By Jim Langham

A close friend of ours was relating the bright details she always enjoyed in the conversations with a 96-year-old lady that she cared for. She was bright, alert and always looking for the little things to cheer her nearly century-year-old perspective on life.

“Things that many of us tend to glance over so easily are the joy of the hour when one took a ride with her,” said our friend, Barb, who spent her life teaching high school art. “She would say, ‘My, look how blue the sky is today,’ ’Look how bright the flowers look,’ or ’Look how rich the colors are across the countryside.’

“In fact,” said Barb, “she was always the kind of person that just knew how to bring the cheery colors out in life.”

For several days I kept mulling over the effect of color in my mind; the memories of the bright zinnias that my grandmother used to grow, the never-ending picture opportunities of the quilt-like colors of autumn across the countryside, the quick-effect of a bright sun and blue sky after a dreary day and the hope brought by the colors of a rainbow right after a storm.

Several days later, I called Barb and asked for her to share her heart, as a lifetime art teacher, about the meaning of colors and how they can effect our personalities and our focus on the world around us. It didn’t take her long to project her heart into a world of awe and wonder about the gift of color that God has wisely placed in creation.

“Color around something influences it,” she said. “If one wants to bring out the brightness of colors, he can do it twice as brilliantly by surrounding those colors with darkness rather than light. A picture of a rainbow with black clouds surrounding it makes the colors twice as brilliant as if it were surrounded by white.

“Colors in the distance always become cold while colors in the foreground become warmer,” she continued. “For that reason, in painting a landscape, colder colors such as blue and pale greens are used to paint distance while warmer colors such as yellow and orange are brought to the foreground.”

When I heard this, I thought of the way that we always think of yellow and bright colors as cheery. I also thought of the “symbolic emotional meaning” of color in relation to the warmth of friendship and how we all need the precious experience of close friendships to bring warmth and meaning to our lives, and to brighten our day.

In the Bible, the word “grace” literally interprets “many-colored,” and refers to the way that everyone’s personality brings the grace of its beauty to our lives through distinguished personality traits and gifts.

Barb also stressed that when we are looking at a picture, it is also more pleasant to see the whole picture rather than the details.

“When preparing a picture of a forest, it is always better to accentuate the forest rather than each individual tree,” she said.

So it is in life that it is better to always evaluate experiences in the context of total experience rather to get bogged down with picking things apart all of the time.

All of life flows much more positively when one works in the spirit, unity and harmony of the whole rather than getting distracted with negative moments and meaningless details around us. The book filled with descriptions of God, Revelation, is filled with pictures of brilliant colors mingled with peace on a high road that leads into a much wider picture beyond nagging details.

“Most effective paintings of objects are puzzle pieces woven together,” said Barb. “A picture of a tree, for example, is actually several pieces of different light areas and shades blended together and interwoven together to make it seem like an effective whole.”

So life itself is a weaving together of different shades and colors of experiences and circumstances of life, all synchronized by the Hand of God, if we so choose to look at the whole and not allow the little things to distract us.

For those of us with a “few years” on us now, we have learned the peace of allowing God to blend it into a meaningful whole rather than living in despair from the short-term segments.

It’s amazing what happens when we allow our hearts to focus on the total picture of the “colors” of a smile, a friendly wave, a great reading, an inspiring verse, meeting someone upbeat well beyond life’s circumstances and the meaning of a close friendship. The mixture of such moments into one picture can bring color to our hearts that combine into beauty beyond description.