Ancient festivals of light were mainly religious rituals carried out with primitive lanterns that were meticulously constructed using ultra-thin rice paper that had been dyed with the pigments from fruits and vegetables.

In Thailand, khoom loy are part of the fabric of the culture. Wish lanterns are also widely used during Chinese ceremonies, especially at the end of annual Chinese New Year celebrations.

The symbolism varies widely.

In ancient times, it was considered good luck to release a Thai lantern with the belief that misfortune would fly away with it.

The lanterns also symbolized knowledge, their light guiding the releaser on the right path to follow in life.

In modern day Thailand, the lanterns are released with a prayer or a wish that one's bad luck, sins or worries will float far away with the flight of the light.

I doubt any of my son's classmates soaked in that bit of history I shared the night before they graduated.

It really didn't matter, though.

Each of them stood on the shore of the lake with a three-foot lantern made of paper more fragile

than tissue, strangely like teetering at the edge of high school with a vulnerable future in hand.

After the fuel cells were lit and we waited for the lanterns to fill with warm air, there was a bit of an uneasy feeling. A gentle breeze rustled the paper back and forth, increasing the risk of disaster.

But as the glow intensified, the lanterns filled and lifted the kids' arms high overhead.

Three ... Two ... One ...

All at once, the kids released the delicate paper globes into the sky. They drifted down the lake with such grace that we couldn't help but ooh and ahh as they sailed southward, carrying a multitude of wishes, prayers and hopes with them.

Some kids admitted that as difficult as it was to hold onto the lanterns as they grew, it also wasn't easy letting go.

Yeah, I know.

But watching them take flight was breath-taking.

Find your wings, kids.