

Inventors

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GIANT STEP

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HAVE BIG HOPES
FOR POP-UP DOG PAD

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His Latest Role: INVENTOR

FAMILY MAN AND 'THE LITTLE COUPLE' STAR BILL KLEIN DEVELOPS PET TRAINING PAD **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

I'VE WORKED with inventors for more than 20 years and have written about them for almost as long. Every so often, I'm privileged to meet an inventor who wears many hats.

I've never been good at balancing my career and home life, though my children are grown and have become kind and accomplished citizens. I have no idea how this happened, but I guess I must have done something right.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting Bill Klein, who is doing many things right. He has a lovely wife, Dr. Jen Arnold, and two great kids: Will and Zoey.

Klein is the epitome of a multi-hat-wearer. He's a successful entrepreneur, a dedicated and truly hands-on dad, an inventor—and oh, did I mention he's one of the stars of TLC's long-running show, "The Little Couple"?

Let's learn about Bill's new pet invention, the Pop-Up Pee Pad, and perhaps we'll be lucky to pick up a bit of his amazing vigor by osmosis.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): I recall seeing an episode of your show where you were trying out the Pop-up Pee Pads with your dog Rocky. When did you experience that "aha!" moment?

Bill Klein (BK): It was about nine years ago. Rocky was my and Jen's first dog together. And while he is a cute dog, he single-handedly ruined a number of kitchen chairs, a leather couch and too many area rugs to count. But from that frustration, the Pop-Up Pee Pad was born.

EGT: How did the invention come about?

BK: Rocky had regularly targeted our kitchen chair, and it was almost a daily routine to do a chair-leg check to see if he had relieved himself there. I began

putting pet pads under the chair leg so I wouldn't have to clean the floor, just the chair leg. It worked like a charm. Rocky continued to target the chair leg, and I had one less thing to clean.

While it worked, I was still a bit dissatisfied. After all, I was encouraging him to keep peeing on the chair! So, I began playing with ideas to get him to pee on something I could avoid touching or cleaning altogether... and that's how we started prototyping.

EGT: How exactly does it work?

BK: First, identify a spot where your dog has been having "accidents." Unfold the pad in a location nearby, allowing the hydrant to pop up. Give your dog an opportunity to use the pad.

EGT: Is it better than a real fire hydrant?

BK: The fire department thinks so!

EGT: What are the advantages over pee pads already on the market?

BK: Our pad is a new creation for the pet training pad market. We are the only pet training pad that provides a 3-D target for male dogs. All other pads fall flat.

EGT: On your show, I saw that your brothers recently accompanied you to the Global Pet Expo at the Orlando Convention Center. How as this show beneficial for your product?

BK: GPE has been great for us. We went to the 2017 and 2018 shows.

Our first trip to GPE was to test the waters. I figured it would be a lot cheaper to go to the trade show than it would be to own a container of product no one wants. After an encouraging first showing, we went back to

Dr. Jen Arnold and Bill Klein were dog lovers who had a problem to solve.





The couple's dog, Rocky (front, with Maggie in back), had "single-handedly ruined a number of kitchen chairs, a leather couch and too many area rugs to count," Bill says.

Global in 2018 and this time, we were in production and had inventory to sell.

It's a great way to get out there in front of big resellers. It only takes one to put you on the map!

EGT: I see you are selling on Amazon and on your pet store's website (Rocky and Maggie's). Are you looking to license the product, or do you want to keep this new business in the family?

BK: Starting out, we've had some great meetings with big players in the market. Our relationship with Amazon has been great. They've helped us get our product out to consumers everywhere and along the way, we've learned a lot about logistics, advertising, production forecasting and negotiating with industry giants.

EGT: Have you invented anything else?

BK: No, but I have another product I'm prototyping for a different market. I've definitely caught the inventor bug!

EGT: How did you make your prototypes, and how many did it take before you got the right one?

BK: We went to Petco and purchased a bunch of pads, then to Michaels to pick up some oak tag, and began cutting and gluing. Surprisingly, our first prototype took an hour or so to create. Since

then, we've made a number of enhancements for production, but the first prototype was very close to the finished product.

EGT: Where are you manufacturing? If in China, has the product been affected by the recent tariff increases?

BK: We are manufacturing in China for the time being. Volume will help us with the development of automation equipment, at which point we would like to move some manufacturing to the United States.

So far, the tariffs haven't affected us. We are watching the volatility of the international trade legislation closely and hope we can continue to offer a great product at competitive prices.

EGT: How is the product packaged?

BK: We rolled out the product in three retail package sizes: 10 pads per pack, 25 pads per pack and 50 pads per pack.

EGT: What are the retail pricing and packaging options?

BK: The packaging for the 10-packs is a four-color polybag available for \$14.95 per pack. The 25- and 50-packs come in newly improved, corrugated four-color shippers and are available at \$24.95 per pack and \$44.95 per pack, respectively.

“We are the only pet training pad that provides a 3-D target for male dogs. All other pads fall flat.” —BILL KLEIN

EGT: Please tell us about your patent process.

BK: The patent process was pretty straightforward. We met with a patent attorney, who helped draft the patent claims and submitted the patent to the USPTO. We paid for the expedited review so we could keep our momentum going.

Most people don't receive the patent without some changes, and we were no different. We made some augmentations and were granted the utility patent just 15 months from our first filing date.

EGT: What obstacles, if any, have you encountered in product development?

BK: We came up with a great idea and secured the patent, but developing a sellable product was the bigger challenge.

We traveled to China, where most pet training pads are made. We met with four manufacturers in three provinces over two weeks. And while language barriers were present, the primary obstacle was trying to convince the production engineers that it was possible to create the Pop-Up Pee Pad.

EGT: Do you find it difficult developing this new business, managing the pet store and the store's online presence, and filming your TV show?

BK: It's not as scary as it sounds. I've been fortunate to have a great group of people around me on all of my different projects. It doesn't hurt that I enjoy what I do, too. Each project has its own unique challenges and learning opportunities.

EGT: How do you work in family time with all of this? You recently moved from Houston to St. Petersburg, Florida.

BK: Family is what keeps me going. I love spending time with each of them and all of them. And while I tend to have hours that extend long into the night, my favorite hours are any hours I get to spend with them.

In a recent 30-day span I traveled to four cities, had meetings with three top retailers in the pet space, closed a number of deals, shipped thousands of orders, and the 13th season of our show debuted on TLC.

My shining moment was teaching my son to ride a bicycle! Incidentally, he learned to ride a two-wheeler much quicker than me.



In addition to raising their children Zoey and Will, their TV show and many other activities, Dr. Jen Arnold and Bill Klein have produced an inspirational book.

EGT: Do you have any spare time for hobbies, as well as plans to increase your product line?

BK: I've heard about these "hobbies." I want to get one, and it's on my to-do list for 2023.

As for production growth, indeed we are planning for growth. We are working with our customers and our manufacturing partners to ensure we can meet the needs of our expanding market.

EGT: Any encouragement for novice inventors?

BK: The world is starving for more creative people to solve problems, improve something or make life a little easier. Thank you in advance for making the world a better place. 🍷

Details: rockyandmaggies.com/products/pop-up-pee-pad

Books by **Edie Tolchin** (egt@edietolchin.com) include "Fanny on Fire" (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.

