

Last May, a portable crib collapsed in a Lincoln Park day-care center, strangling 16-month-old Danny Keysar. His grieving parents deemed it a freak accident—until they learned that the crib had been recalled by the manufacturer five years earlier. Struggling to understand what had happened to their son, they uncovered a flawed system ill prepared to prevent another tragic death



How Danny Died

by Jonathan Eig

ON

HER WAY HOME FROM WORK ONE DAY LAST spring, Linda Ginzel steered her car toward the Sweet Tots daycare center in Lincoln Park, where her son Daniel had spent the day. The date was May 12, 1998, and there were several hours of sunlight left in what had been a beautiful afternoon. The moment she turned onto Wrightwood Avenue, Linda noticed five or six police cars. The closer she got, the more she worried.

Linda stopped, got out of her car, and walked up the steps. Before she could knock on the door, a police officer greeted her.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"A child has been involved in an accident."

"Here? In *this* house?" she asked, her voice jumping almost an octave.

"Yes, and you need to go to the hospital."

"I need to go to the hospital? *I* need to go?"

"Yes, ma'am."

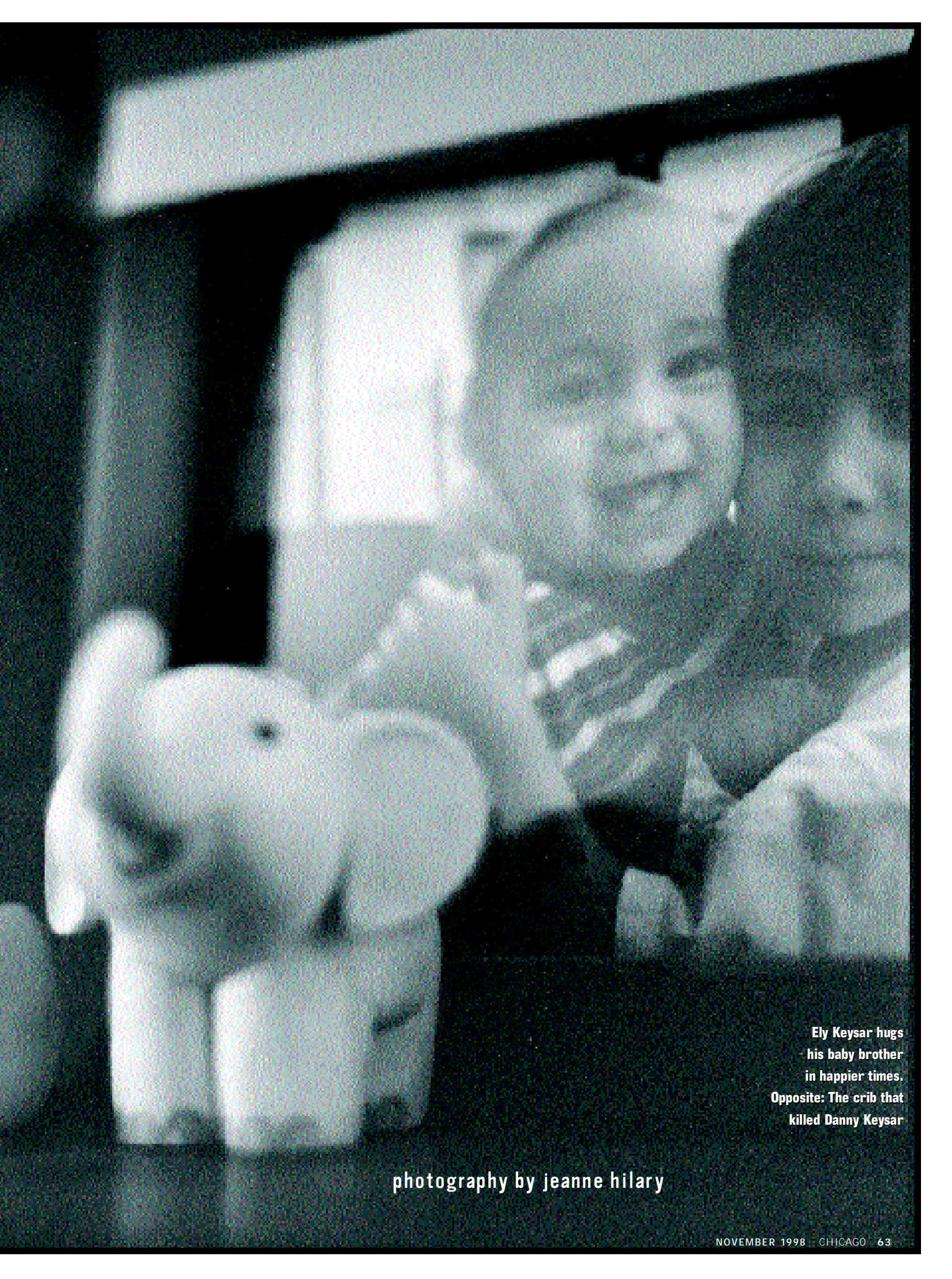
"It was *my* son?"

