

the last word

Mother's Mold

by Jamie Buckingham

Back during World War II a lot of things were in short supply. Things like butter, tires and soap were hard to come by.

My enterprising mother, having to raise five children, solved the scarcity of soap by saving all the used soap bars in the house. These were melted together for reuse in what we called Mother's Mold.

There was a container in the kitchen and in each bathroom for used bars of soap. If we took a trip, we always brought home used soap from the hotel—or from the homes of relatives. Our house was located near a wartime naval air base, and it was not uncommon for my folks to invite sailors home for dinner. Many of them would slip a bar of used soap in their pocket when they left the base in order to make a contribution to Mother's Mold.

When mother had enough, she would put the slivers and bars in a large mold. She would then melt a few other bars—Ivory seemed to melt best, as well as that horrible translucent green soap that smelled like weeds which the sailors picked up in the head—to pour over the loose bars in the mold. When this hardened, she would slice it into squares for us children to use in the bathtub.

It was always interesting to take a bath using Mother's Mold. It was fun to spot the various other bars through the dominant white or green. The pink Life Buoy stood out in particular. So did the black Lava soap. We used a lot of Octagon soap in our house—a very strong, yellow soap, good for softening scabs, curing poison ivy, removing pimples and making you smell like one of those big black outdoor kettles that country folks boiled overalls in. You could always spot—and smell—the Octagon slivers in Mother's Mold.

Ivory soap, which claimed to be 99 and 44/100 percent pure something, seemed to be the glue that held everything else together. But since it melted easily, it always played a dominant part in the mixture—and was always the prevailing smell when mother did her

melting in the double boiler over the wood stove.

Even though this homemade conglomerate of Mother's Mold was exciting to use in the tub, it never did have the cleaning power of a single bar of soap. It lacked the perfumed fragrance of Lux, the scouring power of grainy Lava, and the alkalinity of Octagon. It wouldn't float like Ivory nor did it attack B.O. as that deep radio voice proclaimed for Life Buoy. But it was better than nothing and got us through the war relatively clean.

I always suspected, however, that Mother's Mold caused boils. It seems we kids always had lots of boils back then, especially on the back of our necks and in a few other extremely uncomfortable—and embarrassing—places. After I stopped using Mother's Mold, I never had another boil.

Recently I've become aware my life is much like that molded soap. The problem comes in mixing priorities, it seems. As I have put more items into my life, I have begun to lose the distinctive qualities of my unique giftedness. There are times when I wake up in the morning and wonder exactly who I am.

Some of the nation's best-known min-

istries are asking the same question. Having been successful in one area, they decide to diversify. It's always a mistake. Diversification may be fine for industry, but spiritual gifts don't work that way. Just because God has blessed a pastoral ministry does not necessarily mean it is time to buy a TV station—especially on credit. Thin ice is liable to take a lot of people under when it cracks open.

The Lord has said to me—and to a few others I am in contact with—to pare down. Dropping a lot of things into your life may be okay during those early years, but creative contributions are only made by men and women who sharpen their focus, laying aside the urgent for the important.

The wise man knows that the only way to get on with the things God has told him to do is by saying "no" to everything else. Only a few things are essential—and these are the things that call for concentration.

But it's hard to start gouging for individual slivers once you've melted the whole thing together. Granted, all those brands do add a certain excitement to the bathtub. But in the long run we need to remember: You really can't mix Lava and Ivory. ☞

