



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Sitting outside the intensive care unit at the hospital we wait — and pray.

Just behind the closed door Jackie's daddy, Lynn "Cooter" Law, lies strapped to a bed. One tube pumps blood into his arm while another pumps it out of his stomach. Other tubes, from ominous jars, disappear mysteriously beneath the sheets.

It seems so strange, looking at him there on the bed. Somehow I just can't fit him into this whole sterile scheme of sickness and hospitals. Ever since I've known him (and I started dating his tenth grader daughter 25 years ago), he's been made for the outside. His inside hours always seemed forced. Whether sitting in church with his wife, or polishing the trucks at the fire department where he worked, he was always a bit like a wild animal that had been caught and caged. Restless. Pacing. Waiting for the door to open to the outside so he could be free.

Cooter's place is in the swamps, walking the dikeline, wading the river or nosing his boat into a special place where the crappies are biting. I can't picture him here, chained to a bed, and in life's most critical hours, having some young nurse order everything about him but his thoughts.

He should be aboard an airboat gigging frogs and catching turtles for his grandchildren. He should be manhandling a dragline on his day off from the fire house. He should be fixing the Bar-B-Q out at Bud Holman's lake house. He should be catching specs with Isaac Reams on

Blue Cypress, or gathering oysters from the river bottom with Buddy Cooksey.

I see him here, tossing on the hospital bed, trying to be patient. But his tanned, sun-creased face just doesn't belong in this prison of sickness where people give orders that separate man and wife, father and children. I look deep into his face, see the spirit of the wild dancing behind his gentle eyes.

Sitting in the hallway, we wait. His children, his wife. It seems we're an island to ourselves. People come and go, all of them tied up in their own problems, just as we are. A black aide comes by, recognizes Daisy from the days when she owned the dress shop, and pats her on the knee. The gesture is much needed — and much appreciated.

I hear the irreverent chatter of the nurses as they go from one room to another. How can they stand around and act so indifferent when a man's life is hanging in the balance? What right do they have to give orders, telling a wife of almost 50 years that she can only see her husband for 10 minutes? It all seems so wrong.

I look at my own wife of almost 20 years and realize that long before she became mine, she was his. I really cannot feel the intensity of her suffering as she awaits a decision that rests entirely in the hands of God.

Deep inside me is a desire to steal into Lynn's room. Withdraw the needles. Untie the straps. Unplug the tubes. And spirit him away to the swamp where he can be free. But all I can do is wait on God. And peace comes when we relinquish it into His hands.