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Mandy Haberman

Inventor of the Anywayup Cup

Mandy Haberman knew that if she was to have any chance of interesting a big supermarket chain in stocking the non-spill toddler cup she had invented, it had to make a big impression. So she filled one with concentrated blackcurrant juice and sent it by post in a white unlined box to the head buyer at Tesco.

Her tactic worked. Within days Tesco was on the phone. And within weeks Haberman's Anywayup Cup was on supermarket shelves, paving the way for worldwide success and making Haberman wealthy. She says: 'I had sent pictures and flyers and empty samples to Tesco before but buyers receive hundreds of things every day. I realised that I needed to give them the wow factor. After all, I had nothing to lose.'

Haberman had never intended to become an inventor. She was the daughter of an art teacher and a scientist and brought up in Hertfordshire, studying graphic design before becoming a full-time mother of three. But when her daughter Emily was born with a condition that made it



difficult for her to suck, Haberman became so frustrated with trying to find a way to feed her baby that she was determined to find a solution. She says: 'I didn't suddenly wake up one day and think, 'Oh, I'll become an inventor.' It was a necessity thing. The driving force wasn't to create a successful product or to make money. It was because something needed to be done and nobody else was doing anything about it. The energy came from anger. I didn't see why other families should have to go through what I went through trying to feed my daughter.'

She started improvising with bits and pieces she found around the house and would spend hours at the kitchen table trying to create a device which would solve the problem. In the end it took five years of research and endless improvising to come up with a workable model. On the way she had to endure a fair amount of scepticism from friends who wondered why she was devoting so much of her time to such an unlikely project.

But Haberman soon discovered that creating a model which actually worked was just the beginning. She had no money of her own to spend on getting a proper prototype made, and so had to raise the £20,000 she needed by writing to hundreds of organisations asking for help. Then she was unable to find a company interested in licensing her product, which she called the Haberman Feeder. But having come this far she was determined not to give in. So she set up her own firm and marketed her product by mail order to hospitals and parents.

Haberman says that in many ways inventing a solution to help her child was a way of taking back some control over what had happened to their lives. 'When you go through a problem like that you are blown with the wind. You can't change the fact that your baby has a problem, but doing something about it to help others was my way of taking control.' The Haberman Feeder is now used in hospitals throughout the world.

By now the inventing bug had taken hold. Haberman came up with the idea for her second invention while visiting a friend's house and watching a toddler spill juice on the cream carpet. The result was the Anywayup Cup, a toddler-training cup that automatically seals between sips. Creating a valve that was completely leak-proof took many attempts, but finding a company prepared to take it on was even harder and Haberman made more than 20 presentations without success. Undaunted, she invested her own money to develop a fully working prototype.

The gamble paid off. She discovered a small Welsh company that was willing to work as sales and marketing agents on commission, and within months 60,000 cups were being sold every week.

But then in 1998 disaster struck. One month after Haberman had granted the Welsh company a manufacturing

licence to produce the Anywayup Cup, and they had taken on a new factory specially to make it, she discovered that a major brand had launched a similar cup using her technology. She decided to take the competitor to court for infringement of her patent rights. After 18 months battling in the High Court her opponent eventually dropped its appeal, paying costs and damages to Haberman and her team.

It was a nerve-wracking process, especially as Haberman realised once the legal process had begun that her family could lose their home if the case went against her. The experience inspired her to start campaigning to promote awareness of intellectual property rights and for a fairer system of enforcement.

She says: 'The experience was horrendous. I came away from it thinking that nobody should have to go through this. I realised I was in a privileged position to make a noise. One thing I've learnt from litigation is that I am a fighter. To find that I can't just roll over was a revelation.'

Fact File

Date of birth: 19 October 1954

Marital status: married with three children

Highest level of education achieved: art school

Qualifications: BA (Hons) in Graphic Design from St Martins School of Art

Interests: walking, the arts, good food and wine

Personal philosophy: 'If you think outside the box, everything is possible. Sometimes bad things happen in life but I truly believe that inside every bad thing is a brilliant new opportunity waiting to fly.'

Since that initial court case Haberman, who in 2001 was named Female Inventor of the Year, has successfully enforced her patents against multinational companies in the Europe and the United States, to the extent that United States companies now come to ask her for licences rather than risk infringement proceedings. She is a member of several advisory committees and regularly speaks at events and seminars on the subject of intellectual property rights.

Haberman estimates that the total turnover value of her licensed products worldwide is now around £40 million.

She says: 'I experienced at first hand the problems that face the private inventor in the patent system and I am continuing to use my position to raise awareness and promote change in the system, frequently at government level. I am proud and somewhat amazed by what I have achieved and I am particularly delighted that the intellectual property system is now beginning to change. I feel that I have made a worthwhile contribution.'

As well as developing new products, Haberman, now 54, has also turned her attention to tackling childhood obesity with an initiative called 'The Glugs' to promote healthy living amongst pre-school children and their families through fun and entertainment.