THE BROOKS FAMILY has a holiday tradition that has lasted for nearly 20 years. Every December we all meet up at Uncle Jim's house for our annual holiday dinner. All the gals bring their best dishes. And all the guys, well, we bring our most comfortable pants.

This year, we spent dinner and dessert catching up. By that point, the kids were squirming in their seats, whining to be excused from the table. There's nothing quite like "grown up talk" to drive a kid nuts.

Luckily, my brother-in-law, Jim, has a backyard most kids would dream of. A couple of years ago he'd built a private playground for his three kids, complete with a clubhouse, swing set and slide. By the time they were excused from the table they were sprinting outside, despite the fact that it was snowing.

Once the kids had scampered off, the typical gender divide happened. For the guys, it was off to the den to watch the ball games. For the ladies, it was over to the den for conversation.

Around the third quarter, we grabbed our dishes and our kids, and said our goodbyes. We all piled back into the minivan and hunkered down for the hour-long drive back home.

That particular freeway on that particular night was a lot like a stock car race. There were hundreds of cars and trucks, all filled with families, and all desperate to get back home and get to bed.

Sometime around ten, I noticed a SUV that looked like it was driving a bit erratically. Before I

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