

Words that Move

By Sheila Johnson

When the Scottish poet Robert Burns penned the words to *Auld Lang Syne* and set them to song, I don't imagine he knew the distance this farewell bidding would travel. It has moved throughout Scotland from local bars to fanciful, gala parties; it has summoned tears to the eyes of young collegiates serving as their graduation benediction; *Auld Lang Syne* has conveyed a sense of well-being for those grieving at funerals and has often been employed as a graveside litany; the Boy Scouts carol its words internationally to joyfully close out their jamborees. Even though its author and words are Scottish, for most North Americans, *Auld Lang Syne* has become a traditional hymn to be sung at the beginning of every New Year; and it beckons most of humanity to preserve the dignity of old times and to cherish long-standing friendships.

I truly believe that most people in the world experience a few *Auld Lang Syne* moments. There are times when fate reminds us who stood in the gap when we found ourselves alone at certain crossroads in life. Only we can answer our own question of "Who filled in for Mother or Father when they were not present and we simply needed a safe place to just be—physically or emotionally?" We cannot and must not forget the minutes, hours, days, nights, weeks, months, or even years that we were granted time on the couch or in an extra bedroom belonging to a kind heart because we needed respite from a world that we were unable to navigate at the time. We cannot or must not forget the wisdom of the sages, mentors, pastors, school counselors, elderly, and Spirit who dug us out of our holes of self-pity, depression, denial, low self-esteem, or financial trauma. They are to be honored in words and in song. *Auld Lang Syne*.

Let us not forget the people in our lives who are and have been there for the long haul. There are friends whose lives reflect or have reflected the sacred vow of 'Until death do us part.' No hour is too late or too early to make or receive a phone call of distress or joy. No journey is too long or too wide to travel with a true friend. No fault is too grave to be forgiven. Theologians call it *koinonia*—a Greek word meaning communion, fellowship, sharing in common, being united in purpose, and accepting and serving one another in love. Friends are to be honored in words and in song. *Auld Lang Syne*.

It is the old times and the long-standing friendships that continue to weave a tapestry of what I believe Robert Burns signified when he carved out the words from his heart and placed them in ours so that we would never forget – *Auld Lang Syne. Auld Lang Syne. Auld Lang Syne.*