

Forward, March!

FRUSTRATED BY PAST JOB SEEKING, 2 MILITARY SPOUSES FORM AN INNOVATIVE HANDBAG COMPANY **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

LOVE ME some “Shark Tank” stories. I especially love inventors who have appeared on the show and have great backstories.

I spoke with Lisa Bradley of Granville, Ohio—one half of R. Riveter, who narrates on behalf of herself and of Cameron Cruse, her business partner from Bridge City, Texas.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): Please tell us about each of your backgrounds.

Lisa Bradley (LB): Cameron and I met in Dahlonega, Georgia, where our husbands were Ranger instructors at Camp Merrill. Talking and getting to know each other better, we realized we both had difficulty finding and keeping jobs in our specific fields. Through the challenges of career choices came the idea to create R. Riveter.

Military families are relocated every 2.9 years, making it difficult for the spouse to pursue a single career or gain work experience. Like many small towns, however, Dahlonega poses yet another challenge for military spouses seeking employment. Cameron’s Master of Architecture degree and my MBA were becoming more and more irrelevant, especially with fragmented resumes from our multiple military moves.

Our one-of-a-kind handbag company was born of a mix of frustration, passion and creativity, and designed to help chip away at the heart of military spouse employment woes. In a converted attic, we laid the groundwork for

our still rapidly expanding company with a 45-year-old, 75-pound Consew industrial sewing machine, canvas scraps and the best leather we could find on the market.

Here’s a bit more about my background: I graduated from Columbus (Montana) High School in 2003. I attended the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, on a track scholarship. I decided to study business after I won the entrepreneurship competition as their first woman and freshman awardee. Little did I know that it was going to be practice for a much more intense and public entrepreneurship competition ... “Shark Tank,” in 2016.

Here is more about Cameron Cruse’s background: She graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design, first with a BFA in 2010, and then again with a master’s in architecture in 2011. From 2014 to 2021 she lived in Southern Pines, North Carolina with her family, which became home for our company’s flagship retail store. She is currently living in the great state of Texas.

Cameron and Lisa were named among the 25 people changing the future of retail in 2019 by the National Retail Federation and Cameron was named Apparel’s “30 under 30,” in 2018.

EGT: When did you decide on the business model of R. Riveter? When did you begin the business?

LB: We decided on the business model before we decided on the product. It was 2011, and Cameron and I were both overeducated and underemployed after several military moves.

We knew there had to be a way to engage other military spouses like us, and we started thinking of ideas. With Cameron’s background in design and my business background, we somehow landed on the model of decentralized handbag manufacturing.

At R. Riveter, a portion of each She’s the Veteran Wilson Tote and Betsy Handbag sale will be donated to the She’s the Veteran organization, which works with female veterans to improve mental health.



EGT: How are you giving back to the military community?

LB: We give back in many ways, from our work-from-home “Riveters” and team members running the company daily, but we also give back to multiple military-affiliated nonprofits. As we continue to grow, we understand that the longevity of our ability to invest in our military communities depends on fantastic products that anyone can love—not just those who have served or with family members who have served.

EGT: Have either of you ever manufactured handbags before?

LB: The company is built on a lot of firsts; making handbags was one of them. It’s amazing how much goes into the design and manufacture of a handbag.

Our unique manufacturing process, inspired by Rosie the Riveter (the World War II cultural icon), is shattering the stereotype that you are either a career woman or a stay-at-home mother. We break down barriers and prove the unproven can succeed with vision and perseverance.

EGT: How many different handbag styles are you featuring? Any add-on products?

LB: We have 45 handbag styles and 40 supporting accessories which include small leather products such as keychains and wallets, to home goods such as candles and aprons—all Riveter-made.

EGT: From where are you selling the bags?

LB: We sell predominantly on our website D2C (direct to consumer), but we also have two retail stores: our flagship store in Southern Pines, North Carolina, and a store in central Florida attached to our production facility. You can also find us in boutiques across America, and on HSN.

EGT: How can a military spouse participate in R. Riveter? Do you provide sewing and assembly training?

LB: Military spouses can go to our website to a link toward the bottom of the page, called “become a riveter.” There, they can sign up to receive more information and eventually



“Know what your mission is. Know your passion. Then, make a plan. Then make another one, because the first will probably break at some point.” —LISA BRADLEY

complete a test kit, which is test fabric and instructions to complete a part of our assembly. We wanted to make getting started easy and affordable because that’s what makes us.

EGT: Where do your raw materials originate?

