

# AN OPEN AND SHUT CASE FOR **SUMMER WINDOW SAFETY**

by Becca Keen Cunningham and Jan Berichon

**SIX DAYS BEFORE THEIR TWIN BOYS TURNED 4 YEARS OLD,** Becca and Jason Keen Cunningham's lives changed forever. Their son Thomas fell out of his second-floor bedroom window, experiencing a traumatic brain injury. For the next year, Thomas had to relearn how to eat, talk and walk.

Every year, 3,300 children under the age of 7 in the U.S. fall from windows. While the summer months bring sun, warmth and play to Portland, the weather also brings fear to Becca, because it's when children in the Pacific Northwest spend more time around open windows.

Becca feels a surge of desperation every time she hears of another window accident involving a child. She wishes she could have reached out to the family before it happened to them. She wishes the message had gotten through to her family before Thomas's fall, and saved them all the heart-ache, guilt and regret they live with.

The Keen Cunninghams urge parents to stop their windows at four inches and install window stops or window guards on any window that is six feet or more from the ground. These stops and guards may be removed by adults in an emergency. Window stops and guards are different than window locks, which are crime-prevention devices, not intended to prevent window falls.

Becca combined her passion for window safety and her family's real life experience and wrote "If Kids Could Float: A Window Fall Prevention Story." The children's book is written from the perspective of Zane, Thomas's twin brother, and focuses on what could have been in the backyard to prevent Thomas from getting hurt. By the end of the book, Zane knows that his parents know how to keep him safe. Becca has sold and donated over 1,300 copies of her book.

Jan Berichon, health educator at Randall Children's Hospital Safety Center, talks to families about window safety. She reminds families that window screens keep bugs out not kids in. The most common misconceptions she hears from families are that they don't have to worry because they have screens, that they live in a single-story home, and that their children know better.

On the other hand, when Jan speaks to parents whose children have fallen out of windows, they say things like the following.

"I wish I had known," or "I wish someone had told me about the dangers of window falls before he fell out of the window."

"I was right there, but it happened so fast. I thought the screen would keep him in."

"They were just looking out the window, like they have done so many times."

Most of these falls could have been prevented with some simple, low-cost equipment. Randall Children's Hospital Safety Center provides below-retail-cost window guards and stops, one-on-one education and hands-on practice for window safety.

Protect your children and others. Prevent window falls by sharing the STOP at 4" Campaign website: [stopat4.com](http://stopat4.com). The campaign strives to reduce the number of children who fall from windows by encouraging communities and families to install window stops and guards and to educate families about window fall prevention. ❖



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Becca Keen Cunningham is the mother of three wonderful children, Thomas, Zane and Bailey.

Jan Berichon is a health educator at the Randall Children's Hospital Safety Center and a mother.