By Jim Langham

Appreciating the age of wisdom and beauty

The warmth of the past couple of weeks reminds me of one of my most cherished moments with my Grandma Cook, a dear old person, my mother's mother, who lived with us as I was growing up.

That moment occurred in late March when I was in grade school. Grandma decided that it was time that I learn how to plant my first garden, so she took me to a small plot on the country property where we lived, gave me instructions in spading, hoeing and raking the soil to planting stage. Then, her worn hands of lifetime gardening led the way with instruction on how to plant peas, lettuce, onions and various other early spring vegetables that would become my first planted garden.

That was March; Grandma used to always tell me that when she was younger, people would plant their gardens in March. So I grew up imagining "old fashioned March" as being warmer, spring-like and a time to plant gardens. This spring has seemed to be like the kind of March Grandma referred to as "old-fashioned."

Last week one day, I was reading through information from the National Weather Service and came across the fact that the two warmest Marches prior to this year were 1907 and 1910, right when Grandma would have been in her prime. "Hmmm," I said, as I looked at those figures, "so this is what she was talking about. She did know what she was talking about."

For a moment I felt warmth greater than the warm air temperatures, I felt the warmth of family legends that had come to life through the flowers, blossoms and songs of the birds around me. I felt a sense of having come full cycle with the stories I had been told about March springs in my youth.

The older I become, the more I realize the treasure of having been raised in a family blessed with the wisdom of three-generation living. My parents had many answers to guide their young son, but having a “generation higher” with us seemed to round out the wisdom needed for a young fellow to build the foundation for a lifetime of living.

My grandma seemed to always have such wise answers and illustrations to life’s situations. To me she represented the stability that proved that life can make sense because she was a walking example of a person who handled life in that way. In spite of the fact that she had toughed it through the Great Depression and saw the passing of her husband and several children, she lived her life with her faith undaunted as a generational example that passed down characteristics that we still cherish today.

In addition to the presence of my grandmother, several elderly people lived around us, people filled with their own outlook on life, their own approach to wisdom summarized from their many years of living.

Next door to us was an elderly couple. The husband, especially, was a “philosopher” who had the knack of keeping young minds spellbound by the hour as he rocked back and forth in the creaking rocking chair in his front porch telling stories of his childhood and how he thought that some day the good Lord was going to cause all kinds of things happen in the earth, and how a lot of it would be because of the oil in the Middle East.

Over the years, I have always enjoyed asking the elderly what they attributed to their long lives and their outlook on life. Their responses have always been fascinating to me; many of them have had to do with faith, grit, positive thinking and a never-say-die attitude.

My grandma’s brother, Uncle Manes, lived to be 103 years old. His dad suffered a broken back in a horse accident when Uncle Manes was 10 years old. For all practical purposes, because he was then “man of the house” at the time, he quickly had the responsibility of the crops and other farm decisions placed on him at a young age.

His response concerning his century of living was, “Oh, I don’t know, except the fact that I spent the first 60 years of my life walking 10 miles a day behind a horse in the field.” That probably didn’t happen every day, but the point was clear; life itself created its own set of

aerobics that were probably more rigorous than most enthusiasts undertake at the local fitness center today.

Years ago I read a newspaper article which had interviewed people in their 90s about the success of their long lives. Their responses all had similar themes, “having something to do each day and I exercise every morning before breakfast,” “because I have been active all of my life,” “being happy and seeing on the bright side of things,” “I worked hard and just kept going,” “enjoying the closeness of my family,” and, “I reckon it was the Lord’s will.”

One time, many years ago, I asked my dad (who has been gone for 20 years) what it seemed like to be growing older. His response was very simple, “I still feel like a 15-year-old boy on the inside, but my body won’t quite keep up with it. The longer I live and see how the cycles in the world repeat themselves, I am more ready for the future and God’s will for my life.”

Ironically, at the time I asked him that question, he was six years younger than I am now. The lesson of that statement is impressed deeper on my heart each day, “Lord, if I can have the same attitude that Dad had at his age, life will have been a success.”