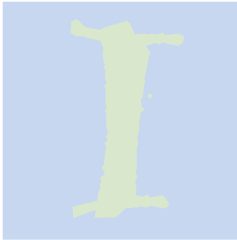


# The Her-story of Toothpaste



This was a boon for mothers who could discourage the further use of bad language and clean their kid's teeth at the same time.

In the eyes of the average citizen, the subject of toothpaste holds an interest rivaling that of coleslaw to anyone but dentists. This is a misconception. Dentists see toothpaste as a useful adjunct to oral hygiene surrounded by mountains of hype and concede that Colgate, Crest, et al. came, as the missionaries did to Hawaii, to do good and did very, very well. It helps to appreciate how far we've come by lifting the curtain on a bit of history.

The scene: Downtown Akhetaten, Egypt, in the year 3001 B.C.

Amenhotep, a local stringer for the *Cairo Daily Bhlal* has chanced upon beautiful Meht-urt, a recent graduate of the Lower Nile Cosmetology and Embalming Academy.

**Amenhotep:** Meht-urt, baby! You look like a million piasters! What have you done to yourself?

**Meht-urt:** I assume you are referring to my scintillating smile. It's the direct result of something called "toothpaste" what me

and the girls at school have developed to brighten our otherwise dull teeth.

**Amenhotep:** What's in it? I must have some forthwith!

**Meht-urt:** Not so fast, Buster. Listen carefully; I shall say this only once. There's some black soot and gum arabic, a pinch of powdered ox hooves, and burnt egg shells and the secret ingredient, pumice.

You dip your chew stick in it; rub it on your teeth and Holy Hatshepsut! Teeth whiter than snow!

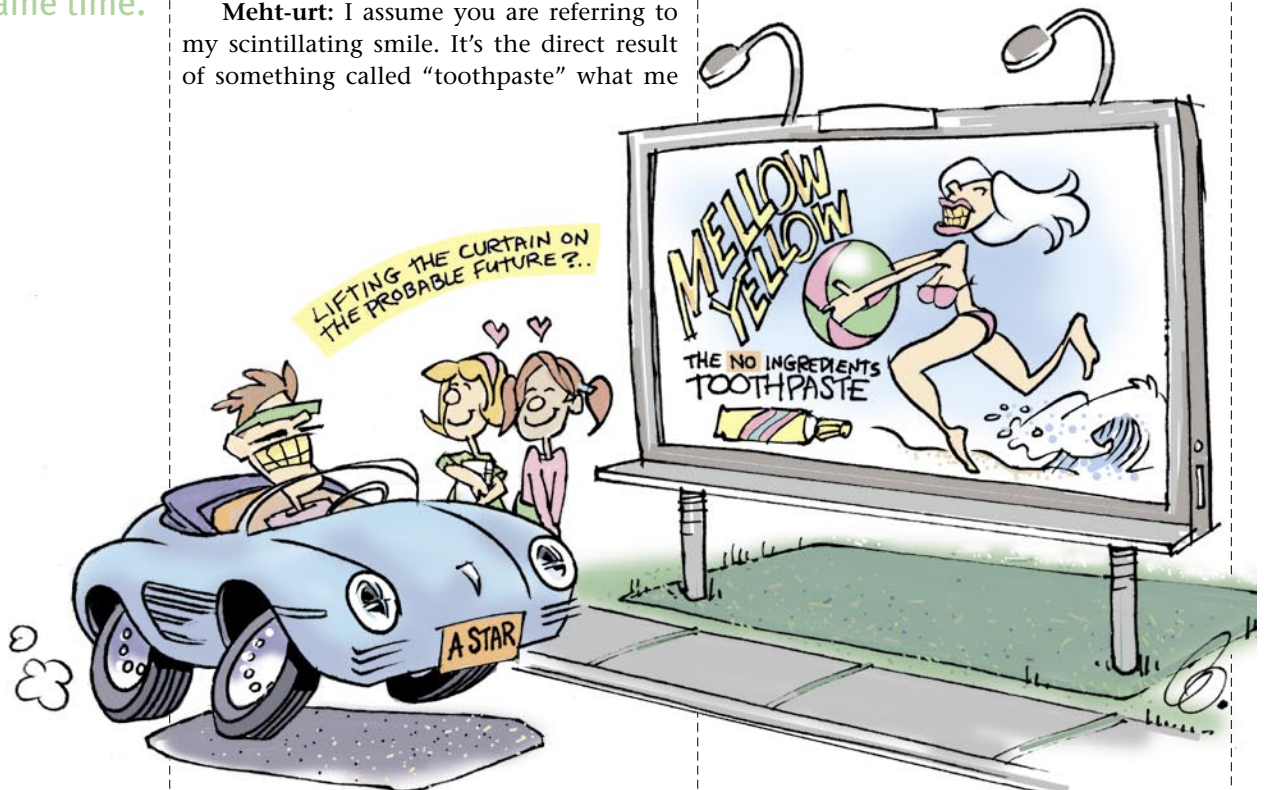
**Amenhotep:** What is snow?

