

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Lisa Lindahl, Hinda Miller and Polly Palmer Smith

Transcript of an interview
conducted by

Alison Oswald

at

National Museum of American History
Smithsonian Institution

on

March 4, 2020

with subsequent additions corrections

Hinda Miller ([00:00](#)):

Hinda Miller. H-I-N-D-A.

Casey McAdams ([00:04](#)):

And.

Lisa Lindahl ([00:05](#)):

Lisa Lindahl.

Casey McAdams ([00:07](#)):

Okay.

Polly Smith ([00:08](#)):

Polly Smith.

Alison Oswald ([00:10](#)):

Good morning. I'm Alison Oswald and I'm an archivist at the National Museum of American History Smithsonian Institution. And I am speaking with Lisa Lindahl, Hinda Miller, and Polly Palmer Smith in the board room of the National Museum of American History in Washington. Today is Wednesday, March 4th, 2020. Welcome Lisa, Hinda and Polly.

Polly Smith ([00:32](#)):

Thank you.

Alison Oswald ([00:34](#)):

So, first question, what was Vermont like in 1970s?

Lisa Lindahl ([00:42](#)):

It was wild. A lot of people moved to Vermont from New York; Connecticut invaded it actually. Someone's actually written a book about it called *Going Up Country* [*Going Up the Country: When the Hippies, Dreamers, Freaks, and Radicals Moved to Vermont*]

Hinda Miller ([00:56](#)):

Back to the Land.

Lisa Lindahl ([00:57](#)):

Back to the Land. Starting communes?

Polly Smith ([01:01](#)):

[inaudible 00:01:01] brought a lot of people.

Lisa Lindahl ([01:03](#)):

You're right. And IBM brought a lot of people as well. It had been mainly agricultural until the late '60s early '70s.

Hinda Miller ([01:13](#)):

And our University of Vermont had a lot of sports but not necessarily women's sports until Title IX was passed in 72. It had to be implemented by 75 and we started with our sampling in 1977. So, we were right at the beginning. So we had a very athletic women's community, like they skied or played tennis or they weren't in team sports yet but we were kind of on the cusp of women learning all the basics about team sports, how to play together and all the things you learn when you play a team sport.

Lisa Lindahl ([01:53](#)):

But the other thing about Vermont in the late '70s is that it had not yet been discovered. It wasn't [inaudible 00:02:01] yet.

Hinda Miller ([02:02](#)):

Right.

Lisa Lindahl ([02:03](#)):

And Polly's family had been going to Vermont... Well forever.

Polly Smith ([02:07](#)):

Yeah. We have a little cabin there that is built a hundred years ago, and they were there before that. But so, I remembered, "Yes. Real cow town." It's just one main street-

Hinda Miller ([02:20](#)):

And my family we came to Stowe to ski in... Well 65 so it was our country house. So, I didn't know about Burlington, but I was a city girl from Montreal, and I got to be in the mountains with the sky and the stars and in nature. And it was amazing to me.

Alison Oswald ([02:47](#)):

What was the status of the sportswear industry in the 70s? What was going on with that?

Lisa Lindahl ([02:56](#)):

In the 70s? Well, that was the beginning of the fitness revolution. So, it was really bubbling and bubbling up and out. Jim Fixx wrote the *Complete Book of Running*. It really actually began with Kennedy. It was President Kennedy who talked about getting out and doing jumping jacks and becoming fit. And I remember that when I was like in the middle of school hear him talking about that, I think. Anyway... And so, what was cropping up around the country with all these small independently owned sporting goods, boutiques, almost, running stores, running shops. Luckily for us really. It was a very entrepreneurial time for sporting goods then.

Hinda Miller ([03:45](#)):

It was the beginning of that industry. So instead of a mature marketplace where buyers are not very interested in your products, we happened to hit on the time not only where our customers were becoming available because we were all running and we were women's lib and we were feeling good and we were going to go into the board rooms and the playing fields and we were very inspired. And there were in Vermont that that sentiment was big because university of Vermont had a lot of women. But to be in at the beginning, like Nike was beginning, Reebok was beginning-

Lisa Lindahl ([04:23](#)):

New Balance.

Hinda Miller ([04:24](#)):

New Balance and-

Lisa Lindahl ([04:26](#)):

Sub 4

Hinda Miller ([04:27](#)):

Bill Rogers who'd had a clothing line, Frank Shorter, these were all men who did marathons. And so we knew that we needed something because we were running but we were holding our breasts like this or we bound our breasts.

Alison Oswald ([04:45](#)):

So let's shift a little to the invention of the jog bra. And I'm going to ask a question. So, if you can repeat the question [inaudible 00:04:52]. How and when did the three of you meet?

Polly Smith ([05:00](#)):

Lisa and I met in eighth grade and have been best friends ever since. Hinda and I met in graduate school and-

Lisa Lindahl ([05:08](#)):

At NYU.

Polly Smith ([05:09](#)):

Yes, New York University. And then I got a summer job in Burlington where Lisa was living and my family was there at the summer, so that's Champlain Shakespeare Festival's the costume designer. And so, then I got sick of living at my parents I moved into Lisa's house. And Hinda was there hanging out with us. And so that's how we [crosstalk 00:05:31].

Hinda Miller ([05:32](#)):

I was your... But I was your assistant. I came up because I knew Vermont and Polly was very talented, so I wanted to go back to Vermont because my family was-

Polly Smith ([05:41](#)):

Yeah. [inaudible 00:05:41] I remember you came... Do you need an assistant? I said, "Yeah. Sure."

Hinda Miller ([05:44](#)):

Yes.

Polly Smith ([05:45](#)):

Come on.

Lisa Lindahl ([05:45](#)):

And then Polly was living with me and through Polly I met Hinda.

Alison Oswald (05:57):

Let's talk a little bit about where the idea came from, what kind of synergy was going on and collaboration with the three of you after having [inaudible 00:06:06]. Can you talk about [inaudible 00:06:08].

Polly Smith (06:08):

Yeah. I think Lisa can answer that best.

