

Op-Art

VALERIE PETERSON and EMMANUEL PIERRE

# A Drop of Cream, a Good Scream, a New Year

The beginning of a new year has been celebrated in some manner for more than five millennia. While traditions differ across cultures and many regional variations have evolved, most rituals that accompany the holiday are intended to symbolically purge the old year or to ensure good times in the new one.



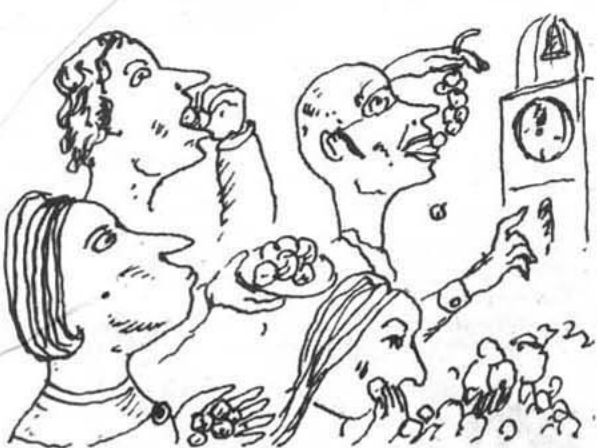
In Britain and Ireland, the first person to cross the threshold on New Year's Day is considered to be a harbinger of the household's luck for the year. Tradition holds that the "first foot" should belong to a tall, healthy, strapping dark-haired man, carrying symbols of abundance for the home: coal for the fire, bread for the table and whiskey for the head of the household.



In many cultures, fireworks are a symbol of light in the new year. While they are restricted the rest of the year in Iceland, on New Year's Eve anyone and everyone can light the explosives.



Colombians and other South Americans who would like to travel in the coming 12 months walk around their house with a suitcase.



A tradition that began in Spain has been adopted in many Spanish-speaking countries: people eat one grape for every stroke of the clock at midnight symbolizing



On New Year's Day in parts of Switzerland, people allow a drop of cream to hit the floor, to ensure overflowing abundance in the coming year.



At midnight, the Danes make a wish as they jump off chairs — literally leaping into the new year.



Many Filipinos wear new clothes with deep pockets. They fill their pockets with coins and fresh bills on New Year's Eve, and at midnight, they shake them noisily to attract prosperity in the coming year.



In Ashikaga, Japan, people participate in the Akutare Matsuri, or the Festival of Abusive Language. They climb a hill to the 1,200-year-old Saishoji temple while screaming curses and railing at employers, teachers, politicians. After that catharsis, they welcome the new year with ceremonies in the temple to allow happiness to flow in the coming months.



Buying and wearing new clothes, especially in red or yellow, is a common ritual. In Venezuela, people give each other yellow underwear to wear into the new year for good luck.

Valerie Peterson is the author of "Peterson's Holiday Helper: Festive Pick-Me-Ups, Calm-Me-Downs and Handy Hints to Keep You in Good Spirits." Emmanuel Pierre is an illustrator.