

Seeing an **Opening**

MOM'S COAT FOR KIDS AVOIDS THEIR HAVING TO TAKE THEM OFF TO GET INTO A CAR SEAT **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

BECAME A MOTHER to two children in the 1980s, when rudimentary car seats became mandatory equipment. Strapping in a child securely was always an issue due to bulky winter coats.

But until your car is warm, would you really want to bring a baby into a cold car without a coat—the only way to securely strap in him or her—to conform to government regulations requiring straps to fit snugly against a baby's body? Buckle Me Baby Coats, invented by Dahlia Rizk of the New England area, is a welcome solution to this years-long dilemma. Daymond John of "Shark Tank" agreed!

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): How did the Buckle Me Baby jacket come about?

Dahlia Rizk (DR): I'm a single mom with three children who was careful about winter car seat safety when my children were little. One day at a Child Passenger Safety Check, a technician educated me about the winter coat danger.

I tried taking my kids' coats off at every stop we made, but my kids were not cooperating. So, one day I thought to myself, if the zipper wasn't in the middle this wouldn't

be a problem. I rushed home and modified an old coat we had, and I was excited to see that it worked!



"I tried taking my kids' coats off at every stop we made, but my kids were not cooperating. ... I rushed home and modified an old coat we had, and I was excited to see that it worked!" —DAHLIA RIZK

EGT: How does this jacket work with car seats?

DR: With a Buckle Me Baby Coat, parents can put on the coat at home, then use it in the car seat without taking off the coat.

Once the child is seated in the car seat, parents:

1. Pull their child's arms through the harness the way they usually do.
2. Pull the front panel of the jacket aside.
3. Buckle the harness as usual.

The back of Buckle Me Baby Coats is thinner than the front (but still just as warm). The front panel is pulled out of the way, so the harness sits right on the chest and shoulders. These two features make it possible to use the harness more easily, at the same setting tightness as if your child is wearing no coat at all. This way, the coat does not interfere with the car seat in any way.

See a complete demo at bucklemebaby.com/pages/tutorials.

EGT: How many prototypes did it take before you had a viable product?

DR: My first prototype worked the way I wanted it to and passed crash testing!

EGT: Are there any other similar children's jackets on the market?

DR: There are a few other car seat coats on the market, but Buckle Me Baby Coats are the

only solution where the car seat harness is directly on the child's chest and shoulders with no coat material between the child and his or her harness.

EGT: Have you ever had a business before this?

DR: I started a counseling private practice with my friend 12 years ago so we could both manage our own schedules and families. We hit all our five-year goals in one year and decided to open the opportunity to other counselors who also needed flexible schedules.

After creating my first sample, I posted a video with my nephew on Facebook to see if other parents would be interested in the idea—and it quickly went viral! I had no production lined up but had people asking to order. So, I did a quick Kickstarter campaign to capture those orders while lining up a factory and creating my first patterns.

EGT: Tell us about your experience on “Shark Tank” (December 2020). How did you prepare?

DR: I have loved “Shark Tank” since Season 1, so I was practicing for the show long before I even had a product. I started applying three years ago, and this is the year they invited me on the show. I am not super comfortable with public speaking so I practiced my pitch in front of anyone who would hear me out, repeatedly. It was an incredibly fun and supportive experience!

EGT: Did “Shark Tank” require a particular minimum dollar amount of sales to qualify you for the show? Did you get a deal?

DR: No. Entrepreneurs can ask for any amount at any valuation they want. I had asked for \$100,000 in exchange for 10 percent of the Buckle Me Baby Coats business. Daymond John offered me \$100,000 for 20 percent and I took his offer.

EGT: Please share your patenting experience.

DR: The coats are fully patented with a utility patent, which is great. My patent is also a



foundational patent, meaning that it's the first patent out there for coats designed for the car seat.

EGT: Since this is a children's product, do you test each production batch for Consumer Product Safety Commission certification?

DR: Yes! The coats are crash tested and CPSIA (Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act) compliant.

EGT: Where are you manufacturing? Any production obstacles?

DR: The coats are manufactured in China. I was manufacturing in the United States the first year, but production was slow and expensive. To be able to reach more parents, I needed to bring my price down and make more coats faster, so production was moved overseas.

EGT: How many different styles and colors are you producing? What is the retail pricing, and where are you selling?

DR: The coats come in three styles:

Toasty is our original design, which retails for \$69.99. In 2021, Toasty will be available in Little Darling (blush pink), Latte Love (light grey) and Baby Shark (blue).

With a Buckle Me Baby Coat, parents can put on the coat at home, then use it in the car seat without taking off the coat. Once the child is seated in the car seat, parents pull their child's arms through the harness the way they usually do; pull the front panel of the jacket aside; and buckle the harness as usual.

Toastier provides more coverage for the neck and head against harsh, whipping winds with a chunky, turtleneck-style, rib-knit collar. It also has extendable sleeves for longer wear across seasons and retails for \$89.99. In 2021, Toastier will be available in I Lava You (red) and Stargazer (purple).

Toastiest has a hood with magnetic attachments—so it comes off automatically in the car seat—as well as an extra-cozy Sherpa liner and Made in the U.S.A. designer flannel in the back. Toastiest also provides more coverage for the neck and head, with the extendable sleeves. It retails for \$149.99. In 2021, Toastiest will be available in Little Dipper (burnt orange), A-Doe-rable (light pink) and Tough Cookie (taupe).

In the United States the coats are available on my website, through Amazon and Buy Buy Baby, as well as in specialty retailers across the country. In Canada, the coats are available through Clekinc.com and Snuggle Bugz.

EGT: Have you increased your product line beyond just jackets?

DR: As a self-funded single mama, it's been hard. I have so many ideas, but the company is growing so fast that all the profits go back into making more coats. I do have a few products in development and hope to have them rolled out by 2022!

EGT: Do you have any suggestions for developing a children's product?

DR: Most "parentpreneurs" I know started their journey like the way I started mine: They were super careful about how they raised their kids and saw a need that should be filled. I recommend talking to other parents to see if they see the same need you see. Then, just go for it! 🐶

Details: buckleme.coats.com

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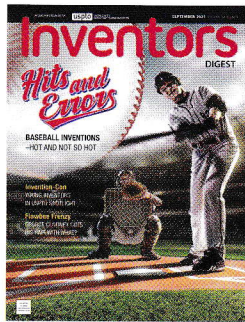
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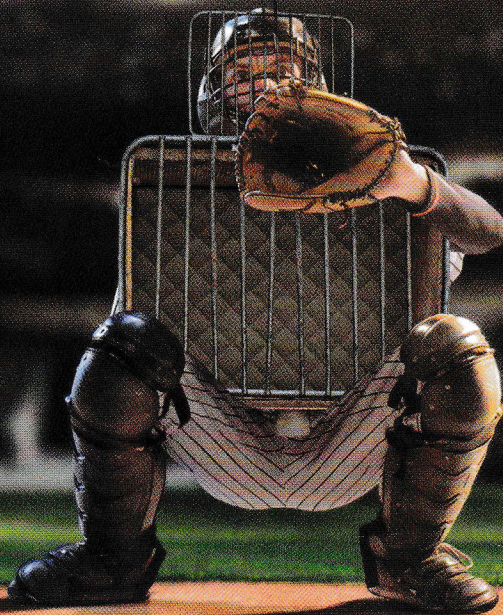
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—HOT AND NOT SO HOT

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