

'Tahiti Looks Nice'

I wouldn't say my mother had allusions of grandeur, but she liked to think we always had the best for what we could afford. The advertising for Imperial Leather soap really appealed to her quest to obtain the finer things in life. If you remember their campaign in the 60s and 70s, they tapped into the desire for some luxury in the post-war years and for the baby boomers?

The adverts that really stick in my mind are the series of '3 baths' featuring a Scottish castle, a train and the most memorable, on a private jet. The family are all in their own baths, a little girl plays in the water, father pours champagne, and mother, with perfect hair, perfect teeth and perfect nails, looks up from her magazine,

'Tahiti looks nice'.

The father picks up the onyx handled phone and speaks to the pilot,

'Simon, Tahiti!'

'Wilko, Roger.'

Daddy downs the champagne and fastens his seat belt in the bath, whilst Mummy ensures the Imperial Leather is safely strapped in the soap dish. Neither seem too worried about the child, (must have been the booze!) The closing shot is the plane heading skywards with fuel billowing out of the engines and leaving me wondering how the water didn't empty out of the bath!

The perfume of the soap takes me back to my childhood bath times, a white bathroom with a high level cistern, where you 'pulled the chain' to flush the loo. It was freezing in there, Dad had installed an electric 3 bar heater above the door. I would describe it as a million miles from the bathrooms in the adverts!

The 'Imperial Leather' name sounds luxurious and in writing this piece I looked up the history on how the name came about. In 1768 a Russian nobleman called Count Orlof commissioned a brand of perfume from Bayleys of Bond Street. The perfume was called 'Eau de Cologne Imperiale Russe'. The birch oil tanning process gave Russian leather a distinctive smell, which was replicated in the fragrance. In 1921 Cussons Sons & Co acquired Bayleys. In 1938 Alexander Cussons's daughter, Marjorie, using the original perfume, created Imperial Leather soap. The soap was called 'Russian Leather', but given the time was quickly renamed Imperial Leather.

In 1980 I went on holiday with friends and came back to a 'surprise'. Mum and Dad had updated the bathroom. Armitage Shanks 'Sun King' coloured suite with gold bath taps, and an onyx shower head, sitting proudly in the soap dish was the bar of Imperial Leather. Mum pointed out the bathroom was like the one on the advert when they all jetted off to Tahiti.

The irony of this anecdote is that I am now living in a house with a Sun King coloured suite, no gold taps and I'm more of a Dove soap girl these days. However, I would happily pick up the shower head and utter those words, 'Simon, Tahiti', I don't care if the bath water slops out a bit on the way!