



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

## Close Encounters

Friendship is an odd thing. I've been forced to think about it recently as I've gone through some close encounters of the wierd kind with some old childhood chums.

A reader called the other day. She was agitated over that bald-headed picture the editor decreed should run with my column. "Aren't you going to sue?" she asked in dismay. "How can you allow that beady-eyed fellow to deface your handsome features that way?"

My wife, Jackie, who was listening in on the extension broke in and said. "Listen, honey, last week's picture with the halo was far more inaccurate than the one with no hair."

What the woman on the phone didn't understand was friendship. She wasn't there that day many years ago at the corner of 14th Avenue where Mr. Simmons used to have his department store. Fuller Warren was in town campaigning for governor and a huge crowd had gathered to hear him speak. We

were teenagers then and intended no mischief. But we were interested in crowd reaction. We wanted to see how people would react to three teenage boys in masks, standing directly in front of the platform, looking up at Mr. Warren with our hands full of eggs and ripe tomatoes.

The lectures from police and parents which followed that little experiment did much to draw us closer together as friends.

But our friendship is far more than that. It involves a common past. Riding bikes together after school. Koolaid in each other's kitchens. Saturday afternoon cowboy movies. Much time spent in thinking up pranks. Even more time worrying if you're going to get caught after you've pulled your pranks. Standing nervously beside each other while first one, then another, makes a speech at the National Honor Society before the entire student body. And eventually going off to college where the three of you room together.

I have more friends in Vero Beach than Jim Thompson and John Schumann. And they certainly have more friends than me. In fact, some of our friendships are much closer with others. But we are friends because we have a common past — and therefore we are not threatened by the present.

If we, all of us, could begin to see in each other common things, perhaps we could walk into that beautiful relationship. You may not have a common past like Jim Thompson, John Schumann and I have. But you live on the same street, attend the same civic club, work in the same shop, go to the same school or are growing old together. Any of these factors qualifies us as friends. All we need to do is act on it.

And when you're friends, you don't sue if someone erases your hair. You just call him "beady-eyed" and hope he'll phone you and invite you out to lunch.