

## Babybump.Com

In the Park Slope section of Brooklyn, one June morning, Annika was pushing her infant to the coffee shop while texting on her smart phone. Sasha was arriving from the opposite direction, also texting on her phone. The infants saw it coming but were unable to warn their mothers. As the two approached, the infants braced themselves for impact, all the while miming a message that was ignored. Traveling at close to 2 mph, the strollers collided head-on directly in front of the café. Sasha's infant threw her hands up in the air; Annika's baby mouthed something that looked like 'WTF'. Meanwhile, an alarm went off in police precinct #78, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Back in 2012, sociology graduate student Carl Lagerfeld was studying population demographics for the Park Slope neighborhood, as part of his thesis. He first noticed that a majority of women in Park Slope had developed a convex mound around their belly button. Following this population, he discovered that a little over eight months later, these same women were pushing strollers around, with wee versions of themselves inside. He reported these preliminary findings to his advisor who told Carl to conduct a long-term study of the women in Park Slope.

Carl hired middle school students to take digital photographs of every woman they saw, noting the time of day, date and location for each. Aggregating these photos into a database, Carl began to recognize patterns. In the first year, a majority of women dressed in work attire, took the subway and left the area for about 8 hours, returning after 5pm. In the second year, the same women displayed the previously mentioned mound around their belly button; Carl named this a *bump*. In the third year, the same population was pushing strollers in the neighborhood and spending most of their time in cafes, parks and yoga studios. That's when the trouble first started.

What began as a small group of women sharing conversation over a latte grew to dozens, then hundreds, then thousands of strollers throughout the neighborhood. Coffee shops that once served 100 people could only hold thirty-five because strollers took up the space. This did not please the owners of coffee shops, cafés and other establishments. And because the women who frequented these establishments tended to stay for hours and talk with one another, the revenue for the shops diminished. That doesn't even take into the account the ten percent of women who brought a dog along with them on their daily errands; dogs tended to bark whenever another person came close to the baby; that further disturbed the café patrons and owners.

Carl noticed that some of the women pushing strollers were developing the *bump* and that these women would exchange their strollers for double strollers eight months later with two wee versions of themselves inside. Most of the time, these double strollers were positioned one seat behind the other, but some strollers had a double-wide position for the infants and that's when the real trouble began.

Suddenly, Park Slope wasn't known for great public schools, restaurants, historical buildings and museums anymore, but congestion comparable to that of the rush hour in Manhattan. The congestion got so bad that the borough president demanded some local ordinances to manage the stroller flow and reduce the possibility of accidents. "Who is that professor who has been studying this?" inquired the borough president.

"Carl Lagerfeld, your honor, from Brooklyn Tech.

"Well, get him in here right away."

Carl had just completed a website, *babybump.com*, which mapped out the locations of moms and strollers and demonstrated it to the borough president.

"That's excellent, Carl. May I call you Carl?"

"Yes sir."

"Good. Now this is a beginning. But what we really need is real-time information, sort of how the news stations track traffic during rush hour."

"Well, then we would need more technology sir."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if we could integrate the website with the Homeland Security cameras on every corner, then we could see video of congestion and stroller accidents."

"It's done. Joe, contact Homeland Security and tell them we're tying in the cameras to Carl's *babybump.com* website."

"Right away, Mr. president." The aide rushed out of the room to make it happen.

"Now Carl, we still have a problem. Seeing the congestion and accidents is good, but how do we prevent them from happening? An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, you know."

"Yes sir. Well, I thought if we could install some stroller lanes on the sidewalk, that would help."

"Yes, excellent. That should reduce accidents quite a bit."

"Well, maybe" said Carl. "But there are these double-wide strollers mothers with two infants have been using. The ones with two in line are no problem but the double wide strollers wouldn't fit in the new stroller lane."

"Hmm. I see. What if we made the women pushing double-wide strollers pay a fee, like trucks do at toll booths?"

"That's a good idea sir. But how would we enforce this?"

The borough president thought a moment. “What if we required all strollers to get a GPS chip installed?”

“I see where you’re going. The DMV, or let’s call it the DSS, could license all the strollers, and issue the GPS devices and tags, like cars have. Who would enforce violations sir?”

“Well, we have the parking department. They’re out on the street anyway. They can issue citations like they do for illegal parking.”

“OK, well that would work sir. We have one more problem though.”

“Yes Carl, what is that?”

“Some of the moms are jogging while they push the strollers. One of our middle school students clocked a mom stroller going ten mph the other day. We are bound to have a major accident some day and someone is going to get seriously hurt.” Carl and the president were clearly concerned.

“Hmm. I’ve got it. In addition to the regular traffic lights and signs, we’ll install mini stop signs and lights for strollers, like we do for pedestrians. And put up mini speed limit signs for the moms, like 3 mph near intersections and 5 mph on long sidewalks.”

Carl was taking detailed notes. “That should help.”

“I can see it now Carl. A whole system to monitor, regulate and improve the flow of stroller traffic throughout the borough. They don’t have this in Manhattan, I’ll tell you that. The mayor will give me a commendation, don’t you think?”

“Quite so, Mr. president. But I think we can do even better. Since we will be installing the GPS chips on the strollers, why couldn’t we require the moms to purchase a bumper guard on the front of the stroller? We could link it to the electronics in the GPS. If a mom bumped into another stroller or pedestrian, a ping would go off and notify the appropriate people.”

The borough president nodded approval. “Yes, that’s even better. Couldn’t we also issue citations for bumping, like reckless driving, or strolling?”

“Of course sir.”

“But where to send the signal of reckless strolling? I know. We could send the signal to the local precinct. Put up a big board of the borough, like the subway people have to monitor trains. And if we use the Homeland Security cameras to record video of the infraction, we would have proof. No hassling with people fighting it in court.”

“There may be some upfront costs, your honor.”

“That’s alright. With the money we raise from licensing strollers, fees for double-wide strollers and citations for reckless strolling, we should be able to cover it. If we OEM the GPS devices and stroller electronics, we could sell those too. And then there’s the extra income we’ll get from visitors, unfamiliar with the ordinances, who will stumble into some citations by mistake.”

“Sounds like a plan, your honor. May I consult on this with your team here?”

“Of course, Carl. We’ll set you up with a desk here. Joe, let’s use the room we have for foreign visitors as a war room. Set Carl up there with a desk. He’ll be on point for this. And I want this done, ASAP. Spare no expense.” He looked at Carl. “Have we covered everything son?”

“Well, what about parking strollers while moms are in the cafés, shops and yoga studios? And there is the problem with dogs barking in cafés.”

“Parking, yes. Joe, have the parking department start painting little lanes for strollers, and spaces for the dogs too. Put in mini parking meters, but charge the same as for cars. That should add some revenue and make the moms carry the babies once in a while. Do them good and create more room inside the coffee shops for people. Wait, what if the mom didn’t put in enough money for parking the stroller?”

“Just like with cars, sir. We tow it away. Better yet, we sell the stroller?”

A loud siren interrupted their plans.

“Sounds like an ambulance, your honor.”

“Joe, what’s happening out there?”

“There’s been an accident, your honor. A jogging stroller mom was almost hit by a truck, but it missed her and ran into a fire hydrant. It looks like the driver will be OK too.”

“Thank goodness for that” said the president. “Carl, it looks like you better get started right away.”

“Yes, your honor.”