

### Detroit: then and now

#### A message from *Life* co-author, Helen Stephenson

*The story of Detroit is very interesting. It's a city that was rich, then it was poor and now it's becoming rich again. I think it's a 'good news' story. I hope you agree with me!*

The American city of Detroit was like Paris, some people said. It had a big river, beautiful wide streets and important buildings. Then, in the 20th century, it was called 'Motor City' because of the number of car factories there. Workers in the car factories had good jobs and they earned good money. It wasn't unusual to own a home, a boat and even a holiday home. In the 1950s, new highways were built and lots of people moved from the city centre to the suburbs. Life was good. But at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Detroit became America's poorest big city.

In a period of fifty years, more than half the people left Detroit. Houses and buildings were empty. Poverty and crime increased. Plants and trees grew in the empty houses. What happened in Detroit?

The city's population fell for several reasons. One reason is people moved to the suburbs in the 1950s. Another reason is that in 1967 there were terrible riots. A lot of people were scared of coming to the city. Also, the big car companies like General Motors and Chrysler had huge problems. And in 2008, the world financial crisis had a big effect on many cities, especially Detroit. Now, a lot of people in Detroit are poor. Half of the city's families have less than 25,000 dollars a year.

In 2013, the city of Detroit was bankrupt. It was the biggest bankrupt city in American history. But then something began to change. It was a new beginning for the city. It had some money to improve small things like lights in the streets and so people felt safe. The police came quickly when there were problems. Old, empty buildings were demolished. There is now space for new buildings. And there are new businesses too. The city gave 10,000 dollars to 30 new small businesses. Now there are grocery stores, juice bars, coffee shops and even bicycle makers. Finally, the city is working again.

#### Glossary

**suburbs** (n) the areas where people live outside of a town or city, away from the centre

**poverty** (n) the state of being very poor

**riot** (n) violent actions by a large group of angry people

**demolish** (v) to destroy a building

**bankrupt** (adj) not able to pay money that you owe