

# **“FOR RINGING DRAMA, DIAL C-Y-N-W-Y-D”**

by Josef Mossman

Northwestern Bell Telephone Company owes a debt of gratitude to my friend Cynwyd. The phone company doesn't know about it, but Cynwyd conducts what you might call a private educational course in correct and careful telephone dialing.

(Cynwyd isn't his name, but it was the name of one of his ancestors, or should have been, for he is of Welsh extraction.)

Like me, Cynwyd is a writer, and hates to be interrupted when he is deep in the throes of creativity. His telephone rang, and a woman asked for Rosemary. Pleasantly Cynwyd replied, "Just a minute," put down the telephone on his desk, and went on typing his manuscript. In a few moments he bellowed "Rosemary! You're keeping your caller waiting" in tones loud enough to be heard by the phone caller.

(To make sure, he leaned over the telephone while bellowing.)

At intervals he brayed his pleas, "Rosemary! Get on the telephone. You shouldn't keep her waiting like this!"

He leaned close enough to the phone to hear the caller saying something about leaving a message, but he pretended not to hear. He got increasingly sharp with Rosemary about dallying.

Incidentally, Cynwyd knows no one named Rosemary, and he was at home alone at the time.

Cynwyd swears that his educational dramatization continued for a full 20 minutes, punctuated by his roars exhorting Rosemary to hurry to the telephone, before he heard the dial tone emanating from the telephone, signifying that the caller had hung up.

"Yes, she's probably mad at Rosemary," he agreed, "but she probably is being very careful these days when she dials a telephone number."

It was on a Sunday morning about 8 o'clock when Cynwyd received a telephone call for Paula. Ever courteous, Cynwyd replied, "Just hold the wire," and put down the telephone. His next step was to invent a Paula.

After a few minutes he leaned close to the telephone and hissed, "You get on that telephone" and a little later, "No, I won't tell her that. You tell her yourself."

Paula's friend didn't wait as long as Rosemary's friend did, Cynwyd reported, but she probably dialed the number correctly the next time, he says. Unless, that is, she decided never to speak to Paula again.

Cynwyd is so pleased and happy – and, to tell the truth, smug – about his educational program that I suspect, every time his telephone rings, he hopes the caller has dialed the wrong number.

Cynwyd's corrective crusade reminds me of a man I knew in the East some years ago. He was Bill Smith, a bachelor living alone. He was frequently annoyed by calls from solicitors asking to speak to Mrs. Smith or to the Lady of the House.

One day a nice voice on the telephone asked to speak to Mrs. Smith.

"Yes, indeed, I'll call her," Bill said politely. "May I ask who's calling?"

"This is Miss Frisbie," said the caller, and Bill recognized the sweetly unctuous tones of the telephone solicitor.

"She'll be right here," said Bill.

After a reasonable time Bill went back to the telephone and said, "She's on her way. Just hold on," and then helpfully he added, "She has to come up three flights of stairs."

Miss Frisbie started to protest, but Bill in his kindly way reassured her, "No, no trouble. She'll be here in a jiffy."

A little later he returned to the telephone. "Now you hjust hang on," he said. "It's taking her a little time. She's on crutches, you know."

Miss Frisbie said she'd be glad to call another time. There was a note of panic in her voice, Bill says.

"Oh, no, no, no," Bill pleaded, a hint of terror in his voice, "she'll really raise hell with me if she comes all that way and you're not on the line. Please wait, Miss Frisbie. Please."

Time passed as the mythical Mrs. Smith made her torturous way up three flights of stairs on crutches, while Bill plotted the next part of the drama.

Inspiration seized Bill. You might say it grappled and engulfed him. He kicked over a chair near the telephone.

Then back to the phone.

"Oh, God!" he cried in agonized tones, "she's fallen all the way downstairs."

Miss Frisbie didn't even express her concern. Bill heard only a gasp, and then the dial tone.

Bill was fiendishly happy about that phone call. He went about all evening whistling merry tunes.

It happened some years ago, but to this day, Bill occasionally muses, "I wonder if Miss Frisbie made any more calls that day? Or ever?"