



A BRAND IS BORN

Our History

In 1960, Björn Jakobson traveled to the U.S. with Stockholm University for research. He visited his brother during his trip, and something he saw in his brother's home piqued his interest — a kind of rocking chair for children that he had never seen before. Having spent a lot of time babysitting his five nieces and nephews in Sweden, Björn was immediately struck by the ingenuity of the chair. He simply couldn't get the idea out of his mind, and after returning to Sweden he began to develop his own version.

The company "Björn Jakobson" was founded in 1961 by Björn and his sister-in-law Elsa, who was married to his brother Sten and was a stay-at-home mom with five children. Because Elsa was home during the day, she could answer the phone, and Nisse, her youngest, was the first to sit in a bouncer. Elsa and Sten's bedroom doubled as the office, and they borrowed a typewriter from a neighbor. Björn and Elsa made a winning team,

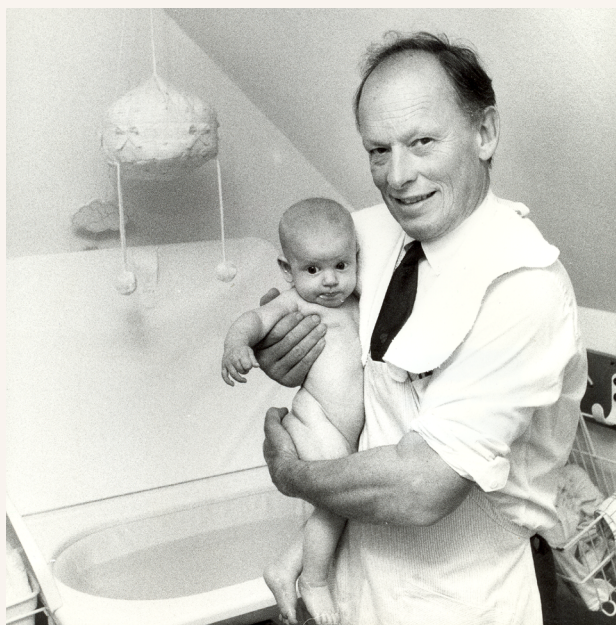
together developing marketing material, products and sales.

They opened a manufacturing site in Småland and took on the next challenge of sales and marketing. But at the stores that sold baby products, their new product was met with skepticism—babies should lie on the floor, in a stroller or in a crib.

Convincing moms to put their child in a bouncing upright position was not easy. Babies used to lie either in their stroller or on a blanket on the floor—there were no other options. So Björn and Elsa contacted the so-called maternity homes that were prevalent in Sweden in the 1960s and offered the use of the chair. The moms and the babies loved it! Björn and Elsa then contacted pediatricians and other specialists for recommendations that young moms could rely on. After these professionals recommended that children benefit from sitting a little more upright, the concept started to find its audience.

BJÖRN'S BACKGROUND

Björn grew up in Stockholm and spent a lot of time in the archipelago. His parents made sure that he was able to travel to England, Germany, and the U.S. as a teenager for longer stays, and these trips fostered his interest in international relationships. After graduating with a master's degree in political science, he went to work for Shell in Sweden, but his employment was terminated because he was not considered to be a very good salesperson. History has since proven otherwise.



LILLEMOR'S BACKGROUND

Lillemor grew up in Stocksund outside of Stockholm and demonstrated artistic talent at an early age. Her father thought that a degree from Berghs School of Communication would be better for her future than becoming an artist, so she studied there and went to work for an advertising agency. Her dream of becoming an artist lived on, though, and a few years later she was accepted to the textile design program at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design.

A FAMILY IS FORMED

Björn and Lillemor met at a dance, and it was love at first sight. For Lillemor, Björn's interest in sailing especially appealed to her. They got married within three months, and in November 1963 their first son, Joakim, was born. Their daughter Siri was born in October 1964, and the couple now had two children under the age of one. Lillemor described this period as stressful, to say the least.

Despite the sleepless nights, the two children were also a source of inspiration for several new products. Björn's brother Sten, who had five children, came up with the idea of an inflatable changing mat, and Björn and Lillemor also developed a travel crib and a collapsible high chair for their product range. Whatever solutions they came up with, they focused on what would make families' lives easier and a little bit more enjoyable.

They registered BabyBjörn as a brand, and Lillemor designed a new logo. Integrating one's first name into the name of the business was a major trend in the '60s.



MORE CHILDREN, MORE PRODUCTS

In 1967, their third child Lisa was born, and the ferocious way she attacked her food when learning to feed herself resulted in a plastic bib with a spill pocket that was easy to rinse off. Bathroom products such as potties and step stools were also added.

