



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Only a few knew what was about to happen when the pastor asked the congregation to be seated at the close of the morning service.

It didn't take them long to figure it out, however, for instead of a benediction the organist hit the opening chords of the traditional wedding march and a wave of joyful expectancy rippled across the sea of faces jammed into the little church.

Necks were craned to see who it was, and when Jim Finnigan, bearded Canadian who has helped thousands through his ministry with hippies, stepped forward, the congregation (which was made up of more than half young people) broke into spontaneous applause.

Jim looked different in his coat and tie. But there was no mistaking the "spiritual sparkle" on his face, nor the wide grins on the faces of the two other ex-drug addicts who stood with him at the altar.

Next came the bridesmaids, having to literally elbow their way through the dense crowd in the auditorium.

"Turn around, Jim," one of his fellow ex-hippies called from the congregation. He obeyed, accompanied by the chuckle of the gathered worshippers. The rest of us let our eyes pick out the white-gowned figure of his beautiful young bride who was being escorted forward by her father. Candy is one of the new breed of Jesus-girls sweeping the country. "I don't understand her new faith," her father had confided earlier, "but I'd a thousand times rather have her this way than hung up on drugs."

Jim and Candy joined hands at the front and I felt a big lump forming in my throat. Maybe it was because I had known them both BC (before Christ). Whatever, after years of attending weddings, I was about to cry.

"Do you take this woman to be your wedded wife?" the pastor said.

"I do," came Jim's firm response and the congregation murmured their own response, "Praise God."

At the close of the service they knelt at the altar, fingers entwined. There was a prayer of commitment and then a spoken prophecy as if God Himself were blessing them. The soloist sang, "Seal Us, O Holy Spirit," and the lump in my throat moved to my eyes and overflowed. I couldn't believe it. I was crying at a wedding.

They rose. Jim pulled back Candy's veil and kissed her soundly. The congregation broke into joyful applause.

They took up an offering at that strange wedding, designated to help Jim and Candy establish their new home ministry with drug addicts. Then everyone picked up his chair and cleared the floor to make ready for the wedding cake and refreshments brought in from a side room.

Candy tossed her bouquet. Rice was thrown and they were whisked away in a brightly decorated car trailed by dancing, jangling cans on a string.

It was past 2 p.m. when I left to go home, but not before one of my Roman Catholic friends who had attended the service said, "Now that was a wedding."

I grinned and could almost hear the voice of the governor at that wedding at Cana so many years ago as he shook his head in dismay and said, "Every man at the beginning of the wedding doth set forth good wine . . . but thou has kept the good wine until now."

I may not ever attend another wedding like it, (I doubt if I could stand it if I did), but at least for this once, I felt like I had been to something real.