



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Looking Back

It's raining in the mountains this morning. For almost a week I have been hiding away in my little Carolina cabin, working on a book manuscript. Little things I can write at home, but serious work calls for quiet and concentration. I can find it easier here than any place in the world.

The weather has been balmy as spring has come slowly. But this morning I awoke to the sound of rain. The clouds are low on the mountains, the air is chilly — just enough to let me know winter does not give up easily.

Yesterday, and the days before, I took a mid-morning break from the typewriter by jogging down the long drive and then up the narrow mountain road toward Hicks Summey's place. I would then circle back through the woods, find my favorite path, and walk slowly — enjoying the pussy willows and yellow jonquils along the path. But this morning it was raining. Instead of going out, I pulled down the little fold-up ladder to the attic, climbed into the cool darkness to listen to the rain hitting the roof — and to browse.

I love attics, especially when I have not been in them in a long time. This morning I discovered in the far corner, behind a couple of old, dusty school desks and a baby crib, an ancient steamer trunk — the kind made from wood with a curved lid. Kneeling before it, I opened the top. Inside was a literal treasure of memories. I pulled the lamp close, sat cross-legged, and rummaged.

On top of the musty books and boxes was an athletic "letter" earned 30 years ago at Vero Beach High School. The big red and white VB used to be sewed on a sweater; now it lay in the trunk of memories.

Working my way down through the boxes and envelopes was like making a trip back through time. Old high school report cards signed by Pauline Whidden, Edna Walters and Leo Cahill. Invitations to birthday parties. Pictures of the family. War Savings Stamps dated 1942 and never redeemed. Gasoline ration coupons (I wonder if they'll still be good if things get worse?), a Boy Scout merit badge sash with the Eagle still attached, a June 7, 1954, commencement program from Mercer University. We had 195 BA

candidates that year. Seven of them are now living in Vero Beach.

But the item that gripped my heart strings was a faded bulletin from the First Baptist Church dated April 5, 1953 — Easter Sunday. College students were in charge of the 8:30 a.m. service. June Herndon played the organ. Gene Bishop directed the choir and Wilbur Bates read the scripture. Berkie Folds, Joyce Platt, Marjorie Perritt, Cathy Calhoun and Marlene Jenkins all took part. And I had forgotten, but I preached the morning sermon that Easter.

I wonder what I said? Did any seeds take root? Even more important, what has become of all the others who stood with me that morning in the house of God?

Where are we now? I only know that this morning I am sitting cross-legged in the attic of my Carolina cabin, sorting through my memories and grateful for my heritage.

Next week I'll be home in time for my 47th birthday. I feel like I'm moving into Spring. Every year has been better than the last. I hope it is so with the others.