

# Missing Detroit, My Home Town

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Author

[Dr. Jerry Bergman, PhD](#)

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I was born in Providence Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. My home was Detroit until the family moved to a Detroit suburb when I started school. Those days, gone forever, are fondly remembered. Our house was a large duplex on a street lined with duplexes (a home for two families), each with small yards and little space between each house. All we needed to mow our postage-stamp lawn was a manual push mower. After graduating high school, most of us found a job in a local auto factory or in retail sales until marriage.

When a couple married, they would usually move to the second floor of either his or her parent's duplex, whichever was the best arrangement. When the bride became pregnant, mom would help out with advice and, after the birth, she babysat when needed. Often reassurance that things were going well was an important part of grandmother helping the new mom. When mom wanted a break to go shopping or spend some time with friends, a call to her mom, who lived on the first floor, was all that was required.

She could then journey out, knowing that the kids would be in good hands. Only one car was needed for Dad to drive to work, and few people could afford a second car. Mom walked or took the bus. Crime was very low then, so travel was safe, and 10 to 25 cents covered the cost. (Today, children are often sent to daycare costing four to twenty thousand dollars a year, depending on the income of the parents.)

When mom and dad needed help when older, the children took care of them. Most parents died while still living in the family home. In 2024, the average national cost for a semi-private room in a nursing home was \$8,490 per month, \$101,880 per year. Care by the family is often superior and this expense often wipes out the parent's life savings.

We often had large window fans to cool the house. Our basement was made comfortable with knotty, pine-lined paneling and tile floors that Dad installed. My brother and I usually slept in the basement bedroom which was warm in the winter and cool in the summer.

Nowadays, it is common for children to move to another state to attend college. Often meeting someone at college, following graduation, if marriage results, the couple is then forced to rent or save up to buy a house. A typical three-bedroom house costs from \$225,000 to over \$740,000. Now both husband and wife often have to work full-time to achieve the exalted middle-class status. With both husband and wife working, two cars are needed. The average used-car price this year is \$26,510.

When Dad, who worked as an engineer for Chrysler, was laid off, neighbors would help out. Some of our relatives rented our second floor, so we had someone to rely on to pay the bills during hard times. Although salaried, Dad, a graduate of Wayne State University College of Engineering, was often laid off when strikes occurred.

Mother's workday was usually longer than Dad's. Her wringer washer would move the water back and forth to clean the clothes. Then the clothes were run through a set of rollers that squeezed out most of the water. Lastly, the clothes were hung on a clothesline outside, or, in case of rain, in the basement. This kept the family in good physical shape and our electricity bill was small. No affordable automatic washer/dryer appliance, dishwasher, freezer, or fancy coffee makers were available then.

Grocery shopping involved walking a few blocks to the local Kroger store with a light-weight cart to roll the groceries home. All meals were homemade except for rare, special restaurant visits three times a year. It was rare to see anyone overweight then, and it appears that our modern, sedentary lifestyle and restaurant food have caused part of the obesity problem rampant today. Over half of Americans are now overweight now.

I read piles of children's books and comic books like Superman and Donald Duck. I owned the *How and Why Library* and religiously read most of all five volumes. Once a month we went to a theater to watch the newest Hollywood production. In the 1950s, most brands of television receivers were complicated pieces of equipment, containing 30 vacuum tubes, as well as rheostats, transformers, and other heavy components. As a result, they were very expensive.

We had a Muntz television that produced an acceptable monochrome picture with only 17 tubes. Our TV only broke down a few times each year, but the repairman lived down the street, so it was not out of commission for long. Our Muntz TV had three stations, ABC, CBS, and NBC, all in glorious black and white.

Our dial phone rarely rang and was a party line, meaning others could listen to our private conversations. Family activities included bowling, swimming in the local community pool, archery, croquet, and table ping pong. All this ended when my parents divorced. Mom had to go to work full-time and still take care of us three boys.

Mom cried for days and my older brother never forgave Dad for divorcing Mom. I worked hard to continue to have a relationship with him, but only partly succeeded. It was a good, secure life until the divorce, which was rare then. I was often the only kid in my class who came from a divorced home; unfortunately it is now all too common. These good times are today's golden memories.

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