By Vernon Whetstone

I was going to write about the Moon-Venus-Jupiter conjunction on Dec. 1, but I don't think I have enough words for the task.

The sight of all three of those celestial objects hanging there in the southwestern sky just at dusk was a sight I would really have a hard time describing without about 40 or so adjectives.

I will just have to use a photograph where words will not do. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words, isn't it?

The photograph is courtesy of my daughter, Kimberly Bartholomew. She took the shot from her front porch in Imperial. Something about being a chip off the old block comes to mind.

I guess I will just have to sit here with my mouth hanging open at the beauty of the sight. You will be able to watch during the rest of December as Venus pulls away from Jupiter rising higher above the horizon each evening and as Jupiter sinks toward the glow of the sunset.

Venus will continue higher and at the end of the month can be used as a marker to help find the blue gas giant planet Neptune.

Our old friend, Orion, the king of the winter constellations is above the eastern horizon by 7 p.m. these evenings and stands high overhead in the south by 10 p.m. making a good spot for viewing with telescope or binoculars. Above Orion is the "V" shape of Taurus the Bull with bright Aldebaran for an eye. Of course, the "V" is the Hyades star cluster and is almost twice as distant, at 153 light years, as Aldebaran is at 65 light years. Their closeness is only an optical illusion as seen from our perspective here on Earth.

Below Orion one of his faithful hunting dogs, Canis Major, the Big Dog, which features Sirius, the brightest star in the northern sky. It also serves as the "eye" of the critter.

If you catch Sirius just after it rises in the southeast at about 9:30 pm you will be able to watch it put on a dazzeling light display. Being low to the horizon it will twinkle and sparkle with white, blue and red lights. Binoculars will enhance the experience.

Just rising like it is, Sirius is often mistaken for a UFO it flashes and sparkles so much.

SKY WATCH: The full Moon on Dec. 10 will wipe out most viewing and that is too bad as the Moon will be occulting the Pleiades star cluster again on that date. This will be the last time this year the Moon will do so. If you are up between 12:30 and 2:30 a.m. you might be able to see the stars of the cluster blink out as the bright Moon cuts a swath through them. Binoculars might help if you put the Moon out of the field of view so the light won't be so overpowering. This full Moon will be the closest of 2008 and will be noticeably larger. If you wait for the full Moon in January it will be the closest for 2009.

"What's Up" is written by Vernon Whetstone of Benkelman. He can be reached at thestargeezer@gmail.com.