

“Ballad for Joe Zito”

Lemme tell you ‘bout Joe Zito,
The kinda man you wanna know.
Selfless acts of courage were his destiny.
Elevator Man. Triangle Factory.

Born the first of September, 1883, fifteen minutes past ten.
Giuseppe Alessandro Zito, sweet green eyes, he’d grow to be the noblest of men.
At eighteen he left Sere, *Provincia di Salerno*, Italy,
Came to *L’America*. Got a job at the Triangle Factory.
Joe ran one of two passenger elevator cars,
The other was run by a man named Gaspare Mortillalo.
But factory workers were treated as freight,
Backdoor elevators took their five hundred bodies up to floors nine and eight.

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Joe and Gaspare brought to the executive floor, bosses, foreladies, and buyers,
And in twin bowler hats, The Shirtwaist Kings: union busters, door lockers and liars.
It was a payday in March, a Saturday night, fifteen minutes to quittin’ time,
All Hell broke loose when Joe heard “Fire!” Glass smashing, fists bashing, way up high.
Joe glanced over at Gaspare and they locked eyes,
And without a single word, pulled their cars up to the fast fast fire way up in the sky.
Up! Up! Up! To save lives, all the workers were screaming, distraught.
Joe Zito never gave his own safety one single thought.

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Girls dove into Joe’s elevator car clutching fabric shears and scissors,
Another guy would’a minded his own biz’iness.
Italian American to the core,
Joe Zito never ran for the door.
Up! Up! Up! Joe! Joe! Joe! Into fire higher higher he climbed,
He went back up about eighteen times.
Why didn’t Joe go up a nineteenth you say?
Mezzomorte at the bottom of the shaft, our noble Joe lay.
Elevator dropped, smashed at basement level.
Cables gave in to fire, an overloading hell-hole.
Jumping on Joe’s car, girls after girls after girls after girls.

Caving the roof, flesh roasted, hair in ribbons and curls.
They dragged Joe out onto Washington Place half dead,
Rushed him to Saint Vincent's Hospital, stab wounds on his arms and forehead.
What ever happened to Gaspare?
He was last seen running into the smoke filled *l'aria*.

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Povero Giuseppe Alessandro never recovered since he saw,
"Burning Rockets" from the eighth floor, fall.
He couldn't forget girls trapped in flames, or
Judge Crain and his gavel saying, "Shirtwaist Kings are not to blame."
Joe left New York City in a state of deprivation,
Shell-shocked from Triangle workers' asphyxiation and decapitations.
Scarred for life, from all he saw,
Joe headed west and seven years later, registered for the Army during The Great War.

No rich man could buy Joe's word
His green sad eyes had saw and heard. All
the papers said he died without a penny.
No bribe could change Joe's testimony. Ah!
The Shirtwaist Kings offered thousand dollar bribes,
While the U.S. economy was taking the great dive.
Joe kept free to tell the truth.
Shirtwaist Kings got rich off insurance loot.
And like too many of our brave
Our noble Joe was buried in an unmarked grave.

Lemme tell you 'bout Joe Zito,
Italian American hero.
Selfless acts of courage were his destiny.
He saved a-hun', a-hundred fifty.
He couldn't a' dreamed *this*, when he left Italy.

Elevator Man, we sing your name.
Thanks Joe! Thanks Joe! Thanks Joe! Thanks Joe!