Lisa Lindahl (06:10):

The idea for the jog bra happened originally as a joke between my sister and I because my sister knew that I was running and she started and she called me up and said, "What do you do about all the breast movement? It's so uncomfortable." And I said, "I don't know. It really is uncomfortable." So, she said, "Why isn't there a jock strap for women? Hahaha." And I laughed back and said, "Yeah, same idea, different part of the anatomy. Wouldn't that be great?" And we hung up laughing and I sat down and I was in graduate school at the time and I opened up one of my spiral notebooks and said, that is not such a crazy idea I'm going to write down what it needs to do. And I said, okay, the straps get fall off and you've got to stop the breast movement because I didn't know at the time that you couldn't stop breast movement. You could only minimize it and there could be no chafing. I thought, what if there was no hardware to dig in and did I say the straps couldn't fall? That was my major annoyance.

Polly Smith (07:10):

And not cutting. A nice wide strap, something to anchor it.

Lisa Lindahl (07:16):

But I [inaudible 00:07:17] so. In the eighth grade, Polly and I took a sewing class together and I got a D- and she got an A+. So, I went upstairs and knocked on her door and said, "Polly, can you help me make this bra for running?"

Polly Smith (07:38):

[inaudible 00:07:38] pretty much go away. She had nudging me a lot and eventually we tried a lot of different things, which I have no memory of. But-

Lisa Lindahl (07:50):

Well, no her really-

Polly Smith (07:52):

I was intimidated because bras were so complicated, cup sizes and all this sizing and it was hard to like figure out the transition from that to that until the fateful moment when her husband put the jock strap on. Here lady, here's your lady's bra.

Lisa Lindahl (08:14):

We were sitting on my living room floor being upset about yet another prototype that wasn't working and I was worried... Neither Polly or I had been athletic growing up. One of the things that bonded us together was skipping gym class. And so, she was kind of going, "What is this running thing that Lisa is into? I don't get it at all." And I was afraid that because it was being difficult to make this jog bra only, we were

calling it jock bra at the time. She was going to bail on me, and my husband came down the stairs and he'd taken one of his jock straps and literally pulled it over his head and pulled it down over his chest and because he was a clown. And he said, "Hey ladies, here's your jock bra. Hahaha." And we laughed and thought that was hysterical. And I had to get into the act, so I jumped up and said, "Let me try it. Let me try." And I pulled his jock strap up on over my head and pulled the pouch over my breast and the waistband of the jockstrap went around my rib and I kind of jumped up in bed and I went, "Polly, Polly, look at this, look at this." And she came and she went-

Polly Smith (09:29):

That was the turning point for me because then I saw something I could do. It made sense to me. It's a stretchy garment, goes on over your head, cross the straps in the back, make it tight. And then I got what it could be, and it didn't intimidate me anymore.

Lisa Lindahl (09:49):

And Hinda says Polly says doing this sort of as a favor to me but Hinda had always been athletic. She had been the [inaudible 00:09:58] and she's watching all this going on and she's very enthusiastic. And she said something that was pivotal. She said she's up at the costume shop watching all this going on. And she goes, "So is there anything like this already on the market?" And I went, "I don't know." So, the three of us trooped down to Bertha Church Intimate Apparel.

Hinda Miller (10:24):

Oh, that's how it happened. Okay.

Lisa Lindahl (10:26):

Which was the local lingerie store and went in and said, "Do you have any bras for sports?" And it was Mrs-

Hinda Miller (10:38):

Racine.

Lisa Lindahl (10:39):

Mrs. Racine is very dignified matron. And she looked at us and said, "Well we have the tennis bra." And I thought, "Oh no." Oh no, it's been done. And she pulls out this bra and all it was white. It was a traditional bra. There was... But I put it on, and I was running and plus Hinda was outside the curtain taking notes and Polly is looking at it on me and I'm going, "This is just a stupid regular bra. This is nothing special." So, then we tried all these bras on-

Hinda Miller (11:10):

I think we bought some bras and we pulled them apart. And I think-

Polly Smith (11:14):

[inaudible 00:11:14] two occasions because there was many [inaudible 00:11:17]. We wanted to make [inaudible 00:11:17]. [crosstalk 00:11:19]. Then you two probably went to Bertha Church.

Hinda Miller (11:21):

Right.

Lisa Lindahl ([11:21](#)):

No. You were both [inaudible 00:11:22].

Hinda Miller ([11:23](#)):

But as costume designers we were used to pulling things apart and putting them together and originality and creativity and an out of the box was really... Polly my training in this costume design. So, we pulled things apart. I think Polly must've made the sample with the right straps, like wide straps, et cetera, et cetera. What we knew, but it didn't work.

Lisa Lindahl ([11:50](#)):

Yeah. Until she cut the two jock straps in half sewed it together, so each pouch was for a breast and straps crossing the back.

Polly Smith ([12:05](#)):

Yeah. And then I had to look this all up because I didn't remember I had my first off Broadway show, so the Shakespeare Festival released me to go back to New York. So, I whipped through the show and then I went around to find fabric jobbers where I could look and find our fabric cotton Lycra, which I was on the mission to find and then a nice comfortable elastics to use for the strap and everything. So that was in August of 77.

Lisa Lindahl ([12:30](#)):

Meanwhile Hinda was covering her ass back at the Champlain Shakespeare festivals.

Polly Smith ([12:34](#)):

Yeah. You had to mount the last show. I don't know if you remember.

Hinda Miller ([12:36](#)):

Really?

Polly Smith ([12:36](#)):

Yeah.

Hinda Miller ([12:37](#)):

Oh good. I'm so happy.

Polly Smith ([12:40](#)):

I had to look through all the programs in my resume, like put this whole timeline together again.

Hinda Miller ([12:47](#)):

Well, good.

Polly Smith ([12:47](#)):

How was I in New York when I was supposed to be in Vermont?

Lisa Lindahl ([12:50](#)):

But I remember that because I remember us talking about it and you said, "Oh, Hinda will take care of the last show."

