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THE BARBER

Conrad the barber was intimately familiar with the best-kept beards and moustaches in the village... and the nicest teeth, for reasons you will soon understand.

Each morning before his first coffee, his ritual was to rub and polish his blue, white and red pole. He loved seeing children pointing at it, amazed to find a candy cane sign that still turned! He was the happiest and friendliest guy around, and there was simply no way to rub him the wrong way.

In Conrad's barbershop, a plaster bust of Ménick, barber to the legends of sport, sat proudly on a pedestal. It was the only face in the place without flapping gums, because at Conrad's, if you walked in a stranger, you walked out knowing everyone. They all greeted each other with "Hey there's Hairy!" or "Chrome dome!" or the like, guaranteeing endless hours of knee-slapping laughter.

People came from miles around to have their sideburns trimmed, heads shaved and necklines tidied up, but above all they came for the stories and laughter. Conrad shaved every skin type, from sensitive to leathery, with his straight blade and a steady hand that ensured cuts were few and far between. But tickling him or making him guffaw was at the customer's own risk and peril!

That was because after laughing uncontrollably at "a good one," an application of rubbing alcohol would be needed to disinfect the nicks. Its burning sting acted as a stark reminder of the sin of causing merriment. At one point, customers even began rationing jokes and stories to avoid close shaves. Conrad missed the laughter, in fact he couldn't imagine shaving a customer without it, so he challenged the village apothecary to concoct a special lathering and gently disinfecting soap. The apothecary, whose knowledge was as extensive as his facial hair, combined new science with antibacterial, antiseptic and antifungal essential oils that could disinfect cuts of all sizes. Since that day, customers have bared their throats without fear at Conrad's Barbershop.