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Five reports from American hometowns

This week's lead story is a joint effort on the part of five staff writers who among them can boast nearly 80 years on this magazine, and no less than 322 LIFE bylines. In common with most Americans, none of them is living today in the place he or she was born. All went back to their original hometowns to assess the country's present mood. Their findings begin on page 22.

Loudon Wainwright, who wrote "The View from Here" column for five years, now thinks that "It might have been easier to write about someone else's hometown. The emotions of childhood take hold and get in the way." Of all the team members, he has stayed nearest to where he grew up on Long Island's south shore, and he now lives in another commuter suburb, Bedford, N.Y.

Jane Howard, whose book on the group encounter movement *Please Touch* was recently published, had a different problem. She had a choice of two hometowns to write about. Born in Springfield, Ill., she was raised in the Chicago suburb of Winnetka. To gather material, she spent two days in Winnetka looking up old high school friends and five days with her parents who are living in Springfield again. Eventually, she wrote about her birthplace because "It's more Midwestern, less touched by influences from the coasts."

Don Jackson came to us from the West Coast only seven years ago. Though he has frequently returned to his hometown of San Mateo, he was more deeply struck than any of the others by the appearance of change. "The town changes so much and so fast that when you go back you don't feel you're going home at all. In more than a nostalgic sense, it's not the way it used to be."

Paul O'Neil has hardly returned home to Seattle at all since he left 26 years ago. He was most startled by a "big six-lane freeway that cuts right through town. It gives the city a north-south orientation it never had before, but it drives you nuts when you think you know where you're going and you find out that actually you are lost."

To Tommy Thompson, who left Fort Worth 15 years ago and has since returned only on holidays, the trip back was another sort of revelation. He discovered that the biggest change had occurred within himself. "I used to think of Texas as a place of shallowness and bragging, money and power. New York was the only antidote to this. Now I have reversed my feelings completely. The most important thing I learned in Texas is that there's communication down there. People talk to one another. They don't run away from each other the way they do in New York City."



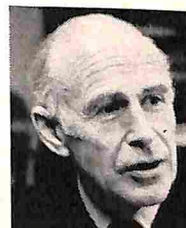
WAINWRIGHT



HOWARD



JACKSON



O'NEIL



THOMPSON

Ralph Graves
RALPH GRAVES
Managing Editor

LIFE

MARTHA MITCHELL

Talkative as ever, she finds
Washington tough going

AMERICA'S MOODS TODAY

Five LIFE
writers revisit their hometowns

WHAT DOCTORS THINK OF US AS PATIENTS

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