

divine in



by Sarah Hill

...The End. Yeah, that's my lame attempt to try and give the end a little bit more recognition. So although you may not read the end of this article, in a way you really already have. Gotcha! April Fool! No, wait; wrong holiday. I'm not paying homage to April Fool's Day. It just worked out that I got to kill two birds with one stone. I'm talking about the end. I'm giving a shout-out to all of you with last names in the w, x, y, and z part of the alphabet. Cheers to those who were picked last in dodgeball and who hang out at the end of Conga lines. You guys rock. Without you there would be no beginning.

New Year, I really feel, is a holiday in your honor.

The end is great. It's when we all get to wipe the sweat off our foreheads, let out a, "whew!" and sail on. I can think of many instances when it's great like that: The end of an awkward date, a bad kiss, a conversation with that stranger who asks too many questions, a conversation with your mom who also asks too many questions, a doctor visit, a bad relationship, a run-in with the ex, finals week, an airplane ride, an elevator ride with you and one other person, a semester... there's so many examples. The end provides a reason to celebrate. It not only means something is finished, but, more importantly, it means something is about to begin.

I love New Year. It's one of the few scheduled events in my life that I don't have anxiety about. No matter what is going on in the world, New Year will still happen. It doesn't

matter what weekday it falls on. It doesn't matter how many days are in the month. It's one of the few consistencies we have in this culture of ours. It's not accompanied by some cookie-eating, tooth-stealing, or carrot-chomping character. There are no creepy costumes or oddball guys sending you Wal-Greens chocolates. There are never any awkward religious conflicts. Nobody has to put together three different holidays into one word to make it politically correct (Happy Chrismakwanzikah Everybody!). You don't have to be born in this country or have a green card to celebrate. Nobody lies to

you for the first eight years of your life about its existence.

In fact, it's the most honest of holidays, providing us a moment to face the reality of what the past year has been. It gives us an opportunity to evaluate who we were, what we did, what happened, what was good, what was bad, why, and how you can change it. It's a dependable holiday. It's the one day of the year where we are reminded that time, thank God, does not stand still, and that Mark Twain was right when he said, "The funny thing about life is... it goes on."

Just like the sun comes back up every new day, New Year is a glowing reminder of hope, renewal, and reflection. It gives us an opportunity to better or change something. It's Obama in holiday form.

Yeah, alright, it's all cheesy-sounding. But even the coolest and coldest-hearted of you can't convince me that you don't take some confidence in a new year. All you macho sport fans, I've heard many mumbles after the loss of that last championship game: "Oh well, maybe next year." Even if you are too drunk on New Year's Eve and too hung-over on the first to think about it, eventually the haze clears and you're stuck with yourself to reflect and recharge. All you other harsh critics, don't lie to yourselves. Somewhere down

EAT YOUR LUCK: EATING FOR THE NEW YEAR

- 12 grapes
- Anything circle-shaped... AKA donuts
- Black-eyed peas
- Cabbage
- Rice (or rice pudding)
- Lasagna

- Pig (or candy shaped like a pig... which, oddly enough, I think the grocery store in Walker Tower has)
- Lentil
- Peppermint ice cream
- Pickled Herring (a fish, kind of like a sardine)

deep you leave some room for the hope that, whatever it is, it will be better next year. Everyone deserves hope. And for those of us who can't afford a shrink to remind us, every year there's January first to do just that.

Alright, so the holiday is great. It's better than Discovery Zone to a five year old. You get it. But the deal is... how did this happen? Nobody died. No one was born. No one lost a tooth or founded a country. What's the commotion about? Luckily for you, I do my research.

Celebrating New Year is the oldest of holidays. It all started with the Babylonians about 4,000 years ago. That's a seriously long time ago. I guess they played games like pin the tail on the dino... to each their own.

Anyway, the Babylonians celebrated the New Year on what is now March 23. It was the beginning of spring and the time when new crops were planted. I'm thinking probably corn... lots and lots of corn. The celebration lasted eleven days. I'm sad that tradition didn't carry on.

Eventually Romans carried on the idea of celebrating the New Year. They originally celebrated on March 25. However, since their calendar was continually being messed with by emperors on power trips, the calendar lost its synchronization with the sun. This is important, because the entire idea of their calendar was based on the location of the sun. The types of calendars that are based off the sun are either called Gregorian or Julian calendars. That little fact might help you win a million dollars one day.

To clean up the mess, or Swiffer it away, in 153 BC, the Roman Senate declared January first to be the New Year. However, the calendar continued to be tampered with until Julius Caesar established the Julian calendar. This once again made January first the New Year.

