



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

I'm slowly being overcome by digit determinism.

In my struggle to find identity I find that I'm falling farther and farther behind. I'm really not a person at all. I'm simply a list of numbers, rearranged to fit the different computers across the nation.

It really came home to me this last week. I have accepted a position with a national magazine as a Roving Editor. That sounded very impressive and the publisher assured me that this placed me in that elite family circle that made up the upper echelon of the magazine staff. This gave me a warm feeling of belonging until last week when I got some correspondence from the business office. It was addressed to No. 264-42-3560. Some family!

But the same is true with nearly all my other relationships. To the highway patrol I am 985860, my driver's license number, and to the FAA I am 1588-277. Even though I can trust my car to the man who wears the star, the friendly folk at Texaco don't trust me enough to call me by name. Instead I am 1111595755.

Even though we no longer use our Sears credit card, paying only cash, they still identify me as 268556. And the telephone company, which at least has my name in it book, won't do business with me unless I tell one of their metallic-voiced operators that my name is really 2548890180W.

The bank is a little better. While most of their customers have to use all 15 digits, they allow me to get away with identifying myself simply by the last seven: 3611921. And sometimes, after making a deposit at the drive-up window, the cashier will smile and say, "Have a nice day, Mr. 921." Wow, now that's really personal.

I thought I could escape this at church where for years I was known as Number 64, the number on my packet of offering envelopes. In an effort to try to get personal I told them I didn't want to use the envelopes any more and would just drop cash in the plate. That may be okay with God, but the IRS is giving me a fit about it. No number, no credit. No credit — well, there's always jail. But even there they give you a number.

The other day I was in the post office talking with one of the civil servants. He had a tag on his uniform identifying himself as "Sam." "Morning, Sam," I said. "Morning 1406," he replied. "You have some mail with postage due." I think I must have felt like Moses when God called him by name in the wilderness of Zen. It's nice to be known.

A while back I was talking with one of the men at the control tower of the airport. "Oh yes," he said, "I know

you. You're N-2204D." That really brought tears to my eyes.

There is some consolation. I got a friendly note from one of my book publishers last week. It was addressed: "Dear Number One." He went ahead to explain that he called me this because one of my books had gone to the top. I wrote him back and told him it was good to be number one which was better than being number three, — my position in the family when I grew up. But if it was all the same to him, I'd much rather be Jamie.