Another officer put his arm around Linda's shoulder and asked if she wanted a ride. She said OK. The first cop said Linda's husband, Boaz Keysar, was waiting at the hospital. The short drive to Children's Memorial seemed surreal, as if it were unfolding in slow motion. The officer made small talk in an effort to distract Linda and keep her calm. "So, you teach at the University of Chicago, huh?" he asked.

The next thing she remembers is the voice of the doctor: "We did everything we could," he said.

"Can I see my baby?" she asked.

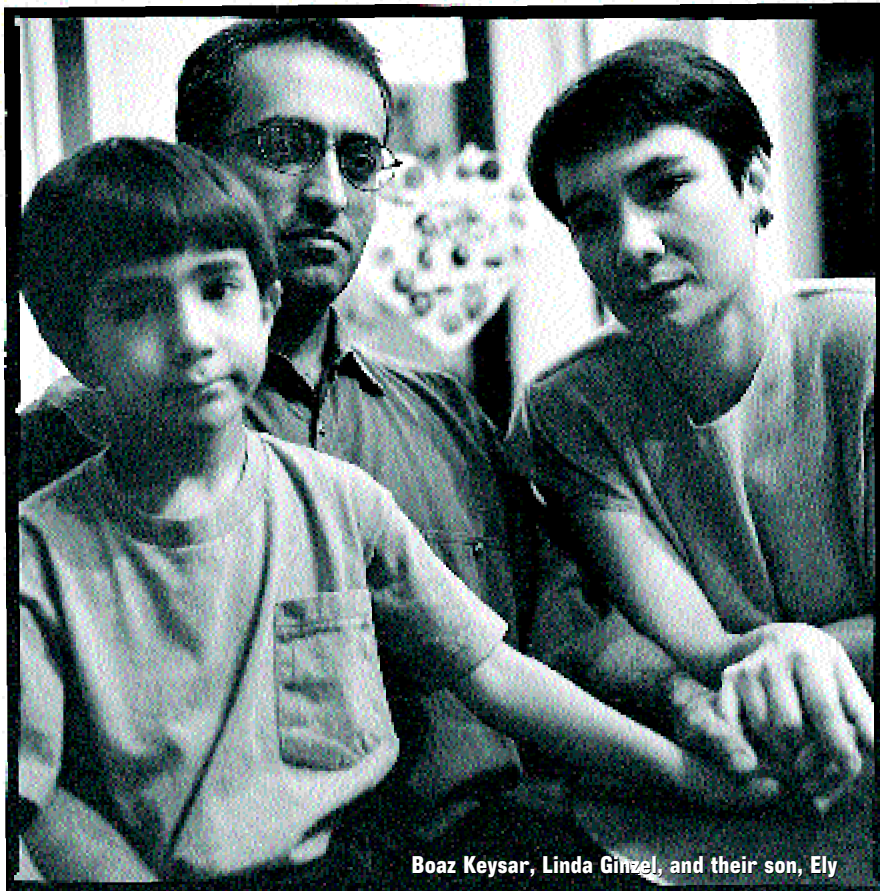




Ely Keysar hugs his baby brother in happier times. Opposite: The crib that killed Danny Keysar

photography by jeanne hilary

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Boaz Keysar, Linda Ginzel, and their son, Ely

A nurse led her into a room with a long table, a rocking chair, and a heat lamp.

"You can hold him as long as you like," the nurse said, handing her Danny's body in the same kind of pink-and-blue-striped blanket in which he'd been wrapped 16 months and 12 days earlier, when he was born. Boaz stood nearby.

