



PROJECT MUSE®

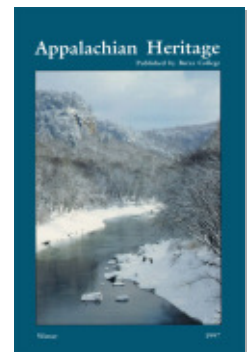
Grandma's New Year's Traditions

Gene Bailey

Appalachian Heritage, Volume 25, Number 1, Winter 1997, pp. 62-63
(Article)

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/aph.1997.0026>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/435771/summary>

Grandma's New Year's Traditions

Gene Bailey

I have many memories of growing up on a small mountain farm in southern West Virginia in the 1930s. I and my brother lived on that farm with our mother and father and grandmother and grandfather, three generations together in one house.

Many of my memories center in my grandmother, who was the central figure in the household; she set the work schedule and made the assignments in and around the house. She also handed down the traditions associated with most holidays and seasons of the year by which we lived, and she had some unusual traditions. But perhaps the most unusual ones she had, and which everyone in the household had to observe, were required of us on New Year's Day.

Now Grandma was a Christian; of that we had no doubt. But she was also superstitious. She kept traditions that had been passed down through her family from mother to daughter for generations and many of these she required of us on New Year's Day. If you had asked Grandma if she really believed in these superstitions she probably would have told you, "No, but why take any chances?" So we observed Grandma's traditions.

Her first requirement for New Year's Day was that we had to get up earlier than normal because rising early would ensure that we would all get an early start for the rest of the year.

And all three meals that day had to be eaten together, as a family, around the table. On other days, family members might run in for a snack without having to sit down as a group but that was not allowed on New Year's Day; Grandma said that taking meals together would help us all to be together throughout the year.

After we were up and had breakfast together, Grandma always made sure that the first person to enter the house from outside was a male, because a man entering first brought good luck throughout the year. This rule was so firm that any woman approaching the house would be turned away until a man entered.

Gene Bailey writes: "I am a sixty-four-year-old father of four and grandfather of eleven. I have taught school and held several local and state political offices. I live on a small mountain farm with my wife, Betty, and we produce Christmas trees." They live at Camp Creek, West Virginia.

And perhaps Grandma's strangest New Year's Day tradition was that nothing, absolutely nothing, could be carried out of the house that entire day. The ashes could not be emptied from the stoves; the table scraps could not be fed to the hogs or chickens; and worst of all, even the filled bedchambers could not be carried out to the toilet and emptied. Grandma made sure that there were sufficient table scraps for the cats carried out and stored somewhere the previous day; and she had us carry out water for the animals and chickens that had to be watered the previous day as well.

On the other hand, anyone who entered the house on the first day of the year, regardless of the purpose of the entry, had to bring something into the house with them. It could be a jar of food or a stick of wood. If they had nothing else, they could leave a penny, but there had to be something tangible carried into the house and left. To be sure that the tradition was carefully followed, Grandma always had us leave a small stack of wood by each door the previous day so that no one would have an excuse not to bring an item into the house on New Year's Day.

The reason, Grandma always explained, for not carrying anything out of the house but always carrying something in was to ensure prosperity for the coming year. If the practice was carefully followed, Grandma said, the family would be assured that more would be coming in than going out for the entire year.

New Year's Day was a difficult day for Grandma; she had to constantly watch all of us to prevent us from breaking any of the traditions and she had to constantly watch the entrances to make sure that visitors from outside the family observed her practices. She was a very tired woman when bedtime on New Year's Day finally arrived.

Did Grandma really believe in these New Year's Day practices she urged us to observe? Probably in her mind she knew that none of them really influenced the events of the coming year but, then again, why break the traditions that have been handed down for generations and take chances on possible calamities in the New Year. I believe I'll continue to observe Grandma's traditions.