If you’re here tonight, it’s for one of two reasons: 1. You know and love my YiaYia, or 2. You know and love one of us, her family. If it’s reason #1, thank you. Thank you for loving her. If it’s reason #2, you’re actually here for reason #1, although you may not know that yet. If you’re here because you love one of us, her family, you’re here because you love something in us that came from her. She’s alive in all of us, her family, having shaped us in a hundred different ways, so if you love one of us, you really love the woman inside of us—my Yiayia, who we’re here to celebrate tonight. Now, although she has influenced all of us and very much made us the people and family we are, it is impossible to be perfectly like her. My Yiayia is a unique and unrepeatable impossibly individual individual, so I’m here to tell you how, if you’d like to join our family tonight, you can emulate an aspect of our very special and highly unique Yiayia. I have a list of 15 ways to be like Yiayia. I’d like to share my list in the hopes that there’s an item on the list (or many items) that might inspire you to join our family and adopt part of Yiayia’s beautiful self as your own.

1. Cook until your oven door falls off.
2. Be so thrifty that you repair said oven door with duct tape.
3. Iron everything, including underwear and handkerchiefs. This is how you meditate.
4. Wear purple whenever possible.
5. Always “tip” your family for coming to visit you.
6. Always feed the dogs from the table.
7. Lie about it.
8. Place chocolate at the top of your food pyramid.
9. Cheer and clap for your granddaughters as loudly as possible at every opportunity. Bonus points if you break a blood vessel in your hand from clapping so hard. Level up if you scream out a curse word in a Christian school when your granddaughter loses a point. Total success if you single-handedly begin a standing ovation for your granddaughter in the middle of her performance simply because she held a note for a really long time.
10. Make up Christmas songs. They must rhyme, but nonsense words are strongly encouraged.
11. Feed everyone. At all times.
12. Compliment your family often on their accomplishments, big and small. The actual praiseworthiness of the complimented thing is irrelevant.
13. Be everyone’s Yiayia, especially people who have lost their own.
14. Always complain when someone gets you a Christmas present, even when it’s a really good one that you love. Tell them it’s too much. Then fight with them when they try to take it back.
15. Threaten your granddaughters often with “tha faa xilo,” and frequently moan that you should have smothered your son when you had the chance. Never mean these things.
16. Whatever the game is, always cheat. Be sure you’re caught cheating. So you can deny it.
17. Always cry when watching musicals, but especially *Fiddler on the Roof* and *The Sound of Music*. Watch these musicals often.
18. ***Love your family.*** Love them even when you’re force feeding them, or when they don’t call or visit enough, or when they’re teasing you. Love them when you’re exhausted or sick or just sick of them. Love them because they do exactly what you want and love them because they don’t. Love them with shared recipes that are impossible to decipher and never turn out as well as when you cooked them. Love them through health crises, failures, job changes, travels, crazy hairstyles, breakups, weddings, funerals, long distance calls, new dogs, new houses, shows and sporting events, win or lose, big parts and small, good things and sad things. ***Love your family.*** Show them your unique and unrepeatable self so they can learn from you and take you inside their hearts and become an amalgamation of the very best parts of you. ***Love your family.*** Love them imperfectly, because that’s your way. Love them unwaveringly and without expecting anything in return. Love them with food, love them with money, love them with praise, love them with your presence at every event, love them by telling them not to spend money on you, love them by telling them to be different than how they are, love them by telling them how much others love them. ***Love your family.*** And always, **always**, when one of your family says, “I love you,” you respond with “I love you more.” Because you do. And you always will.

I invite you now to think about my list of How to be Like Yiayia, and pick a way (any way) that you can be like her. When you do that, you’ll become part of our family—you’ll forever be part of the family that was shaped and crafted by her uniquely loving self for the past 89 years. And when you do that, you’ll give Alexis and me the greatest gift of all—the gift of knowing that in the minds, hearts, and actions of every person here, our Yiayia is still very much alive, still loving us more than we could ever hope to love her. But there’s a bonus… if you do this, if you pick a way to be like Yiayia and add it into your life, you’ll also have given her the greatest gift of all—magnifying her love for her family to such an extent that no matter how you measure it, she will always love us more.