

SECTION ONE: PROFILES

Phone Company Veteran

The Duncans lived in St. Louis, Missouri in 1950. Ed was 50 years old and worked as a lineman for the telephone company. After 30 years, he made \$3,880 a year and was at the top of his pay scale. His wife Gina never worked outside the home, putting her energy first into raising their two children and then into enjoying their grandchildren, a common lifestyle for married women in the 1950s.

Life at Home

- The Duncans purchased a five-room home in their neighborhood near the airport to control the rapidly rising cost of housing rent.
- Following the war, housing demands rose quickly as soldiers took advantage of the GI Bill to buy homes, attend college, and start families.
- The neighborhood was a mix of young couples with small children and older couples who lived in the area for 30 years.
- The family's overall cost of housing, including taxes, life insurance, and household expenses rose 10 percent since 1947.
- The Duncan's food costs included two meals outside the home per month, costing approximately \$25.00; often this included a night out with their grandchildren, who lived nearby.
- Their two daughters both graduated from high school and married men who fought in World War II; one son-in-law obtained some college training under the GI Bill before going to work at a glass factory.
- Under the GI Bill, the Veteran's Administration paid \$500.00 a year toward all tuition and books, plus a monthly subsistence allowance of \$85.00 a month.
- Ed and his family had an automobile and two radios, but no television or air-conditioning.
- The grandchildren had a Mr. Potato Head to play with at grandmother's house; Mr. Potato Head, an overnight success, proved the power of television, becoming the first toy ever advertised on TV.
- The grandchildren wanted grandmother to redo her kitchen in pink—the in color at the time, from prize fighter Sugar Ray Robinson's 1950 Cadillac to the sports coats worn by young men.
- The Duncan didn't have a telephone until the 1940s, even though Ed worked for the telephone company; in many working class families, an automobile was considered more important than a phone.







- Ed and Gina followed the local professional baseball team, the St. Louis Cardinals and their favorite player was Stan Musial.
- They couldn't afford season tickets, but went to the ballgame at least a half-dozen times each year; many summer nights were spent on the porch listening to the St. Louis Cardinal's games on the radio.
- Gina was a great letter writer and often corresponded with friends who moved from St. Louis, paying \$0.03 postage for a first class letter.
- Both Ed and Gina voted for Harry Truman in 1948, proud that a "man from Missouri" was in the White House.

Life at Work: The Telephone Company

- In the early days of telephone, telephone poles had eight to 10 cross arms, all holding open telephone wires in an attempt to keep the wires untangled during St. Louis's frequent storms.
- Telephone linemen were considered a hardy lot, working through emergencies and bad weather to restore service.
- Ed, like most linemen, was physically strong, capable of climbing the pole with nothing supporting him but the spurs of the climbing irons dug into the pole and the strength of his arms grasping the pole.
- Once in the desired position on the pole, he hung on with one arm, unhooked the safety strap from the belt, threw it around the pole, and rehooked it into the ring on the belt—a task that required considerable strength and coordination.
- Climbing tall poles at night in a snowstorm often led to injury, and typically linemen found it difficult to obtain life insurance unless they lied about their occupation.
- Ed's job included maintenance such as replacing broken glass insulators on the poles, repairing broken wire, and splicing cables.
- After 30 years on the job, Ed helped train young men on the poles, often climbing poles himself to demonstrate his skills.
- Ed's benefits included a two-week, paid vacation, and eight paid holidays a year.
- For the past three years he also received a Christmas cash bonus.
- St. Louis started moving away from open lines in the late 1940s, and more telephone lines were buried underground.



Lines to a Lineman

No word of pen or stroke of artist's hand
 No flowered phrase or oratory's boast
 Need tell the story of the world you've made.
 'Tis writ upon the pages of the land
 From north to south—from coast to coast.

Those poles you mount
 Those lengthened strands you string
 Are not just sturdy uprights in the sky
 That march across the miles in proud parade.
 You've made them into words that help and sing
 A doctor's call, good news, a lover's sigh.

Deep etched in time the record of your skill
 The work you've done—your willingness to do
 The fires and storms you've tackled unafraid,
 Your signature is carved on every hill
 Yours, too, the creed—"The message must go through."

—Bell Telephone System

