



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

It's an odd thing how facial hair threatens people who don't have any. A man with a beard brings out all kinds of hostilities from those around him. Maybe because we associate beards with robbers who wear masks or with tramps who don't bathe. Whatever it is, if you want to make people made—grow a beard.

Two summers ago I was holed up in the mountains for a couple of weeks finishing a book manuscript. I decided to let my beard grow and everyone (well, almost everyone) treated me like I had suddenly broken out with leprosy. Only my best pal, my Dad, treated me with admiration (an admiration which now, after 80 years, has caused him to grow his own).

I tried to explain to the rest that Abe Lincoln, Robert E. Lee and Jesus wore beards. It didn't make any difference. One dear lady said every time she saw me she wanted to scream. I could only assume that as a child she had been scared by a billy goat. (Thank goodness she didn't find out I also chew up little bits of paper). Even my daughters refused to walk beside me on the sidewalk fearing some stranger might say, "Those poor, innocent girls have to live with that wild man."

I didn't feel wild at all. Oh, I itched around the jowls a little, but I thoroughly enjoyed not having to do anything when I got up in the morning but brush my teeth. (Considering the distance everyone kept from me, I probably could have eliminated that chore, too.)

I did have trouble keeping my fingers off my whiskers. There's something about facial hair that makes you want to touch it all the time. But even that didn't make much difference, because I didn't keep it very long. It came out multi-colored with patches of gray and red mixed with blond.

However, my primary reason for going back to the lather, razor, bandaids and smellum was domestic. My wife, although she never said a word, kept giggling when I tried to kiss her. And when a guy is serious, a giggle kicks the manhood out of him like a punch in the belly.

But a beard isn't the only thing that threatens the hairless ones, so does long hair.

Since my last formal haircut in May I've gotten used to the unfamiliar sensation of having hair around my ears and down the back of my neck. But nobody else has gotten used to it. At least that's the impression I get when folks look at me and grit their teeth.

I want to shout, "Hey, it's still me." But nobody listens. Instead of me they see Charles Manson, Timothy Leary or Jack the Ripper. I think I'm beginning to understand just why some of today's youth are rebelling against the white-eyes. Nobody cares if my forehead is shiny and bald, but my long hair in back is tantamount to treason.

An old friend invited me to speak to a group of university students recently. When I walked in my pious friend took one look at my hair and got one of those peculiar looks on his face — you know the kind, white around the mouth, flared nostrils, narrowed eyes and shallow breathing. I don't think he heard a word I said. Too bad. Some of the students said they "saw Jesus" while I was speaking. But all he could see was Judas.

Yet that's the mixture we all have, isn't it? Judas and Jesus?

The long hair has taught me one thing: What I see in others depends largely on what I have inside me — as well as what I am looking for in the heart of my brother.