

LUCILLE BALL

continued

decisions to her board of directors—but she knew how to run a company.

Lucy believes it all goes back to her feeling for people. "The rules were here before I took over. All I've had to do is to keep everybody happy. I never wanted to be an executive, but since I became one, I've run my studio the way I run my home—with fairness and understanding for people."

As a result of Miss Ball's personal approach to her company, morale began to climb some time before profits improved. Her three-room suite was used unofficially as often as officially: she often threw parties for the Lucy Show cast after the Thursday-night taping, and once invited everyone there for a surprise birthday party for her mother. Says her close friend, character actress Mary Wickes: "She never seemed inaccessible. You always got the feeling she knew everyone in the place and everything about everyone—like who was having trouble keeping up with the mortgage."

Way back during the *I Love Lucy* years, Lucille Ball used to leave business matters to her husband (Desi was a shrewd businessman—not at all like Hollywood's conception of him as a bongo-beater who trailed in the wake of his supremely talented wife). From an initial investment of \$5,000, Desilu mushroomed to a giant enterprise; and when Arnaz heard that the old RKO lot could be bought from Howard Hughes for \$6,150,000, he raised the money and bought it. But his creditors insisted on one stipulation: in the event either he or Lucy left the company, the other would assume command.

In 1960, after business and personal strains had shattered the marriage, Lucy turned out to be the one who left. She filed for divorce and flew to New York for a short-lived, unhappy experience on Broadway. Later she married nightclub comedian Gary Morton. In 1962, CBS asked her if she would return to TV.

"I decided to do it," Miss Ball recalled, "and Desi said, 'If you're going to do that, how about buying me out now?' I figured my credit was good at the bank. So I went into hock for a few million." Three, to be precise, borrowed from the City National Bank of Beverly Hills.

The first two years as president were the hardest. In the first place, Lucy was her company's Number One asset as star of her own show. She had to

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