

Generations

Remembering one New Year's Eve

When I think about New Year's Eve, it's a melancholy time for me.

I remember the times when my family would celebrate when I was a kid, the parties with uncles and aunts, my grandfather puffing on a cigar and dealing out the cards while my grandmother worked in the kitchen.

Then there was the clubs I went to later on in life, the discos, Embassy parties while overseas, and how many times I watched the ball drop in Times Square and celebrated with friends and family dear to me.

But it's not difficult to recall a New Year's Eve incident that hasn't dimmed with time. I was 9 years old and my brother, George, was 7. We had moved from a small duplex in Bayside, New York, to a new home on Long Island. It was super to have my own bedroom now, but often scary in a big, split-level home that was settling and producing noises I'd never heard before.

Our parents were invited to the next door neighbor's New Year's Eve party and they were thrilled to

be able to celebrate with new friends. My Mom told



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me that she or my Dad would be making rounds to check on us every hour and that it was my job to look after my brother

in between checkups.

"Sure, Mom," I said as she kissed my forehead. "Have a nice time."

The moment I heard the front door close, I glanced at the clock, saw that it was nine and figured she or Dad would be back around 10.

"George? You awake?" I asked.

Our beds were against the same wall and we could hear each other.

"Yeah," he said, but I could also hear him try to stifle a yawn.

"We need a system ... just in case you get afraid," I said.

"Okay."

"If you get really afraid, bang on the wall three times and I'll come running in."

"Like this?" he asked and knocked three times.

"Perfect," I said. "And if I bang three times, you

have to come running in. You're only 7 so I know you're going to be afraid and Mom said I have to protect you."

"I'm not a baby," he said indignantly, and I could hear him turn over and rustle the covers.

Yeah, sure, I thought. He'll come running into my room in a matter of minutes. But he didn't and the minutes crept by. The house was eerily quiet, unlike the Bayside neighborhood filled with police sirens and honking cars.

I was wide awake, staring at the ceiling and the clock. Then, I thought I heard a thud, a bump, or a wishing noise. Was it the turn of the front door knob? Was the creak a step on the stairs leading to our bedrooms? Was the whish part of Dracula's cape rubbing against the wall as he climbed the stairs in search of me and my brother?

I knocked three times and George came scurrying in.

"What's wrong?" he asked, rubbing his eyes in the doorway.

"Nothing," I said quickly. "I was testing you."

He stomped back to his room and, glancing at the clock, I saw that it was

now 9:55 p.m. Mom or Dad would be checking on us in five minutes. We had made it through the first hour!

Then, again, the thud, bump and whish took control and I knocked on the wall. No George. I knocked again, but after 10 attempts, I realized I was now on my own.

By 10:15 p.m., I was still knocking when my Dad peeked in.

"Something wrong?" he asked.

I was embarrassed and stammered, "I was knocking so George would know I was here and not be afraid."

Dad came in and sat on the side of the bed. "I just checked on him. George has been asleep for awhile."

He pulled the covers up to reach under my chin and stood for a moment in the doorway. "Are you going to be okay? I know it's a little strange in a new house."

I nodded and he smiled. "Happy New Year, Peg," he said before closing the door.

By the time he reached the front door, I was probably asleep.

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