

# Chemistry Puts Us “In the Limelight”

from **Celebrating Chemistry**



**W**hen people notice something you have done and make you the center of attention, they say you are “in the limelight”. Where did this expression come from? Of course, it is chemistry that provides the answer!

When actors appear on a stage, there are lights in a row along the front of the stage that shine on the actors and make the actors easier for the audience to see. These lights are called footlights. Before electric lights were invented, the light for footlights and spotlights was produced by using a chemical called calcium oxide. The common name for calcium oxide is lime.

This lime is not the fruit, lime, but a white, solid substance sometimes found in powder form. When the lime was burned in an oil or gas flame, a greenish light was produced that shined on the actors who were on stage. Thus, someone on stage was in the limelight! When you are the center of attention, it is as if you are on the stage and “in the limelight”.

