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**We sing about lost love on December 31st**

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—On most matters, I'm a "rank sentimentalist" in the words of Captain Renault, who, himself, joins the afflicted when he's unexpectedly delayed in the Casablanca airport by a barfly named Rick who sneaks past airport security with a loaded pistol, which he uses to get the love of his life onto a plane with another guy, namely her husband (who never even had Paris with her), whereupon he and Rick stroll through

I'm a pushover for Hollywood tear-jerkers, even the dopey ones. It doesn't take much to buzz my cold Yankee heartstrings.

However, I do not cry over the deaths of talking animals in full-length cartoons, like somebody else I know pretty well.

Nor do I mourn the past year when December 31st rears its icy head.

Still, I've always thought that "Auld Lang Syne" brought out my best mushy nostalgia, even though I never understood the lyrics that did the trick.

"Auld Lang Syne" in Scots means "old long since." How choked up can anyone get over "old long since"?

For that reason, the champagne lobby has spent millions to convince Americans that "Auld Lang Syne" means something like "for [the sake of] days gone by" and can only be sung to a beat provided by popping corks.

Robert Burns, Scotland's left-wing farmer-poet, set his lyrics to a traditional melody that he often heard while under a table at his "favourite howff," a Dumfries saloon called the Globe Inn. Unlike Rick's Café Américain, the Globe had no crooked gambling in the back room, letters of transit in a piano or Nazi refugees playing Nazis.

Burns asks: "Should old acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind?" Of course not, he says. Who, then, is this old acquaintance he wants to recall in his bleary haze?

It's a girl with whom he has "...run about the slopes, and picked the daisies fine."

Well, that narrows his field a bit, down into the dozens, maybe.

(It actually eliminates my field, since I can't recall picking daisies of any

quality on any slope. Now if we're talking metaphorically....)

Burns, it seems, was known for harvesting the flora on numerous slopes, several of which proved to be slippery enough to end him up in paternity suits. I'll leave it at that.

Anyway, after denuding half of hilly Scotland of its flowers, Burns succumbs to the despondency he called his "blue devilism" when things didn't work out.

We two have run about the slopes,  
and picked the daisies fine;  
But we've wandered many a weary foot,  
since auld lang syne.

A cup of kindness, then, to whomever we ran about the slopes with in days gone by and later wandered from for reasons better left alone.

It turns out that there was more to Burns's melancholy than a few plucked flowers and some foot pain. The girl he remembers was also the one with whom he had "...paddled in the stream, from morning sun till dine'."

(I'm assuming that they were paddling a boat in the stream, not each other.)

Now I confess that several auld companions of mine found our paddling interrupted with an unscheduled immersion that was unfairly attributed to my ineptitude rather than the typhoon-like conditions that arose unexpectedly from an otherwise stagnant pond on a sunny day.

So, another cup of kindness to those I have dunked, including my wife, Melissa, who now refuses to board any boat I am captaining, except those in dry dock. Once dunked, forever shy.

Burns, too, seems to have had to deal with a drenched female who had not brought a change of clothes.

We two have paddled in the stream,  
from morning sun till dine';  
But seas between us broad have roared  
since auld lang syne.

Apparently, there were other issues in this relationship, though I wouldn't dismiss his compulsive paddling as a factor in the broad and roaring sea that she put between them.

Those with whom I have paddled unsuccessfully have generally stayed in the

continental United States, albeit in a semi-habitable place like Wyoming or an occasionally unreachable place like New York City.

Things never worked out well for Burns with the lassies.

Also with his teeth. He died at 37 after getting one pulled.

But before having his wisdom extracted, Robert Burns gave us a toast to old times and old friends for New Year's Eve.

To those, then, from whom we've wandered many a weary foot, and to those with seas between us broad and roaring, here's a cup of kindness to days of beautiful friendships amid the daisies and the paddles.

Auld Lang Syne.

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