By Jim Langham

For most of her life, my mother was one of those people that was one of the first ones knocking on the front door when there was a need. When someone returned from the hospital, she took them their first meal. She loved working at the church sewing group, knowing that projects she finished would end up in the hands of people with need in third world countries.

One time, I can remember when a family moved into town of a different national background, poor, not knowing a lot of language and rather forlorn in a different culture. My mother visited them; she and my father picked them up for church on Sunday mornings. She purchased school supplies and took the lady and her two children to a clothing store to take care of them.

Of course, all of this, and many more actions, were performed without fanfare, preferably behind the scenes, with never any mention to anyone else that help had been given.

So it was only fitting, I thought, that as my mother grew older, and became confused and depressed with dementia, that God should give her a special “angel unawares,” to lift her spirits and continue to provide the essentials of her spiritual nourishment.

For Mom, it was an old friend, a lifelong friend, someone that she had exchanged visits with for a lifetime. Every Wednesday afternoon for 25 years they attended a ladies’ Bible study together. When periods would occur when mom was sick, there she would be, no fanfare, very quiet, saying very little just sitting quietly by her side, a true definition of the expression, “being there.”

One thing that has always intrigued me is the potential names of angels, whether they are clothed as angelic beings as we picture them or they show up as a next door neighbor in common attire, just knowing what to say and make the right move at the right time to console our lives. In this case, the angel’s name was, “Billie.”

As mom grew older, it became more difficult for her to drive to certain places, so Billie would stop by and take her. After my dad passed, when my mother was lonely, she would go to Billie's and they would just sit and visit, not necessarily weeping or have parties of self-pity, just nice visits about the neighbors, gardening, church meetings and things common to their lives.

Eventually, my mom's condition deteriorated to the extent that she was taken for care to a local nursing facility. Occasionally, she would receive a card, school children would walk through the home and sing and at Christmas they would bring candy and pictures colored for mom's bulletin board.

Years slipped by and mom's contact with the "outside world" began to fade. I will never forget the last time I took her for a ride around her beloved Rainbow Lake and then stopped at Trees Drive-In for a sandwich, usually a vintage ride for her.

As we sat there, I noticed that things were changing quickly. She seemed stressed and kept saying, "I think we've got to get back. I think they want me back there soon."

In my heart, my countenance sank and I knew that she was no longer feeling comfortable with the "outside world." Her world had faded into the confines of nursing home life, with one exception.

Each week, Billie stopped by, usually on Bible study day, even though mom could no longer attend. I would stop later in the day and there would be a card on her dresser, also a piece of candy and a cheery picture or note.

The card contained special words of encouragement and was signed by Billie. Often she would stop and read to my mother, whether she could take it in or not.

I will never forget the evening of April 27, 2006. A brilliant red sunset faded behind fresh apple blossoms outside my mother's window. Spring was coming to Indiana, but mom had a different journey in mind.

A few days later, a moderate crowd of people gathered in the funeral home to pay tribute to her. I glanced around and there she was sitting quietly in the back of the room, no fanfare, nothing fancy, but there.

I walked back to Billie and said, “Thank you, thank you, you were such an angel to my mother.”

She looked at me with her tender caring eyes and said, “I think it was the other way around. She was a wonderful woman. We were friends for life.”

It was a good definition of what the writer of Hebrews meant when he wrote, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” (Hebrews 13:2)