

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Paola Corso: Three Poems

Paola Corso · Thursday, April 28th, 2022

### IN THE BRONX THEY SAY

A boy loses a galosh trudging up a step street  
in snow so deep it takes two weeks to  
melt before he finds it

A girl loves to hop down steps but mom has  
to treat her to a malted and a pretzel to get  
her to climb back up

Friends in a tied game of stoop ball at the base  
borrow a cell phone and call home to say they'll  
be late for supper

And in the Bronx they say

An athlete lines up bottle caps at the bottom of the  
steps, picks one up, runs it to the top,  
then over again times fifty

An artist lures pedestrians with a  
mural of a quetzal bird neon yellow and indigo blue  
feathering the steps

They say

Ice Age rock and concrete stairs rest side by side  
in a park Children scale a boulder then conquer  
another

shouting down crevices and cupping hands  
over ears to listen for  
the echo of their voices

Elders hear youthful  
cries piercing the air as  
they tilt and totter as

they test their footing  
on the solitude of each  
step

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## A CIGARETTE BUTT ON A LANDING

Pick it up, toss it in the trash, pretty up city stairs for an annual trek.

Years ago the same Camel woulda been flicked by a mill hunk

taking his last drag as he climbed down to the factory gate.

What did he care about clean steps when he was a sooty shadow of a man

after his shift, pants and shirt the color of a charcoal sky, the color of factory lungs.

Now trekkers climb a yellow-brick road for views, for snapshots, for exercise,

for a lighter carbon foot when the bottom of his steel toe boots was black, his sole heavy.

Old-timers climbed steps before they were cool, before they were the destination. They climbed

to church and school, to a haircut and soda pop. And to a steel worker, steps were the route

to punch in and out, the route he didn't want to take except on payday.

On my grandfather's last night shift operating a crane before he retired,

my father and his brothers borrowed a Cadillac and drove him home at sunrise.

He wasn't gonna climb up no stairs on his last day of work after 47 years

in a sweat cabin above open fire. He came home to a pancake breakfast,

to maple syrup, strips of bacon, black coffee.

Home, an old destination. Home, a new route.

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## ON YOUR FINGERTIPS

Corso is the name my father gave me, the name I keep, the name engraved on the Immigrant Wall of Honor.

We board the ferry to find his name. Mario Procopio Corso, a Calabrian farmer's son who flunks a grade of school after he emigrates to this country, who one day shows his teachers he can spell and write his name when he finishes high school, works in a steel mill, attends college on the G.I. Bill, becomes the school's business administrator signing their paychecks.

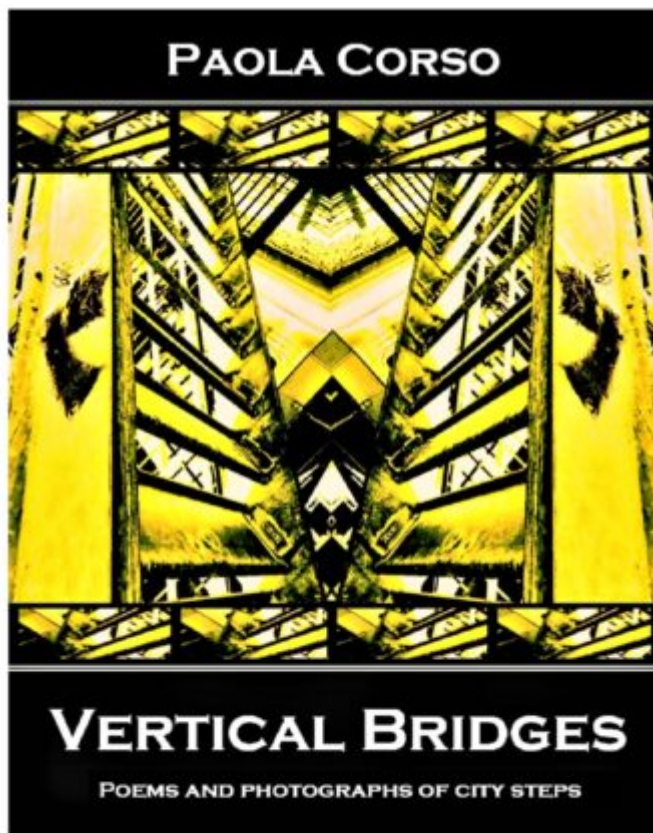
My father's course begins with a boat ride to Ellis Island— not like this one. My grandmother and

Aunt Grace, like others in steerage, are sick to their stomachs and eager to see Lady Liberty in New York's harbor to mark the end of an agonizing journey across the ocean, while a sailor takes a shine to my father, puts his naval cap on his little head, perches him on his shoulders. Already my father finds his way.

I say to my sons: *Sono Corso. Siete Corso. Siamo Corso.* We are the course, the main street, the boulevard, the parade that passes by. We are New Yorkers, and I will boat you to the Statue of Liberty and you will land. You'll trace the letters of our name, curved and circular, winding like a hairpin turn on the road to your grandfather's hill town.

The C, the O, the R, the S, and O. Your course rests on your fingertips. Someday you'll know who you are and what direction to take. Live your life. Live your name.

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Cover Photograph by Paola Corso

*Vertical Bridges* by Paola Corso

### **Purchase *Vertical Bridges* by Paola Corso**

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