



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

In real measure, old age is a state of mind. You are as young as you think. I know some people who are "old" at 30—because they think old.

Then there are others, like Jessie Stewart. Miss Jessie, at almost 88, is younger than most women at 28—and certainly far more progressive and optimistic.

Jessie Stewart is the oldest living white person born in neighboring Brevard County. She lives alone in Eau Gallie (now Melbourne) on a street that bears her name. Most of her life was spent teaching.

Now all around her she sees her friends growing old and dying. There are very few of her generation left. Most of those who remain have minds turned inward in loneliness and senility. They live in the past and talk endlessly of "how it used to be." They criticize the younger generation for their irreverence and grow bitter toward a world that doesn't feel as sorry for them as they feel for themselves.

Perhaps that's the reason I get such a lift out of visiting Miss Jessie. Her hair is now turned snowy white, her body feeble, yet she is full of laughter, sweetness and love for God and children.

"I'm simply living on prayer," she states. "Every organ in my body has worn out several times. But my friends keep praying and God keeps restoring the worn out machinery with new valves and pistons."

Yesterday when I visited in her humble frame home, she took my hand and said, "Sometimes when I pray I hear the voices and see the faces of my loved ones who have gone on before—my husband and my eight children. When I open my eyes I can still feel their presence in the room. Maybe this means I'll be joining them pretty soon."

Miss Jessie is still able to get to church occasionally. A special rocking chair has been placed in the third row and is reserved for her. And when she stands to testify, or bows to pray, things always happen.

My body is still young and healthy. But my spirit often sags. When it does I go see Miss Jessie. I always leave with a song in my heart because when I am with her I am in the presence of angels, too. After all, her house is full of them.

Yesterday as I left I asked her, "Miss Jessie, is there anything I can get for you?"

Her Bible was in her lap and on the table beside her a huge magnifying glass to assist her in reading. She looked up from her recliner. "Jamie, I don't need a thing in the world."

The words took on a new meaning as I softly closed the rusted screen door that hung askew on her front porch. Most of us think that the things of the world are all we need. Maybe if we could see things through Miss Jessie's eyes, angels would live in our house too.