Linda took the nurse at her word when she said she could hold her baby as long as she liked, and she decided she would spend the night, if not longer. She unwrapped the blanket and rubbed the lint from between Danny's toes.

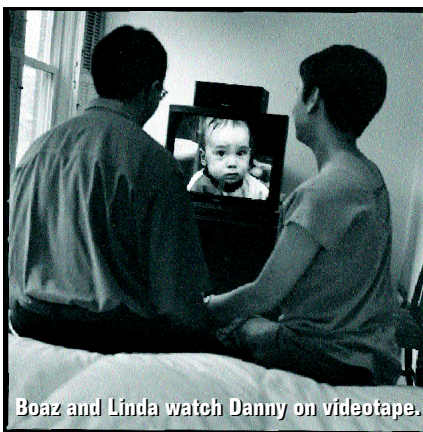
"Oh, I should have given him a bath last night," she thought.

She caressed his legs and rubbed his belly and lifted his hand to her cheek. For half a second she thought she felt his hand move against her skin. She spoke to him. She told him she was sorry he would never get to grow up, that he wouldn't get to see his brother, Ely, again, and on and on, until the nurse finally interrupted.

"You can hold him as long as you like," she said, "but soon you'll need to say goodbye."

Linda hadn't thought about that. The heat lamp had done its job for a while,

Linda is haunted by two babies—her own, and one who has not yet died.



Boaz and Linda watch Danny on videotape.

but now Danny's body was growing cold and hard, and his fingernails and lips were turning blue. She would have to say goodbye. So Linda wrapped him back up in the blanket. The nurse cut a lock of Danny's hair and gave it to her.

"That was his first haircut," she told the nurse. And she cried.

Linda and Boaz made the short walk home from Children's Memorial and picked up Ely, who had been at a neigh-

bor's house. They spent the rest of the evening trying to explain to the four-year-old that his brother had died.

"At least he won't bite us anymore," Ely said.

When Linda and Boaz asked if he wanted a bedtime story or a song before he went to sleep, Ely said he wanted a story. A story about how Danny died.

Linda and Boaz told the story many times that night, not only to Ely, but also to their friends, their parents, and their brothers and sisters. It had been a freak accident, they said. Danny had spent the day with Anna, his daycare provider. He had somehow strangled when his portable crib collapsed, turning the horizontal side rail into a V-shaped wedge that squeezed his throat.

"It was just an accident," Danny's tearful parents repeated to everyone they talked to that night. "No one knows why it happened."

But the next morning, the story became more complicated, and, if possible, more painful. Boaz was out making arrangements for the funeral. Linda an-

swered a knock on the front door of their home and found a television crew on the steps. The reporter asked her if she wanted to comment on the death of her baby.

"And why is this news?" she asked.

"It's an unusual incident," replied the reporter.

Linda told the reporter to come back later and gently closed the door.

Later she would learn that it wasn't so unusual—but it was news: The crib in which her child died had been recalled by the manufacturer and the government five years earlier after it had killed four children. Danny was number five.

In Jewish tradition, when someone dies, the family sits at home for seven days of mourning, and for seven days their friends and relatives bring food and keep the mourners company. They refer to this process as sitting shiva. In some cases, sitting shiva can be redemptive, fulfilling, and even warmly amusing. Families spend long hours together telling sto-

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ries about the deceased, remembering his favorite jokes, and poking gentle fun at his more amusing character flaws.

But there was nothing amusing about Danny Keysar's shiva, and there were not enough stories to fill seven days. Linda had already described the memories beautifully at the funeral when she read a brief eulogy, describing how Danny loved eating crayons as much as drawing with them, had already learned to hum "Twinkle, twinkle, little star," and had begun imitating his big brother's love for basketball. She had already described how he barked in Hebrew ("How-how!") instead of English ("Bow-wow!") when he saw a dog, how he liked to brush his hair with a toothbrush, and how he loved the scratch of his father's day-old beard when they kissed goodnight.

So the people who attended the shiva found themselves talking not so much about Danny's life as about his death. As it happens, Linda and Boaz are both professors at the University of Chicago, and most of the friends who surrounded them during their seven days of mourning were fellow business school and psychology faculty members whom they had met over the course of their academic careers. The visitors came from the best schools in the country—the U. of C., Princeton, and Stanford, among others—because Linda and Boaz had studied and taught at those schools. The friends and scholars sat around a coffee table in the living room and they began to piece together more information about how and why Danny had died.

