



# Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

## The Essence

The smell is unique. It's traveled all over the world — and smelled some exotic things — but never found it duplicated. Not in New Guinea, the Philippines, South America, Scandinavia or the Orient. It's murky. Acrid. Yet not entirely unpleasant. It is stronger in the early mornings when the air hangs moist and heavy. It settles in the tree tops and sifts down to grass level. It is in the quiet streets of the big cities before the day begins. It is in the dew-laden orange groves. It clings to the palms and ornamentals in our quiet subdivisions. It hovers over the clipped grass of the golf course. It blankets the entire southern half of the state, sometimes for weeks on end. It is the smell of burning earth.

In the spring, when the ground is dry and the water level drops in the swamps, the rich Florida muck often catches fire and continues to burn deep into the earth. It is useless to try to put it out. It smolders, down to depths of 10 feet. Put it out in one place and it will simply burn underground for a mile and break out

someplace else. For weeks, sometimes, the peninsula will be covered in an early morning haze before the winds blow it out to sea. If you awake early in the morning, you'll smell it. No matter where you live in South Florida.

Like sand in your shoes, it is part of our tropical culture.

I woke before dawn this morning and the smell had drifted in our upstairs bedroom. I lay there, quietly, letting it carry me back to the days of my youth. I was a paper boy, delivering the Miami Herald to the sleeping citizens of Vero Beach. Long before anyone ever dreamed of the word "mo-ped," I had one. It was a "Whizzer" motor attached to my bicycle. Up every morning before the sun I would putt-putt down the long marl drive next to the then Number 3 fairway of the Royal Palm Golf Course. Cross the wooden bridge on the Main Canal and ride south on the oiled dirt road which ran along the Number 10 fairway out to Royal Palm Boulevard. Then, with just the first touch of rose in the

dark sky to my back, ride into town to roll my papers in front of McClure's Rexall Drug Store next to the old post office across from Knight's Bar. Then, my wire basket stuffed with papers, I'd return to deserted streets to throw them in the dewy yards of my still-sleeping customers.

The smell of burning earth was my constant companion.

This morning, once again, it woke me. Softly. Gently. Seeping through my bedroom window. To remind me that I, like all children of this earth, am temporal. As I lay there in the semi-darkness, hearing the cooing of the morning dove and the lonesome call of the whippoorwill, I remembered something from the ancient prophet: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever."

The earth is burning, and our planet seems populated by fools who believe they can put it out. I need to remember that when all else is gone, God remains, and this morning, cling even tighter to Him.