

First Footers for the New Year

By Dennis Payton Knight

Is your larder stocked? Is your wallet full? Are your bills paid? Those rules about welcoming in the New Year are all new to me. I learned about them on Snopes.com, the folks who usually dispel myths and political nonsense, so of course this information must all be true.

I learned that at midnight on New Year's Eve, one should open all the doors to let the old year escape unimpeded, because it must be out of there before the New Year can come in, and, when it does, you should also make all the noise possible. Horns and noisemakers are not just for welcoming the New Year, they are for scaring away evil spirits. And be extra loud because you left the doors open, you dummy.

The first person to enter your home after the stroke of midnight will influence the whole year ahead. The "First Footer" should be dark haired, good looking and come bearing gifts, maybe coins, bread, or salt. Blonde and redheaded first footers are unlucky, and female first footers, according to Snopes, "should be shooed away before they bring disaster down on the household. Aim a gun at them if you have to." Even otherwise qualified males must not be flat footed or cross eyed, and their eyebrows must not meet in the middle.

After it strikes midnight, no one should leave the premises until the first footer arrives, because the first step across the threshold must be headed in, not out. Upon arrival, the first footer should knock properly, be let in ceremoniously, greet those present, drop off his tokens of good luck, make his way through, and leave by a different door.

Snopes says on the first day of the year absolutely nothing should leave your house, not even garbage. If you have food to take when calling on someone, sneak it out to the car the day before.

Be sure to check the weather when you awaken on New Year's. If the wind blows from the south, there will be a year of fine weather and prosperous times. If from the north, it will be a year of bad weather. Wind blowing from the east brings famine and calamities. Strangest of all, if the wind blows from the west, the year will witness plentiful supplies of milk and fish but will also see the death of a very important person. If there's no wind at all, a joyful and prosperous year may be expected.

It is unlucky to eat chicken or turkey the first day, or you'll be scratching in the dirt all year for your dinner. Southerners eat black eyed peas to attract good luck and financial fortune, Japanese eat rice cakes, and Mexicans pop a grape for each stroke of midnight.

So I've stocked my larder with all the approved things. I have noisemakers, Guy Lombardo is standing by on Pandora, and I'll be taking out no garbage. Happy New Year.