By Jim Langham

Bouquets and other gifts from the heart

Our hearts are all broken with the agony of pain, not only physical, but emotional, as we reflect on the lives of fellow humans 200 miles south of us whose homes and belongings were shredded inside of 30 seconds during the devastating March 2 tornado outbreak.

As I view the agonizing cries of those searching through belongings that were completely intact when they left for work on Friday, I keep asking myself, “What would I search for first if our home was suddenly swept into a pile of rubbish such as we’ve viewed on the news?”

It’s not hard to compile a list of things I would care about the least – the television, computer, golf clubs, libraries of CD games and popular music, CD player, car and things that might lean towards a bit of prestige.

But what would bring me to tears as I clasped a “found item” that was fully connected to my heart?

Pictures would be near the top of the list, especially those of the children, special family outings, childhood trips and pictures of family members who are no longer with us.

Years ago in my childhood, my parents embraced a family who had lost everything in an Easter Sunday fire, including the only picture that existed of a child that had a passed in infancy. Somehow, my mother was able to search and find the negative in a photo warehouse in Chicago, and the picture was recaptured, no easy task in 1964 when camera equipment was much more primitive.

While there are countless items that connect with family members, the children and loved ones, there is no question in my mind that certain items stand out in a heart-tugging serendipity of their own.

One would be a special paperweight that sits on my dresser. It says, “To Dad from Sandi,” and has some hand sketching that immediately became some of the most beautiful artwork ever created when my daughter handed it to me as a special handmade gift when she was in elementary school.

Another is a plaque with a picture of a hand and a simple but profound poem printed beside it. It was the size of Jason’s hand when he was 5 years old. I had done the same thing in the old Geneva Grade School in art class when I was about his age. Both still exist, my hand as had been preserved by Mother and his hand as a family heirloom hanging over the landing of our stairway.

A third item is an adult gift, woven in picture/plaque form by daughter, Julie. It hangs on the wall by my desk in the church study. It reads, “The Prayer of Jabez, Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, ‘Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.’ And God granted his request. I Chronicles 4:10.”

It has often been the source of silent meditation when I’ve needed some away time to sit in the quietness of my study and fixate on its message.

Of course, there are all of the cards that Joyce and I have given each other over the years; even the letters we wrote to each other in college are still in existence. Now I understand why my mother sent encouragement cards several times a week to those who melted her heart for one reason or another. I understand why my father built a sofa for us as a wedding gift and why my grandmother was always crocheting around handkerchiefs to be given on special occasions.

And I remember my own reaches, the simple tools I bought my dad, the times that I gathered fragrant bouquets from the lilac tree behind our house, placed it in a Ball jar, watered it and

placed in on the table to be enjoyed during the evening meal. I meant it with all of my heart when I wove together two paper plates with yarn and called it a letter holder which I presented to retired missionaries I had great admiration for.

I wasn't surprised when I searched through items in the old home place that I found post cards I had written to my parents from church camp and to my grandmother during family vacations with my parents.

This train of thought was triggered when I read a Facebook entry from a dear friend. It stated, "Every spring when I see the first dandelion sprout, it always takes me back to my childhood when I'd very strategically go to the park across from my Gram's house and pick her (what I viewed) as the most beautiful bouquet of flowers. It wasn't until my adult years that Gram told me that those flowers made her sneeze and itch to high heaven ... but that she loved my gesture and never had the heart to toss them. I so miss being able to pick you those flowers, Gram, and every spring reminds me how blessed I was to have Grandma, who loved the 'weeds' I picked for her."

For me, too, it brought back memories of the times when, as a child, I would visit the local jewelry store and spend money I had worked for to purchase broaches and jewelry for my mom and grandma, and a sleeve of golf balls for my dad.

I suppose some would look at this column like a dandelion, but to others, who understand the heart with which it was written, just maybe it would be retrieved and kept as it was intended ... a bouquet of flowers to all of those who take the time to understand my heart.