Hinda Miller ([12:59](#)):

And then when... Well, so what I remember... So, then we had this prototype, which we see in the archives. But then we had to see if it really worked so Lisa and I went to the track, this is my memory and Lisa ran forwards and I ran backwards looking at her breasts and I said, "Well, it looks pretty good. How does it feel?" And she said, "It feels good. So, then we had Polly make a few other samples and Lisa had a group of friends that we gave it to to kind of solidify and little did we know we were doing market research and et cetera. And then I went to South Carolina to teach costume design in September, I think must've been.

Lisa Lindahl ([13:42](#)):

Yeah, you both left at the end of August.

Hinda Miller ([13:43](#)):

We left. Yeah. We didn't know we were going into business. We just had what we had.

Lisa Lindahl ([13:48](#)):

We could keep going. You want to ask another question?

Alison Oswald ([13:53](#)):

Sure. That's great. That's really great. What are some of the obstacles that you encountered? You sort of alluded to this a little bit with the structure of the bra. But can you talk little bit about the obstacles you encountered?

Lisa Lindahl ([14:06](#)):

[crosstalk 00:14:06]. Which level? [crosstalk 00:14:08].

Polly Smith ([14:09](#)):

At my level it was avoiding obstacles. I was saying, "I don't want to do that. I want to do that." And I don't really remember. Lisa says and Hinda says we bought bras and reconstructed them. But that I was probably concentrating more on my-

Hinda Miller ([14:27](#)):

Costume.

Polly Smith ([14:28](#)):

Shakespeare costumes at the moment. And I don't remember any obstacles. I mean this is Yellow Pages time as far as finding fabric, job version, whatever that said in their little blurb in the Yellow Pages of what kind of fabrics they-

Lisa Lindahl ([14:44](#)):

Carried.

Polly Smith ([14:44](#)):

They carried, I'd call them up. And I had to look this up because I didn't know. People kept asking me, how did you know about cotton Lycra? So, I Google, Mr. Google tells me that DuPont who was providing all of the Lycra for the girdle industry. Once women stopped wearing girdles in the late '60s, early '70s started pushing to develop fabrics for sportswear with their Lycra so they'd have a market. So, cotton like I think came on the market about three years before we went looking forward. So, I think I must have been aware of it. They moved to polycotton like later, but I'm a big anti polyester. I hate [inaudible 00:15:23] right after the polyester leisure suits. And I knew polyester doesn't breathe so I was held bent on cotton and Lycra.

Lisa Lindahl (15:32):

But I actually have a different or additional memory to that. I remember Polly coming back from New York and saying, "Okay, I found fabric and I made up this prototype using this fabric." And what I remember you saying to me is I went to DuPont and they had this cotton Lycra and they don't know what its use is. They don't know how it's going to be used but I think it's going to be really good for our cups. And so, I am have been known to say we were the first people to use this cotton Lycra.

Polly Smith (16:06):

Well yeah, any samples... [inaudible 00:16:08] would have been that Charbert Fabrics Company that's on there-

Lisa Lindahl (16:12):

[inaudible 00:16:12]?

Polly Smith (16:12):

[inaudible 00:16:12] whatever it is. Because that's where I got the yardage and they might've given me samples of other stuff from DuPont I don't remember.

Lisa Lindahl (16:17):

So we were one of the very first to use that. And then what we learned once we started mass producing these things, we learned that using the cotton Lycra made it stronger.

Hinda Miller (16:32):

So the poly was strength the comfort was cotton and the light grip held it in.

Lisa Lindahl (16:38):

Was the shape.

Alison Oswald (16:39):

That's great.

Hinda Miller (16:40):

And then I was in South Carolina for this summer and I had nothing to do-

Lisa Lindahl (16:44):

Wait, before that. Before that there's history before that.

Hinda Miller (16:47):

Okay.

Lisa Lindahl (16:48):

We all have our little chunks. So, they left and I'm sitting there with this prototype going, "Well, now what do I do with this? Now what?" Okay. And I will turn to the only person I knew in business at the time my brother in law who was six years older. He was in business and he was in sales. And I said, "Okay. How might I turn this into... Make money from this or get it to other people." The general wisdom was they're costume designers. I was a part... I was an artist I was in graduate school license it, sell it to a big company. So, he found someone called International Inventors. They're going to do the patent search, find someone that you could sell the product to and they would take care of it for you. Oh, okay. All right. That sounds well. I'll look into that. And he got very excited about it and he was going to help with this all. But who was selling it? And I thought, "Oh, okay. I guess I should form a corporation." So, I went to a lawyer who was also a friend Bob Ressler, who by the way, he lent us money.

Hinda Miller (18:23):

I thought he did.

Lisa Lindahl (18:23):

Yeah. Which was not something which was in my memory until I'm back in these old files. And I went, "Oh, he lent..." Anyway, so I went to a friend and he drew up incorporation papers and said, "Who are your partners?" And so, I issued shares to Polly and Hinda and myself.

Hinda Miller (18:43):

We each put \$1,000 in the paper-

Lisa Lindahl (18:45):

\$100.

Hinda Miller (18:46):

\$100? Really?

Lisa Lindahl (18:48):

And that was only to [crosstalk 00:18:50]. Which is to cover the Bob's fee. And I opened a checking account when I incorporated and I put my savings from my checking account from my savings account in as well, which Ruth Nab could never figure out. Where did that extra money come from?

Hinda Miller (19:11):

That was the book keeper.

Lisa Lindahl (19:13):

Because I was so stupid. I didn't know. I just thought we might need the money and it was to cover this lawyers' fees to incorporate us. And he sent each one of you [inaudible 00:19:22]. And so, then it started out as Jogbra Inc., no Jockbra Inc and then it changed to SLS for Smith, Lindahl and Schreiber anyway-

Polly Smith (19:40):

You're not going to tell till the end of the Dick story?

Lisa Lindahl ([19:42](#)):

I am. I'm getting there. So, then I had something that we could go to international vendors and say SLS, Inc. is interested in signing this contract with them to-

Hinda Miller ([19:54](#)):

Make and sell-

Lisa Lindahl ([19:55](#)):

Promote the product to some big company. Well, my brother in law went ahead and signed the-

Polly Smith ([20:03](#)):

Agreement.

