

Inventory Gremlins

Introduction to GremWorks

Amanda Gojko was an ambitious student at the University of Michigan. Already a successful entrepreneur as a sophomore, Amanda had opened her start-up—GremWorks—during the summer after her freshman year in order to fund her junior year study abroad. When Amanda moved to Ann Arbor from San Francisco in fall 2007 to begin her studies at Michigan, she became intrigued by a local craze for “fairy doors.”ⁱ Inspired by illustrator Jonathan Wright’s imaginative brainchild and the liberal, eco-friendly flair of the city that surrounded her, Amanda had an idea of her own—“gremlin doors”.

Her idea was sparked by a childhood affinity for the infamous folkloric creature the gremlin. The granddaughter of a World War II pilot, Amanda had listened to countless stories from her theatrical Papa Steve who told of his heroic adventures in the air force. One of her favorite stories was the popular military myth of the gremlin: Her Papa insisted that his exploits were sometimes foiled by devious fairy-like creatures that tinkered with equipment. They removed nuts and bolts with their minuscule hands and perched on the wings of airplanes to blow dust into the fuel pipes—all for their own amusement! *They* were responsible for the inexplicable failure of missions, WWII veterans claimed.

Amanda did a bit of additional research on gremlins and found that, in earlier times, they were believed to be helpful to humans. The “wee mechanics” were intelligent, and their tiny size allowed them to work more precisely with tools. It was even believed that gremlins’ fun-loving tinkering caused minor, inconvenient accidents that prevented catastrophic ones. This paradoxical creature was the perfect inspiration for her unique and sustainable new product.

i Illustration by Jonathan B. Wright (a lifelong resident of Ann Arbor, Michigan) originated the idea of fairy doors in 1993 when his wife operated a preschool program in their home. On a creative whim, he installed a small fairy-sized door in the wall of their house into which the children could gaze to see the tiny dwelling of a fairy. Witnessing the children’s frenzy for the door and wanting to make a difference for the lagging business on Ann Arbor’s Main Street, Wright used this unique form of public art to contribute to his community and attract families and customers to the area. He installed fairy doors inside and near businesses around Main Street. The lure of the doors continues to attract the whims of fairy-finding children (who leave behind trinkets and change for the fairies) to this day.