By Jim Langham

When I was a child, my life was centered around elderly people. My grandmother lived in our home and it was as though she were a second mother to me. She would take me along to visit her elderly friends in the small community where I was raised.

As I grew older, I would run errands for them; I would mow their yards, shovel their snow and take goodies to them from our family. When I became a gardner, I would take them goodies from the garden. Giving to the elderly was a way of life for me.

I remember how upset our next door neighbor, Stella, was the day her house caught on fire. I remember the visits with another neighbor, Mary, after her husband, Jake, was killed in an old Model-T Ford. I will never forget the little visits and sugar cookies she shared when I would carry in her wood and water after school.

When I went to college, I encouraged our church youth group to give services in area nursing homes. Once I was a pastor, I encouraged groups from the church to conduct services and reach out to the elderly in their homes and in local nursing homes.

For me, elderly people have always taken on a “wise parent” figure. I love talking about history and bygone days with them. Many times, I try to design “Homespun” columns for their enjoyment.

When we moved to Payne 20 years ago, I was immediately introduced to Dallas Lamb Foundation Home. I became a part of “the list” of area clergy to share in Sunday afternoon services at 2 p.m. Residents have become like family members to me. The last service I conducted, a week ago, when I walked into the Great Room to see the “congregation” for that day, my heart was warmed by their warm smiles, greetings and heartfelt singing. I never dreamed at the time that that could be the last such service I would ever hold there.

Monthly services over 20 years – I have seen many of the residents come and go, have heard their prayer requests, have shared in their communion, and have given many hugs to “moms and dads.” I can remember one particular resident who always asked for a visit following a service. One of the employees always told me that she would be waiting for me following the service.

I can remember one special occasion when she asked for communion and we shared that time together. But I can also remember the day I walked into her room and it was empty; the bed was cleanly wrapped and made ... my greatest fear was realized – she had passed away.

I will always have a special place for Dallas Lamb because it became a shelter for my own mother during her years of dementia. It was so nice to drive a few blocks and eat lunch and supper with a great lady in my life. Not once did I worry for a second whether or not she was well cared for or happy. She enjoyed the bingos and the friendliness of staff and other residents in the home.

More than once, I saw employees tear up at something she said and wipe tears because they cared so much for those they were caring for. As caretaker of my mother, it wasn’t hard for me to understand those tears of love and compassion.

I was as devastated as the next person when I heard that our home was going to be closed. In fact, my heart hurt so much that it took me two days to talk about it to my wife, Joyce. I felt so deeply for residents and loving caregivers that I couldn’t say anything about it out loud.

Early this week, I walked through the halls of Dallas Lamb. I embraced tearful employees and lonely and hurting residents. Once again, I saw the love of my mother and the kind care that she received; I recalled the many times we had sung “In the Garden” in the services, and the Christmas carols that reverberated during the holiday season.

The halls, which were full of laughter and cries of loneliness, had also served as walls of hope and a shelter of security for many people over the years. I didn’t realize that my heart was going to feel so heavy as I walked out the doors. To my right, a resident was loading clothes in his car;

behind me I had left the sobs of a broken employee, but my heart was full of a lot of wisdom and love I would have never known had I not passed through the halls of Dallas Lamb Foundation Home.