By Jim Langham:

How priorities change

I will never forget the fall and early winter that my grandmother spent making doilies to be distributed as Christmas presents for family members. Any time she wasn't busy with something else, she would be sitting by the old wood stove in the living room, crocheting various designs and colors of doilies to be placed under lamps, figurines and other small items of importance. It was the type of an idea that a grandma would think of, a dear old old lady wanting to leave handiwork behind for family members to enjoy for years to come.

As our family Christmas reunion approached, I, along with cousins of elementary age, began to speculate what we were going to get for Christmas that year. Cars, trucks, baseballs, bats, jack-in-the-box, Tinker Toys, Lincoln Logs, various games, and other items for fun were popular gifts to receive in those days.

In our case, family members would gather together at someone's house on a rotating basis. While adults would have a name drawing type of gift exchange, everyone brought gifts for all of the kids.

That year, there were so many gifts underneath that old pine needle tree that we could hardly walk through the living room. Following our overstuffing Christmas dinner, excitement filled the room as it was time to open the gifts. Adults were given their gifts, and piles of gifts were piled for the children.

As we started opening our gifts there were baseball cards, basketballs, various toys and some popular clothing for the boys. Girls received similar toys except there was more of an emphasis on dolls and doll clothes. Somewhere, during the opening of gifts, I came across a gift that said, "To Jimmy from Grandma Cook." Each of my cousins received similar gifts. Excitedly, I tore the paper away and there was a beautiful white and yellow flowered doily made by Grandma.

I tried as hard as I could to act excited about the crocheted gift from Grandma, even though I was so disappointed in my heart because it wasn't another toy of some kind. Needless to say, I didn't get at the time what she had in mind in giving us the doilies.

As life continued, my appreciation for family heritage items and personal memories with children and loved ones began to change. Things began to mean less and less and heart expressions began to take on greater meaning.

When we were asked to share things that we were thankful for, I switched from my first list of, "good food, my toys, playing games, lots of nice clothes (although they were made by my mother), and the fun things I did such as visiting the neighbor kids, going to basketball games and having great times."

At some point in time, my Thanksgiving list started to change to represent times with the parents and family, faith in God, beautiful chats with friends, realization of the importance of small things, the Bible, church family, employment opportunities and a greater understanding of what brings hope, opportunity and appreciation into our lives.

Thanksgiving evolved from enjoyment of all that was there for me to opportunities to reach out and do for others. One of the most memorable Thanksgivings was the year our family volunteered to serve the food at the Thanksgiving dinner at the Fort Wayne Rescue Mission or the times we took things to those with need.

These days some of the most cherished items in our home are the doilies that grandma made. When I look at them, I think of how that little old lady shared her gift, the gift of crocheting and family love, and how she combined the two to give herself and the gift of her hands to a family that she loved.

"Bless thou the works of our hands," said the Psalmist.

It was 40 years ago on Nov. 7 that Grandma Cook passed away, but she continues to live through those items in our home that are now at the top of my thanksgiving list ... those doilies she made that far away Christmas to pass herself on for generations to come.

Jim Langham is a feature writer for the Paulding County Progress.

The opinions stated are those of the writer, and do not necessarily reflect that of the newspaper.