Lisa Lindahl ([20:04](#)):

The agreement as the inventor and-

Hinda Miller ([20:09](#)):

I didn't know.

Lisa Lindahl ([20:11](#)):

I've told you.

Hinda Miller ([20:12](#)):

Yeah. Probably forgot it. I knew there was some trouble there but...

Lisa Lindahl ([20:15](#)):

And I didn't realize it. I said, "Oh, I'll meet you at Thanksgiving in a family Thanksgiving we'll talk about this." In my head I'm thinking it all sounded like a lot of money I didn't understand what they really did. [inaudible 00:20:28].

Polly Smith ([20:27](#)):

Yeah because we had to put money down, didn't we?

Lisa Lindahl ([20:30](#)):

Yeah. It was going to cost.... It was one of these tiered things where to sign the contract cost \$250 and then to do the patent search, cost another \$1000 and then to do this. And in my mind, I'm going, "Really, but he thought it was a good idea." And so I thought... So, at Thanksgiving I thought, "Okay, I will sign this." Well, there's more, there's actually way more to the story, but I won't go into it here. That had to do with easy and you had to sign a confidentiality... Anyway, at Thanksgiving, that's when I look at this contract and I see that my brother-in-law has signed it.

Hinda Miller ([21:08](#)):

As the inventor.

Lisa Lindahl ([21:10](#)):

As the inventor and I was like, "You can't do that." And I truly believe that these were different times. This has to do with women's history and how women get into business and how they think and do. And I think that he was really just... He was doing me a favor. He was taking care of me. He was moving things along and he didn't get my reaction at all, "You can't do that. I'm the inventor, you can't do that Dick." And he took great umbrage at my reaction and he had paid the \$250 to this company and signed it and I just had this and so he got very upset and he said, "Pay me back my \$250 and I'll get out of this [inaudible 00:22:01]." And it caused a problem in the family. But I did, I paid him back as \$250 and-

Polly Smith ([22:11](#)):

When the paperwork didn't go through or did you-

Lisa Lindahl ([22:13](#)):

I don't remember exactly. I think I must've contacted International Inventors. I think they were probably used to such things happening, nothing ever happened with them. I have that file with me I think.

Polly Smith ([22:25](#)):

Yeah. Well they wouldn't have moved ahead without more money [crosstalk 00:22:28].

Lisa Lindahl ([22:27](#)):

And of course, those sorts of companies still exist. I still see ads for them. And so then I went back and-

Hinda Miller ([22:39](#)):

We didn't do anything after that I remember because somehow-

Polly Smith ([22:42](#)):

When did you get it?

Lisa Lindahl ([22:43](#)):

No. Then what I did next was meanwhile I'm getting divorced from my husband in the middle of this. I'm separating from him-

Polly Smith ([22:51](#)):

The prankster. Very sad again.

Lisa Lindahl ([22:52](#)):

The prankster, and I'm living part time in the apartment. I'm worried about what's going to happen with the prototype so I decided it's Hinda's turn.

Hinda Miller ([23:00](#)):

You sent it prototype to me-

Lisa Lindahl ([23:02](#)):

I sent the prototype to you-

Hinda Miller ([23:04](#)):

Okay. Well that's great to know. I remember all that frustration, but I wasn't part of it. And I'd gone to South Carolina to teach costume design at the University of South Carolina in Columbia and there was a running community of women there. And I took this prototype in to, as Lisa said, a small boutique it was a franchise called Phidippides and it was owned by a woman and a man. But the woman, the wife was the manager. And I said, "What do you think of this product?" And we had a jogbra, but I said, "What do you think of the product?" And she said, "Well, I'm going to ask my daughter. She's running a 5K." So, her daughter put this prototype... It was a sample by then. It wasn't a prototype; it was a sample.

Lisa Lindahl ([23:49](#)):

Had you found JD and Kim [inaudible 00:23:51]?

Hinda Miller ([23:50](#)):

No. And she said, do this, this, and this and I told Lisa, I don't know if I told Polly, cause Polly had said, "Listen, I'm a costume designer, I'm going to work for the Muppets. I'm not interested." And I think it's important that Lisa to say that Lisa and I came together and we were very anti corporation and we were very enthused with the women's lib and we were out to prove that we could do this and we could do this in the man's world, et cetera, et cetera. So, we decided to do it together and we were the first that said by women for women and it was that age and that's who we were part of, and we were designing for our friends. We were designing for ourselves, we were developing new language for the new technology and creating a need for the product educating women. But so... It was the woman, I don't remember her name at Phidippides said, "If you want to manufacture this," I said, "Well, what should I do with this?" She said, "If you want to manufacture this there's a woman near the airport. She was just fired as a sample maker from a big manufacturing factory." And there were lots of sewing factories in South Carolina in that era and so I went to Carolyn Morris, she was in a trailer park and I went in and I said, "This is... Can you make something like this?"

Hinda Miller ([25:14](#)):

I had told my father about it and he was a great supporter of women. He was a great supporter of women getting out there and experience. And he gave us I think it was... Did we pay him back? He gave us or-

Lisa Lindahl ([25:25](#)):

We paid him back.

Hinda Miller ([25:26](#)):

It was a loan for \$5,000 and with that \$5,000 Carolyn Morris graded our medium sample because Lisa and I were medium, we decided we were medium and then the small was graded down, the large was graded up. So, she graded the product, she made the product and we had 60 dozen bras made. I gave half to Lisa and she went to California.

Lisa Lindahl ([25:55](#)):

Oh no.

Hinda Miller ([25:56](#)):

[inaudible 00:25:56] you can ask her where she went. I went to North Carolina, South Carolina and New York because I was still living in New York and they sold through. So, places like Phidippides, Fleet Feet, before Lady Foot Locker or Foot Locker. And so, what happened was we had sales history, we had

these units that sold out, which means our plastic Ziploc bag didn't break. We had the name Jogbra, we had applied for the patent and now listening to Lisa, I think that that company instructed us to patent and trademark and gave Lisa more information about what our journey was going to be.