They had already read in the newspapers the child had been strangled by a Playskool Travel-Lite crib, which was manufactured by Kolcraft Enterprises, of Chicago. Three children had died before the crib was recalled, and two more, including Danny, had died after that. Products made with the same design but manufactured by different companies had killed another seven children. More than 1.5 million cribs had been manufactured with the same or a similar design, and no one knew how many were still in use. They also discovered that state inspectors had visited Sweet Tots a week before Danny's death and hadn't checked to see if any recalled products were being used. That wasn't part of the inspector's job. The daycare center's operator, who had impeccable credentials, also had no idea the Travel-Lite had been recalled.

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The more they talked, the more the professors began to sense that they had tragically, accidentally, come upon an important issue they had never heard about, never researched, and never taught in their classrooms. They began framing Danny's death in terms of profit-and-loss, corporate ethics, government regulation, and brand marketing. Why was the product badly designed? Why didn't the recall succeed in getting the crib out of the daycare center? Why didn't users know this crib was dangerous? How many more children's products had been recalled—and how many of them were still in use, still threatening the lives of children?

As the discussion continued, pushed on by Linda's urgent tone, it became clear that the professors were no longer talking about hypothetical solutions. Something good had to come from Danny's death. Something had to change. Boaz turned on a tape recorder to capture some of the ideas being kicked around. At one point, Linda's voice, calm but forceful, can be heard on the tape: "What can Boaz and I do—without any money, without anything, just us?"

Linda Ginzel and Boaz Keysar

met at Princeton, where they were each pursuing doctorates in psychology. They fell in love quickly.

Boaz grew up in Jerusalem. At 40, he has short brown hair, big brown eyes, and a gently reassuring smile. Boaz, who researches and teaches cognitive psychology at the University of Chicago, also has the perfect temperament for academics. He is even-tempered and sharply analytical, and finds rewards in the small details of hard work well done. Perhaps it is not so surprising, considering that he studies the way people use language, that Boaz stays mostly quiet during interviews, listening as Linda does the bulk of the talking. When he does speak, it is usually in short sentences, and usually to support or amplify something his wife has said. If he begins to get emotional, he sometimes gets up and walks away until he can gather himself again.

If Boaz's voice represents a straight line, Linda's is a roller coaster, capable in one brief sentence of quick climbs and sudden drops, always moving purposefully. She is 39, a Colorado native, the

daughter of a disabled Vietnam war veteran and a mother who worked on the assembly line in an electronics factory. She has a disarming smile and a gentle manner that nicely complement her ambition. She is currently the director of the U. of C. business school's corporate education program.

When Linda became pregnant with Danny, she prepared for his birth as if he were the most important start-up company ever built, or at least the most important since Ely had been born. She read and reread books, she attended child safety classes, and she began keeping meticulous journals. Memories, she says, are not just lived but made, and she wanted to preserve the memories of her children until they were old enough to start doing so themselves. In May 1996, she pasted a small photo of Danny's ultrasound exam in her journal and added the caption "First Photo of You."

Danny was born on the last day of 1996, so Linda used a 1997 calendar to chart the tiny details of her son's life: how his eyes turned from green to slate to brown; how he always woke up smil-

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ing; how he liked to bite everybody when he started teething. On May 12, 1998, less than halfway into her second calendar, Linda drew an "X" through the date and wrote "Danny died today." As if she would need the calendar to remember.

DANNY LOVED ANNA. HE SPENT HIS FIRST day at Sweet Tots when he was eight months old, and eleven months after he was born, he made "Anna" his first word—followed shortly thereafter by "Mama" and "Abba," the Hebrew word for "father." Anna declined to be interviewed and asked that her last name not be used, but she has told Boaz and Linda's lawyers the details of how Danny died. On the morning of the 12th, Anna set up the Travel-Lite in one of her bedrooms and tested the support rails to see that they were firmly locked. Later that day, three bigger children were napping on mattresses in her living room, and she put Danny in the crib. She left him alone for about 15 minutes. When she went back, the crib had collapsed, Danny was trapped, and he was not breathing. The medical examiner attributed his death to asphyxia and called it an accident.

