

# Solving Little Problems

FORMER ATTORNEY THRIVES WITH LINE OF INNOVATIVE BABY PRODUCTS **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

**B**Y THE TIME you read this interview, I should be a grandma for the first time! My daughter and son-in-law were expecting a baby boy, due at the end of September.

After my many years of manufacturing safe baby products in China, I now have a personal interest in inventions for little ones. Recently while surfing on social media for such items, I came across an ad for grabease by elli&nooli, and its line of innovative baby products. I can't wait to try them on my grandson!

**Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): How did the grabease story begin?**

**Maya Shalev (MS):** My background is in law and business management, but I was always fascinated by the art of product development. I always loved problem solving (possibly due to my previous life as a lawyer and trained mediator), as well as observing my babies' and other babies' development.

I first came up with a stroller blanket that wrapped around the baby in a way that couldn't fall off the stroller. In 2011—together with my father, who was an engineer—I invented the looping recorder to go into a plush animal and play Mommy's (or any loved one's) voice in a loop until the baby could fall asleep. To this day I personally think it's a brilliant idea, but marketing it and educating the market was difficult.

In 2014 my father passed away, and I felt that I needed a break from the entrepreneur adventure. I was pregnant at the time with my third one and had to focus on being healthy for him. But the inventor's bug didn't just go away and in 2017 the grabease utensils came to life (as with my other products) by observing my little one at the stage of self-feeding. I noticed that baby utensils aren't really designed with babies' needs and capabilities in mind.

I started by breaking the spoons in my kitchen and designing a proper handle with play dough. Given its small size, I felt it needed a choke shield. So, that was added, and our first 3D fork and spoon were printed. I had consulted with occupational therapists and feeding specialists and made some changes to make sure the utensils are ergonomically designed for baby's natural hand grasp.

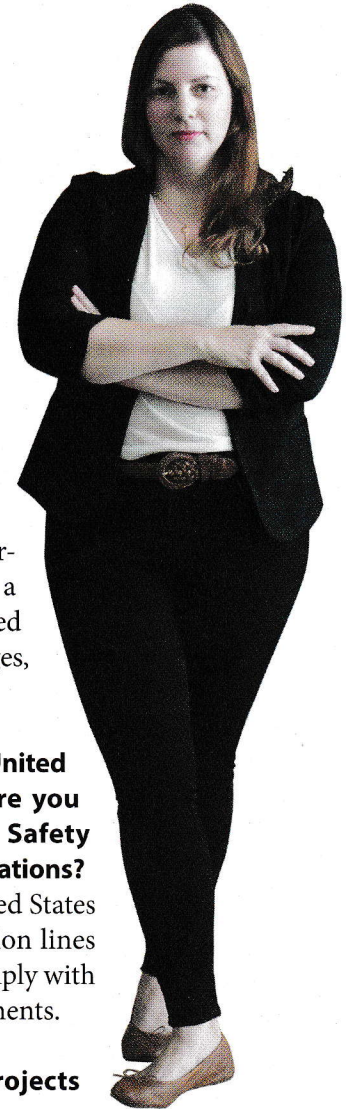


Maya Shalev came up with the idea for the grabease Allover (waterproof) Bib during a visit to the hair salon with her little one. The Ergonomic Utensils set was one of her first innovations.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRABEASE

**“Apparently once a product has been patented anywhere outside of China for more than six months, you can no longer apply for a design patent in China. The solution is to invest in a patent in China ahead of time.”** —MAYA SHALEV



After the plastic utensil launched, I noticed more and more young babies chewing on the rounded handle, so we made a silicone version of the ergonomic spoon to serve younger babies.

The toothbrush was my daughter's invention. She noticed we were struggling to brush her little brother's teeth and suggested we come up with a toothbrush that he could use on his own and become more comfortable with independent brushing. So, together with our pediatric dentist, the double-sided toothbrush was designed! It was patented under her name after she and I did some market research and learned about product pricing.

Then the bib came to life after conducting a survey that showed parents' second biggest struggle (after putting baby to sleep) was the mess during mealtime. There are so many bibs and floor mats on the market that I wasn't sure what else we could make. One day, I was at the hair salon with my little one when the bib apron/ chair cover came to mind.

**EGT: Have you a favorite among these?**

**MS:** I love the toothbrush because my daughter came up with that idea and we patented it together. I'm mostly attached to the ergonomic utensils. They were the first ones in the grabase line and are like my fourth child.

