



Perspective



By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

My wife, Jackie, has become a public speaker. Or maybe I should be more accurate and say she is becoming a public speaker.

Her first invitation came back at the end of the summer. We were on vacation in the mountains and a friend of hers invited her to speak to a group of women in a nearby city. Jackie was terrified and tried to back out. "I don't have any trouble scolding you," she told me, "but I could never stand up in front of a group of ladies and talk."

However, her friend assured her it would be a small, informal luncheon and Jackie agreed to go. When she arrived she found a banquet hall filled with 200 ladies, a head table complete with microphones, podium and a little man with a tape recorder. To make matters worse she was stopped in the lobby by a woman who asked her which way to the banquet hall. When Jackie gave directions, the woman beamed and said, "Oh, I've heard that Jamie Buckingham is going to speak and I've driven for miles just to hear him. Are you coming to the meeting also?" Jackie didn't have the heart to tell her it was Jamie's wife who was to speak, figuring the poor woman would find out soon enough. She later told me she felt like Pogo, who said, "We have met the enemy and he is us."

She must have done all right, though, for just this month she has received three other invitations from women's groups. All are very legitimate. They'll fly her up to Virginia or Pennsylvania or wherever she's to go, put her up in a swanky hotel and give her an honorarium. That moves her out of the amateur class, of course, and makes her a professional. This delights me and the children, although we are wondering what

it will be like to take her to the airport and watch as she flies off into the sunset.

Everything went okay until last week when the little man from the mountains sent her a tape recording of her first speech. She went off into an upstairs room, locked the door and listened. It was after dark when she finally came out, her face stained with tears.

"It was awful," she sniffed, "just awful. I'm going to cancel out on all my engagements and just stay home and scream at you for leaving your clothes all over the floor."

"No way," I said. "They're expecting you up in Newport News next week. The newspaper called asking for a picture and I understand you're to appear on television also."

That did it. She turned and fled back up the stairs into the dark bedroom. The children and I were close behind, but she refused to come out. Inside we could hear the tape recorder replaying her first talk, accompanied by loud moans which we interpreted to be prayers for mercy.

However, I think she's going to make it. At breakfast yesterday morning our 15-year-old girl, noticing the dark circles under her mother's eyes, tried to encourage her. "Mom, it won't do any good to stay awake all night wondering what you're going to say. Just talk to those women like you talk to Dad. If you can make him do things, I know you won't have any trouble with them."

I cleared my throat and started to correct my saucy teenager, but then I saw a new light come into Jackie's eye. I hid a smile behind my napkin. Yep, I think she's going to make it as a public speaker.