Alison Oswald ([26:40](#)):

Can we go back just a little bit to materials and testing? You talked about giving the bra or the sample to this woman in South Carolina to use. How were you gathering your test data? Were you recording it, were you just [inaudible 00:26:57]-

Hinda Miller ([26:57](#)):

Test data?

Alison Oswald ([26:58](#)):

Yeah. I mean were they telling you anything? You talked a little bit about what were you expecting back from them if they wore the bra for a 5K?

Lisa Lindahl ([27:10](#)):

It was never that considered or formal at all. It was naive. I like this works for me.

Hinda Miller ([27:20](#)):

Right.

Lisa Lindahl ([27:23](#)):

And truly if I had done any market research at the time, I would never have gotten into the bra business. But of course, I didn't really think of it as a bra, but at that time, the traditional bra business was flat and yes, it's a pun. The traditional bra manufacturers were just eating up each other's market share because our generation, we were-

Hinda Miller ([27:52](#)):

Burning bras.

Lisa Lindahl ([27:54](#)):

Burning our bras, if not literally, certainly not [crosstalk 00:27:58]. Right, we weren't wearing them. And we have pictures to prove it.

Polly Smith ([28:02](#)):

Yes.

Lisa Lindahl ([28:08](#)):

As all, they were just cannibalizing each other's sales. The sports bra, all of a sudden it was a reason for girls and women to buy this thing that they put on their breasts. So, we will call it a bra, but they were buying it in sporting goods stores. So, all of us... So, if I had done market research, if anyone had done market, they would have said, "Oh no, don't make a bra." But this was athletic equipment and as the years went by, all those regular bra manufacturers, they had their version of a sports bra.

Hinda Miller ([28:43](#)):

But I think it's important to say that we lived in the era, it was the new market. So, people were willing to say, "Well give it to my daughter." We made improvements after that I can't remember her name I wish I could. We made improvements so we changed the sample. So, we were in sample development going into a production development sample and then women... Because it's such an intimate thing because it impacts you so much in sports and fitness no matter what your size we would get a lot of letters at that time [crosstalk 00:29:17] technology and we would look at them and we would see if what we had and it became obvious to us that women of a certain size, bigger than our large said your bra doesn't work. And then we said, "Oh, okay. We need to develop a bra for larger breasted women called the sport shape." And we were the first sports bra company to admit and want to serve women of all sizes because our vision was no matter what your age, shape or size, every woman and girl has the right to the benefits of exercise.

Hinda Miller (30:00):

So, we had a broad vision because we weren't triathletes. And I remember going to LA to do a video and our marketing team brought all these models who were very thin and beautiful triathletes and that's kind of how people-

Lisa Lindahl (30:15):

That must have been after we sold.

Hinda Miller (30:16):

No, no, no. That was Michael Jagger. No, no, not at all. Well, I don't remember, but in any case, I think that we were not professional athletes, we were women enjoying taking care of ourselves and that was our marketplace. So, our marketplace educated us. So, we didn't do market research because-

Lisa Lindahl (30:38):

Formal. We didn't do the former but we were always listening to our customers.

Alison Oswald (30:43):

So, you talked about identifying a manufacturer. Can you talk a little bit about the issues surrounding working with a manufacturer in South Carolina? You're up in Vermont.

Hinda Miller (30:59):

Well, I was in South Carolina, so we had to form relationships as Lisa has said time and time again, whether it was with our manufacturers, whether with our sales reps, because we were starting out, we didn't have that much money and as far as manufacturing, we had to go with Carolyn Morris because she was in a trailer park, she was used to low volume. She was needed our product, not like factories that were already filled out-

Lisa Lindahl (31:30):

She was an entrepreneur as well. [crosstalk 00:31:32] So we were supporting each other.

Hinda Miller (31:34):

Yes.

Lisa Lindahl (31:36):

A regular factory wouldn't have touched us with a nine foot pole, one product, three sizes.

Hinda Miller (31:40):

Right. So, she was very instrumental in the grading of it and then she had to make a production model, so that shifted it a little bit. And then when it went into production, it shifted a little bit. And we grew with her for I don't know-

Lisa Lindahl (31:58):

How long?

Hinda Miller (31:58):

Maybe three or four years and then our financial advisors had said, "Listen, you're getting into volume, you have to pay less per unit." And we had to look elsewhere for manufacturing. But we helped her grow her business. So, there was a intention and goodwill-

Lisa Lindahl (32:16):

Symbiotic.

Hinda Miller (32:18):

And she was a woman and she was in a relationship, her husband, but she ran that factory.

Alison Oswald (32:25):

Hinda can you explain what grading is?

Hinda Miller (32:28):

Yes. Grading means... Thank you for that. If you have one sample medium, let's say in the bra industry which we learned later or it was an obvious thing I mean as costume designers we fit different bodies but Lisa and I were like the first models and what fit us was medium and then there was a sort of a mathematical adjustment-

Polly Smith (32:54):

Standard measurements that guide you how you go up to the next size.

Hinda Miller (32:58):

Or down to the next size.

Polly Smith (32:59):

Or down.

Hinda Miller (33:00):

And we were pretty... We were a medium, we were like in the bulk of the street.

Polly Smith (33:07):

And that's the part I didn't really want to get involved in. I mean I had taken pattern drafting and fashion design school, but then I'd gone into costume design where you're used to making one thing for one character. This was my character. I was making a bra for her and I just... That was enough for me. I didn't feel like making a whole bunch of different sizes and figuring out that mathematical equation.

Lisa Lindahl ([33:31](#)):

Then different manufacturers will have their different idea of what their medium is. And you know that all of you knew that from going out and buying clothes and you'll know that this manufacturer, Oh, I can wear their shirt and another manufacturer, Oh, I have to buy a large from them because-

Hinda Miller ([33:47](#)):

We were good. It worked.

Lisa Lindahl ([33:48](#)):

That's what grading is.

Alison Oswald ([33:52](#)):

So, let's talk a little bit about marketing. Can you describe or talk about the role that Barbara Sandage and others played in the marketing of the jogbra?

