



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

My older brother, Clay, belonged to a gang when he was a kid. It consisted of the "terrible terrors" of the Community Church youth group and was called "The Gnats." Other gang members were Bob Carter and Herb Guy. They weren't very fearsome, but they did do a few fearless things — like spending the night camping on an island in the middle of the Indian River.

It took courage to do a thing like that because back in the early 1940s mosquito control consisted of a net attached to the brim of a panama hat and a raffia brush that hung by the back door to knock the bugs off your clothing before running through the screen door into the house.

I was too young to go with them and wept bitterly when they left me behind. Even when the Gnats appeared the next morning, a mass of welts and bumps from their rumble with the mosquitos. I still wished I had been along. Ever since then I've wanted to camp out on one of those islands.

Last week I finally got my chance. Thursday I mailed my publisher the final manuscript of my book. Most authors go out and get drunk to celebrate occasions like this. Instead, I strapped our blue canoe on top of my VW, took my two boys and headed south along the river until we spotted a likely-looking island offshore.

It took two backbreaking trips to paddle the canoe through the choppy water and deposit both boys and gear on the sandy beach in a quiet lagoon on the leeward side of the island. But it was worth it. By dark we had our tent up, a fire burning on the beach and our supper cooking over the coals.

It was just as I had dreamed it would be. The full moon scooted in and out behind tiny clouds, casting golden reflections on the rippling water. A soft east breeze felt cool against our faces and rustled through the boughs of the pines. Far away we could see the tiny lights of the cars on the highway; but the only sound was the crackle of the campfire, the sound of the wind in the trees, and the lapping of the water of the lagoon on the canoe beached beside our tent.

We came prepared to battle mosquitos and sandflies, but none appeared. Our only visitors were the ghostly forms of occasional sailboats plying the waters of the channel in the moonlight, or a shadowy winged creature that lighted in a nearby tree to examine these invaders of his island paradise.

We lay in the tent, the flap open, and peered upward at the starry universe. Sleep came gently, but not before the three of us had had a chance to share many intimate things, then in quiet tones talked to God — and listened as He talked back.

"Daddy," Timmy said, "did you get to do this when you were a little boy?" My mind flashed back to the time the Gnats went without me.

"No son, I never did," I answered drowsily, "but it doesn't matter. This moment was worth waiting for — all these years."