

# Ringling Your Party Now...

## Screening the Calls

IT WAS about midnight one summer night in 1945 when I arrived in New York City after a 29-day ocean trip from Calcutta, India. I was a 17-year-old radio operator on a Merchant Marine Liberty ship.

I couldn't wait to talk with Mom, and I managed to get to a pay phone on the dock with a handful of quarters for the long-distance call.

After some negotiation with various operators, I finally heard the voice of Aimee Hooker, the local switchboard operator in my hometown of Lineville, Iowa, population 521. She said, "Is that you, Jesse?" I replied in the affirmative.

After Aimee established that I was okay and in good health, she said, "Now, Jesse, you know that your mamma is asleep. You call her tomorrow when she's awake. I'll tell her in the morning that you called, and she'll be expecting a call from you."

None of the big-city operators on the line interfered, although I do think that I heard a snicker or two. As an obedient Iowa farm boy, I did as I was instructed.

Those small-town switchboard operators really ruled the roost in those days. —Charles V., Holiday, Florida

## Now, That's Good Service

DESPITE ALL the modern, sophisticated advancements in telephone technology, there's something missing. You could ring up the operator and find out the latest news in the community, news that you wouldn't read about in the weekly paper until the following week.

My Aunt Minnie doubted this personal aspect of our small town in

northern Missouri until the night she tried to call us from Kansas City. Minnie could not believe her ears. She overheard the local operator tell the K.C. operator that we were probably at the basketball game, noting, “Wait a minute and I’ll see.”

Whereupon the local operator got up from her chair, walked to the window and looked up at our apartment window across the street. Noting that the window was dark, she assured Minnie that if she’d call back at about 9:30 p.m., we’d be home by then, which she did and which we were.

—J. K.  
Blue Springs, Missouri

### **The Almighty, Please**

BACK IN the early 1950s, some small towns still had local telephone operators. I was one of them, and it happened to be my first job.

I had worked several weeks and finally had 2 days off in a row, so I went home to see Mom and Dad. We sat down for dinner that night, and Mom asked me to say grace.

Well, just getting off a new job that was very repetitious, I bowed my head and automatically said, “Number, please.”

My folks and I laughed so hard that I don’t remember if grace was ever said for that meal.

—Mavis M., Sentinel, Oklahoma

### **All in the Family**

WHEN I was very small, the local telephone office was in the living room of our family home. After a few years, my mother began to tire of all the traffic—people paying their bills and making calls—so my father bought a vacant store and moved the switchboard there.

My father also installed the telephones and maintained the lines. To

keep phone conversations to a reasonable length on the party line, my father always insisted on putting the phones high enough on the wall to prevent people from sitting down and talking. He reasoned that if they had to stand, they would shorten their conversation.

We also served as an information center, telling people the time of day, whether someone was home that day, when the mail carrier passed the center of town and answers to any other questions someone might have.

I worked the switchboard every morning at 6 a.m. so my father could go to his regular job. My mother relieved me at 7:30 so I could catch the school bus, and I relieved her after school until my father got home, had dinner and manned the switchboard in the evening.

It was an interesting life and sometimes you'd talk to a person for many years and never know what he or she looked like. Having made a mental picture of that person, sometimes it could be a shock when you eventually met face-to-face.

—Norm C., Calumet City, Illinois