Though he wasn't there, of course, and never saw his son trapped in the nutcracker grip of the Travel-Lite, Boaz remains haunted by the image. He still sees it in his head. He shakes his head and begins to lose his voice as he talks about it, and then he stands up and walks to the kitchen.

Linda, meanwhile, is obsessed by a more complicated image. Sometimes she sees a giant lead ball rolling behind her, not quite threatening to run her over, yet always pushing her on. At other moments, she sees the lead ball in her lap, like a load she's been saddled with, something she must care for so that the ball isn't passed on to another set of parents. The lead ball represents death. Or at least the threat of death. If another child dies in a Travel-Lite, the ball catches up to Linda; maybe it crushes her, or maybe it falls into the lap of another innocent mother.

"There will be another death," she says. "I don't know how I'm going to feel when that happens. Part of what keeps me going is the belief that we can help other children and keep other parents from going through what we're going through. I don't know how I'm going to deal with that."

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THE CRIB THAT KILLED DANNY SITS IN STORAGE at the law offices of Schwartz, Cooper, Greenberger & Krauss on La Salle Street in the Loop. Its collapsible blue handrails have turned dull and lightly brown from who knows how many children grabbing and pulling on them over the years. The crib was bought in 1991 or 1992 at a Toys “R” Us store in Chicago. When her child outgrew it, the original owner passed the crib on to a friend, who eventually gave it to Sweet Tots, where she sometimes left her child. These days, the joint where Danny’s neck was trapped sags a bit, but the rail remains firmly locked and doesn’t collapse, even when an attorney from the firm pushes and pulls harder than an infant ever could.

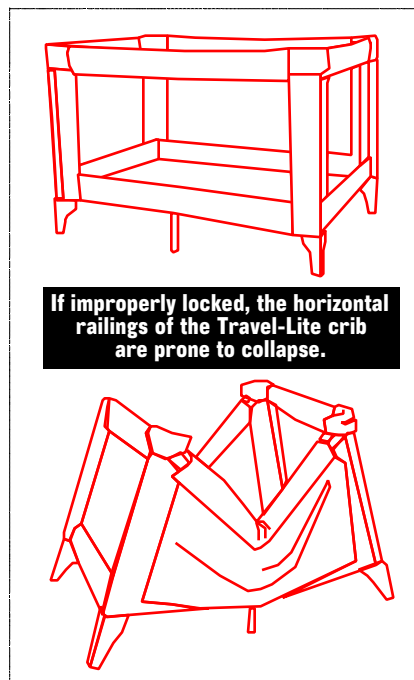
Stephen Senderowitz, an attorney at Schwartz, Cooper, has filed a lawsuit against Kolcraft on behalf of Linda and Boaz; his co-counsel on the case is former U.S. attorney Dan Webb. The suit also seeks damages from Hasbro, the Rhode Island-based company that licensed the Playskool name that appears on the crib’s side panel. (Officials at Hasbro failed to return several phone calls, and Kolcraft declined to answer questions.) Linda and Boaz will seek compensatory and punitive damages that could run into millions of dollars, the attorneys said, and they have vowed to dedicate a portion of the money to Kids In Danger, their new nonprofit organization.

Kolcraft—a 50-year-old family-owned business with headquarters on the South Side and more than 400 employees in Chicago, California, North Carolina, and Georgia—manufactured and sold about 11,000 Travel-Lite cribs (models 77101 and 77103) from 1990 to 1992. The sky-blue box of plastic and nylon folds up small enough to slide behind a sofa and weighs only 26 pounds. When the crib was unveiled in 1989, the Juvenile Products Manufacturers Association called it one of the year’s ten most innovative products, and marketers hailed it as a terrific advance for parents of the cellular phone age. But Kolcraft had the product on the market only three years before recalling it.

Federal officials at the Consumer Product Safety Commission said that the crib’s horizontal side railings were prone to collapse, though the government has never specifically said that the crib was badly built or designed. Thomas Koltun, Kolcraft’s president, declined to be inter-

viewed, but, in a pair of letters to *Chicago* he maintained that the crib collapses only if it has not been set up properly. The company has not publicly admitted to a specific design flaw, saying only that the crib poses a “potential danger.” According to the company’s pretrial response, Kolcraft “specifically denies that the crib ‘collapsed unexpectedly’ as a result of any defect in the crib.” Attorneys for Linda and Boaz believe Kolcraft will likely argue in court that Danny died because the Travel-Lite had not been set up properly. Linda and Boaz say they are certain Anna set up the crib properly, and they don’t blame her at all for Danny’s death.

