



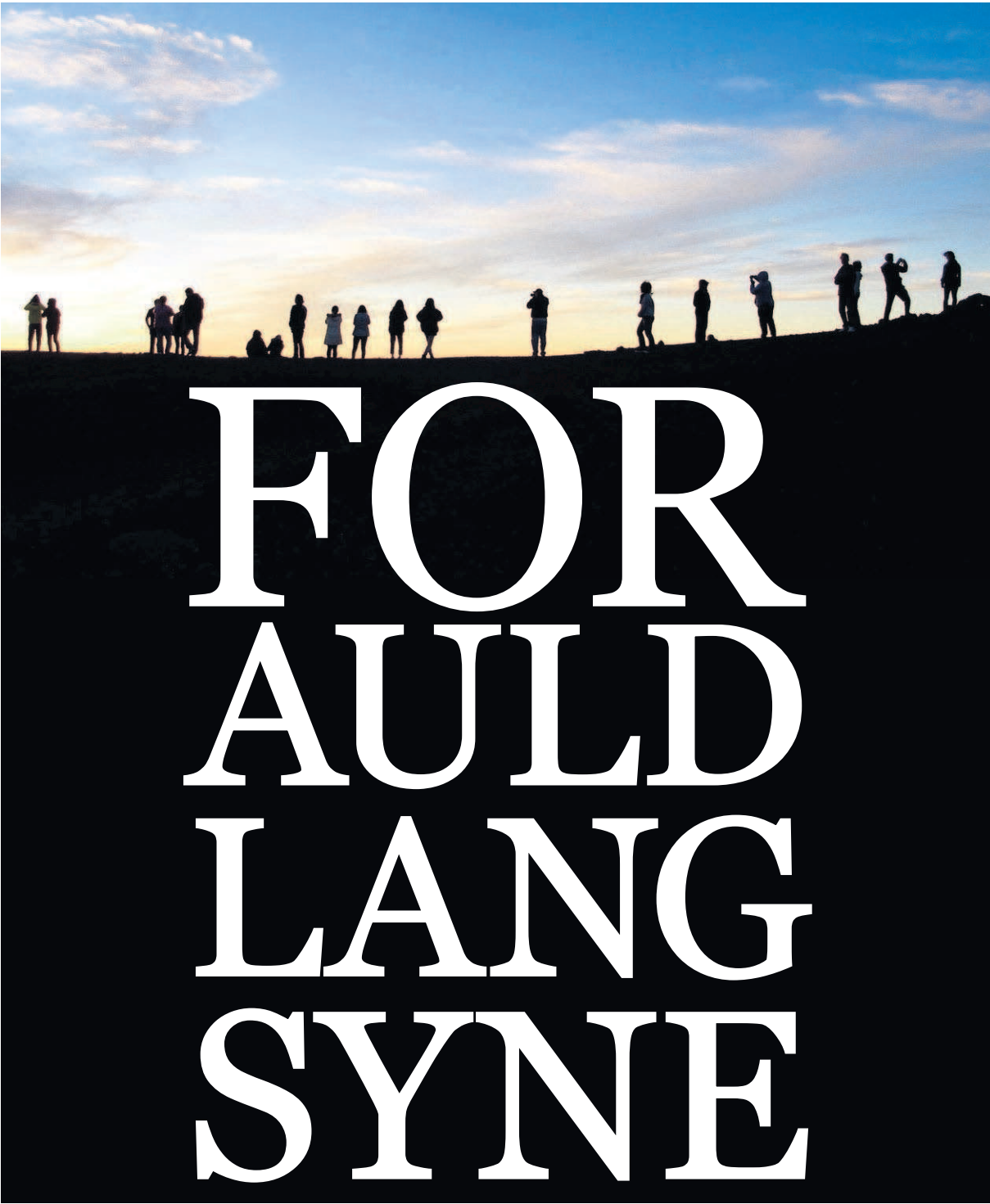
Hitting the Discovery Trail in Long Beach, Washington, New Year's Day, 2015.

Photo by Lynette Rae McAdams



Wild strawberries bedecked with winter's icy lace.

