should have seen sooner.
Somehow it was like...like...
Just as in a sudden thaw,
The frame
Of the thing snow-buried (in unsuspecting guise) yearns
For the fullness of its plan.

circa-1966



EXCERPT FROM A PRAYER OF A MAN SEARCHING

...in a most absurd position yet
down deep-beautiful
not simple-simple-simple but
a paradox paradise
so that life means end in finding-losing is beginning with death
(yet the Starlight Bowling Lanes and Joe's Grill
would not hold this
—and that's who I am; and many more).

something
there is out there...I know because
surging up, grasping for those ultimate limits
comes the why
(it would be so much easier
to live by the sea free—
but it can't be that way)
so you see how it is—I don't know
where or how. I just know to go.

and when I go out—
searching
I use my cautious-walking ice-muscles
through nice elusive pastures
old mists cold and silent like
a loneliness
swallow me up in their touchlessness
a smooth enamel table-top has nothing on it
except maybe an empty, dusty, faded vase.

that's how it is
sometimes
along the way
and then I'm blind,
oh my God—I'm blind

circa-1965



TACITDECEPTION

the heat machine is whispering in the dark
and i, with centipede-thoughts scurrying
in dark cranial cracks, am waiting for my turn to speak:
"Did you know that the dresser has a loose knob?
Have you seen the shower damn curtain flying?
(Obviously, one keeps the shades to window level-open height.)
But then, of course, i am a one-shave-a-day man myself."
rather awkward plastered situation!
(how they would laugh when they would pull the plastic cork off the bufferin bottle
floating on the grass and read the same old trite helpamlost message.)
what twistythinking they would say—
thinking oaken boards anything like island sand.

what darkly bizarre and alien hollow is this that keeps
my floating feelings so confined—like
nose and fingertips windowpane-pressed?
i am forced inward by gentle almost gestures,
by soft children hands my lips are closed—
locking fat(dripping, greasy-cold)uousness.
tendrils of tenebrous silence grope amid...
hah! waiting for my turn to speak speaknothings;
(i thought i had to follow this "freedomfire" of
expression to be fullme, but it was just a space/atom-century will-o'-the-wisp).
this dusky hollow (seemingly four-walled) is but...
me alone-silent with myself.
the heat machine is whispering in the dark and i am
learning to love black winterforest silence.

circa winter 1964



ON TRANSIENCE

A cloud is like a storied mansion white
That sits on hillock compassed 'round by blue.
Or like the sea that rolls with morning hue,
Some clouds advance upon the shore of night.
The nubic smoke drifts onward in the height
In shapes and patterns somehow old yet new.
They wander nowhere far between and few,
Or like invading hoards they range past sight.
Hell's chambers hold dark no more than these hold,
As prisons strong they fetter light and sound;
Dark, dreary, damp—they form the sky's gray wold.
These simple travelers tell a truth profound:
The guise is but a mask—much is untold.
The earth's but a cloud—a cloud all around.

circa fall 1962



SIXTY YEARS OF YOU IS NOT ENOUGH

Sixty years of you is not enough.
Not enough time to discover the labyrinth of your heart.
Not enough days to discover your love, so gentle, so smart.
Not enough learning your yearnings—the horses of your cart.
Not enough golden song—your essential music confounding Sartre.
Not enough of your beguile—sweet yet dash of tart.
Not enough laughter and smiles to guide my longing dart.
Not enough words to tell your story—the unscripted part.
Not enough of you in park peace or bustle of the mart.
Not enough forest to range—you the hind, me the hart.
Oh, sixty years of you, alas, is but a timid start.

Basha's 60th Birthday | 30 March 2009