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Night of Fire

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the raw potatoes, then squeeze the be Jesus out of them in a large press. The fluffy mass would be shaped into big balls, with a crouton in the center, and then dropped into boiling water until they floated to the surface. I delighted in the sliced leftover potato dumplings, fried in lots of butter the next morning for breakfast, sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon.

Preparing for our traditional New Year's Eve feast meant a special trip to the Moore Street district of Brooklyn, a predominately Jewish neighborhood. From one of the push cart vendors my mother would select two schmaltz herrings, and have them securely wrapped in newspaper, for our long journey back home on the Wilson Avenue trolley. When we arrived home, Mom would soak the critters in cold milk for a few days, to reduce their saltiness. The final step was to clean them, cut them up into chunks, layered with pickles and sliced onion, and covered with sour cream. In a day or two, by New Year's Eve, they would be well marinated and ready for presentation with hot boiled potatoes.

New Years Eve at our house was really strange, now that I think of it... We performed a "ritual" so unusual, and I wonder if others did so, also? Rather pagan, I thought, even then. It took place late in the evening, and we watched intently as Pop and Rudy would recycle a few damaged or imperfect "lead soldiers" from the vast toy army and melt them down. A little pot, wired to heat lead to a melting point was used. Rather than pour the liquid into the little soldier forms, we watched as the lead was slowly trickled into a pot filled with swirling boiling water, on the gas range. The result was allowed to cool. Odd little abstract squiggles emerged, and from the shapes we tried to predict our future, like a group of fortune tellers.

While we impatiently waited for supper; that special feast of herring in sour cream, we restlessly tossed a ball around the large kitchen. Someone missed the catch and the ball dropped into the tureen filled with herring. Sour cream flew everywhere, beginning our New Year's celebration with a memorable splash! My mother, stoic lady and woman of proper dignity, wanted to begin the New Year in a manner befitting the important occasion. Since none of her fine German Meissen china, taken out of storage for the mini-festival was damaged, she decided the big mess would be seen a positive omen, and joined us all in laughter, as we cleaned up what we could, and saw the New Year in with a bang.

NIGHT OF FIRE
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