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The Goods

A Bedsheet Built for Two

LONELY singles often dream of playfully chastising a lover for hogging the sheets. Once a couple have moved past the honeymoon phase, however, sheet-stealing can cause acrimony that's anything but good-natured; hell hath no fury like a man or woman who has spent one too many a chilly night.

Sheet competition pushed one of Kevin Robke's relationships to the brink in 1996. "I had a girlfriend who — how do I say this in a nice way? — she stole from me every night," said Mr. Robke, of Fort Collins, Colo. "She liked to roll herself up like a mummy." Rather than call it quits, the pair decided to innovate: they stitched together two sheets at the bottom, giving each sleeper much independence. Sheet-stealing ceased to be an issue, and the arguments subsided.

The relationship fell apart two years later, for reasons unrelated to bedding, and the sheets were forgotten. But in 2002, after selling his shrub care company, Mr. Robke started looking for a new business to build. He called his former girlfriend and asked her to find the sheets that they had created.

Those sheets, found languishing on a storage shelf, became the prototype for DoubleUps for Beds, a line of bedding products that, according to Mr. Robke's mission statement, "lets couples share their beds, not their covers."

"You can still cuddle, or hug or whatever," Mr. Robke explained. "But when you sleep, moving on one side doesn't affect the other side of the bed."

The original design from 1996 worked all right, but it also suffered from what Mr. Robke termed "tuck issues": because the sheets were joined at the bottom, sleepers could not autonomously choose whether to tuck or untuck their sides at the foot of the bed. To solve this problem, Mr. Robke moved up the "sewbox" — the small area of overlap where the sheets are stitched together — by 14 inches. That means the two sides of a DoubleUps sheet are connected near the point where an adult's calves typically rest.

Mr. Robke also said that the prototype was a little too narrow, especially for plus-size sleepers, so he increased the size of the sheet. "We had to make it big enough so when you put your body under it, you didn't have your bum hanging out," he said.

When applying for a patent on the design, Mr. Robke said he was surprised to learn that he was not the first inventor to come up with a solution to the sheet problem. His lawyer discovered

similar products dating back to the 1950's; Mr. Robke was granted a patent in 2003, however, because his design was unique in the positioning of the sewbox.

Clueless about the finer points of textile production, Mr. Robke enlisted the aid of apparel researchers from Clemson University in South Carolina. They helped Mr. Robke figure out how to manufacture the sheets with precise measurements, and instructed him on the finer points of thread counts.

MR. ROBKE acknowledged that DoubleUps, which have been available since October 2004 at doubleupsforbeds.com, compete against conventional sheets that may have lower prices. The cheapest DoubleUps set, which contains a fitted sheet, a flat sheet, and two pillowcases in a cotton-polyester blend, starts at \$85.95 for a full-size bed. (Prices for the most luxurious option, made of 600-thread-count Egyptian cotton, can climb to \$298.95 for a king-size bed.)

But Mr. Robke is confident that consumers prize a good night's rest highly enough to pay the premium. And he's not aiming only at human combatants in the sheet wars. "I never realized how many people sleep with their pets," he said, "and they can't roll over because they have a 110-pound dog on top of the middle of their bed." In some households, DoubleUps may be what saves a pet from relegation to the floor.