

Perspective

Miss Jessie Isn't Old, Even At 84

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It's hard to imagine Jessie Stewart in a convalescent home. Some women grow old—but not Miss Jessie. At 84 she's younger than most women at 24—and certainly far more progressive and optimistic.

In real measure, old age is a state of mind. You are as young as you think, and this is what has kept Miss Jessie a flowering rosebud among a generation of faded and falling petals.

ALL AROUND her others are growing old. Their minds turn inward in the loneliness and they begin to feel sorry for themselves. They live in the past and talk endlessly of "how it used to be." They criticize the younger generation for their inconsiderateness, unthoughtfulness, and irreverence. They grow bitter toward a world that doesn't feel sorry for them as they feel for themselves.

Old age has a way of doing this. It causes old people to grow cynical. It causes them to spend the long hours gossiping or criticising others.

But of course, Miss Jessie isn't an "old woman." Well, in some respects she is—she's the oldest living white person born in Brevard County (I guess that gives her a certain amount of seniority over the rest of us Johnny-come-latelies); and she's suffered enough heart-breaks in those years to give her ample reason to be bitter and resentful. But Miss Jessie is an unusual woman.

SHE LIVES ALONE in Eau Gallie on a street that bears her name. That is, she did until last month when, in typical young-person fashion, she stood up on her bed to fix a contrary window shade and fell and broke her back.

The doctor said she might never walk again, which would probably be true if Miss Jessie were an old woman. But Miss Jessie is a fighter. If you don't believe it, just ask some of the younger women around who've felt the sting of her lash when they were gossiping or slandering.

And besides this, she possesses an unshakable faith in a God who heals, who answers prayer, and who has a purpose for her life even at 84.

MISS JESSIE has never run from anything; and even though she's going to have to spend a short time in a convalescent home, she's looking at it as a challenge (which is exactly the way youth ought to look at life's experiences).

Perhaps you can catch a hint of her secret in a little poem she shared with me last week.

I needed the quiet so He drew me aside.
 Into the shadows were we could confide.
 Away from the bustle where all the day long
 I hurried and worried when active and strong.
 I needed the quiet. No prison my bed,
 But a beautiful valley of blessings instead.
 A place to grow richer in Jesus to hide.
 I needed the quiet so He drew me aside.