LB: Our raw materials are globally sourced, as some of our hardware isn’t even being made in the States anymore. We design and assemble everything in the U.S.A.

EGT: Have you tried crowdfunding?

LB: In 2013, we ran a successful Kickstarter campaign. We were able to get enough capital to keep us moving forward, but the biggest outcome is that we caught the eye of a “Shark Tank” producer. After some encouragement, we decided to throw our names in the hat and ultimately were selected to pitch our company to the “Sharks.”

We appeared on “Shark Tank” in February 2016. The business has not been the same since! In 2016, we had a small team of 13 remote

Overeducated and underemployed in 2011, Cameon Cruse (left) and Lisa Bradley decided on the business model before deciding on the product.

Contents

November 2023 Volume 39 Issue 11



22

Features

- 26 Tragedy and Thanksgiving**
Brandon Harris Reshaped His Life, Jaw, Innovates for Others
- 32 2023 Holiday Gift Guide**
Inventors Discuss Their Inspirations, Motivations
- 37 IPOEF Inventor of the Year**
Dr. Cato T. Laurencin a Force In Regenerative Engineering

Inventor Spotlight

- 22 Forward, March!**
Military Spouses' Handbag Company



Departments

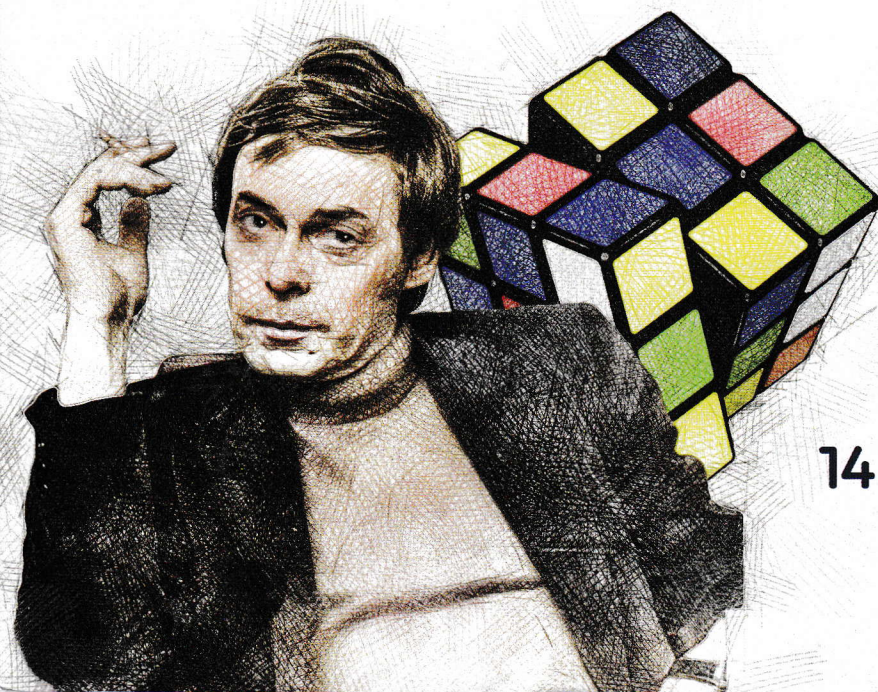
- 6 Your USPTO**
1 Millionth Design Patent
- 10 Editor's Note**
Inventing Words
- 11 Everybody's Talking**
A Pass on Celebrity Case
- 12 Bright Ideas**
Innovation That Shines
- 14 Time Tested**
Rubik's Cube
- 16 Lander Zone**
Patent Writing Homestretch
- 18 Social Hour**
Social Media Listening, Part 2
- 25 Inventor Update**
Ay, There's the Rub
- 38 Think Marketing**
Ask the Experts? Why?
- 42 Prototyping**
Goodwill Exchange
- 44 Eye on Washington**
Goal: Better Transparency
- 46 Inventiveness**
Focus on the Fun and Fascinating



32



ON THE COVER
Brandon Harris,
founder of Jawzrsize;
photo by Hawaiian
Lifestyles Studio



14

IN COOPERATION WITH



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

NOVEMBER 2023 Volume 39 Issue 11

Inventors

DIGEST

SAVING FACE

TRAGEDY IN PARADISE SPARKS INSPIRATION AND INNOVATION

Holiday Gift Guide

FIRST-PERSON STORIES FROM INVENTORS

1 Million Strong

MAJOR MILESTONE FOR DESIGN PATENTS

BRANDON HARRIS



UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