Photo by Lynette Rae McAdams



Holiday revelers gather at the rim of a volcanic crater at Haleakala National Park, Maui, Hawaii, on Jan. 1, 2012.

Photo by Lynette Rae McAdams

FOR AULD LANG SYNE

Story by LYNETTE RAE MCADAMS

It's an awkward moment really, a bit like having to participate in a public singing of "The Star Spangled Banner": Sure, you're a superstar at the beginning, but then there's the place where you can't tell your rockets from your ramparts and the best you can do is hum lamely along, hoping the guy in the next seat will carry it off for the both of you.

At least when it's time for "Auld Lang Syne," you can usually count on the cover of midnight (and perhaps a few drinks) to see you through those mumbling middle parts; but for one New Year's Eve in your life, as the clock strikes 12 and the bubbly makes its rounds, wouldn't it be nice to actually know what you're singing about?

Written in 1788 by the famous poet Robert Burns, the song that ubiquitously

accompanies the turn of our calendar is actually a version of a much older Scottish folk song — one Burns claimed he learned from an old man while wandering the hills of his native Scottish Lowlands. Translated literally from the Scots dialect, "auld lang syne" means "old long since," but because that doesn't make much sense in modern English, we understand it today as something more like "times long past," or "days gone by."

While there are five verses to the song, contemporary revelers seem to stick with only the first verse and chorus, and just in case you've been faking it along with all the rest of us, here are the lyrics:

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And auld lang syne?*

*CHORUS:
For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne.
We'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.*

Now being clear on the words is one thing (and should be enough to impress any fellow party-goers), but simply belting them out with confidence won't make their meaning any more obvious. What's this song really about, anyway, and why does all the world sing it on New Year's Eve?

In this country, "Auld Lang Syne" owes its popularity to Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadian Band, a big-band orchestra that began the tradition at a midnight show on New Year's Eve in 1929, at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City. Lombardo, who became known as "Mr. New Year's Eve," performed the song every year thereafter until 1976, broadcasting it first over the radio and later, on television, becoming synonymous with the ball drop at Times Square. Lombardo said he learned the song from Scottish immigrants in his hometown of London, Ontario, in Canada.

Listen just once to the version recorded by the Scottish folk group The Cast (readily available on YouTube), and you'll have a new and crystalline understanding of the song you've been singing all your life. With a voice hauntingly clear and melodious, Mairi Campbell sings what is believed to be the original tune, in the original Ayrshire dialect, and it's so beautiful you'll never forget it.

Verse by verse, with tones drenched in longing, she takes the listener through Burns' classic poem — the tale of old friends who once were very close, but whose paths have long been parted. Reunited, they must decide how to feel about the distance that circumstance has wedged between them. In the end, as you may have guessed, they choose to remember and honor each other for the sake of the time they once shared, joining hands and lifting glasses, in friendship and goodwill.



Photo by Lynette Rae McAdams

Put your best foot forward on New Year's Day

On Jan. 1, both Oregon and Washington state parks invite the public for a FREE day — no day-use fees or Discover Passes are required. Guided First Day Hikes take place in Oregon at Ecola and Fort Stevens state parks, and in Washington at Cape Disappointment. For more information, visit oregonstateparks.org or parks.wa.gov

Sunset at Manzanita beach, New Year's weekend 2015.

Could there be a more fitting anthem for the ushering in of a new year?

Here we stand on the cusp of time as we know it — one foot firmly rooted in yesterday, the other stepping lightly toward tomorrow. And as the clock ticks on, memories of friends and loved ones line up like silhouettes before a distant sun, their every detail

sharpened by the ache of sweet nostalgia.

This year, what will you do with your own small string of human history, so likely full of both sadness and joy, delight and regret? Can you remember with fondness a friend who once forsook you; will you mend that bridge or burn it down? And if you choose forgiveness, can

you manage at last to also save some for yourself?

May the dawn of a new year find each of us deep in the spirit of "Auld Lang Syne" — arm in arm with friends old and new, our glasses raised and eyes wide open toward a hopeful future, but our hearts entirely bursting with the richness of the past.