Lisa Lindahl ([34:04](#)):

Thank God for Barbara. She was truly ahead of her time. When I think about it now, I mean-

Alison Oswald ([34:12](#)):

Another influential woman?

Hinda Miller ([34:13](#)):

Yes.

Lisa Lindahl ([34:14](#)):

A strong, opinionated, smart woman running her own company in an industry that was a take no prisoners kind of an industry. And because it was a service business so... And she taught me that it's one thing to charge money for a product. You know what it costs to build it and all that but when you're charging money for time and talent, it's a whole other thing.

Hinda Miller ([34:44](#)):

And we were... I think what helped us a lot is that we knew what we didn't know. And so, we weren't egomaniacs, we didn't pretend we knew things-

Lisa Lindahl ([34:54](#)):

Speak for yourself.

Hinda Miller ([34:55](#)):

Okay. And right away Barbara Sandage was our marketing arm and I remember sitting in circles with her people and Lisa and I, and then when we got a marketing person, sales person, she would come in and that was true collaboration at the same time with the same goals-

Lisa Lindahl ([35:16](#)):

And learning.

Hinda Miller (35:17):

And learning. Yeah.

Lisa Lindahl (35:17):

My father was in marketing and advertising, so I know that I picked stuff up through osmosis, if you will. But he used to sit in front of the TV set and critique ads and he was known for one ad in particular. So, I know that that was in me, but it was so interesting to learn and actually do it. And we did some amazing things. You were just talking the other night about this one ad we did; I have a copy of it and it was in the '80s and it was the profile of a bare breast. And because as you said, we were educating people about why a sports bra was needed that you have to... There isn't some magic muscle holding the breast up and anyway... So the ad was a beautiful visual, dark background with a woman's bare breast and some magazines refused to print it.

Hinda Miller (36:20):

That must've been in the mid '80s.

Lisa Lindahl (36:22):

And there wasn't a lot of nipple showing even. It was very kind of discreet and... But of course, we got a lot of PR off of that. Why won't they [inaudible 00:36:33], why won't they talk about women's breast health and blah, blah blah.

Hinda Miller (36:36):

Yeah. And as we know, it's very expensive to be the first person for a new category. And so, I remember sitting around the table saying, "Well, will they remember the brand jogbra?" And then by then we figured out the language that we supported the breasts by pulling the breast close to the body and so the center of gravity was closer. What wasn't hanging out and also the breasts was supported by the chest wall. So, we got language that told people why this worked and we also at that time, because we were educating people, we understood that when you're bouncing breasts the Cooper's ligaments, they stretch. And that is not good for the breast is not good for breastfeeding, it's not good for anything. So, we were moving into a scientific kind of explanation.

Hinda Miller (37:32):

So, we created from our own need and we had to move into language as Lisa said, it was a piece of athletic equipment. We did a black box, we put it into the sporting goods, franchises.

Lisa Lindahl (37:46):

But also our language was important. We did things like on our boxes that had a picture of us and we said the brains behind the bras.

Hinda Miller (37:53):

Yeah. So, two women [inaudible 00:37:54].

Lisa Lindahl (37:54):

And the thing about "support by any other name is not the same--"

Hinda Miller (38:01):

Right. And by women for women.

Lisa Lindahl ([38:03](#)):

By women for women.

Alison Oswald ([38:04](#)):

Can you elaborate on that that's... Where did those slogans come from?

Lisa Lindahl ([38:09](#)):

We are sitting at that table with Barbara Sandage talking about... Because for a while there was no competition and when the traditional bra companies started to make their version of a sports bra, it didn't impact us too much because first of all they're just doing traditional bras and calling it some sporty name-

Hinda Miller ([38:31](#)):

In department stores.

Lisa Lindahl ([38:32](#)):

In department stores, not in sporting goods. And being in sporting goods gave us the... First of all, we were the first and we are authentic because we were in sporting goods. And so, then as Nike and New Balance, it took a while for the shoe companies to come out with their versions, but eventually they did. But by then our name was out there, it was jogbra. Jogbra the term itself almost became like Kleenex.

Hinda Miller ([38:59](#)):

So that was good for us and bad for us. So, we would say jogbra, the first sports bra. We had to start making differentiation.

Lisa Lindahl ([39:06](#)):

And then it became sports bra, which we should have also tried to trademark but-

Hinda Miller ([39:13](#)):

We didn't.

Lisa Lindahl ([39:13](#)):

We didn't do that. So, then we were jogbras, sports bras and... But it was really around the table and I do credit Barbara a lot with her being like, "[inaudible 00:39:23]." She wouldn't let us off the... She was amazing.

Hinda Miller ([39:28](#)):

And we used the energy of the time. I think we were very timely in our product, in the history of all this stuff. And we were timely because we were part of this they call it now second wave feminism that we graduated-

Lisa Lindahl ([39:46](#)):

[inaudible 00:39:46].

Hinda Miller ([39:47](#)):

And now what?

Lisa Lindahl ([39:47](#)):

Now we are in the third wave.

Hinda Miller ([39:48](#)):

Yes. But then we were all... We didn't want to get married after college, although Lisa got married. But that's okay.

Lisa Lindahl ([39:55](#)):

Well, so did you. Come on.

Hinda Miller ([39:57](#)):

Well, and we wanted to go out into the world and we were empowered. I think running really empowered our generation and its white privileged college women going to college in greater numbers it wasn't expensive like it is now and it was just a wave. And then Title IX gave us the legislative power for money to go into women's sports.

Lisa Lindahl ([40:27](#)):

But my narrative is a little different from that one. I mean that may have influenced you a lot, but my narrative is a little different.

Hinda Miller ([40:35](#)):

[crosstalk 00:40:35]. I think it's important.

Lisa Lindahl ([40:37](#)):

Well the one of the reasons why I got married... The whole epilepsy thing, being underemployed and unemployed and not having a driver's license and-

Hinda Miller ([40:45](#)):

That's right. I was so amazed you didn't have a driver's license [inaudible 00:40:49].