According to an independent test commissioned by the Cook County Medical Examiner’s Office, Danny’s crib would not collapse so long as the knob at each end of



both rails was turned to the locked position. Shaking would not cause the rails to unlock, the lab reported. But the rails could come unlocked when they were rotated, and tests showed that it took as little as five pounds of torque to turn the rails and cause the crib’s collapse. Lawyers for Linda and Boaz say that Danny could have easily rotated the rails.

“Even if the [Travel-Lite] crib was not set up properly,” Senderowitz says, “the penalty should not be death.” Kolcraft, he says, should have designed a crib that protected a child’s life even when set up improperly, or else it should have designed one that could not be set up improperly at all. Now, he says, the compa-

ny should pay damages not just for designing the crib badly, but also for failing to conduct a successful recall: At last count, only about 30 percent of the cribs that were sold had been recovered.

NEARLY A DOZEN GOVERNMENT AGENCIES have the power to order recalls. The one with the most responsibility is the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which was established in 1972. “But far from being the powerful product safety watchdog it was supposed to be,” wrote *Consumer Reports* in 1994, “the CPSC of today is more of a gerbil.” The agency’s budget and staff were cut in half during the 1980s, and now, with a \$45-million annual budget and 480 employees, it is one of the smallest entities within the federal bureaucracy.

As a result of these drastic budget cuts, the CPSC usually relies on manufacturers to recall faulty products voluntarily. The CPSC doesn’t have the legal authority to test products before they go on the market, so it usually waits for accident reports and lawsuits to alert its staff to an unsafe product. Manufacturers are required by law to report safety problems with their products, but the CPSC receives relatively few reports. The agency can also fine companies that do not report faulty products, but, once again, the small staff generally doesn’t have time to pursue many investigations. Last year, it collected only \$1 million in fines from 11 cases. Critics of the agency say the CPSC goes soft on corporations because it can’t get much done without their cooperation.

In 1997, the CPSC handled 362 product recalls. Of those, 239 were toys and children’s products. Most of the manufacturers cooperated, but even that doesn’t guarantee effective results. The average recall, according to the CPSC, results in the return of only 30 to 40 percent of defective products.

On big ticket items, such as cars and refrigerators, manufacturers can usually track down consumers, because many of them mail in warranty cards after making purchases. But there were no warranty cards on the Travel-Lite. Making matters more difficult, cribs are usually recycled many times. They are handed down to friends and relatives, sold at flea markets, and purchased used at resale shops.

Successful recalls are possible without the cards, even on hand-me-down products, but they are expensive. In one well-

known case, Black & Decker recalled 750,000 fire-prone coffeemakers, spending millions of dollars on advertising and offering customers free repairs or new coffeemakers at a 70-percent discount. Black & Decker acted after receiving 45 claims of property damage but no serious injuries. But many companies prefer to roll the dice, gambling that lawsuits and fines won't cost as much as a thorough recall.

Critics say that the CPSC doesn't have the power or the funding to require companies to make more aggressive recall efforts. Some companies do agree to pay big bounties—up to three times the original cost of the product—even though the CPSC can't force them to do so. In fact, the CPSC has such a low profile that some manufacturers are not aware that they are required to report their faulty products. "I find companies sometimes that don't even know about the commission," says Dotty Drago, an independent product safety consultant and a former CPSC staff member.

"Our government has a friendly attitude toward the recallers," says Dirk C. Gibson, an assistant professor of communication and journalism at the University of New Mexico and an expert on the recall process. "They try to help them out a bunch. They give recallers every opportunity to appear that they're willing participants in the process."

Gibson says companies should spend more on recalls even if the government can't force them to. He says a good recall effort, combining heavy advertising and a strong public relations campaign, can actually boost the economic performance of a corporation. If a company, such as Black & Decker or Tylenol, can show consumers it is making every effort to ensure their safety, their customer base will grow in the long run, he says.

