

## THE LERNER THEATRE, 1953

By Shari Wagner

*Elkhart, Indiana*

When my mother purchased high heels  
at Ziesel's Department Store  
and then crossed Main Street  
toward a white terra cotta wall  
with a marquee that announced,  
*From Here to Eternity*,  
it was the beginning of the end.

When she fell head over heels in love,  
not just with Burt Lancaster, loping,  
bare-chested across the beach,  
but with the click of her blue  
stilettos on terrazzo stone,  
it was the end of the world  
as a good Mennonite knew it.

The girl who made a necklace  
from safety pins to wear  
beneath her dress to school  
marveled at the extravagance  
of beaded chandeliers. She saw  
dancing maids and griffins,  
pipes, harps and Grecian urns,  
the Turkish screens behind box seats,  
the plush gold, pleated curtain.

*All of it was worldly.*  
*All of it was good.*

Outside, the city was an oven,  
but she slouched in a sanctuary  
cooled by the river's pumped water  
sprayed as fine mist into fans.

She loitered with hundreds of other sinners  
in a dome of darkness  
where she could see distinctly  
the complications  
a romantic life could take.

There she was: on the deck

with Deborah Kerr, tossing  
her lei upon Pearl Harbor,  
watching a wave, like a cursive swirl,  
sweep the flowers out to sea.