

Christmas Eve Traditions

I have clear memories of every Christmas eve as far back as I can remember. The same routine every year, from hauling food and gifts to my grandpa's house, eating a huge Italian meal in the dining room surrounded by photos of our family, washing dishes and putting away left-overs while the boys ate dessert in the living room. I can smell the red wine and the 8 different pies my grandpa makes, I can hear the rambunctious laughter of my Uncle telling his wild stories and my brother screaming "uncle!" when my aunt would pin him to the couch in a tickle fight (even when he was well into his 20's). We'd open gifts, give our thanks and hugs, and snuggle down to watch National Lampoons Christmas Vacation with our hearts and bellies full, a family tradition on Christmas Eve.

Now looking back, I laugh at jokingly fighting with my aunt about who received the most presents from my grandpa. We were spoiled, as she was the only daughter in the family and I am the only granddaughter. The Queen and Princess she'd always joke. We'd race upstairs in my grandpa's house, trying to push each other over to get ahead to the piles of presents and start counting. The piles dwindled each year, with the passing of my mom's parents who used to come and my brother starting to spend his Christmas Eve with his wife's family. Each Christmas felt smaller and smaller, but the smallest of them all was the most recent after my aunt lost her battle to cancer.

The piles of presents have gone, with a card remaining for each member of the family now that many have passed and we've all grown older. There is no more running up the stairs, tackling each other to get to the gifts, or whining to my grandpa about who his favorite girl is. Christmas Eve used to be about the tradition of counting the presents. Now, the Christmas Eve tradition is counting the years I was lucky enough to spend with those family members who have passed. It's about counting the people I am still lucky enough to be able to sit beside and recite the lines of Christmas Vacation with.