

# Old Favorite, New Meaning

WOMAN FINDS UNEXPECTED BENEFITS WHILE REVIVING KIDS' CRAWLING TOY FROM THE 1960S **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

**N**EW BABY PRODUCTS are all over the place! More are being developed as parents stay home due to the pandemic, a situation in which necessity became the mother (and father) of invention.

In this case, Stacey Kohler of Wauconda, Illinois—president of Kiddy Crawler, LLC—rediscovered a 1960s invention called the Crawligator and found added need for it.

**Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): What is your background? Have you invented anything before?**

**Stacey Kohler (SK):** I was in the earth-moving business for 30 years. I have experience in heavy equipment operations and material handling processes.

In 1993, after I witnessed the devastation from the flooding caused by the Mississippi River overflowing its banks, I invented the Sandbagger. I instinctively envisioned a “hopper”-type configuration that could fill multiple sandbags simultaneously be tractor loaded and transportable. I had the support from a very talented friend who fabricated a prototype.

Within two weeks we were field-testing two Sandbaggers in Ste. Genevieve, Missouri. Using women and children volunteers, they filled 36,000 sandbags in a weekend!

The Sandbagger was proven by the Missouri Army National Guard to do the

work of 40 men. The Sandbagger is now being used by military installations and municipalities around the world.

**EGT: How did the Crawligator come about?**

**SK:** Originally created by a major toy company in the 1960s, the Crawligator became a popular crawling toy for infants by helping to naturally develop mobility, gross motor skills and muscle strength. When I was a child, there was a Crawligator in my house.

When I became a grandmother five years ago, I wanted to buy a Crawligator for my granddaughter. I began to search for the once-popular toy and soon discovered it was no longer available. What happened to the Crawligator? Where did it go?

During my research, I became aware of the importance of tummy time for a baby's development. Studies continue to show the importance of crawling and developmental milestones.

It was at that moment I realized there was a void in the marketplace for a tummy-time toy that promotes crawling. I decided to go to work to bring the Crawligator out of extinction, design it to meet today's child safety standards, and bring it to market.

**EGT: What are advantages of this product over other similar baby products?**

**SK:** Swings, bouncy seats, baby walkers, exercisers and car seats are just a few of the other products available for babies. Extended time throughout the day in any of these items may lead to issues currently referred to as “Container Baby Syndrome.”

The Crawligator helps naturally develop mobility, gross motor skills and muscle strength. It also can be beneficial to babies with special needs.





**“I realized there was a void in the marketplace for a tummy-time toy that romotes crawling.”**—STACEY KOHLER

An infant “container” is any device that limits movement of a baby. Overuse of equipment can result in even greater impact and delays for the baby, including flat spots on the head known as plagiocephaly.

The Crawligator provides mobility and promotes natural crawling movement, builds strength, and develops gross motor skills. The sleek, contoured surface allows the child to rest comfortably on their stomach while using their arms and legs to reach and push. It encourages bilateral coordination as the child’s arms and legs make reciprocal movements, or a crawling motion. There are no similar products on the market that provide mobility like this.

You can learn more about the benefits of the Crawligator in an interview with a pediatric physical therapist on the Crawligator website.

**EGT: How is the Crawligator helpful to babies with special needs?**

**SK:** The Crawligator is helpful to all babies and infants building strength and motor skills on their way toward learning to crawl. It also has shown

to be a great tool for children with developmental delays—something I didn’t really expect and turned out to be a nice surprise.

When a child is already at risk for developmental delays due to prematurity, Down syndrome or other medical concerns, overuse of “containers” can result in even greater impact and delays for the baby.

Many of these children need assistance with mobility and are typically in the crawling stage for a longer period. The Crawligator enables these children to have the independence to explore their surroundings while building strength.

The proof of concept was when I demonstrated the Crawligator at the Academy of Pediatric Physical Therapy’s annual conference. It immediately sold out!

Pediatric physical therapists report that they have noticed an immediate improvement in a child’s response when using the Crawligator. At that moment I realized this was more than just a toy. There is a real need for this product now more than ever.



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**EGT: What materials are used in the Crawligator?**

**SK:** The Crawligator is made of a polypropylene plastic material. It's designed to move just above a hard floor surface on ball caster wheels.

**EGT: Where is the product manufactured?**

**SK:** I am very proud to say the Crawligator is made in Volo, Illinois. The ball caster wheels are manufactured in China.

