



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

To The Sinai

Writing this column has been a fun experience. And sometimes a blasted chore. I've written it in some of the most gosh-awful places imaginable: the top of a tree in the Everglades, a hydrofoil on the China Sea, and once from an old PBY aground on a sandbar in the Amazon River. They have arrived at the Press-Journal office with post marks from all over the world. I cannot imagine why you continue to read them, but an occasional letter indicates someone's out there — and I keep on writing.

Press-Journal readers are a special lot. You've put up with my wild, running battles with my old school chum who sits in the editor's chair, my insults of established religion, my horror in dealing with dishonest clerks, my bragging over my children, my continuing love affair with my wife, my gratefulness for my parents, my old friends in Vero Beach, my rich heritage as a native son, and my unfeigned joy in the Lord.

But after 10 years of weekly columns I've finally persuaded Editor Scrooge to release me for a one month sabbatical. I'll return (unless he discovers that any one of several people could easily replace me) on or about June 6.

Tomorrow I leave for the Sinai on a two-week camping-research trek. This is my third such trip over the last four years, collecting data and photos for a coming book which will follow the footsteps of Moses. However, whenever a 47-year-old man who spends the majority of his time behind a typewriter or sitting in comfortable living rooms talking with overfed Americans, starts making out bivouac equipment lists and then heads off into one of the world's most desolate and remote areas, you can assume that book research is only an excuse. A better reason is to fulfill that God-given sense of adventure which is common to all men.

I'm taking 13 other men with me — three doctors, two attorneys, two other writers, a judge, four preachers and a camping expert. One of the doctors, in his spare time, runs in the Boston marathon. Needless to say I've been out jogging, jogging. Halfway up Mt. Sinai is a poor place to repent of overweight.

But my actual reasons run far deeper than research or macho-type adventure. When God descended upon Mt. Sinai He was accompanied by thousands of angels — some of which are still resident in that place.

Moses, the long figure, clung to the craggy sides of the mountain overcome by what was taking place before him. Even the mountains around were illuminated by the divine glory. Despite the passage of 3,200 years and the constant shift of political power, that glory remains.

Last year, dressed in shorts and an arab headress — a kaffiyeh — sitting cross-legged in the sand of Wadi Feiran and sifting small pebbles through my fingers, I realized I was "home." Daddy used to sing about "Away Back Home in Indiana," mother crooned "My Old Kentucky Home," and my wife talked of one day going home to Vero Beach. But I've realized my real roots are not traced through earthly ancestry. Rather, through my spiritual heritage, they go back to Calvary, Bethlehem, and eventually to the place where God first encountered his chosen people — Mt. Sinai.

So, every once in a while I have an urge to go "home." I take off, with sleeping bag, canteen, and hiking boots, to trek the lonely wadis, lie alone under the stars, and listen in the silence.

If I hear anything — I'll let you know.