

When things don't make sense from your vantage point

By Jim Langham

A childhood vantage point that I enjoyed for more reason than one was that of being underneath a developing quilt during quilt day gatherings held at our house.

Several days a year, especially during the winter months, neighbors and families would be invited into our home to help put together a quilt, made usually from cut-up material that had been used to construct clothing, or rags that had been salvaged from various situations. I was also surprised when completed quilts emerged that I could spot shirts, scarves, tablecloths and other items from our house. I can still recall my grandma saying concerning an extra piece of material, "Let's just stick that in the quilt bag."

Often, I was called upon to cut and shape quilt blocks, probably an exercise in busyness to fill out the temptations afforded to a young boy who might have otherwise gotten in trouble, had he not been given other things to do.

One of the things I liked the most about quilting day was the food. Underneath the quilt frame and emerging masterpiece, there was plenty of room to play with toys, making houses with building blocks, constructing with Lincoln logs – and eating snacks that special hands would "sneak" under the table as I waited for goodies.

Somewhere in midmorning and again in mid-afternoon, someone would say, "Time for a snack," and out came cookies, homemade candy, fudge and other country goodies. While I played, unknown to my mother, ladies around the table quilting would "treat me" to various goodies. I was so glad that it was not a coordinated effort, that the left hand didn't know what the right hand was doing, that no one realized the sum total of goodies that were being handed down over a day's time of work.

As time progressed, I began to appreciate the quilts themselves, their beauty on our beds and their representation of material we had around the house at that time.

Eventually things shifted around our place. Many of the quilts were given as gifts; in some cases, the deed would be reciprocated as another neighbor or family member would host the construction of another quilt in a quilting bee. Several stayed around our house, decorating various family member's beds with former pieces of clothing and material wear.

One thing that amazed me from "underneath the quilt" was how different things looked than they did from the top. I would see those strings and knots hanging down and I would think, "How is this going to look like anything?"

One day, one of the quilters told me a story that stuck with a good "life lesson story" to this very day.

It seems that some ladies were quilting and a small boy, in the same fashion that I used to, kept looking at the threads and ravel. Finally he said to his grandmother, "Grandma, what are you making? It just looks like a bunch of strings and things hanging down."

Wisely, the grandmother replied, "That's because you are looking at things from underneath. Up here where I am, a beautiful pattern is unfolding."

Wow, did I get that immediately, something I think about more these days as I watch things around me that don't seem to make sense from "down here," but in the eyes of the Creator, I continue to believe that, like the quilts the ladies were making years ago, a beautiful pattern is unfolding.