

Trays Bien

WOMEN'S REUSABLE AIRPLANE TRAY COVERS ADDRESS HYGIENE ISSUES, PROVIDE SUSTAINABILITY **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

EVER SINCE COVID-19 wreaked havoc in 2020, travel—particularly by airplane—became an icky-sticky subject, especially for those like me with OCD-tendencies.

Because I experienced COVID even though I've been multi-vaxxed, I discovered an added tier of ick-protection in Go-Be Sleeves. The reusable airplane tray covers were created by Barbara Booth (cofounder and chief executive officer), and Cornelia Quinn (cofounder and chief creative officer), whose company is in White Plains, New York.

Cornelia Quinn (left) said her son's frequent illnesses could be traced to unsanitary airplane serving trays, according to friend and business partner Barbara Booth (right).

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Please tell us about yourselves, your relationship, and how you invented the product.

Barbara Booth (BB): Cornelia and I have been best friends since high school. When we were dining in New York City one night, she voiced her concerns to me about the number of germs she believed existed on the airplane tray tables.

Her concerns were justified: Her son Jake has autism and is severely immunocompromised. He also survived a long battle with leukemia. Cornelia believed the germey tray tables were largely to blame for Jake's frequent illnesses, which seemed to emerge immediately after air travel.

As a CNBC reporter at the time with years of investigative experience, I offered to explore this. And after talking to airline personnel, flight crew and researchers who studied airline hygiene, I quickly learned that airplane tray tables are rarely, if ever, sanitized—and are by far the germiest part of the plane. In fact, researchers from Auburn State University revealed the tray table is eight times germier than the lavatory flush button.

Cleaning protocols post-COVID have waned due to packed flights and quick turnarounds. Airline crew have admitted they sometimes have only 4 minutes between flights to clean, and the one thing that's always overlooked is the tray table.

Upon my research, though, I discovered another alarming issue: Most single-use disinfectant wipes passengers are using to wipe down their trays are made of synthetic fibers, which means they never decompose. With 2.65 million people flying domestically every day – and 6 million globally—that's millions of wipes heading to landfills every day!

We were committed to checking every box for quality, sustainability and environmental friendliness. And we also wanted our products to be made in the U.S. So, the first thing we did was research the best, safest antimicrobial technology—one that was non-toxic, non-irritating and hypoallergenic, then talked to mills that have used this technology and could also provide us with a high-performance fabric created from BPA-free, post-consumer plastic.

Once we found the proper mill, we spent months corresponding with them to figure out the perfect proportions of strength and stretch. It also needed to be extremely lightweight





without sacrificing quality, because when rolled up, it needed to be small enough to fit in our compact case.

Weight and size matter greatly to travelers. Being extremely compact is key. Airplane trays are primarily 10 inches by 16 inches, but they vary a little, so our covers needed enough stretch to fit universally.

We built our own tray table and sewed prototypes using fabrics of varying weights, thicknesses, stretch and texture until we found the perfect one. The one we settled on is super durable but soft, stretches perfectly so it glides on easily, and has enough texture that it prohibits items on the tray from sliding around.

We talked with several mills before deciding to go with one in North Carolina, and we based it not only on their personal service but also because they could be a one-stop shop for printing the fabric, sewing it, and coating it with the non-toxic, hypoallergenic antimicrobial technology we insisted on.

At the same time, we searched for and found a talented graphic designer to help design our patterns and hired an industrial engineer to design our case.

EGT: How many tries before you knew you had the perfect prototype?

BB: It took about 6 months before we perfected the case and created the perfect prototype of the sleeve. But it was a full year before we approved our cover designs and were ready to launch our website.

“Researchers from Auburn State University revealed the tray table is eight times germier than the lavatory flush button.” —BARBARA BOOTH

EGT: Where are you manufacturing, and how did you locate a reputable supplier?

BB: We manufacture all our sleeves in the United States and found our mill first by finding out who carried the advanced antimicrobial technology we wanted (because it's expensive and not a generic, this limited our options), and who could provide the cut-and-sew and printing as well. Most mills can't do that.

This one mill was willing to connect us with a printer within 10 miles of them and facilitate the process between all the moving parts. We also flew there and took a tour to see their operation and to meet with them personally.

It's extremely important to us to source responsibly and use an antimicrobial technology that is certified and non-toxic, which is why we haven't been willing to go outside the U.S. to get our sleeves made—even though it's much less expensive to do so.

EGT: Do you have any competitors?

BB: There are about eight others in this space, but none are an actual competitor because ours are the only tray covers made from BPA-free plastic waste, come in stunning designs embedded with a non-toxic antimicrobial technology,



and are stored in a case that holds two covers and clips to your carry-on.

EGT: Who “invented” the product name?

BB: Cornelia and I tossed around a lot of ideas but eventually hired an agency called “hello-Muller,” based in Belgium.

