

MONTHLY COLUMN NOVEMBER

By

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Betrayed

How sad I was today (19th October) when I read one of my heroines say that her products were rubbish and ineffective. How sad that a person who has made a personal fortune of £150 million can decry the natural products that have enabled her to amass that wealth. How completely crazy, that so much inspiration collected from travelling the length and breadth of the planet to seek out new ideas and new civilisations can be thrown against the wall with so much contempt. What are my thoughts today about the person who was such a wonderful source of inspiration and who inspired me personally to look deeper and deeper into natural products? I think the modern vernacular for my condition is gutted. Clearly, if her products did not work, then the message is very clear, she could only have watered down the true benefits and played the oldest marketing confidence trick in the book and spoofed on the truth.

As we wait to see whether her empire goes belly up, in the same way as another great entrepreneur who was belligerent enough to think that his customers were idiotic simpletons who owed him a living in the high street jewellery business, I wonder how many people are going to feel cheated and betrayed by these revelations.

My message is quite simple. Ethnobotanical remedies do work, if the product is a faithful recreation of the original tribal remedy or shaman's craft, then that product will function as well for the housewife in Stepney as it did for the mother in the Waimiri-Atroari Indian tribe of South America.

It is permissible to change some of the less refined materials for more modern and more hygienically prepared alternatives; it is not part of the game to replace large percentages of the active material with non-functional cheaper substitutes.

The benefits of Coconut, Shea, Illipe, Cocoa and Mango Butters have been shown by how the local population have protected the precious moisture of their skins by using these materials. They are rich emollients with skin glossing properties that turn a dull grey skin into the gleaming mahogany so treasured by the Nigerian and Ghana peoples. Shea has been shown to help protect the skin against the hazards associated with full sunlight.

The Tahitians knew that coconut oil was a rich and emollient oil, sweet smelling and pure that would gloss skin and hair to protect it from dryness. They infused this oil with exotic Tiare flowers to produce an oil that had an elegant fragrance that wafted along the length of a sun-

drenched beach as the sun slowly sunk to the horizon. Not only was this oil called Monoi safe enough to use on the delicate skin of a baby, but it was the chance for a person living at the hectic pace of modern suburban living to have that small touch of paradise put into a bottle. A dream that should not be diluted with such copious volumes of mineral oil that it becomes a lie, but a chance for the senses to sway with the distant palms from which it came and at the same time be a skin moisturiser that is technically proven to be protective.

The reputation of honey as a healing agent, aloe vera as a cooling emollient that will counteract and ablate skin reactions to many types of radiation and the wonderful effects of many other natural remedies would not be the subject of so much interest to the medical profession and the World Health Organisation if there was not the faintest reason for success. The drugs we have come to rely on with such hope in cases of despair have come from nature, such as Oncovin (the vinca alkaloids) from *Vinca rosea*, Vinblastine from *Catharanthus roseus*, and Paclitaxel (taxol) from *Taxus brevifolia*. Pilocarpine, theophylline, podophyllin, physostigmine, reserpine and xanthine to name but a few of the pharmacists' major warriors in the fight against disease have come from plants.

Plants can benefit the skin, they can add to the desire of a product, and they can improve the performance of both. It is no good watering down the gin and then to expect that your party will go with a swing. If you use anything less than full measure then do not expect to be branded anything but a cheapskate.

I guess I am just an old-fashioned romantic. I like to think that every product is not only an effective skin protector, but also a small part of somebody else's life or culture, which can be shared and enjoyed. Nobody really believes that they will never grow old; nobody really believes that they will never have wrinkles, but they do believe that they can have a beautiful experience slowing the process down or just suffering the pure heavenly indulgence that they deserve just for trying. It is the ritual, it is the chakra, the well-being, it is the performance and the rites associated with the ceremony of beauty that we sell. Don't hang up the stocking, don't leave out a mince pie and a carrot, don't write a note and post it up the chimney for Father Christmas and then tell your child as you lay it to sleep excited and full of hope on Christmas Eve, that Santa Claus does not exist, and for that matter neither do any of his reindeer.

We all agree that staying out of the sun, going to bed at nine o'clock, not having children, taking moderate exercise, eating sensible foods, not having sex, staying in doors to avoid pollution, not drinking alcohol, avoiding stress and eating copious quantities of tomatoes are ways of staying younger – personally, I would rather be dead.

To those of you (and there are many) who use real levels of traditional plants and remedies, who still believe in bringing their loyal consumers fun, enjoyment, hope, satisfaction as well as a well

moisturised and protected skin with the hopes of keeping a beautiful complexion, please keep our industry and hopes alive. On behalf of your customers who will be too busy (taking a tan, working like a dog, partying, shouting at the kids, working out school rosters or just having a drink) to pay you any notice - I will salute you.