



New Year's Eve: Humbug!

By Arthur Shapiro

I am not fond of New Year's Eve, and here's why.

I grew up in NYC, and as a teenager, I couldn't wait to go to Times Square to watch the ball drop. It was on 42nd Street, but the closest I could get with my date was 50th Street. It didn't work out; she kept complaining. We ended up at a lame party somewhere. She went home with someone else. I was relieved and happy.

Fast forward to NYE with my wife. Lots of parties and dinners and no Times Square. We decided one year to go to the Grace Bay Club in Turks and Caicos. Wonderful place, and the allure was black-tie dinner on the beach—table for two. We signed up, brought my Tux, Marlene got a beautiful cocktail dress, and off we went. So romantic, sitting on a moonlit beach, watching and listening to the surf while we ate and awaited the new year. And then it rained. We're talking torrent of rain, as in, "if you don't get off the beach, you will be drenched." So, our NYE dinner was back in our room in wet clothes.

Okay, enough of that. The subsequent celebrations were with friends back in the city. You needed a catcher's mitt as they threw the food at you in cool but noisy, crowded places. Not to mention the watered-down drinks.

What followed was my ill-advised venture into cooking dinner for the two of us... "Hey, hon, I never cook, so how about I make a special dinner for us on NYE?" It turned out okay, mainly if you ignored how I messed up the kitchen. It took until the end of the month to get things back in shape.

At about that time, we traveled the world with my job and saw beautiful places and great experiences. So, we decided to go to Madrid, Spain, for NYE. The Grand Westin Hotel. The Prada Museum. Great city.

The unique attraction was dinner at the hotel, again black tie and a fabulous dinner, and a superb orchestra. It started at ten, and the meal was excellent. Suddenly, as the hour approached midnight, we received a martini glass filled with 12 grapes. The "twelve grapes" tradition comes from Spain, where it is called *las doce uvas de la suerte* ("The Twelve Lucky Grapes"). People eat one green grape for every twelve months to ensure good luck for the following year.

Twelve grapes one minute before midnight. Have you ever eaten grapes so fast that you worried about choking? How do you say the Heimlich maneuver in Spanish? But it was fun. We danced and had a great time until about four am when we finally went to bed.

We woke up around noon and went to the city looking for breakfast/lunch. As we approached the square near the hotel around 1 o'clock, we were shocked to see people coming home from NYE parties. We left too early. No question that people in Spain know how to party.

Since these experiences, we have decided that NYE is just another night. I won't cook, and we won't go anywhere.

Except if invited to a DWRM party. Happy New Year to all!