**Meht-urt:** (ignoring him) Well, I'm off to the Dark Continent to have my toothpaste patented and declared a national treasure.

**Amenhotep:** Abyssinia?

**Meht-urt:** Not if I see you first.

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In 1937, Wallace H. Carothers in the DuPont Laboratories invented nylon, and bingo: Dr. West's miracle toothbrush with nylon bristles!

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Despite this auspicious beginning, toothpaste received little notice from the media what with the Huns, the Visigoths, the Romans and first and second Thessalonians all busily engaged in making the world safe for themselves at the expense of the others.

In 1824, a dentist called Peabody whose full name has been lost, or perhaps he, like Cher and Madonna, and Sting, rather fancied the cachet a single name endowed, added soap to toothpaste. This was a boon for mothers who could discourage the further use of bad language and clean their kid's teeth at the same time. Six years later, John Harris added chalk. On a roll now, improvements came fast and furious. Toothpaste first became mass-produced. A little glycerin to keep it moist, some calcium carbonate for bulk, maybe a bit of charcoal and some detergent for foam so it didn't dribble on your blouse or tie. It came in a jar, and according to Fortunata Stallwort, who died in Hartford at the age of 104 with two of her original teeth, "It smelled good."

The big break, though, came in 1850 when Dr. Washington Sheffield of Connecticut was the first to put toothpaste into a collapsible tube and his wife was the first to squeeze it from the top. He formed a company to market Dr. Sheffield's Crème Dentifrice, a company that was to become Colgate. Today, promptly at 10 a.m., employees at Colgate genuflect before Dr. Sheffield's portrait before taking their brush break.

Previously, around 1780, William Addis of Clerkenald, England, made his first toothbrush. Until that time,

application of toothpaste was sharply divided between the haves and have-nots. The rich used aromatic twigs and the poor used their index finger, or in the case of the upwardly mobile, their pinky. In 1937, Wallace H. Carothers in the DuPont Laboratories invented nylon, and bingo: Dr. West's miracle toothbrush with nylon bristles!

Today we face an embarrassment of riches in toothpastes. When it became obvious, even to the most beef-witted, that flavor was the driving incentive to the use of toothpaste; the marketing mavens took over the development of dentifrice. Their early forays into selling toothpaste resulted in such pallid copy as Ipana's Ipana for the Smile of Beauty and Pepsodent's "You'll wonder where the yellow went when you brush with Pepsodent."

Now, of course, your local supermarket devotes entire aisles from floor to ceiling touting upward of 89 different brands of toothpaste. In addition, each company offers a half-dozen purportedly different formulas of their basic product. All of this backed by more media money than the combined GNP of a dozen nations.

The American public, many of whom have progressed to the 12th grade and beyond, will continue to be mesmerized by the chimera of tooth whitening, tartar reduction, and the chance of acquiring a better classmate.

Now that Meht-urt's patent on her Egyptian formulary has expired, look for the addition of powdered ox hooves and the attar of potrzebie to take their place alongside sodium lauryl sulfate and fluoride to cure a yet-to-be-determined oral ailment. ■■■■