But David Messick, a professor of business ethics at Northwestern's Kellogg Graduate School of Management and a friend of Linda and Boaz, says there isn't much economic incentive to improve the recall process. The federal government doesn't want to impose too many restrictions on manufacturers because it doesn't want to hurt their profits. The manufacturers want to follow the law and make safe products, but they also want to make the biggest profits possible. Messick says that some companies withhold money from product testing and rely on lawsuits to inform them when a product turns out

to be dangerous. "The problem is built into the way the system works," he says. This year, he'll be asking his students how they might redesign the system. Unfortunately, the answers will be hypothetical.

Critics say that manufacturers spend far too little advertising their recalls. And to make matters worse, the CPSC has no advertising budget at all. Russ Rader, a CPSC spokesman, says successful recalls depend heavily on the cooperation of the news media. In the case of the Travel-Lite, the agency issues new press releases every time a child dies in the crib. The crib is also included in the agency's "recall roundup," an annual news release that lists some of the most dangerous recalled products. Rader says that the CPSC issues hundreds of press releases every year, including video news releases for television stations, but the agency can't persuade most mainstream media outlets to run the reports. "The news media is a public servant, and they have a very important responsibility here when it comes to public safety," says Rader, who is clearly frustrated by the lack of response.

Actually, says Gibson, the news media are not public servants. They operate independently of government, they are privately owned, and they are not under any obligation to print what the government wants. "Unless there's a lot of blood or it's weird—like the doll that ate hair—it's not going to become news," says Gibson. "I don't think it's the media's fault. The media won't run stories that don't meet their criteria for news."

Kolcraft officials have boasted in press releases that they have done everything possible to recall the cribs. The company has, in fact, written directly to pediatricians and to all J. C. Penney catalog customers; mailed posters to stores that carried the cribs; set up a toll-free telephone hot line; and offered consumers \$60 for the return of each crib (the cribs originally sold for about \$89 each). But Kolcraft bought no advertising, and company officials declined to say how much they actually spent on the recall. Hasbro was not required to participate in the recall because the company neither manufactured nor distributed the Travel-Lite. The recall was announced by the CPSC and Kolcraft on February 18, 1993, after the commission received its third report of an infant death, and even then the CPSC struck an accommodating tone. "While it is still unclear why the crib side rails fold-

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ed,” said the government news release, “Kolcraft is recalling all Travel-Lite cribs in an effort to prevent any further risk of injury to infants using these cribs.”

When *Chicago* caused the federal Freedom of Information Act to request details on the Travel-Lite recall—details that might show when the defect in the product was first detected, how quickly the recall took place, and how much money Kolcraft had spent—the agency stalled. Rader said the agency was required by law to send the file first to Kolcraft for review to make sure it didn’t contain any proprietary information before releasing it to the press. The process usually takes several months, he said.

In his letters to *Chicago* Thomas Koltun said Kolcraft voluntarily recalled the cribs and removed them from store shelves “immediately upon learning of the potential hazard presented by the collapsing side rails.” He wrote that the company offered refunds and urged that the products be destroyed “despite the fact that our investigation of the incidents involving the Travel-Lite confirms that the side rails of the portable crib collapse only if both of

the two side rails are not properly rotated to a fully locked position.”

Koltun wrote that he first learned in July 1991 that a child had suffocated in a Travel-Lite, but the child’s mother refused to participate in an investigation, and Kolcraft was never able to determine how the child had suffocated. In January 1993, when the company got word of the second accident, it launched an investigation, Koltun says. One month later, Kolcraft was informed by the CPSC that a third death had occurred in November 1992. Only then, Koltun writes, did the company learn that the Travel-Lite’s side rails had collapsed in the second and third incidents. Later reports by the CPSC indicated that the side rails had not been locked when the child died in November, but may have been locked when the next child died, in July 1995. Koltun says the company’s own investigation suggests the rails were not locked in either incident. Officials at the CPSC would not comment on the details of the case. Nevertheless, within days of receiving the CPSC report in February 1993, Kolcraft recalled the Travel-Lite. The company also

paid settlements to three of the first four families that lost children, but Koltun declined to say how much it paid.

