

# Leave your butterflies behind

By Jason Winders, MES'10



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(PHOTO: SPECIAL TO ALUMNI GAZETTE)

**S**onja Salmon, ACS'92, has no interest in your butterflies. As a young Bay Street executive, Salmon traveled the world, living her life out of suitcases. Really, really ugly suitcases.

"I was always conscious of my personal brand. When I traveled, it was important to me to represent myself just as I would as if I were at home," she said. "But when it came to luggage, my options were either a man's bag or a man's bag where they changed the colour profile, threw some horrendous pattern on it and called it a women's line – 'Here, this butterfly version, this is what we have for women.' That was what was on the market."

She knew there had to be a better solution.

Born and raised in Mississauga, Salmon was the oldest of three girls. Marcia Salmon, MLIS'01, and Angela Salmon, ACS'01, both followed their older sister to Western, a place "where she knew she was supposed to be."

After earning an LLB, JD and MBA, and working in various corporate positions, Salmon used the skills she acquired in classrooms and boardrooms and applied them to overhead compartments.

Flying to the United Kingdom, to Hong Kong, to destinations around the world, she became aware of the challenges facing female travelers first hand.

"Here I was, spending time on what kind of trench coat or purse I wanted, and the luggage never fit in," she said. "It was consumer frustration with not being able to find something in the marketplace I felt should be there."

Inspiration struck while she prepared for yet another trip by zipping her shoes into a Ziploc bag. "That is when the shoe dropped. I thought, I can do this, I can do this better than anyone has done it up to this point," Salmon said. She wrote the first draft of a business plan in that hotel room.

Today, Salmon is the CEO and Founder of Ebby Rane, a global brand of luxury luggage and accessories designed to enhance the travel experience. Her collection is anchored around the Quartermaster, a nifty piece of stylish luggage that rolls like a "custom closet on wheels."

Launched in January 2014, Ebby Rane – named for her businessmen grandfathers Ebby Salmon and Clarence Rainford – has exploded. The company has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Martha Stewart Weddings*, *Good Housekeeping* and *InStyle*.

With product lines expanding, and eyes turning to further growth in the United States, Salmon, who is married to L. Gregory Fletcher, BMus'88, BEd'93, continues to see opportunity.

"It has been a fun run so far," she said. "But we're excited about what the future holds." **WAG**



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