

A TOY IS BORN

*Even when all hope seems lost, don't give up...because
you just might get that random phone call from
your sister-in-law in New Jersey.*

WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU LEMONS...

In the 1930s, a Cincinnati soap company called Kutol Products expanded their line to include wallpaper cleaner. Their doughy detergent mixture was the best way to remove the soot from walls caused by coal-burning stoves—you just formed a handful of Kutol into a ball and rolled it over the soot.

But after World War II, fewer people had coal-burning stoves, and more people had easy-to-wash vinyl wallpaper. Result: Kutol's sales plummeted. In 1949 the company's owner was killed in a plane crash. His widow inherited the business, and she hired her 25-year-old son, Joe McVicker, to run it. Not long after, young McVicker was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, a type of blood cancer. He was dying, he had a factory full of products that hardly anyone needed, and Kutol was on the verge of folding.

...MAKE LEMONADE

In December 1954, McVicker got a phone call from Kay Zufall, his sister-in-law, who ran a nursery school in New Jersey. She told him that because the clay her kids were using to sculpt Christmas tree ornaments was too hard for their little hands to manipulate—and it stained—she went to a hardware store and bought a tub of Kutol Wallpaper Cleaner. It was softer than clay, nontoxic, and didn't stain. And it worked great. So McVicker sent a few tubs to the Cincinnati School District. Again, it was a hit.

Then, after receiving experimental radiation treatment, McVicker's cancer went into remission. With a renewed sense of purpose, he had the detergent removed from Kutol Wallpaper Cleaner, added coloring and an almond scent, and decided to market it as Kutol's Rainbow Modeling Compound. "Don't call it that!" said Zufall. McVicker asked her what they should call it. "It's dough you play with," she replied, "so how about Play Dough?" Since 1955 two billion cans of Play-Doh have sold.