

Hogmanay

By Joan Black

No, no, NO! It is NOT New Year's Eve – it is Old Years NIGHT! To my grandfather – who was born a Glaswegian (i.e. in Glasgow, Scotland) HOGMANAY superseded Christmas. Our Seth of the Clan McDonald, the Hewisons, gathered in force on Old Year's Day for one HUGE celebration of Hogmanay. The relatives started arriving at Granddad's big old Victorian house on the outskirts of London around 10 p.m. on December 31st. By 11:30 all the hustle and bustle and greetings were over and we got down to the serious business. Any children already tucked into beds for the night, were brought downstairs. The men in the family then lined up in the hallway according to age with fathers carrying male babies. Grandfather brought up the rear. As the melodic chimes of Big Ben wafted across the River Thames into our neighborhood, the eldest daughter ceremoniously flung open the front door and all the men then trooped out with Grandfather being the last one to leave the house. At the first BONG! of the midnight hour Grandfather led the procession back into the house – he being the first one to cross the threshold in the New Year. This is called The First Footing.

With everyone back inside we formed a circle, arms crossed to grasp the next hand and then we sang a rousing chorus or two of Auld Lang Syne while pumping our hands up and down. Then the women came around with trays of special glasses, used ONLY at Old Year's. Each contained a dram of Scotch Whiskey. Everyone, and I do mean EVERYONE, was REQUIRED to down that whiskey! Children under 15 were given a silver thimble full and babies had the tip of their tongue touched by a finger dipped in Scotch. Everyone kissed everyone else and wished them Happy New year.

Then off to the dining room where the ladies had set a magnificent table groaning with good food. The Piece de Resistance was the entry of the Haggis. The Haggis, soaked in Scotch whiskey and set ablaze, carried in on a huge salver traditionally preceded by a piper playing Scotland The Brave. We did not have a piper in the family so several children tooting kazoos managed a pretty darn good imitation of the bagpipes. Haggis is served with Neeps and Tatties (turnips and potatoes) and, of course, a "dram."

Partying continued till the wee small hours, with Scottish reels and flings as well as traditional waltzes and foxtrots. All these many years later, I recall those Auld Acquaintances and the good Auld Times.