**EGT: Please share your experience with safety standards for baby products. What type of third-party testing is conducted?**

**SK:** It took three years of research and design, design review, different types of prototyping, laboratory testing, tooling and final product testing. Intertek Labs was the testing facility for baby products.

I incorporated safety features mandated by the CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) on the infant walker standard into the Crawligator design. The Crawligator was tested to several baby product safety standards and failed because it was a new innovative product that did not fit into an existing category.

Today, the Crawligator meets all current child safety standards.

**EGT: Is the Crawligator patented?**

**SK:** The Crawligator has a utility patent. I researched many patents to find the language needed to write my patent application. I saved thousands of dollars by using a patent agent instead of a patent lawyer. I used the savings to expedite my patent application.

**EGT: Have you tried any crowdfunding?**

**SK:** No, I have not tried crowdfunding yet. I was advised that it is a lot of work to manage a crowdfunding campaign, and I alone did not have the bandwidth to manage. However, I raised \$50,000 in a pre-seed investment round.

**EGT: What have been your biggest obstacles?**

**SK:** My biggest challenge has always been funding. I bootstrapped this project on a very conservative shoestring. I was not eligible for bank financing since I had not been in business for a minimum of 2 years. The struggle was real.

Thanks to my determination, I met some great people who led me to find my initial investors and we built a small team to help take the company to the next level.

**EGT: What advice do you have for inventors seeking to manufacture a baby product?**

**SK:** Don't give up your day job! It is not an easy road to travel, especially by yourself.

Find a couple of mentors to help keep you on track and moving in a forward direction.

Join a networking group to learn from inventors who have faced similar challenges.

Don't take "no" for an answer. Determination, stick-to-itiveness and tenacity are all qualities needed to succeed. 🍀

*Details: [thecrawligator.com](http://thecrawligator.com)*

Books by **Edie Tolchin** ([egt@edietolchin.com](mailto:egt@edietolchin.com)) include "Fanny on Fire" ([fannyonfire.com](http://fannyonfire.com)) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing." She has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000. Edie has owned EGT Global Trading since 1997, assisting inventors with product safety issues and China manufacturing.

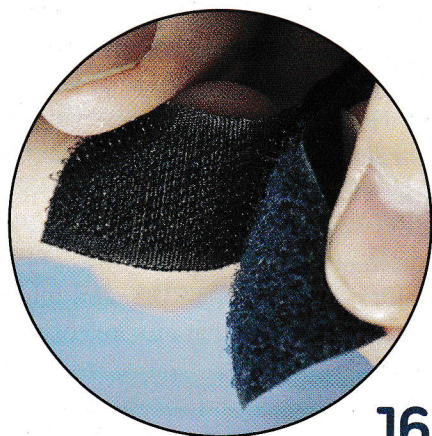


# Contents

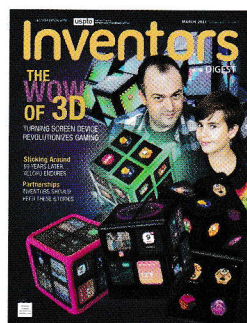
March 2021 Volume 37 Issue 3



24



16



**ON THE COVER**  
Ilya Osipov and his son Savva, inventors of WOWCube; photos courtesy of Cubios Inc.



32

## Features

- 28 **3D's Wow Factor**  
Father/Son Device Revolutionizes Gaming
- 32 **Alight With Inspiration**  
Candle Company Honors Memory of 2 Mothers

## Inventor Spotlight

- 24 **New Old Favorite**  
Mom Revives Crawling Toy



## Departments

- 8 **Your USPTO**  
News, Upcoming Events
- 13 **Everybody's Talking**  
Conversation Pieces
- 14 **Bright Ideas**  
Innovation That Shines
- 16 **Time Tested**  
Velcro Sticks Around
- 18 **Lander Zone**  
Partnerships: True Stories
- 21 **Inventing 101**  
Goal: Be Doubly Perfect
- 22 **Social Hour**  
Starting Your Own Podcast
- 36 **Prototyping**  
Anti-typing' Joys
- 38 **Launching Pad**  
Excuses, Excuses
- 40 **IP Market**  
This Game Has to Stop!
- 44 **Eye on Washington**  
Could Iancu's Successor Come From Big Pharma?
- 46 **Inventiveness**  
Focus on the Fun and Fascinating

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