



Perspective ✓

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It's a good feeling, having the Christmas tree in place. Usually we wait until the last moment and then rush madly to one of the civic club lots to scrounge through the dying, pathetic scrubs left behind. This year, however, my friend George Sowerby from Ft. Pierce played Santa Claus and brought us a fresh tree cut from his mountain property in North Carolina.

Back in November, for the first time, Jackie and I debated whether we should stop trying to be realistic and buy an artificial tree. It was the children who objected, however.

"Everything else is artificial," they discerned. "Disney World is made out of plastic, wax and wires. We have fake wood on the side of our station wagon and synthetic cream to put in the coffee. Mom's diamond is made out of glass and even the paneling on the walls is made of vinyl. Can't we at least have a real Christmas tree?"

Then George and Velma walked in with a perfectly shaped cedar, fresh and fragrant from the mountains. It wouldn't fit our fake Christmas tree stand, so I did something I had done for years, fashioned a stand out of boards. Now it is sitting in the front room waiting for us to drape it with synthetic icicles.

I'm with the kids. Artificial things turn me off. Some of my friends wear artificial hair pieces. And no matter how they glue the things down, they still look

like wigs. Others wear artificial smiles and a few women I know try to hide their age under pancake makeup.

No, with everything else in our plastic world giving way to cheap imitations, it seemed right that we should at least stick with a real Christmas tree — even if it is sprayed with synthetic snow and hung with something called angel hair which, from my contact with it, definitely does not come from angels.

Last week at a church retreat an angry woman accosted me, trying to prove that Christmas trees are heathen. I assured her that shopping for one might put a man in a hellish state of mind, but that did not mean God frowned on Christmas trees.

She jabbed her finger in her open Bible and made me read what the prophet Jeremiah said about the vain customs of people who cut a tree out of the forest, deck it with silver and gold, then fasten it with nails so it won't move. I disappointed her by saying this didn't apply to my Christmas tree, for it always fell down at least once during the season.

Frankly, I'm glad it's Christmas season again. I wish I could go back to those boyhood days when we went out in Dad's pickup and cut a tree along the ridge behind Oslo. But most of that property is either fenced in or covered with concrete. In another 30 years we may be forced to go artificial. But until then I'm going to hang on to the real thing.