By Jim Langham

An eye-catcher for heartfelt treasures

What do you think of when you think of something that catches your eye – certain colors, a special type of flower, your favorite kind of food, certain items related to a hobby or the discovery of something you've lost and have found again?

The Bible talks about a poor woman who lost a coin. For hours, she swept the floor, looked under things, sorted through her closets and hunted feverishly for the coin. For one who was poor and had no money, one single coin was a treasure of great value, said Jesus, and when she found it, her rejoicing was as though she uncovered an item that seemed many times its worth.

The coin finally caught her eye and it became the apple of her eye.

A close friend had a brother that was autistic and mentally disabled for a lifetime. Several things were of value to him, but they weren't your usual things of importance, for reasons never understood, anything having to do with pigs caught his eye.

Near his chair was a piggy bank that had been named "Peter Hog." Peter's stomach was full of lost coins. Anytime he or his brother would find coins on the street, he would feed them to Peter. Then, when Peter's stomach was totally filled, there would first of all be a treat trip to McDonald's, and then a trip to the bank to deposit the found coins in a banking account, one

that added to an unbelievable collection over the years of time.

One of the most fun times with our buddy would occur when we went for rides in the countryside. Unable to carry on fluid conversations, he had his way of identifying things that caught his eye, especially pigs, so much so that it became a game. I can remember one time when the three of us were riding through the rural Amish country of our home area. We drove past fields of horses and cows. Suddenly, he started to laugh and point. There, up ahead in the road, was a field full of hogs. “Pig, pig,” he said excitedly. At age 60, a simple field of pigs was worth more than money, wealth, fame or anything the world might classify as “rich.” They were the apple of his eye and they caught his attention more than anything.

For those who know me, it is no secret that the main eye-catchers for my heart are cardinals – spirit signs of spiritual blessing beyond description between my personal God and I. The Bible teaches that we are the apple of His eye and that He sends things along the way to let us know that we have caught His attention.

Recently, on a mild spring-like day, I went for a walk on trails in one of my favorite areas to connect with nature. As I sauntered down the trail beneath the warmth of a golden sun, suddenly I heard it in the distance – undeniably and clear – the song of a cardinal echoing through the woods, and my heart danced in freedom and peace.

Recently, I was looking through an old diary with an entry written when the children were small. On that occasion, Sandi was spending a few days with her grandparents and Joyce and I had taken Julie to McDonald’s. As we sat at our table, an elderly man, bent over, wrinkled and walking with a cane, came into the restaurant. After he ordered a simple sandwich, he looked around and saw Julie playing at our table. His eye fell on her and a smile face-wide immediately spread the wrinkles in his cheeks.

With a smile as gentle as a a warm breeze, he walked over to us and asked us if he could give her a quarter. We agreed. His shaking hands reached in his pocket, pulled out a quarter and placed it beside her. Nothing was said, but their two smiles met in ways that only hearts can embrace. Quietly, he walked over to pick up his order and walk out of the restaurant. One more time, their eyes met, caught each other’s attention, and responded with a smile.

I had never seen him before and we never saw him after that. He wasn't a person who was known by those around us. However, the vibes of a real person, who understood what true riches are, filled our souls. Somehow, over the years, in spite of what life had done to his physical body, he had developed an eyesight for the important things of living. His joy in life had come from smiles, greetings to those around him, and just a friendly exchange with someone passing him on the street. It appeared that his world was that of poverty and loneliness, but I sensed that he didn't look at it that way.

Over the years, it has become obvious that life's greatest treasures are not those things that pass through our hands, but those that catch our eye at a glance. At that moment, the smile of that elderly man was life's greatest treasure. Things come and go, but the sunshine smile of a young child (as in our granddaughter, Kirsten), words of encouragement, people who read our hearts well, robins hopping across melting snow, the gentle flow of a never-ending river and the song of a cardinal are, to me, the riches of the universe.

The wisdom of being over 60 tells me that the happiest moments of this day will not come from things with a price tag, but that which catches my eye ... cardinals, love, friends and family, and warm smiles. After all, how do warm response smiles occur except through the meeting of the eye?