



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It snowed the day we arrived here in Franklin, North Carolina, and the mountains were covered with a soft, white blanket of freshness. Every shrub looked like a Christmas tree and all the ugly, the dirty and the sharp disappeared beneath the innocent beauty of the sparkling snow.

The mountain cottage at the end of the winding dirt road (now obliterated by snow) belongs to George Sowerby, Presbyterian pastor from Ft. Pierce. The cabin is designed to accommodate eight persons, but there were 37 of us crowded around the roaring fireplace — most of them young people from George's church.

Last night we sat in a circle in front of the fire. Through the picture window we could see the big snowflakes drifting silently through the night. Inside the crackling fire accompanied us while we sang nonsense songs and spirituals, followed by a time of discussion and prayer.

After the kids were bedded down, the girls on the floor and the boys in sleeping bags in a camper trailer, I walked up the dark, snow-covered road toward Cowee Bald. The sky had cleared, revealing a billion stars twinkling in the clear, cold night. The only sound was the gurgling of a small mountain stream beside the road. All the other night noises were smothered by the snow, leaving me with the impression of standing alone on earth.

I wondered about the time, but to glance at my watch would have been sacrilegious. Clocks, calendars, automobiles and airplanes — instruments of time and speed — were all buried beneath nature's cloak of stillness and slowness. I kicked the snow with my boot and, standing in the middle of the road, threw my head back and breathed deeply of the pine-scented air. Looking into the heavens I could see stars whose light had left there a million years ago, and realized I was just glimpsing the edge of space. Beyond that was infinity — and surrounding it all the Creator.

A quote from the German philosopher, Kant, popped to the surface of my mind. I hadn't thought of it since reading his books in graduate school. There are two irrefutable evidences of the existence of God: the moral law within and the starry universe above. I breathed His name: "God." Then, overwhelmed by His presence, I called Him what I had learned to call Him through experience: "Father."

This morning the sun has come out, transforming the countryside into a veritable fairy-land of brilliance. Every branch has its own overcoat, every twig its own diamond. I've just returned from a walk to the waterfall which cascades down icicle-shrouded boulders. I dread catching that jet into New York this afternoon, much preferring to stay isolated here.

But I have stories to write. George has to preach. The kids have to go to school and my wife has family obligations back home. Yet for two days my world has slowed to a stop beneath a blanket of winter innocence — and I'm a better man because of it.