



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

of cockroaches and ghost writers

one of my childhood heroes was a cockroach named archy. actually, archy was a ghost writer who slipped out of the woodwork at night and wrote stuff for his boss, poet don marquis. especially did he like to write saucy poems about mehitable the cat. from his precarious perch on top of the carriage archy would select the right key, then leap down headfirst, striking one slow letter after another.

true ghost writers are always like that. committed. regardless of bloody foreheads and the fact someone else gets all the glory, and most of the money, they keep on, night after night, writing for writing's sake.

in archy's case, he was unable to strike the shift key to make capital letters. thus, even though la cucaracha didn't always sign his name, his style became his signature — the e. e. cummings of the insect world.

every ghost writer, every editorial writer and most newspaper reporters have at one time or another identified with archy. they bang their heads against walls and their fingers against typewriters, meeting dawn deadlines — only to find someone else getting the glory when their stories appear in print.

i remember the outrage i felt when my first book appeared. i had ghost written it for another fellow who could hardly speak english, much less write it. when his name appeared in huge type on the dust jacket, and mine in tiny letters, i was somewhat upset. i complained to god and he reminded me he didn't make it on the dust jacket at all. well, that shamed me pretty deeply and i promised him in prayer i'd never complain again. my next book was called "god can do it again." god and kathryn kuhlman made it in big letters on the cover — and i was left off completely.

all of which proves some prayers are more dangerous than others.

that's the reason i identify with the archies of the news and editorial room — not to mention those guys who write advertising copy. check this issue of your newspaper. there's an awful lot of writing but few of the things are signed. even the editorials are anonymous. now maybe that's to keep the writer from having a cross burned in his yard, or because the editor feels too much exposure may go to the writer's head and encourage him to demand a raise, as columnists do at regular, yet unsuccessful, intervals. but whatever the cause, the unsung heroes remain those who do the work but never get the glory.

so, whenever you see a successful publisher, a swaggering columnist, or a rich poet, remember that someplace in the nocturnal areas of his life is a hardworking cockroach, pounding the keys with his head.