



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It had been a busy day. I pulled in the driveway dreaming of how nice it was going to be to pull off my shoes and relax all evening. Jackie met me at the front door. "Hurry up and get ^{dressed} your suit on. We're supposed to be at a group discussion meeting at Mrs. Van Alstine's in 30 minutes."

"Aw, honey, not tonight. Someone else is leading it, ~~and~~ they don't need me. I'd rather stay home."

Half an hour later we were sitting in the luxurious living room of a fashionable mansion on the beach. There were about 20 people present—mostly older ladies. Everyone was stiff and formal and I felt miserable.

The hostess was going around the room introducing each person and asking them to say a word about their various "accomplishments." I sighed. Maybe I could say something about my work rehabilitating drug addicts and prostitutes, shake them all up, and then sit back and relax the rest of the evening.

Instead the hostess said, "Your wife tells me you have a beautiful voice. We're all hoping you'll sing a solo at the close of the meeting."

I turned and glared at Jackie while the little ladies all clapped politely. The hostess continued, "We don't have a piano but I know you won't mind singing without accompaniment."

This was too much. I was horrified. Singing to strangers is one thing. Singing a cappella is quite another. I tried every way possible to squirm out of it. I played humble. I suggested someone else. I even suggested that maybe the whole group would like to sing. Nothing worked. I was stuck. "After we serve tea you can sing," the hostess said as she moved on to the next person.

Horror! Mortification! Dread! What could I do?

Sitting next to me was one of the few ladies in the room whom I knew, the widow ~~of one of the most famous~~ Presbyterian missionary doctors ~~in the world~~—Julia Lake Kellersberger. She sensed my predicament, ~~and~~ as I sat brooding, ^{she} broke into bubbly conversation.

She began telling of her work in Central America with a group of lepers whose voices had been burned out by the horrible disease. They would come to church, hold their hymn books with their stubs (their hands having been eaten away by the leprosy) and turn the pages with their chins. Opening their mouths they would sing praises to God, but since their vocal cords were gone, they would sing through silent lips.

~~I felt my face burning.~~
~~I've never felt such shame.~~ Here was I, perfectly capable of singing praises to God, trying to wiggle out of it because I was too sophisticated. ~~I bowed my head and asked the Lord to forgive my stuffy pride, egotism, and prima donna complex.~~

At the close of the meeting, I sang. But I had to ask the group to bow their heads so they wouldn't see the tears ~~of~~ contrition on my face.