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MY TURN

■ Wayne Chan



The perfect, much too perfect, Christmas tree

The end of another year is upon us and I have a confession — last month we bought our first artificial Christmas tree.

The year was 1991, and it was my first Christmas as a married man. We lived in a small townhome, and despite its very modest size, I was determined to show my new bride Maya, who was born and raised in Taiwan, what a traditional Christmas holiday was all about. And, of course, the first order of business was buying a real, live Christmas tree. The idea of finding our first live tree might conjure visions of bundling ourselves up in goose-down winter coats, trekking to a local tree farm that supplies steaming hot mugs of apple cider, and strolling along the rows of snow-flecked trees while listening to yuletide tunes in search of our perfect newlywed Christmas tree.

Not exactly.

Living in sunny Southern California, the experience was a bit more, shall I say, temperate?

There would be no winter coats. If I recall accurately, I was wearing shorts and a t-shirt that read something like, “My other car is a surfboard.” There would be no walking to any tree merchants. We drove my beat-up truck with the air conditioning on high while wearing sunglasses. And each of us sipped 32-ounce ice teas purchased at a 7-Eleven store on the way to the Home Depot that was selling Christmas trees in the parking lot. No yuletide music, either. But I did hear someone blaring the Grateful Dead from his car while he was backing up to buy some fertilizer.

Aesthetics aside, it didn't matter. This would be our first Christmas together and I wanted to make it a good one. That meant buying the biggest tree on the lot.

The thing is, when you are first married, especially for the groom, you're still basically in the dating phase of the relationship. You've spent the last year courting your soon-to-be wife, trying to impress her, and even though you're now married and made everything legal, there's still a part of you that wants to be sure she knows she made the right decision. Which means that something as seemingly simple as buying a Christmas tree needs to be a gargantuan task, because you are about to buy a monumental, monstrous Christmas tree.

It didn't matter that our little townhome was

completely unsuitable for a 12-foot Christmas tree. It didn't matter that once the tree was set up, it would actually scratch our ceiling and knock off some of the popcorn texture on it. Can you hear me rationalizing that the popcorn texture looks like more snow?

It also doesn't matter that I forgot I was putting this massive tree on a stand I used for trees when I was single, which was basically designed to hold up any tree, so long as that tree was no more than three feet tall.

Oh, and let's not forget that since I had spent my entire holiday budget on this tree, I no longer had any money for additional ornaments for it, which meant I decorated the 12-footer with ornaments from the aforementioned three-foot-tall, single-guy Christmas tree.

Quite simply, the ornaments I had weren't enough to fill that tree. Not even close.

So, what did my gargantuan tree look like? Have you ever seen those wooden ships encased inside a glass bottle and wondered, “How did they get that thing in the bottle?” That's what our tree looked like in our little house. Just envision far too few ornaments on the top half of the tree — I couldn't afford a ladder — and some wires stretched between the tree and the wall to keep the tree from falling over because of the super-undersized tree stand and the breeze created by anyone who happened to walk past it. I think you get the picture.

If you think that one experience would dampen my enthusiasm for finding a live Christmas tree every year, you're right, but it did take a while.

In the years since, the tree has gotten a bit smaller every year, while the house has become bigger — and the ornaments have multiplied. And now that we have three children, the quest to find the perfect tree has been passed along to the kids:

*The branches aren't even on that tree!
We need more ornaments on this side!
There's no room for presents over here!*

It's been 26 years since that first tree — and I give up. This year it was an artificial tree. It's easy to set up. Simple to put away. It already has lights! What's not to love?

My son Tyler had the answer: I don't like it. It's too perfect!

Someone help me.

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Wondering what events are going on this week?

Check out *The Asian Reporter's* Community and A.C.E. Calendar sections, on pages 10 and 12.