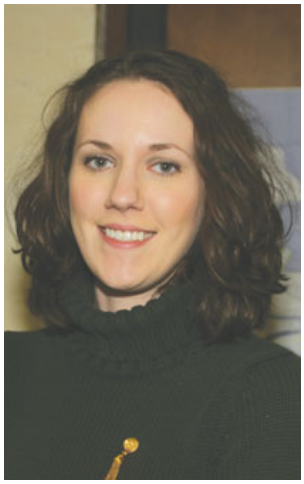

The day after Thanksgiving always marked the start of two traditions in my childhood home. We always had to go to all the Black Friday sales at the crack of dawn. But toward the evening, when we were back safe and sound at home, the first box of Christmas decorations came down.

By the end of the night, the Christmas tree was up with its colored lights, ornaments, strings, peppermint canes, sparkle, the whole nine yards.

Momma always put up stockings, fat Santas and other festive decorations. But my Maw Maw had an obsession with Christmas villages.

We were at the local gift store in Monticello one weekend when her obsession began.

The gift store was located in this small row of stores along the main strip of town. Across the street was a gas station that also sold fried chicken. And then on the other side of the street was the Ward's hamburger joint.

With the smell of fresh fried chicken and juicy burgers in the air, the last place I wanted to be was inside a gift store full of a bunch of older ladies eager to catch the early Christmas sales.

Maw Maw found a table with a variety of Christmas village buildings on sale. The porcelain post office, mayor's house, city hall, flower shop, day care, laundry cleaners and an assortment of regular homes could be filled with lights at the flick of a switch. And let's not forget about the pine trees, street lights, shoppers, pets and skaters who danced via magnet on a glass pond.

Before long Maw Maw had an entire village in the back of that Ford station wagon. In her mind, her collection had only just begun. But I knew Paw Paw wasn't gonna like this.

"What's all this junk," Paw Paw asked, as we unloaded the car.

"Maw Maw found a sale," I said, grabbing the skater's pond.

"You bought these things," Paw Paw asked with a laugh. "Are you sure they weren't giving them away to a good home?"

Maw Maw ignored him, but that brief moment of silence soon ended.

Maw Maw said the village would go on top of the old wood-burning stove. The stove was no longer used since we had central heat now. But this gigantic black stove that could have fit an entire car inside still sat up against the wall in the formal living room.

The only problem was that formal living room had been transformed into Paw Paw's bedroom when he became disabled. He used the larger room to sleep in, watch his own television, listen to me play piano and practice his walking exercises from his wheelchair.

He looked on in disgust as Maw Maw threw a blanket of white snow over the stove.

"Why does it have to go in here," he asked. "Can't a man have just one room, one room? You got 50 places to put this junk in, and you pick mine."
Maw Maw continued placing her village up as Paw Paw and me gazed at it with both confusion and tinge of excitement I guess.
"Now, let's hit the lights," Maw Maw said, turning out the lights. "Here it goes."
With one flip of the switch, the entire village was in full lights. Paw Paw and I even squinted our eyes. It was really bright.
"Now Earlene, that darn thing lights up the whole house," Paw Paw said. "Ain't no sense in turning the night lights on cause it gives you a landing zone all the way to the toilet."
That village stayed there that year. And it returned every year after with a new addition.
Paw Paw would lie in his bed at night with the village in its full glory. Finally, they reached an agreement that the village would be turned off after our nightly prayer together so that Paw Paw could get some sleep.
I admit that I have started my own village collection in my older years. But it is nothing like the size of Maw Maw's.
And for the record, it is in the living room and not Jason's "man room."
Although there is more room in there perhaps.
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