



Crest & “Look Mom!”

By Greg McCoy

“Triumph Over Tooth Decay!” This not too modest announcement flared from the pages of magazines across the United States in January 1956, and marked one of the most significant product introductions of the 20th Century – Crest toothpaste.

The introduction of Crest marked a singular scientific achievement for P&G, and would play a key role in changing how people around the globe thought about their oral health. J.G. Pleasants, Head of P&G R&D (1955-1969), called Crest “one of the most exciting things we have ever done from the standpoint of providing something better for the public.”

Crest’s story would begin in 1938 with the introduction of Teel, one of the first detergent-based liquid oral care products. Based on newly discovered detergent technologies, P&G sought to enter the Oral Care category and deliver benefits to a population that brushed, on average, less than once a week. This led to

most people in the population losing one or more permanent teeth by their 20th birthday. Tooth decay was the second most prevalent disease behind only the common cold, while dentists preferred to pull teeth rather than treat the cavities.

Unfortunately, Teel was a flawed product and underperformed but it did allow P&G to learn about the category. In 1946 the creation of a stable fluoride toothpaste became a key company objective.

Meanwhile, at Indiana University’s dental school, a second-year student began studying the effect of fluorides on teeth. Not long after driving his worn-out car from Indianapolis to Bloomington, young Joseph Muhler made a stunning discovery— that stannous fluoride, then a little-studied substance first prepared 100 years earlier, seemed markedly more effective than other fluorides in protecting enamel. With this discovery, P&G’s interest was peaked and the company began to fund and assist Muhler’s work.

By 1955 Dr. Muhler, his associates at IU, and a team of researchers at P&G had created the first stable fluoride toothpaste and conducted numerous clinical studies to prove its effectiveness. The product was launched into a test market and the following year Crest advertising began using the slogan, “Look Mom, No Cavities!” on TV and in print. Far more memorable than the TV copy, the print advertising featured original Norman Rockwell paintings of children and their dental report cards.

“Look Mom, No Cavities!” was chosen by Advertising Age as one of the top fifteen memorable tag lines of the 20th century. This would lead one

to believe the campaign was a success, but it actually wasn’t! In a field of fierce competitors, the “Look Mom” campaign did little to improve Crest’s sales, primarily because consumers simply wouldn’t believe the product could deliver on its promises. Many brands had come and gone that had claimed effective cavity protection, and every one of them disappointed consumers and dentists.

Crest would languish as the fourth best-selling toothpaste brand until 1960 when, after many years of evaluating Dr. Muhler’s clinical data, the American Dental Association (ADA) recognized that Crest truly was effective against tooth decay. The consumer response was immediate and overwhelming, causing shortages on store shelves as the brand surged to market leadership virtually overnight.

There was one caveat to the ADA’s announcement though - Crest must stop running the “Look Mom” campaign and allow ADA approval over future advertising. Deemed as “an exaggeration” by the ADA due to the simple fact that no product at the time could absolutely guarantee “No cavities!”, the “Look Mom” campaign was sunset in 1960 but certainly not forgotten.

For the thousands of P&G employees who have worked on Crest over its 60 years, the “Look Mom” campaign and the original Norman Rockwell paintings remain a point of pride and passion. Treasured by these employees, the P&G Corporate Archives is pleased to share them with the people of Lima.

These books are recommended for students and teachers to use to learn more about Norman Rockwell and his work. They are usually available in most public libraries, or may be purchased through The Norman Rockwell Museum customer service by calling (800)- 742-9450.

1. Buechner, Thomas. *Norman Rockwell: A Sixty-Year Retrospective*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1972.
2. Cohn, Jan. *Covers of the Saturday Evening Post: Seventy Years of Outstanding Illustration from America's Favorite Magazine*, Viking, 1995. Every cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* is reprinted in this book, which combines social history with the golden age of American illustration and graphic design.
3. *Cobblestone: The History Magazine for Young People*, December 1989. This entire issue is devoted to Norman Rockwell and his work. Illustrated with his art, it is an excellent introduction to Rockwell written specifically for young people.
4. Hillcourt, William. *Norman Rockwell's World of Scouting*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1977. Covers Rockwell's sixty year association with scouting.
5. Marling, Karal Ann. *Norman Rockwell*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1997.
6. Mendoza, George. *Norman Rockwell's Americana ABC*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1975. An imaginative combination of Rockwell's paintings and Mendoza's verse presented in an ABC format.
7. Meyer, Susan E. *Norman Rockwell's World War II: Impressions from the Homefront*, USAA Foundation, 1991. Rockwell's images created during World War II captured the spirit of a nation at war in a way that no other body of work managed to accomplish. Contains images ranging from the playful foibles of Willie Gillis, to posters urging support of the cause.
8. Meyer, Susan E. *Norman Rockwell's People*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1981.
9. Murray, Stuart and James McCabe. *Norman Rockwell's Four Freedoms: Images That Inspire a Nation*. Berkshire House Publishers, 1993. Roosevelt's 1941 *Four Freedoms* speech inspired the images of those freedoms painted by Norman Rockwell. This book tells the story of the paintings and Rockwell's approach to painting them.
10. Murray, Stuart. *Norman Rockwell at Home in Vermont*. Images from the Past, Inc. 1997. Describes Rockwell's years in Arlington and West Arlington.
11. *Norman Rockwell: A Centennial Celebration*, Norman Rockwell Museum Staff. Michael Friedman, 45 Publishing, 1993. Celebrating the centennial of Rockwell's birth, this beautiful volume features full-color reproductions of his paintings, as well as preliminary sketches and photographs of the artist at work.
12. *Norman Rockwell and the Saturday Evening Post: The Early Years (Vol. I), The Middle Years (Vol. II) and The Later Years (Vol. III)*, MJF Books, 1976. Contains the complete set of the covers Rockwell painted for the *Saturday Evening Post* reproduced in three volumes.
13. Rockwell, Margaret. *Norman Rockwell's Chronicles of America*. Michael Friedman Publishing, 1996. Packed with first-hand reminiscences from Rockwell and his loved ones, this book is a heartwarming tribute to this artist's life and art.
14. Rockwell, Norman as told to Tom Rockwell. *My Adventures as an Illustrator*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1988. Rockwell tells many humorous stories about his life as an illustrator. Contains over 130 illustrations.
15. Rockwell, Norman. *Rockwell on Rockwell: How I Make a Picture*. Watson Guptill Publications in cooperation with Famous Artists School, 1979. Rockwell describes his creative process from ideas to final illustration. Out of print and hard to find, this book is worth the hunt.

SOURCES

The Norman Rockwell Museum, Norman Rockwell Resource Packet for Teachers

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