

Thursday, September 17, 1981

# Missing the soaps? Just dial your 'Ma'

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

Something's brewing on your favorite soap opera, but you've got an appointment that won't wait. Instead of missing out on daytime TV excitement, avid viewers can now pick up the phone and find out what crisis befell their favorite afternoon soap characters.

A new Michigan Bell service called Soap Scoops — billed as the first in the country — offers daily updates on breaking video news. Crucial moments from daytime series favored by area viewers are summed up in just 57 seconds by newspaper columnist Lynda Hirsch.

"I don't know if I should go for more information or less breathiness," said Ms. Hirsch, who watches ABC while videotaping shows on the other networks.

"That old saw that nothing ever happens on soaps is just not true."

One of eight recorded tape messages offered by Ma Bell, Soap Scoops started June 29. The 16-cent service attracts up to 7,000 calls daily, placing it just behind the popular Dial-a-Joke and Children's Story.

"Those services are hard to beat because all those kids call," said Ms. Hirsch, in the area recently to promote the phonecasts as well as soap opera apparel sold by J.L. Hudson Co.

OFFERED SINCE November 1979, local telephone Dial-it services average 37,000 calls daily. Other offerings are Sportsphone, Lottery Line, Horoscopes by Phone, Mystery Line and the new Michigan Outdoors. Dial-a-Pep-Talk is the only recorded message to be dropped.

"We wanted to capitalize on the idea that people like soaps," explained a Bell spokesperson. "We're meeting a need people felt they wanted."

**'A soap is like a good book — only better. You don't have to wonder what happened to the characters because they go on and on.'**

— Lynda Hirsch  
Soap Scoops reporter

"A Cleveland resident who began watching soap operas during her lunch hour from grade school, Ms. Hirsch, 30, credits the success of Soap Scoops to a growing interest in daytime shows. It's a fascination enjoyed not just by housewives but by factory workers, bank presidents, football players and students, she said.

"If I were a college professor teaching during (General Hospital), I'd forget it," said Ms. Hirsch, whose summaries and show business tidbits are carried by more than 200 U.S. newspapers.

"General Hospital has 42 percent of the viewing audience in its time slot. Nightime shows would kill for that."

Ms. Hirsch doesn't believe soaps help people forget their own troubles. "A soap is like a good book — only better. You don't have to wonder what happened to the characters, because they go on and on," she said.

"And you get to see everyone's emotions played out. You know what everyone is thinking."

BLESSED WITH a strong memory which helps her remember story lines of soaps now on the air and many long gone, Ms. Hirsch admits she's a big fan of some shows. Her all-time favorite is "All My Children," which she believes turned things around when it first aired 11 years ago.

"Before that, shows focused on older

characters whose children were on earth to cause them problems," she explained.

Today's shows focus on younger characters, deal more with social issues and contain more sex and violence — a trend Ms. Hirsch thinks is a way of competing with evening TV. Viewers are now taken outside the studio to exotic locations like Puerto Rico and Ireland.

While admittedly a soap fan, Ms. Hirsch doesn't hesitate to criticize when she thinks a story is a "real bow-wow." "Don't blame me; I just watch them," she tells phone listeners.

"I like soaps, but I'm irreverent about them," said Ms. Hirsch, who contends there are too many bad soaps on the air. "If a show stinks, I'm the first to say so."

She believes shows should offer interesting story lines that are more than just "musical beds," feature more ethnic actors, and do their research better. "If they're going to be topical, they should get their facts straight. Don't give me any hogwash."

MS. HIRSCH freely admits some shows — "The Doctors" tops this list — are very "painful" for her to watch. But while she used to pay people to do her research, she now views all the shows herself with the aid of a speed search.



DAVID FRANK/retail photographer

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