

Four Poems

by Jay Lesandrini

It's a long time back
to 15 N. Second Street
where nothing changes but
the seasons; turning years
into memories of a
sidewalk, splitting our front
lawn like a cement cross.
I can remember each room
separately, as though each
is a house that contains
a memory of my youth.
There, in my bedroom, I
awake — nine years old
with summer thought resting
beneath a fresh snowfall.
My mother sleeps lightly
downstairs, alone. She dreams
of my father, now four years
dead; buried beside sister
at the Holy Cross Cemetery.
But I am happy not knowing that
death takes no holidays.
In three years, my childhood
will end, and I will be left
with only memories of
15 N. Second Street,
Evansville, Wisconsin.

George Fritcher would come over
with his wife every Tuesday
to play pinochle with my parents.
George owned the local popcorn stand,
where he sold sno-cones and cotton
candy from the trailer parked
adjacent to The Pizza Palace
on S. Main St., across the tracks.
He always brought popcorn to us
when he came to play cards. And
I would stay up and eat popcorn,
and listen to them talk, and then
slowly fall asleep on my mother's
lap, and they would have to stop
the game so that she could put me
to bed. On Christmas, George would
come to our house dressed as Santa,
and deliver presents to us kids.
When my father died, Tuesday
nights became lonely without
popcorn, but Christmas remained
the same, until George died.

On certain Sunday mornings
I would walk alone to St. Paul's
Catholic Church, on the corner
of First and Garfield streets.
I would leave my house when
the church bells rang (fifteen
minutes before mass) and sometimes
I'd make it on time. I
always sat in a back pew
when I was alone; or instead
I would ascend to the choir loft
to observe the ritual that
I seldom felt a part of.
At St. Paul's, the choir had
long since disbanded, and now
the loft was a haven for
rebellious youths whose only
reason for religion was to
please parents. I knew no other
reason for religion, and I
accepted this as reason enough.
So I would take communion,
following the others to the back
of the church, making no right
turn at the door to the loft —
and the last ten minutes of mass.
Instead, I would walk straight out,
blessing myself as I left; with
a guilt that evaporated
as quickly as the Holy Water
that dripped from my forehead.

Your Hair

—for Shelley

Your hair has just travelled from
1968 to 1986 in just over
an hour's time; and now it rests
in a trash can in some hair-
cutting joint that your sister
frequents, and suggested that you
do the same.

You look just fine. No complaints.
Even Dylan has changed in
eighteen years; and if you like
your hair in 1986, then so do
I, though you no longer look
perfect for a bookcover of
Brautigan's.