



FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

“Amateur Night”

By: Ron Brounes

Issue 95

January 2012

To put it mildly, I have never been a big fan of New Year's Eve. As a child, the night meant staying home with a babysitter (and my “annoying” older sister) as my parents painted the town red (well, maybe pink), downed a shooter or two (or a few decafs), and pulled an almost “all-nighter” with their party animal friends (often playing scrabble and mah jongg). They typically would stumble in about 11:00 pm and we could watch (a much younger) Dick Clark count down to the new year together. As a teen, the night meant a trip to the Astrodome with pimple-faced friends (present company included) to catch the real “Granddaddy of Them All,” the Bluebonnet Bowl, that usually featured two teams no one cared about (but, at least, I had something to do).

As a young adult, New Year's Eve became Amateur Hour as those of us who made it a habit of closing down bars and buying underwear models a few drinks on a routine Saturday night (that's how I like to remember my 20s) suddenly found our favorite watering holes overcrowded with “novices” who could barely hold their liquor and surely didn't know the proper technique to chug a tequila shot. (I have a scar on my chin to prove I was an “expert” chugger in my day.) New Year's Eve often translated into lame hotel ballroom extravaganzas, where, for a ridiculous set fee, we were entitled to a few drink tickets (and a cash bar), a loud band that ruined any chance for stimulating conversation, and a table full of cold finger food that most people avoided. (Actually, the meatballs and mini hot dogs almost made these affairs worthwhile.)

AGING NOT SO GRACEFULLY

In later years as the clock inevitably took me into my unmarried 30s (and God forbid, my 40s), New Year's Eve simply brought tremendous pressures to have some plans (really, any plans would do). I didn't care so much that I enjoyed myself during the evening, but I really needed to be able to answer the dreaded “what did you do for New Years?” questions that lasted for the initial few weeks of the new year. My friends started marrying off and my playing “third wheel” on this night was entirely unacceptable. Occasionally, some couples friends would host a bash at their home and I could set up shop in front of the TV watching whatever lame bowl game (in the post-Bluebonnet era) was on TV with the other socially inept (no offense). But, at least, I had a few friends' wives to peck on the cheek when the clock struck 12:05 a.m. (and they were done making out with my buds). Sure I had a few “friends by default” (other middle aged non-marrieds) with whom I could hit the annual Jewish singles party, but once my nieces (20-plus years my junior) and their friends started attending these bashes, I knew I had to move on.

I am not too embarrassed to admit that I spent a few New Year's Eves solo, camped on the couch with my best friend at my side (unless my dog Flo had made other plans), devouring a Domino's pizza, while watching a Woody Allen marathon on the BetaMax. (I suppose counting Woody as among my favorites helps explain a bit about my neuroses and makes spending New Years alone a tad more justifiable.) The evening would inevitably end with my falling asleep on the couch before midnight (and even before learning whether Alvy is able to win back Annie...certainly, I had to be cooler than that guy?). Flo generally departed to her room once the pizza was gone.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME

All in all, New Year's Eve would be more bearable...I could deal with the immense pressures of it one night a year...I could handle the badgering questions leading up to the Big Night and those that came in the days to follow...except for one small detail...it also happens to be my birthday. (But, of course, all my close personal Facebook friends already know that.) I not only had to

address the constant inquiries about New Years, but inevitably, they would be followed up with the “you better have great plans, since it’s your birthday.” As if turning 30, 35, 40 or welcoming the millennium were not bad enough. As if I enjoyed celebrating another year of social failures; remembering bad blind dates (even those I considered good, but apparently was mistaken); scribing new year’s resolutions that eventually were broken (usually within the first week).

How many years did I consider buying theater tickets to force myself to go out more? (Do underwear models like Broadway shows?) How many times did I swear Tony Robbins could provide me a more positive attitude? (Stuart Smalley seemed more my speed...“*I’m good enough; I’m smart enough and doggone it, people like me.*”) How often did I consider joining a dating service if only I had a decent profile picture to submit? The night would end, the week of annoying questions would pass, and ultimately I would blow off the theater, the Tony Robbins’ tapes, and the JDate questionnaire (for another year).

THE LATER YEARS

Of course, the mood of the night changed several years back after I met (actually re-met) my would-be wife and I have rather enjoyed the thrill of the pressure-packed evening, the countdown, and even my birthday ever since (except for the year that she chose to break up with me shortly after the clock struck midnight, only to come to her senses a few days later). In the early romantic days, we would dine at our favorite trendy restaurant (not one with an overpriced pre-set menu...another downer of the “holiday”), sit at a back table where we could hold hands and play footsy through the various courses, share a bottle of vino, and gush about how fortunate we were to find each other at this stage in our lives (isn’t that right, Honey?). We would then hit a hip party or two where we would mingle with friends, new and old, most of whom watched with jealousy as we giggled incessantly, finished each other’s sentences, and fed each other little pastries, cheese squares, and fruits from the dessert table. We would then find a hidden corner in the back of the room to ring in the new year with a passionate moment as we said goodbye to the prior year (and my birthday) and shared hopes and dreams for our future days together.

Once the kiddos arrived, the romance and passion were toned down (at least, publically...right, Honey?) as we celebrate the season as a family. For the past few years, we gather with close friends who have similarly aged kids and spend the night discussing nursery school curriculums (each of our kids is gifted), coed little leagues, potty training, and childhood allergies (no peanut butter served at these affairs). We commiserate about New Year’s Eves past and share horror stories about prior bad dates, expensive party packages at trendy hotels/restaurants/bars, and pressures to have great plans each year (the solo Woody Allen marathon usually takes top honors). We down a beer (or one-and-a-half) and brew a pot of coffee in anticipation of the late night, while the kids run around like little monsters and jump on the beds (I never object when we are partying at someone else’s house). We settle them down with threats of no dessert, while eyeing the cupcakes/cookies/banana pudding that we plan to take home as leftovers (but only because our kids love them so much). We watch Ryan Seacrest do a rather poor Dick Clark impression as the clock pushes beyond 10:00 pm and debate whether we could make it home in time to watch the ball drop in New York (midnight in Houston for the kids is not even an option).

The evening is nothing fancy; some people may even snub their noses when we recount our plans in the days that follow. No one wakes up with a hangover, forgets where they parked their car, or kicks themselves for getting suckered into the expensive pre-set meal. We simply talk, laugh, remember the year that passed, share hopes and dreams for the one ahead. The kids crash in the car and we try to carry them upstairs without waking them. We climb into bed in anticipation of the countdown to the New Year. We wake up January 1st and wish each other a Happy New Year for the first time because one (or both) of us fell asleep before midnight. All in all, not a bad way to spent a night (and a birthday). I must admit, I’m now a big fan of New Year’s Eve.

***FOR WHAT IT’S WORTH** is a publication of Brounes & Associates focusing on not much of anything other than personal anecdotes, musings, and mindless thoughts about life. Please call Ron at 713-962-9986 (ron@ronbrounes.com) for questions and/or comments, and check out www.ronbrounes.com for earlier issues and for financially-oriented pieces. BTW, my wife is also a fan of Woody Allen movies...but just the ones that he is not in. Next New Year’s Eve, perhaps? Or what about scrabble and mah jongg?*