Lisa Lindahl ([40:49](#)):

Yeah. And so, when I had this prototype in my hands, I'm thinking I was in the middle of getting it. It scared the hell out of me that I was getting divorced because I didn't have a driver. I was wondering how I was going to get to the grocery store. We didn't have a washer and dryer do the laundry and it looked like I'd gotten into graduate school so I just finished my undergraduate because I stopped that and gotten married and [inaudible 00:41:21]. Anyway, my life was about survival and I knew I wasn't going to make money making, doing artwork I was making stained glass in my basement and on the craft fair route and being a part time secretary and going to school and my husband and I were splitting, he had met someone new. I mean it wasn't pretty. And so, I thought, "Oh this can be a nice little mailer business on the side because you don't have to drive to do that." I could be sending out bras out through my mailbox. And Hinda had found somebody in South Carolina [inaudible 00:41:59] and she actually put an ad in *Running Times Magazine* and put my apartment address and my private phone number in that ad-

Hinda Miller ([42:10](#)):

Sorry.

Lisa Lindahl ([42:11](#)):

And then called me and told me that she'd done it.

Hinda Miller ([42:13](#)):

And that was the ad where Lisa... I'm so sorry. You know now I know I have to ask. I was so enthusiastic and these running magazines, people were doing mail order and when you did mail order, you put the ad in if you could afford a full page that was very cool-

Lisa Lindahl ([42:29](#)):

No. It was this big.

Hinda Miller ([42:29](#)):

I know. Ours was very small in the beginning, but there was a little coupon and we said small, medium and large it was only in white and that's how we began to get checks in and that's how we... That was sort of our online commerce, if you will. The beginning of that and-

Lisa Lindahl ([42:46](#)):

And my end, because the guy at Phidippides had told her to say, "Put dealer inquiries invited."

Hinda Miller ([42:52](#)):

Oh yes. We didn't know that.

Lisa Lindahl ([42:53](#)):

And I say to her... I call her I was like, "What's a dealer?" I said, "Is that the same as a retailer?" And she goes, "I don't know the guy at Phidippides just told me to put it in."

Hinda Miller ([43:03](#)):

Right. Oh yeah. They encourage me to put it in.

Lisa Lindahl ([43:05](#)):

[inaudible 00:43:05]. What the hell does that mean?

Hinda Miller ([43:07](#)):

That's right.

Lisa Lindahl ([43:08](#)):

And meanwhile I ended up with that apartment. Thank God, because-

Polly Smith ([43:16](#)):

Al could've been out mailing bras.

Lisa Lindahl ([43:19](#)):

It could have been Al the comedian sending out bras.

Hinda Miller (43:21):

Right.

Lisa Lindahl (43:22):

Sending out bras.

Alison Oswald (43:24):

Can you explain a little bit about how you found representatives?

Lisa Lindahl (43:28):

Oh, that's such a good story.

Alison Oswald (43:30):

How did your network grow? [inaudible 00:43:32]?

Lisa Lindahl (43:32):

So, I came in from a run one day and my phone was ringing, this is after the ad. My phone was ringing, and I pick up the phone and go, "Hello." And this gentleman is on the other end he goes, "[inaudible 00:43:46] looking for representation." And I went, "Huh?" He says, "Is this the jogbra?" And I'm going, "Yes, yes, yes." And it turns out this was a man in Georgia who had seen the ad and was calling to see if we were looking for sales representation. And I said, and this is true, "What's a sales rep?" Because I had no idea. And this lovely man was kind enough. The phone was on the wall and I slid down the wall and kicked off my running shoes and sat there for... It was at least an hour, maybe longer while he explained to me the entire sporting goods business. What a sales rep was, how it worked, how they got paid, what we had to do and I'm sitting... And I again, the spiral notebook on the dining room table I'm taking notes like this really, really. And he said, "You send us samples and then we take the samples in the stores and show it to our customers." And I'm going, "I send you samples for free?" And there's this pause. He goes, "Yep. How else are they going to know whether or not they want to buy it?"

Lisa Lindahl (45:09):

And I go, "Okay." And at the end of that conversation I hired him. And then the other thing he did he said, "Well, there are trade shows and you want to go to these trade shows and here are the ones I recommend. And there some that are certain territories, certain regions. And then there's the big national one. Now maybe you all are ready for the big national one."

Hinda Miller (45:30):

But we were, we went in 79 to the sporting goods, the big national sporting goods annual one was called-

Lisa Lindahl (45:37):

In Chicago.

Hinda Miller (45:38):

It's crazy cold. And we rented a booth... So, Lisa educated us so we rented a booth 10 by 10, and I remember Nike was beside us and they were like-

Lisa Lindahl (45:49):

Were they? Was Nike beside us?

Hinda Miller ([45:50](#)):

Yes. Nike was beside us.

Polly Smith ([45:51](#)):

It's not that picture that's on the table. [crosstalk 00:45:54].

Lisa Lindahl ([45:55](#)):

No, that was later.

Polly Smith ([45:56](#)):

Okay.

Lisa Lindahl ([45:56](#)):

No, because this time-

Hinda Miller ([45:56](#)):

Yeah.

Lisa Lindahl ([45:56](#)):

Okay. Go ahead.

Hinda Miller ([45:59](#)):

This time we didn't know what we would do... Yes, Nike was there with two 10 by 10 booths. We were one 10 by 10 booths and we needed a display because we were designers. Anyway, we had a clothing rack that was royal blue and it just so happened that a *New York Post* photographer took a picture of a playboy bunny in our bra-

Lisa Lindahl ([46:23](#)):

His girlfriend.

Hinda Miller ([46:24](#)):

His girlfriend, and we blew it up and that's what our display was. And we had a line of sports reps and Lisa took their names, interviewed them because Lisa took care of the sales and I took care of production design.

Alison Oswald ([46:37](#)):

That's a great segue to ask the question how did you divide your responsibilities amongst the three of you in terms of the company?

Polly Smith ([46:47](#)):

I was pretty much out of it because in 1978 I joined the Jim Henson Company and was off doing muppet stuff. So I... Bye. Have fun.

