

Heaven pulled out its finest artwork on Friday night to show approval on the phenomenal effort of Paulding County residents in raising money for cancer research.

The sacredness of the luminary service was never more surrounded by angels of hope and comfort than it was this past weekend.

It all started close to sunset when God's own luminaries began to fire in the western sky with brilliant and bright reflections of orange, red and yellow in a sunset that came to full bloom over the fairgrounds.

Ironically, a light pole silhouetted the beauty by taking on the appearance of a cross surrounded by fire as the glorious artistic painting of nature took our heads from earth to Heaven.

But that was only the beginning of the seemingly celestial benediction over a community that was in the process of raising \$123, 121.56 towards cancer research.

To the east, the artistic panorama in the sky continued with the emergence of a brilliant rainbow. At one point, both manifestations could be seen, with the blazing sunset to the west and the rainbow of promise illuminated over the track of walkers faithfully braving the chilly air to raise money toward the dreaded illness snatching life and loving experiences from the lives of many.

For this cardinal loving soul, Friday's unexpected heavenly luminaries were just a part of a "cardinal promise" week that was long overdue. It all started on Monday when I was returning from a Memorial Day service in Indiana. I was driving through Wren when my peripheral vision realized that I had just passed a brilliant cardinal banner draping over a flower garden to my left.

Quickly, I turned the car around and returned to take a picture of a magnificent banner that initiated a week of cardinal appearances that had been long overdue, a time in which I had experienced a “cardinal drought” in a heart reaching for re-enforcement for a soul needing a little boost.

But that was only the beginning. On Wednesday morning, as I emerged into the pleasant early summer morning, I heard, “the song,” the precious, “cheer, cheer, cheer,” song of the cardinal at daybreak. Presently I glanced around to look for my friend and there he was, sitting on top of the statue of the Blessed Mother in the neighbor’s yard looking right at me and singing away.

But even with that peaceful sight, the cardinal promise was not over. For me, the most meaningful was just ahead.

The previous Saturday, I had decorated the graves of loved ones, carrying out the family traditions I had recalled from my childhood, that of taking homemade bouquets to the cemetery and placing them on our loved ones graves for Memorial Day.

Since the passing of my dear friend, my buddy who had also found such solace in the song of cardinals, I had always placed some type of cardinal figure on his grave. This year, for some reason, I was having a difficult time bringing myself to do that, so I let it go.

However, on Wednesday morning, I was working in Swiss Heritage Village, a preservation of buildings and relics from my Swiss heritage in the Berne, Ind. area. I was browsing through the gift shop and I saw brilliant cardinals on special hangers draping a display.

My heart was totally drawn to the sight of my friends, unaware that one of the most meaningful cardinal moments of all was about to appear.

The volunteer administering the shop said, “Jim, just take one of those; I know how much cardinals mean to you. Those were mine, I want you to have one.”

Immediately, I knew what I was supposed to do with that unexpected gift. I drove to the grave of my friend and hung the cardinal on a flower by his grave. It had been the ultimate cardinal moment, one which was an opportunity to honor a brother that I missed so dearly.

Sunday morning, there he was again, my cardinal friend, walking across the road by our house. I smiled and went inside to check my Facebook messages. The first one I saw was Jillene McMichael's posting from the Relay For Life.

I rolled my eyes toward Heaven and said, "Aren't you something, with your promises of cardinals, rainbows and the hearts of people?"

It all came together, the hope of the singing cardinal, the memory of Christ's suffering on the cross and the rainbow telling us to never give up on hope.