**EGT: Have you tried crowdfunding?**

**MS:** No. I figured if I need to spend time and money on promoting the crowdfunding, I may as well put that money into sales of the product directly. Of course, this strategy is possible when the initial fund for a small production is available.

**EGT: I first noticed the Allover Bib ad on social media. Have the ads helped sales?**

**MS:** Yes, ads help if you have a knowledgeable person running them. We had an interesting case with the Allover Bibs, where at first people did not understand the products and we were getting a lot of negative response. Once we changed a few things in our messaging and images, it was a game changer.

**EGT: Are you manufacturing in the United States, or overseas? If overseas, are you following the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act testing and certifications?**

**MS:** We manufacture both in the United States and overseas, and with both production lines we run third-party lab testing. We comply with U.S., EU and other countries' requirements.

**EGT: I understand you have many projects of giving back.**

**MS:** I always wanted my company to be tied to doing good. (TOMS was the inspiration.) We started small by cooperating with homeless pregnant women to do our packaging, we donated utensils to Feed the Children and Baby2Baby, and donated on a monthly basis to Operation Smile until we were able to commit to donate a meal to the Children's Hunger Fund for every item we sold.

**EGT: What is your patent situation?**

**MS:** Some items are utility patented, some are design, and some aren't at all. Some of the products are patented and trademarked internationally as well.

**EGT: Where are your products sold?**

**MS:** Grabase.com, Amazon, Nordstrom, buybuyBABY and in boutiques throughout the world.



Maya Shalev's favorite product is the Double-sided Toothbrush because her daughter came up with that idea and they patented it together.

**EGT:** Have you encountered any problems during product development?

**MS:** Of course! I can write a semester-long course about it. One example has to do with China's patent system. Apparently once a product has been patented anywhere outside of China for more than six months, you can no longer apply for a design patent in China. The solution is to invest in a patent in China ahead of time.

Another example has to do with sourcing materials. As the designer of the RecordablePal plush recorder, I wanted to use all kinds of fabrics to create the most appealing owl plush toy. From a business perspective, that wasn't a good idea. Each component and fabric of the finished product had to go through chemical and safety tests. With all the different kinds of materials I initially had it made with, the testing cost became very high.

When designing a product, you need to take into consideration the effect your design will have on the product's cost. I ended up cutting down on the variety of the materials to lower the testing costs.

**EGT:** Do you have any advice for our readers?

**MS:** I wish I knew the patent system in China better at the time. I was thinking small and didn't want to "waste" my money at such an early stage. Good products get picked up (by international distributors) pretty quickly, so you have to keep that in mind with everything you develop. 🐼

Details: [grabease.com](http://grabease.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.



## 2 Critical Steps to getting your NEW PRODUCT "out there"

### 1 GET IT MADE

Contact Edie Tolchin – "The Sourcing Lady" (SM) for sourcing, China manufacturing, product safety issues, packaging assistance, quality control, production testing, final shipment inspections, freight arrangements, import services and delivery to your door!

[www.EGTglobaltrading.com](http://www.EGTglobaltrading.com)

[EGT@egtglobaltrading.com](mailto:EGT@egtglobaltrading.com)

P.O. Box 5660 - Hillsborough, NJ 08844

845-321-2362

### 2 GET A WEBSITE!

Contact Ken Robinson – While your order is being manufactured, you need to start working on your WEB PRESENCE! Get people talking about your product on Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+), get good search engine placement (SEO)!

[www.widgetsontheweb.com](http://www.widgetsontheweb.com)

[kenrbnsn@widgetsontheweb.com](mailto:kenrbnsn@widgetsontheweb.com)

614 Van Liew Court - Hillsborough, NJ 08844

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Get more BANG for your BUCK from two professionals with a combined total of over 60 years of experience!

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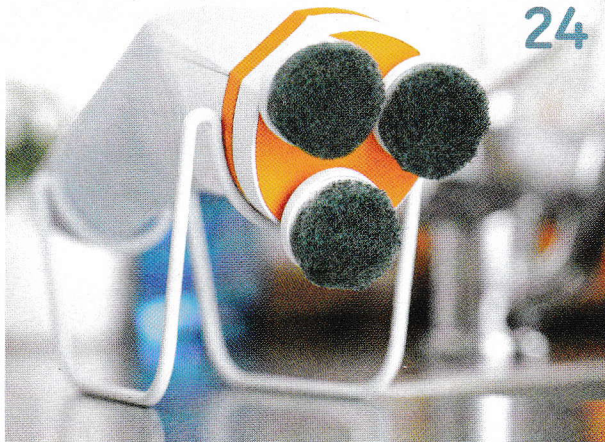
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