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# We're Numbed by All the Numbers

**I**t's getting harder all the time to be anybody. When I was born there were 92 million people in the United States. Now there are 230 million, competing for everything in life.

Most of these individuals are crowded into metropolitan centers, where an individual can disappear into the crowd as easily as he could get lost in a tropical jungle. A few may be recognized in public but most people don't know most people.

There still are small towns where everybody knows when a neighbor moves, gets married, has a baby, becomes ill, or dies. But the smaller part of our citizens live in them.

In cities we live closer together but farther apart. People in the next

block are apt to be strangers.

The business world doesn't seem to regard patrons as people. If you get a bill through the mail it will carry your name and address, of course, but you'd better put your account number on your check to be sure your payment is credited to you.

A lot of mail we receive is addressed "Resident," without reference to Mr. or Mrs. You can't get high hopes from a prize notification letter that begins "Dear Occupant."

We live in an impersonal world. Merchants may recognize you only as a customer. To your doctor and hospital you are a patient. To your church you are a member, perhaps also classified as a generous contributor or faithful worker.

To your lawyer you are a client, whether plaintiff or defendant. Your banker may love you as a depositor but generally will take greater interest if you are a frequent borrower.

To each such label is attached a number. Your Social Security number also is your taxpayer number and your drivers license number which in turn is used for identification when cashing a check.

Predictions made 25 years ago said the time was coming when everybody would be assigned a number at birth by a government bureau.

This hasn't happened and may not occur. Imagine trying to remember your federal number with a 5-digit Zip Code and 3-digit Area Code when you move!