

Small Souvenirs: Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap Doris Dörrie always collects strange things when she's travelling. This time it's something from the U.S.

by: Doris Dörrie

I met my friend Nora in College in the United States. I admired her a lot. She was so cool and unconventional, wore strange outfits and knew a lot of things that seemed exotic, amazing and entirely absurd to me. She used only one type of soap that came in a plastic bottle, called Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap. She didn't just use this soap in the shower; she brushed her teeth with it, she washed her hair with it, she used it for doing the dishes, her laundry and she applied it on her insect bites.

She used to call this universal soap a wonder product, and I eventually started using it as well. Emanuel Heilbronner, whose forefathers were traditional soap makers, fled from the Nazis to America. His parents who hesitated, remained in Germany and were murdered. The last time Emanuel heard from them, was a postcard that said: "You were right. Your father, who loves you".

Once settled in the United States, Emanuel Heilbronner created a personal and unique philosophy of world peace, which he called "All-One-God-Faith". This philosophy was also printed in long dissertations on his soap bottles. I read them over and over again in the shower, but couldn't quite make sense of them. It was some kind of moral ABC, with sources from the Jewish and Christian religions, but also including references to Rudyard Kipling and Mark Spitz. **"ALL-ONE OR NONE! ALL-ONE! "LISTEN CHILDREN ETERNAL FATHER ETERNALLY ONE!" EXCEPTIONS ETERNALLY? ABSOLUTE NONE!"**

Heilbronner now called himself Bronner, but also Rabbi and Doctor and eventually, his ideas sometimes ended him up in jail and sometimes in psychiatric hospitals, until the Hippies discovered his soap in the sixties.

There wasn't a hippy left who didn't have Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap.

It smelt strongly of peppermint and burnt like fire, if it wasn't properly diluted before use. This is the reason why it lasted so long and why everything had its smell. Hair, laundry, the dishes and my girlfriend. When I no longer lived in the U.S. and only occasionally went for a visit, I would always bring some Dr. Bronner's Magic Soap home with me. At home its smell would blissfully remind me of the days I spent endlessly chatting with my girlfriend, and I'd recall her apartment in SoHO with the bath tub in the middle of the room, where we would take turns to wash with the Magic Soap, while the other one was cooking nearby.

My girlfriend died a year ago. I still have a bottle of Dr. Bronner's soap in my cupboard. And from time to time I open it and smell it. And then my girlfriend comes back.

Hey, how is it going? she is asking. Hang in there, okay? Okay.—

The soap is now also available at home, here in Germany.

Doris Dörrie,
62, is a film director and writer.