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Bert Almon

LIFE IN USONIA

In the late '30s Frank Lloyd Wright created his Usonian houses, naming them for a word he said he found in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*. No one has traced the word *usonian* in *Erewhon* and the speculation is that he really meant USONA, the United States of North America. The Usonian house was made of cement blocks placed on a cement pad, no basement, no attic, an open area for living room and kitchen, a patio, and a carport in place of a garage. After the war it was the pattern for the ranch-style house my father bought on the G.I. bill, in Ranchland Hills where no one had ever ranched. Cinder blocks instead of concrete, iced with orange stucco. The open area kept the nuclear family in one big chamber, nervous atoms ready to explore when any neutron of strife strayed through. Our house didn't have an exotic name—The Wave, Wingspread, Hollyhock House, Deertrack, La Miniatura, Honeycomb House, Fallingwater—like the great Lloyd Wright houses. *Erewhon* was nowhere, but at 7441 Wilcox we were somewhere once a simple interchange linked us with the new freeway. Later Frank Lloyd Wright's vision of a great decentralized city called Broadacres lay debased at the end of every exit ramp: wall to wall Wal-Mart, Wendy's, Exxon, Red Lobster, Toys or Else, and sometimes Exxon, McDonald's, Arby's and K-Mart. In Usona, our Dystopia and Dyspepsia, Toys R Us, ramps without end.