Our tagline at the time, during COVID, was “Lose the fear. Enjoy the journey.” We wanted to encourage people to have wanderlust, to be get-up-and-goers and joy seekers—to break through your personal barriers, whatever they may be.

So together, we came up with the name “Go-Be”—like, “Go be the best you can be and don’t hold back. Lose the fear and enjoy the journey, whatever that journey may be!” Because we are more than just a product; we are a voice for positivity, mindfulness and change for the better. In this case, we are transforming travelers’ habits to be more sustainable.

EGT: Any patents or trademarks?

BB: Our Go-Be name is trademarked, and we patented the case. The Go-Be case is uniquely designed with separate compartments so it can hold multiple sleeves, ensuring they always stay fresh. The Go-Be case is the only airplane tray-cover case that has multiple compartments. It’s dishwasher safe and fully recyclable.

EGT: Who is handling your PR?

BB: We do our own. As a career journalist, I understand what it’s like to be on the other side of pitches, so I reach out to the media myself, as

well as hire PR/social media interns and train them how to write pitches and contact the media.

Our interns are great at creating reels and posts, and we boost these on all our platforms—especially on Facebook and Instagram.

EGT: Where are you selling?

BB: We sell primarily online but also on Walmart Marketplace, AAA, retail boutiques and several third-party online wellness platforms.

EGT: Please tell us about working with Grommet.

BB: Grommet has been our greatest experience thus far regarding organically scaling our business.

We applied to Grommet and were accepted right away. They asked us to send images and video clips of our products, and their super-talented team created a page for us on their site.

Every Thursday, Grommet launches 20 new innovative products and blasts emails and Instagram posts to their 2 million subscribers asking them to vote on their favorites. The day we launched on Grommet, our sales exploded!

We won Product of the Week, having the most votes, and we are still trending. And they chose us to be on Grommet Live, in which they will showcase “Travel Must-Haves!”

It’s been a whirlwind experience, and I would recommend any inventors looking to raise brand awareness and scale their business to apply to Grommet.

EGT: How many SKUs are you now featuring?

BB: We currently have 31 SKUs: (13) “Go-Be 2-Packs,” which are sets of two coordinating sleeves in our patented carrying case and (18) “Solos,” which are our individual sleeves that come in a plant-based zipper pouch. Our collections include Classics and Kids.

EGT: Why are Go-Be Sleeves good for the environment?

BB: Go-Be Sleeves are not only knitted from BPA-free, post-consumer plastic, which means that with every purchase you are helping to clean up oceans and landfills, but each sleeve is embedded with a non-toxic antimicrobial technology that’s safe for the environment.

Moreso, our sleeves eliminate the need to use single-use disinfectant wipes—many of

which contain harmful toxins and are made of synthetic fibers—so they never decompose. Six million people fly globally every day. If just 20 percent of these passengers use a disinfectant wipe, that's 1.2 million heading to landfills every day!

EGT: Any plans for your business? Do you have any new products?

BB: We have a very exciting collaboration happening right now. We are encouraging artists around the globe to submit their interpretations of some of the world's most popular destination hot spots.

The winning designs will become our latest collection, called "My Happy Place." We envision this series to be both a great collectible and giftable.

EGT: What wisdom have you gained from inventing Go-Be Sleeves?

BB: I feel as though I'm learning every day. I think the biggest lesson we learned is to start slow. Don't try to be too fast out of the gate.

Test, test and test again. Be open to feedback from your customers. Listen to their needs and be willing to continuously adapt.

Continuous improvement is vital for staying relevant. If you don't get it right the first time—whether it's your logo, brand colors or messaging—know that you're still young enough to pivot. Setbacks are powerful learning opportunities if you can see through the clouds.

And of course, network, network, network! I'm on LinkedIn every day connecting with new people who can offer crucial support, advice and growth opportunities. Build relationships with mentors, peers and suppliers. Always have backups! ☺

Details: gobesleeves.com

Edith G. Tolchin has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000 (edietolchin.com/portfolio). She is the author of several books, including "Secrets of Successful Women Inventors" (<https://a.co/d/fAGlvZJ>) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing" (<https://a.co/d/8dafjd6>).



INVENTOR UPDATE

TAGIE! She's It!

Inventors Digest columnist April Mitchell was honored in November with People of Play's TAGIE Award as Game Innovator of the Year.

Within the past year or so, Mitchell had six new games released by various publishers: Foxmind's Slanguage; John Adam's Am I a Dirtbag; MoCo Games' Danger Hugs; Hootenanny's Disco Island Escape; Martinex's FormWorm, and Life is Better Outside's BamzBall.

"I've been in the game and toy industry for roughly seven years, and one of my major goals was to someday receive a TAGIE!" said Mitchell, who accepted the award onstage at the ceremony in Chicago. Almost 350 attendees from 20 countries celebrated the finalists, winners and honorees.

"I feel like it was a group award," she said in an interview on LinkedIn. "I feel like it belongs to so many people" who supported her and gave her opportunities.



Inventors

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