In September of 1990, within a year of a total house fire, we moved halfway across the country, thoroughly confusing our 3 and 6 year old children.

Then came the capper, their father was to report for Desert Storm (the first) and would need to leave on Christmas day! He and I conspired to move 'Christmas' forward just a bit. After decorating the tree and putting the family gifts under it, we went out for the evening.

It was cold, much colder than southern Louisiana here in Tennessee, BUT the lights at Opryland Hotel winked more the clearer. And we wandered inside amid the animated scenes and the dancing fountains and the huge tree filled atriums all decorated for the holidays. We ended near midnight with cocoa and pastries from a little shop, and then back out into the cold and drove home. When our daughter turned on the lights at home, SANTA had been there!!

The next day the kids and I drove north to visit my Mom, while Mike headed south to join his New Orleans Reserve unit. We have visited the magical atriums every year since, and still marvel at the sights. And still remember that first desperate 'early' Christmas.

PS. when the kids suspected just 'who' Santa 'was' we would invite 'those' friends to join us in the pilgrimage and SANTA still came!

PPS. Last year, Mike died during the summer, and we did not go out to see the lights. Instead we went to see, listen/feel to Trans-Siberian Orchestra. The kids are now 23 and 26. But I still felt the lure of the lights. Karen from Madison, TN