



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Licking The Lollipop

Spare days are hard to find. I mean the kind when you wake up in the morning and have absolutely nothing that has to be done until the next morning. They are so hard to find, I eventually scheduled one on my calendar. .

But what do you do with a spare 24 hours? Especially if you're in Denver, Colo. Especially if you're alone. Especially if you haven't had a spare day like this in years.

I was in Denver to autograph a new book at the annual meeting of the Christian Booksellers Association. Several hundred publishers and thousands of bookstore owners were present. The convention was to close on Wednesday and I didn't have to be in Steubenville, Ohio — to speak at the National Catholic Youth Conference — until Friday afternoon. So, I deliberately scheduled Thursday as a "do nothing" day.

It looked great on my calendar. No telephones. No people. No obligations, I had thought about

renting a car and driving up into the Rocky Mountains. Maybe Pike's Peak. Maybe a quiet mountain stream and a place to sit and meditate.

But as Thursday rushed toward me I realized that despite my desperation to be alone, I was already a lonely person. The idea of seeing something even as beautiful as the Rocky Mountains, without my wife and children to share it, was depressing.

So, I spent Thursday doing nothing. I woke at 6 a.m., turned over and slept until 9 a.m. That was a good start. In the bathroom of the Hilton Hotel I started to turn on the shower. Then with an out-loud "Why not?" I put the stopper in the bathtub and took a 45-minute tub bath. I only take a tub bath about once a year — I never have figured out how to rinse off the dirty water — but it felt good to just sit and soak. Then I flopped back on the bed and did something I would never do at home — I read my own book. Lunch

with a couple of writers at 2 p.m. An afternoon nap. An evening stroll in a nearby park. Dinner with an old friend at the Top of the Rockies — 30 floors up with a vista of the sun setting behind the mountains which was breathtaking. A night walk through the city and in bed by 11.

In the darkness of my hotel room guilt tried to condemn me. I had, guilt whispered, wasted the most precious thing God gives — time. Like dropping coins in the river, it was gone and could never be recovered. Then another voice, one I have grown to recognize over the years, whispered that some gifts are given, not to be used, but to be consumed. And my spare day was one of those rare gifts. Like an all-day lollipop, I had savored it hour by hour. Now it was gone. And tomorrow I would be back to work.

Too many lollipops make you sick. But surely one every 3 ½ years won't hurt. And it surely did taste good.