Alison Oswald ([46:58](#)):

So how did you craft those I'm going to do this I'm going to do that?

Lisa Lindahl ([47:04](#)):

Well in the beginning, first of all, let's be clear, any entrepreneurial venture, everybody's doing everything all the time in the beginning. But thank God for Hinda because she had started with JD and Carolyn within the factory and she kept that up. She did the production and the manufacturing, and I say thank God because I had flunked sewing. I was not interested in it and I didn't get it and I didn't have a... But I did have a feeling for and a nack for the marketing.

Hinda Miller ([47:39](#)):

And she was a [inaudible 00:47:40] and she is and was a very good writer. And we had to start writing our own copy and Lisa was very good at that.

Lisa Lindahl ([47:47](#)):

And I'm a people person, so I talk to people and so I could do that. I could talk to these strangers and say, so, you know and both of us were very good at asking questions of everybody all the time. It's amazing how people are really happy to help. We were all over the sales, show floor asking people questions and-

Hinda Miller ([48:14](#)):

But we we're all new and it was such a liberating time. Of course, we were young, so it was liberating-

Lisa Lindahl ([48:21](#)):

Stupid, young [inaudible 00:48:22].

Hinda Miller ([48:22](#)):

But it was a young industry and it was a very hip industry and we had great parties at the shows and our whole social... I mean it was the whole thing. It was like theater. Like when I started theater, I liked the design, but I liked the social aspect. And I think that this new sporting goods industry, we make good friends with other young companies that were doing other things.

Lisa Lindahl ([48:45](#)):

I think all of that was that part that was easier for you. I was there... I write about this a little bit and in *Unleash the Girls* that I felt like a fraud a lot at their shows because I wasn't a jock. I had never been a jock and here I was in sporting goods land and all these people doing all this and I'm thinking about I'm not in the studio, I'm not reading a book-

Hinda Miller ([49:18](#)):

You were transforming.

Lisa Lindahl ([49:20](#)):

I'm like... I often felt like a fraud.

Hinda Miller ([49:23](#)):

Interesting. Well and I want to say something [crosstalk 00:49:26] too and we had something... Well I called it "fake it till you make it" and Lisa would always tell me, "Don't say how big we are. Just pretend you're a very big company." And we did that. Right. So, and Lisa knew-

Lisa Lindahl (49:42):

It's true.

Hinda Miller (49:42):

Certain things that we had to do in order to sort of pretend that we were a bigger company than we were and that was a good strategy at that time.

Polly Smith (49:54):

They couldn't Google you.

Lisa Lindahl (49:55):

No, they couldn't could Google.

Hinda Miller (49:56):

There was no Google. Right. That was there too. We had five years for incubation. We don't have that anymore. Once something's online, online commerce, you can find out anything. How it's designed, what the fabric is, what the sizing is, everything.

Lisa Lindahl (50:10):

Who's behind it. What's their worth.

Hinda Miller (50:13):

So, it was a good time for us for exploration.

Lisa Lindahl (50:18):

I forgot that I used to say that. Pretend we're bigger than we are.

Alison Oswald (50:26):

Is there anything else you want to add to what we've just talked about and this is pretty broad strokes because we're going to do a more in-depth dive in the individual before we move to looking at some of the materials.

Hinda Miller (50:41):

Well I think it's very important now that we're in this stage of our lives when we look back and see all the groups of good intention, people who came along with this ride, who recognize the value, whether it was the sales reps, the dealers, the manufacturers, our vendors who sold us raw materials, they all were enthused because we were two women who were creating something and they were as Lisa said, happy to help. And we were very open for what we didn't know. So, we were sucking up the knowledge that we needed and we would educate ourselves when we learn things. So, we kept up the education and so... It takes a village, all that stuff so we had this story of invention, but the story of the 12 years building a brand, I mean there are a lot of stories and they are women's stories, whether it was a woman who came

from the UK to run a marathon that's held at the marathon show and took the bra back to UK and said, "Can I sell it... Can I be a sales rep in UK?" And we said, "Okay."

Lisa Lindahl ([51:54](#)):

The one thing that I would say is that for myself, I had no idea that the sports bra would become as significant as it has become. For me, it was very significant because like I said, I was not a jock, but running transformed me. It made... It empowered me. But I felt like that was my personal experience. And when I left the company a year after we sold it, I went on to do other things and having another life. And I would sometimes chafe when people would call me or point me out as the jogbra lady. And I'd go, "No, no. I've done so much work with my life. That was then, that was then." And I would chafe until I came to realize it, how much my personal experience of being empowered and transformed was true for so many other girls and women. And I went, "Oh my God, it was a big deal. Thank you."

Lisa Lindahl ([53:00](#)):

Thank you for listening to me and making it happen. Thank you for making it happen because it really was impactful, and I didn't really understand that until like-

Hinda Miller ([53:16](#)):

And you could say that I would come into Lisa and I'd say this is our shot for contribution for value and Lisa would say, "No, no. I'm an artist." And she went on to become President of the Epilepsy Foundation and she did a lot of other things, but I got the energy of what we were doing. I didn't see the significance until other people called us back. Like Eva Longoria, 30 by 30 ESPN about four or five years ago. She brought us back together-

Lisa Lindahl ([53:45](#)):

For the 40th anniversary of the sports bra 97.

Hinda Miller ([53:48](#)):

And then when Brandy Chastain pulled off her shirt, they called us how important the original jogbra was. And then the Smithsonian came to us, and I think by your recognition, other people's recognition of this as a true invention and we always said that the jogbra was an icon for our generation of women. And then the whole world-

Lisa Lindahl ([54:12](#)):

Athleisure, went on like it changed fashion.

Hinda Miller ([54:15](#)):

Yes.

Lisa Lindahl ([54:16](#)):

[inaudible 00:54:16]. Oh my word. Who knew I was just solving my own problem.

Alison Oswald ([54:22](#)):

Well, I think that's a great place to pause and we'll transition over here.

Jake Klim ([54:28](#)):

Absolutely. Can we just have each of you just say your names. First and last names for us please.

Hinda Miller ([54:32](#)):

Yes.

End of transcript