Björn was now working closely with pediatricians, in particular Dr. John Lind, a pioneer within pediatric care at Karolinska Children's Hospital (and known for his comment that not only children are born at the hospital, but also families). Dr. Lind and his colleagues presented new research showing that physical proximity and body contact are incredibly important for babies, and they encouraged Björn to develop a baby carrier.

Carrying children in different ways is an ancient tradition, but it had disappeared from the western world. The focus was instead on strict breastfeeding schedules, that screaming is good for children, and that children should not be spoiled.

The new research appealed to Björn and Lillemor, who realized early on that physical closeness worked best with their own children. And in 1973, BabyBjörn launched its first baby carrier, Hjärtnära (Close to Heart).



Their fourth child was born in 1974, which meant Josephine could be carried in it. Björn compared the feeling of carrying her to walking on clouds.

LILLEMOR: DESIGNER AND ADVERTISER

They developed a number of products in the '70s, some best-sellers and others short-lived. The plastic container for storing toys proved to be a massive success, and for five years large numbers were sold primarily in Sweden and Germany. The sulky did not last long due to price pressure, and neither did the lion rocking horse and the children's furniture.



Lillemor was able to attract attention with few resources thanks to her ability to use leftover materials and items that others (especially Björn) wanted to throw away. Old pallets and fishing nets, for example, made a good background for products with a marine design. She also took on colors in the kitchen and bathroom range. She experimented with a see-through potty, which was rejected by all markets except Holland.

In parallel with the business, Björn took an active role in his children's lives, mainly as a soccer coach. Björn himself considered coaching youth to be the best conceivable CEO training.

BABY CARRIERS BREAK GROUND

The Close to Heart baby carrier became popular, and Björn and Lillemor started to think about how they could make it even better. In 1991, they released a new baby carrier on the market in a marine design that went on to be a best-seller for more than ten years. With this baby carrier, BabyBjörn took a huge step. Exports exploded, and new markets contacted BabyBjörn, wanting to sell its products.

In 1993, the baby carrier was featured in an article in Harper's Bazaar. The photograph was in black and white, and suddenly lots of people were calling to buy the black baby carrier. Fantastic, except that what they thought was black was in reality the dark blue marine design. Inspired by the demand, Lillemor created a black baby carrier.



This is the first time a black baby product was available on the market, and reactions in the sales chain were mixed. Remember, back then strollers were basically navy blue, and most baby products came with motifs such as ducks or teddy bears. Lillemor introduced a new approach with her baby

carrier design since she adapted it to the parents' style. Yes, the parents; she was also the first to consider the dads. Dads were included in the advertising early on, and these images were loudly criticized in a number of markets, France in particular.

A new generation of test subjects (grandchildren) entered the scene, providing Björn and Lillemor with great happiness and inspiration. The dessert of life, they called them.

When Black Gingham appeared on the market in 1994, sales exploded. The baby carrier caught the eye of a different type of parent. Both politicians and Hollywood stars began to carry their children, creating plenty of buzz. Crown princes, ministers, tennis stars and actors were carrying their children in a BabyBjörn baby carrier.

At the end of 1999, the carrier was named Design of the Decade by the Industrial Design Society of America (IDSA) together with around 20 other products that were considered to be trendsetters. The award ceremony was held in Washington, and a full page in Business Week was dedicated to the baby carrier. One of the jury's motivations asserted that "If more babies were carried in this, the prisons wouldn't be so full." People quite simply adopted the original inspiration behind the baby carrier—that babies need a lot of closeness and body contact to get a better start in life.

SWEDISH DESIGN FOR EXPORT

In the 2000s, the baby carrier continues to be popular, and sales are expanding through new, larger channels. The phrases "the babybjornification of American dads" and "to bjorn the baby" start appearing. The company now has more than 50 export markets.

Björn and Lillemor's marriage is closely intertwined with the company, something they describe as a very positive experience. They have grown together and been able to take many trips together. They have always complemented one another well and respected each other's areas. As Lillemor says, "Björn likes to lie around reading annual reports at night—I do not."

FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

In 2018, Björn and Lillemor decided it was time to turn over ownership to the second generation. This younger generation had grown up with BabyBjörn as a fifth sibling. They were also partners since the '90s and active on the Board for just as long, and some of them also worked at the company. The values and the vision are deeply embedded in who they are.

A STROLL DOWN MEMORY LANE

Contact press@babybjorn.com for more information and photos.

