

Why This Christmas Angel Brings a Flood of Precious Memories

Every day of the Christmas season is magical when you're 8 years old. Bright lights, colorful decorations, dazzling trees, gaily-wrapped gifts and mouth-watering treats combine to create an enchanting time from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day.

During my childhood, the second most important day for me in December—next to Christmas Day itself, of course—was the day the lights of Christmas migrated from the streets and the stores into our living room. The day we put up the Christmas tree.

First, Dad assembled the tree branch by branch—longer boughs on the bottom, shorter limbs on top. Mom untangled the strings of multi-colored Christmas lights and wrapped them on the tree. Then it was time to bring the ornaments out of their boxes—12 compartments to a box, with a blown-glass ornament resting in a tissue paper nest in each compartment.

As much as I wanted to, I did not help with this process. The branches were too unwieldy, the old-fashioned light bulbs too fragile and the glass ornaments too delicate to be handled by 8-year-old fingers. Even so, I watched all of these preparations with a worshipful gaze. A decorated tree in our living room meant Christmas was only a few short weeks away.

But everything changed the day of my eighth Christmas. That Christmas, as our family celebrated the holiday at my aunt's home, I opened a small box. Nestled in a bed of tissue paper was an angel.

She was the most beautiful Christmas angel I had ever seen.

Less than four inches tall, she wore a fur-trimmed red gown and a tiny halo over her soft white hair. A Christmas gift from my godmother.

Aunt Ramona didn't have children of her own back then, and my sister and I were the blessed recipients of her bountiful love. She opened the way to a multitude of firsts in our lives: the first time we went ice-skating, horseback riding and camping. Even more important was the first time we attended Sunday school. It was my aunt who first taught me about Jesus.

Now Aunt Ramona had given me my first Christmas ornament, long before Hallmark became inextricably linked with the tradition of exchanging annual Christmas ornaments.

Christmas would never be the same.

Although I wasn't allowed to handle the fragile blown-glass ornaments Mom so carefully unwrapped and hung on the tree each year, this angel was different. She was my very own, and I eagerly awaited her emergence from the storage box of Christmas decorations.

You would have thought she was made of silk and china instead of polyester and plastic.

When I held this little angel in my hands, my dreams soared. I felt like I could do anything, be anyone, and go anywhere: the sky was the limit. Stretching to my full height, I would carefully grasp the metal hook and position her on the tree in a place of honor, my reach extending a bit higher with each passing year.

It's been more than 50 years since I first held that tiny red-and-white angel. She came with me when I married and stayed with us each time we moved. She even survived a relocation of a thousand miles from New York to Florida.

Where ever I am, this little angel never fails to release a flood of memories each time I lift her out of her packaging and lovingly position her in a prominent place on our Christmas tree.

I'm grateful for my Christmas angel. I'm also grateful for the related memories that grow more precious with each passing year. Memories of adventures with my own fairy godmother.

Now it's your turn. What's your favorite Christmas ornament?

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This article originally appeared at .