



beauty

soap salvation

A hit with hippies in the sixties, Dr. E. H. Bronner's weirdly packaged, all-purpose cleansers have been rediscovered by hipsters in the nineties. Robert Sullivan pays homage to the "pope of soap" and drops in on the heirs to the foam.

BIZARRE BARS
DR. BRONNER'S SOAPS HAVE WON A CULT FOLLOWING AS MUCH FOR THEIR KOOKY COPY AS FOR THEIR SYNTHETIC-FREE PURITY

Volkswagen vans with it—to being hip with nineties hipsters, the fashionably antifashion soap selection that is as cool again today as it is cheap (about \$3 for eight long-lasting ounces).

I am able to report that Dr. Bronner's passing will not affect his enthusiastic patrons. I learned this the other day when I took a trip to Dr. Bronner's All-One-God-Faith Soap factory and talked to Dr. Bronner's sons and associates. They were sad about Dr. Bronner's departure, but they were carrying on with his soapmaking. They directed me to an excerpt from an article published in a soap newsletter that was read at Dr. Bronner's funeral. It said, "Dr. Bronner will leave this world a better place. He is an inspiration to soapcrafters everywhere."

Before I toured the soap factory, I was briefed on the amazing life of Dr. Bronner. He was born Emanuel Heilbronner in Germany in 1908 to a family of longtime soapmakers. In 1930, he moved to Milwaukee, where he began sending telegrams to world leaders in an effort to promote world peace and to end such things as Communism and fluoridation. To say Dr. Bronner was eccentric is being gentle, but his eccentricity was mistaken for illness and he was sentenced to a psychiatric hospital. He escaped twice and endeavored unsuccessfully to prove his sanity, but both times he was locked back up. When he escaped the third time, he fled to Los Angeles, where, as his sons like to say, he fit right in. There he began mixing his own concoctions in bathtubs in an old apartment building on Bunker Hill in downtown L.A. beauty ▶ 548

for those of you who have used Dr. Bronner's Peppermint 18-in-1 Pure-Castile Soap and have paused in the shower or the bath to ponder the existence of the Rabbi Dr. E. H. Bronner, SMMC (soapmaker and master chemist), and have assumed him to be nothing more than a figment of some marketing genius's imagination—the natural-beauty-product industry's version of Dr. Pepper, say, or as a kind of Ronald McDonald for the organic-soap set—know this: Dr. Bronner is real, as real, in fact, as the total-body tingle that results from bathing with Dr. Bronner's Peppermint 18-in-1 Pure-Castile Soap, the invigorating menthol Peppermint Pattie-esque sensation that hits this correspondent best at around six in the morning, post jog. At least he was real. He died in March at age 89, near the soap-company headquarters in Escondido, California, where he lived and formulated the word-filled, *Finnegans Wake*-ian labels that made him both famous and infamous and that made his soap a favorite of everyone from backpackers to motorcyclists to models. But he lived just long enough to see his soap go from being the all-purpose cleanser of sixties hippies—flower children washed everything from their hair to their teeth to their