It's interesting to note that in the middle ages, Christians changed the date of New Year's to December 25th (the birth of Christ). Typical middle-aged Christians, they messed with everything! But eventually they came back around when Pope Gregory XIII changed it back to January first. The way I see it is all of these poor people just wanted to celebrate something special, and everyone just had to keep changing the dates on them! Oh well, they lived... for a while.

So those are the facts about New Year. But along with everything Roman, there's also a fictional myth surrounding the holiday that explains some of the traditions we have today.

The tale starts with a mythical king of early Rome named Janus (no, not Jesus, Janus). Janus had two faces, like some girls I might know. He had one in the back of his head and one on the front. This gave him the ability to look back on past events and forward to future ones. Janus became the symbol for resolutions and forgiveness. Somewhere along the line a tradition was started of giving gifts in honor of him and what he stood for. It became custom for Romans to give one another branches from sacred trees for good fortune.

Eventually the branch thing spawned off into other ways of securing good luck for the New Year. Just like everything else, each culture around the world celebrates with its own custom. Even cultures that have a different calendar than we do (for example, the Chinese calendar is focused on the phases of the moon) celebrate New Year. The date may be different than ours, but a celebration is still had!

"Uhm... sorry to interrupt, this is your captain speaking. Buckle up. I'm going to briefly take you around the world."

In Austria, the pig is the symbol for good luck for the upcoming year. So pig is served on a table that's decorated with tiny, edible candy pigs. They also eat green peppermint ice cream that's shaped like a four-leaf clover.

In Brazil, the lentil is believed to symbolize wealth. On the first day of the New Year, they eat lentil soup. Also in Rio de Janeiro, a boat loaded with flowers, candles, and jewelry is pushed out to sea. Sea ya!

In Denmark, it is good luck to open your door and find a large pile of broken dishes. People save their dishes all year and then throw them at their friends' front doors on New Year's Eve. This one is odd. Why can't they just have a Tupperware party?

In England they place their fortunes in the hands of their first guest. For good luck, it should be a male with an armful of gifts (coal, bread, alcohol). Also the guest should enter through the front door and leave through the back. My question is, what happens to the guy who sacrifices having a party at his house in order to be the first guest at his friend's? Is he doomed all year just because he lives with his parents and can't have parties?

In Germany, people used to drop molten lead into chilled water. They then

tried to tell the future from the shape it took. A heart or a ring meant a wedding was to come. A ship meant a great journey was expected. A pig meant there would be plenty of food for the New Year.

At the first stroke of midnight in Wales, the back door is opened and shut. It releases the old year and then locks out all of the bad luck. Then at the twelfth stroke of the second hand, the front door is opened to welcome the New Year. It's a great tradition, especially if you're a robber.

In Sicily, they must eat lasagna. Period.

RESOLUTIONS

Goalsguy.com surveyed 300,000 people and found these ten things to be the most popular New Year's Resolutions.

- Lose weight and get in better shape
- Stick to budget
- Reduce debt
- Enjoy more time with family and friends
- Find soulmate (good luck)
- Quit smoking
- Find a better job
- Learn something new
- Volunteer and help others
- Get organized

Some other interesting resolutions I found ...

- Get more action (This guy needs to be hit in the face)
- Go to the duck pond (Like that's hard?)
- Stop losing things (So then did you lose things on purpose?)
- Become a millionaire/ actor/ screenwriter/ charity worker (Maybe this person should pick one of his/her personalities first)
- Buy a horse (uhm... cough... and a stable?)
- Be enlightened (Ying. Yang. Aha!)
- Learn Salsa
- Learn Japanese
- Be early for work
- Resign

In Spain, when the clock strikes twelve they eat twelve grapes—one for good luck for each month to come. They also do this in Portugal.

The festival last three days in Rome. People exchange gifts that are thought to bring good luck. Sweets or honey are given for sweetness or peace in the New Year. Gold, silver, or money is given to ensure prosperity in the future. And, for the quirky ones, lamps can also be given to guarantee a year filled with light.

In Norway they make rice pudding. Then they hide a whole almond at the bottom of the bowl. Whoever gets the almond is guaranteed wealth.

And in the United States, if you didn't know, we're supposed to kiss at midnight. The tradition is believed to have derived from the old tradition of having masked balls on New Year's Eve. The mask symbolizes evil spirits from the old year, and the kiss is purification into the New Year. For those of us who are single and don't want to risk getting herpes, you can do what I do and just eat some black-eyed peas. If you don't like them, just listen to a song by the band. I think that'll count.

So like I said in the beginning, which really is, "the end" of this story, the end of a year is great. Out with the old and in with the new. As T. S. Eliot said, "To make an end is to make a beginning." If you're not into endings, probably those of you with A at the beginning of your last name, I'm sorry I've focused so much on the ending of things. But it really doesn't matter. After a while it all comes full circle. The beginning is really...