

Opinion



Perspective

By Jamie Buckingham

Changes



It's been 26 years since Press-Journal publisher John Schumann Jr. and I sat in Glenn Pelham's journalism class at Mercer University and studied things like inverted pyramids and feature stories. We've both come a long way since that who-what-when-where-why introduction to writing. Now he's the esteemed publisher of one of Florida's finest papers, and I've just finished the manuscript of my 30th book. Even Glenn Pelham would be pleased, I think.

I guess that means it should be safe to use at least one cliché and trust some copy editor with a quick-draw blue pencil will not edit it out. The cliché: "All good things must come to an end."

It was about 10 years ago when several of us attended a mini-high school reunion out at P.O. Clements' house and John invited me to start writing for the PJ on a weekly basis. "Say whatever you want to say," he said. Since then I've only missed two deadlines (because I was overseas) and he's only scuttled two other columns because he happened to violently disagree with my theology and my politics (they get all mixed up sometimes). Not bad for an editor who made a B plus on his term paper: "The Values of Yellow Journalism."

Now comes time to re-evaluate my priorities. As long as I filled a comfortable niche on the editorial page of a weekly paper I could justify the time and effort spent writing this column. Now, however, the paper is big time and the pages are sparkling with columnists from Washington and New York. That's change. That's good. But it also gives me reason to listen to a Voice I often override.

The pressures of writing three magazine columns a month (I've just resigned from one of those), plus struggling to find time to work on my book manuscripts (which is supposed to be my vocation), plus finding myself (much to my disdane) thrust into a full time church ministry in Melbourne, simply does not leave time for weekly deadlines.

The wise man knows that in order to do the things God is

telling him to do, he has to stop doing a lot of other things which are desirable — but not absolutely necessary. That means, on the last Wednesday of November, I'm going to quietly slip off the pages of the Press-Journal for a while.

I appreciate John's offer to resume the column whenever I want. Even more I appreciate his comments that the only Christianity some PJ readers get is what I give them through this column. That's deeply meaningful, but it makes laying it aside even more difficult.

I look at change and feel sad. I liked it when the PJ was a small town weekly. But then, I liked Vero Beach when it had two stop lights and a wooden bridge across the river. Change is always painful. But I can understand it better since some of the old-timers on the dirt road where we live in Palm Bay are angry because I've encouraged a number of my friends to buy property around me and build a Christian community. Now Hield Road is full of cars and there are lots of houses going up in the formerly quiet, rural neighborhood.

But they can't hold back change any more than I can wish Vero Beach small again. So it's time to re-evaluate. For me that means narrowing my interests, sharpening my focus and using my remaining years to do only that which God tells me to do.

Important things, it seems, always get pushed aside for the urgent. And now, as I wrote once, it is time to decide whether I am a swamp who covers a lot of ground but goes nowhere, or a river, working inside self-imposed limitations, achieving a definite goal.

If a few of you can adopt that goal with me — hearing God and doing what He's been asking you to do before you grow too old to care any more — then all these hundreds of columns will have been worth while.

In the meantime, I have three more columns to write, for I am obviously going to have to generate some money to combat Jim Thompson's fiendish idea to name the new city dump after me. That's one change even I shall resist.