



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

## Deer Stand

I really didn't want to go. The idea of returning from two weeks in the Sinai and going directly into the Everglades on a hunting trip with my teenage son was more contrast than I wanted to consider.

Yet to Tim, the hunting trip was far more important than all my excuses — including all that unanswered mail and the dozens of phone calls to be returned. The night before, complaining to my wife about all those unanswered letters, I had remarked it seemed I spent most of my time writing people and telling them I couldn't do what they wanted me to do. She said she hoped I wouldn't apply that same syndrome on my son.

So, here I am, 20 feet high in an oak tree, a shotgun across my knees, watching the sun peek its head above the cypress of Okloacoochee Slough. Across the meadow, veiled in the early morning mist, Tim sits in another tree. Waiting. Looking. Thinking. A man does a lot of thinking — and praying — on a deer stand before dawn. It's

a good time to talk — and listen — to God.

We were up at 5 this morning. Guy Strayhorn, an attorney from Ft. Myers in whose cabin we're staying, fixed us a huge breakfast and then brought us out to the stands in his monstrous swamp buggy. It's awkward, sitting in the top branches of this tree like an owl, writing a newspaper column while I try to hold on to the trunk with my legs. But this is one thing I can do — and go hunting with my son at the same time.

Last night, after an afternoon of tramping through the hammocks with me, Tim had the privilege of watching a real pro skin his hog. Mickey Evans, sometimes Baptist preacher, part-time cowboy and fulltime counselor of alcoholics, had flown over from Indiantown to meet us at LaBelle for the hunt. Using his razor sharp case knife, Mickey disemboweled, skinned and cut up the two pigs in less time than it takes me to write this column each week. I was impressed. So was Tim.

Later, around the campfire in the thick hammock, we sat quietly — listening to the night sounds of the Glades and chuckling as Guy and Mickey swapped gator stories.

Now it's dawn. Across the meadow, at the edge of the treeline, five deer are feeding. They are out of range, and I'm glad. I don't feel like killing. There is too much life here. It is enough to just sit, and enjoy the miracle of unspoiled creation. No need to go to the Sinai to find God. He's down here in the Everglades, too.

I keep thinking about one of those letters I need to answer. An old friend, wealthy and influential, has lost his son to drugs. Like me, the Dad has a lot of people making demands on his time. I think how close I came to putting "them" above my son. Maybe if he would also re-position his priorities he could still salvage his home. But I doubt if he can do it without taking time — with God, and his son. If he does, he'll probably not need to write me. If he won't, even my answer won't help.