

Gliding in the Grass

WOMAN'S HIGH HEEL ATTACHMENT STRIPS ELIMINATE THAT SINKING FEELING OUTDOORS BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN

EVEN AS a young woman, I was not able to master the art of walking in high heels. I gazed longingly at my gal pals who rocked the stilettos with ease, but I never wanted to look like an oaf, tripping while on a date in the 1980s.

Nowadays, however, according to statista.com, “The value of ... (the high heels, aka “stilettos”) market was expected to rise to 42.7 billion U.S. dollars by 2024.”

Stilettos ain't goin' nowhere! And now, with wedding season upon us, Grasswalkers,[®] invented by Sheryl White of San Diego, are a great way to rock those heels in an outdoor setting.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Where are you from, and have you ever invented anything before Grasswalkers?

Sheryl White (SW): I was born and raised in San Diego, had a 28-year career in banking, and was a founding board member of Torrey Pines Bank. While in banking, I always had many clients I looked up to for starting their own businesses and wanted to do the same one day. I have never invented anything prior to Grasswalkers.

EGT: How did the idea for Grasswalkers come about? How do they work?

SW: I went to a friend's wedding that was held on a beautiful lawn at a hotel in San Diego. All of the women were dressed in heels,

including me. As we walked on the grass our heels would sink—not only twisting some ankles but ruining some beautiful shoes! There were also some older ladies who had to wait outside the grass area on the concrete because they didn't want to chance the risk of an injury.

I got home and researched products that were out there to solve this problem. I could only find products that fit over the heels of the shoe (like little caps), so I ordered several different kinds. Most of them that I tried were hard to place on the heel because the size of the heel didn't quite fit into the cap.

When I was finally successful, it didn't increase the circumference of the heel enough to stop the heels from sinking in the grass. In fact, in my first attempt with “Soulmates,” I had sunk in the grass immediately and the “cap” stayed buried in the dirt.

I decided to attempt making a product myself, because I had just received my master's degree in leadership at USD and I was motivated by the students in my cohort who were all inventing new businesses. I also thought, “How hard could it be?”

The product I came up with (in 2012) is so simple. You just attach a flexible plastic strip to the bottom of the shoe from the toe to the heel, making it a completely stable surface to walk on and start walking. You don't have to worry about the size of your heels not fitting, because the bottom surface of the toe and heel are the only surfaces that touch the product.



“I had to go through many prototypes before I finally discovered the proper material, flexibility, and size that work—a total of eight prototypes.” —SHERYL WHITE

EGT: How many tries did it take before you had a viable prototype?

SW: I had to go through many prototypes before I finally discovered the proper material, flexibility, and size that work—a total of eight prototypes.

I started by bringing several drawn shapes to a plastics company in town for them to die-cut the shapes out for me. I literally taped these different shapes onto my heels and walked out on the grass to see which shape would work the best and look the best.

It actually took me a couple of years to whittle down the size that would finally work and be saleable.

I recall one of the earlier shapes I tried and handed out at a cocktail party; the journalist covering the event called them “snowshoes for heels.” I knew that would never work and got back to making them smaller and more flexible. I also was advised by a friend to change to a mold instead of die-cut plastic.

About three years ago, I decided I needed to improve on the product’s life span. I didn’t want to be accused of not caring for the planet’s trash problem when it comes to non-reusable plastic. The plastic we use now is recyclable, and when the adhesive wears out on the product, we now sell “Replacement Adhesive Pads” for a small cost that will make the Grasswalkers like new.

We are hoping that individuals using them will keep buying the pads to reuse their Grasswalkers. Currently, about 80 percent of our clients buy these replacement pads with their first order.

EGT: What are Grasswalkers made from? Fabrics and components? How is the product packaged?

SW: It’s made from recyclable flexible polycarbonate with adhesive and non-skid tape. It is



packaged in a recyclable paper envelope, and the product can be re-used.

EGT: Where is the product manufactured? If overseas, have you had problems with logistics or quality control?

SW: Every part of the product, including the packaging, is manufactured in San Diego.

When I started, the company I hired to do the mold was in Carson City, Nevada. Even having it there, which wasn’t that far from where I live in San Diego, was not convenient for meetings. So, I found a company in Carlsbad. I never looked at manufacturing in China or anywhere else, because I really wanted this product to be 100 percent “Made in the USA!”

EGT: Can you share info about your patent process?

SW: We have trademarks in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

We have a patent in Australia that was given in October 2015.

We have tried to get a patent in the United States and, after much time and money, were turned

Grasswalkers is a flexible plastic strip attached to the bottom of a high-heeled shoe from the toe to the heel, enabling more secure walking on unstable surfaces.

down because there is a product the USPTO feels is similar. However, that product is not for high heels; it is for men's flat shoes. To me, there is no comparison with the look or how it works.

EGT: Have you tried crowdfunding or TV shows such as "Shark Tank"?

SW: No. I did meet with Lori Greiner privately, and she said she thought the product was too much of a niche product for her. I have not pursued crowdfunding or "Shark Tank" because I want to retain sole ownership and I have enough funds to continue to pay for the expenses. It would, however, be nice to have some marketing advice.

EGT: Have you had any obstacles in any of the phases of product development?

SW: The biggest obstacle has been the patent process and dealing with attorneys.

EGT: Will you be adding any items to your product line?

SW: In 2019, we added "Replacement Adhesive Pads" to our site because we didn't want this product to be thrown away and contribute to the "plastic problem." Now, for the small price of \$3.50, customers can keep the Grasswalkers strips, making them like new. I also have another item I am thinking about, also for heel wearers.

EGT: Any advice for inventors seeking to develop a fashion item?

SW: It takes much more time and money than you think. But if you think of something that hasn't been done before or you believe you can greatly improve upon an interesting idea, don't wait for someone else to make it. Just go for it, no matter what. It is very rewarding. 📌

Details: grasswalkers.com

Edith G Tolchin has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000. She is an editor (opinionatededitor.com/testimonials), writer (edietolchin.com), and has specialized in China manufacturing since 1990 (egtglobaltrading.com).



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