



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

He looked like any other bum when he shuffled into my study. His name was Harry Gasque and he was tall, rawboned, bald and completely devoid of teeth. Unlike most tramps he looked me straight in the eye and gave me a firm handclasp. He was hitchhiking from Jacksonville to Miami, but since he had not been able to catch a ride south, he decided to go north instead.

I never did quite figure this out, but I couldn't help but think how nice it must be to have so few obligations that even when you want to go south you can go north if the situation demands.

However, I guess this was the reason he was a bum rather than a responsible member of society. He had never been able to buck the tide. He just put himself in neutral and went where he was pushed. It takes a real man, you know, to go south when all the traffic is going north. Any old bum can just float with the tide, though.

But still, I couldn't help but like old Harry. All he wanted was a sandwich and cup of coffee. "You know," he said, "everybody I meet says I'm too old to work. I can still plow a mule all day when the young fellows fall out. I can still hoe a cotton field and laugh when the day is over. I don't care what they say to me—age is a state of mind."

I like that, don't you? Think young and you'll stay young. Think old and you get old. Of course, this type of thing will eventually play out when your hair falls out, your teeth decay and your eyes grow dim. But as long as you can think young you're a lot better off than the fellow who can't think about anything except how old he's getting.

Several years ago, Satchel Paige, the famous Negro baseball player who was still pitching major league ball at 50-plus, gave these six rules for staying young:

- Avoid fried meats, which angry up the blood.
- If your stomach disputes you, lie down. Pacify it with cool thoughts.
- Keep the juices flowing by jingling around gently as you more.
- Go very light on the vices, such as carrying on in society. The social ramble ain't restful.
- Avoid running at all times.
- Don't look back, something might be gaining on you.

The Harry Gasques and the Satchel Paiges may lack a lot in purpose and responsibility. But they make up for it in knowing how to stay young and enjoying the abundant life where they are. And chances are they'll be here a long time after our ulcers, hypertension, insomnia and "nerves" have killed the rest of us.