When I was young, we spent every Christmas Eve at my Maw-Maw’s and Paw-Paw’s house. You could spot their little brick ranch on Meadow Lane from a mile away by the glow of large blue lights hanging on the front windows every year. They were horribly tacky, and I couldn’t have loved them more. Once, when I was in college, I stopped in for a visit a few days before Christmas, and the lights were nowhere to be seen. I expressed my dismay—and by Christmas Eve, they had magically returned in all of their hideous, sparkling glory. Maw-Maw also had a myriad of electronic decorations that one might only find on display at a shopping mall. There was a standing Santa Claus that rang a bell, an ice rink with skaters who appeared to magically glide across the ice, and my all time favorite: a three-foot-tall angel holding a candle, swaying back and forth while seeming to sing a silent hymn. That angel lasted for years, and, thankfully, even my children have it in their memory banks as well.

As a child, I always led the “Can we open presents yet? Can we open presents yet?” chant that would inevitably break out halfway through supper, and Aunt Sue would always sneak in the den with me to take a peek at things as long as I was quiet. After supper we would tear through paper and laugh and hug; it was like a scene from a Lifetime Christmas movie. There were a few of us who regularly exchanged gag gifts each year; that was always such fun, especially for my daddy. He still gives a beautifully wrapped jar of maraschino cherries to my cousin Leigh every single year. It’s tradition.

But the highlight came later in the evening—after all of the presents had been unwrapped and the kitchen had been cleaned and the trash had been taken out—when we would all head outside and shoot fireworks. I don’t mean a few bottle rockets and a couple Roman candles. I mean a Fourth of July-worthy fireworks spectacular that lit up the sky for hours and drew neighbors from their homes. One year we had some sort of contraption that was supposed to be nailed to a tree before lighting. Uncle Stanley was worried it might send sparks cascading onto the car in the driveway, so he parked it elsewhere before we fired it up. Unfortunately, that spiral spinning fireball dislodged from the nail and—you guessed it—sailed straight across the lawn to rest underneath the car. Fortunately, it ran out of steam before anything exploded.

Maw-Maw and Paw-Paw are in heaven now, and recently their house was sold to a new family. Even though we haven’t all been together in years and years, somehow I think I may be a little more nostalgic about it this Christmas Eve. Sure, life goes on, people move on, and, if we are lucky, we will all live to see many more Christmas Eves. No matter where we all may be, I know we are bound by love—and that is truly the greatest gift.

When the house was emptied after the sale, my daddy managed to snag the blue Christmas lights for me, and I couldn’t have been more excited. There are more memories in those tacky lights than you can possibly imagine, and even though I might give the president of our HOA a heart attack, I think I will hang them out front this year. I might even scout around for a three-foot-tall, candle-waving angel. But there’s one thing I know without a single doubt: my Christmas Eve will be filled with food, fun, family—and this year I’m bringing back the fireworks! It’s tradition.