



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Tough Love

Norman Vincent Peale tells the story of the time he decided to shock his mom by coming home after school one afternoon, parking his bike in the driveway, and saying "Damn it" loud enough for her to know he was now a man.

He says what she did to him shocked him a lot more than he shocked her.

Parents, kids eventually find out, require a lot more of their own offspring than they do of others.

My father worked around tough men all his life. Those early days in Florida, during the 20s, were no picnic. Only the tough survived, and my dad was one of them. He was involved in a great deal of the land development in Vero Beach during those days, and was responsible for many of the early groves planted in Indian River County. It was hard work. Trees were put in by hand. The mosquitoes were worse than any of us moderns can imagine. Few of the roads were paved. The machinery was often limited to a grubbing hoe, a machete and a brush hook. If there was a fire in the woods you didn't put it out — you

beat it out. It was hot, dirty work and only the tough survived.

But through it all my dad remained a gentleman. Even though he worked with and supervised hard-drinking, iron-mouthed men, he never took a drink, never smoked and I never heard him utter an oath stronger than "Well, I declare!" Even when he was at work in the groves, his leather snake boots laced to his knees, his dusty, khaki pants and shirt soaked with sweat, he always wore his black bow tie. It was his trade mark of remaining a gentleman in a pioneer world.

And he expected the same of his sons. Smoking was a cardinal sin. If you can't eat it or pick your teeth with it, don't put it in your mouth. Bad language, of any kind, evoked instant punishment. One night at the supper table I decided to pull an "It's-time-to-let-you-know-I've-grown-up trick" and described a football injury as hurting "like the devil." My dad reminded me we didn't use language like that around the Buckingham house, and sent me away from the table. It was great vocabulary training, for it forced

me — if I was going to be expressive at all — to find words descriptive yet acceptable. Even to this day I refer to my dictionary almost as much as I do my Bible.

But I never did grow accustomed to the idea that my parents required more of us kids than they did anyone else.

"But Dad, Uncle Dale smokes," I said to him after a painful encounter when he had caught me smoking little plastic-tipped cigars. "And you kid him about it."

"Your Uncle Dale is my sister's child," my father answered sternly. "You are mine. I require more."

It helped a little when I discovered, after talking with Dale Jr., that his dad was pretty tough in certain areas also. In fact, we both commiserated about the unfairness of it all.

Now, with teenagers of my own, there is new insight. God, it seems, requires more of His children than He does of those who refuse to be part of the family. And so do I. It's one of the inherited factors I'm glad to have. Even though I know my kids will have to wait a generation to understand.

That any reference to the devil was profane and I should leave the table.

Remember