Senderowitz believes that Kolcraft is avoiding any admission of error to protect itself in court. He also insists that Kolcraft could have conducted a more effective recall if it had offered more money for returned cribs and spent more on advertising. If it is found that the company knew the product was not safe and dragged its feet on the recall, punitive damages could be very high. But even if the recall had run smoothly and effectively, he adds, Kolcraft should pay for having made a crib that was not reasonably safe for its intended use. “If you send it out and it’s bad, you’re liable,” he says.

ONE DAY LATE LAST SUMMER, LINDA AND Boaz sat at the foot of their bed and watched a videotape with some of their favorite scenes from Danny’s life, beginning with his delivery and ending shortly before his death. The videotape shows Danny in the bath, Danny crawling on an electronic keyboard, Danny playing peekaboo, Danny starting to walk, Dan-

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ny dancing to the Beatles, Danny biting Linda, Danny biting Ely. Danny is definitely cute. By the end of the tape, he has red, crab-apple cheeks, an eight-tooth smile, and big brown eyes that seem to want to make friends.

Less than six months after his death, Danny remains a constant presence in their home, and his legacy is growing. Linda continues to think of new ways to spread the word about recalls, and she continues to be haunted by the image of a giant lead ball chasing her, pushing, falling into her lap. She is haunted by two babies—her own, and one who has not yet died.

“I was thinking about the depth of this story,” she says. “There is something at the core of the story about public policy and the forces of commerce and politics, and what’s caught between them is the children—my baby. What is it about the dynamics between commerce and politics that is allowing this to happen over and over and over again?”

When Danny died, Linda began almost immediately to concentrate her attention on the recalled cribs. She spent sleepless nights at the computer, researching recalls and learning why they failed, looking for ways in which a grassroots campaign might make a difference. She learned that, in a recent 12-month span, at least 52 children under the age of five had died while using toys or nursery items, and at least 137,000 children were hurt. She wondered why, in all her parenting preparations, no one had warned her which products were dangerous, and she wondered what she could do to spread the word. The research, she knew, was in many ways a distraction from the grief. But she didn’t want to analyze her motivations. She wanted to act.

“If the government can’t do this, and the manufacturers don’t,” she says, “then we will. We’ll tell everyone we know to tell everyone they know, and we’ll get word to the level of the users.”

“There’s a lot to change,” adds Boaz.

It began as simply as that. First, they sent an e-mail message to almost everyone they knew (“Subject: Prevent death of next child”), as well as a lot of people they didn’t, and they asked everyone who got the message to pass it on again. The letter described Danny’s death, warned about the Travel-Lite, and listed some of the other deadly children’s products that had been recalled. The message also told

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parents how they could get up-to-date information on all recalls (www.cpsc.gov, or 1-800-638-2772). Within 11 days, the message had reached more than 5,000 people and had more than 300 responses, including several saying they had been using the defective cribs and would no longer do so. A few weeks later, their fledgling organization had a name, Kids In Danger, and its own Web site (www.kidsindanger.org).

In the beginning, Linda and Boaz almost felt as if they could reach every parent on their own, and Linda, in particular, went about trying to accomplish the task all at once. She composed a two-page flyer that warned parents of the danger of the Travel-Lite and instructed them on where to get information on other dangerous products. The flyer included a frightening drawing of a partially collapsed crib squeezing a child's throat—the precise image that haunted Boaz. Everywhere she went, Linda carried the pages in her purse and handed them out to parents with small children.

"I think Ely was a little embarrassed that I would walk up to complete strangers in airports and tell them my baby just died and I wanted to warn them about the dangerous product that killed him." She takes a long pause and fights back tears. "But I couldn't help it."

Early on, Ely got involved, too. He suggested handing out the flyers to every house on Burling Street. So he and his mother knocked on every door and told everyone they met what had happened.

One day Linda was watching *Mad About You* on television, and though she thought she had taken her mind off Danny and the crib, she nearly jumped out of her seat when she realized that the set of the show included a recalled portable crib. Kids In Danger hopes to contact one of the show's stars or directors.

Soon the campaign grew more efficient. Linda and Boaz had a well-connected group of friends, and before long they had spoken to officials at the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Ambulatory Pediatric Association, and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. DCFS distributed an alert to licensed daycare providers statewide. At City Hall, Caroline Shoenberger, the commissioner of consumer services, got angry when she heard what had happened. She had the city payroll department print a crib warning on the pay stub

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of every city employee, and she published alerts in several newsletters. Shoenberger also wrote to the American Association of Retired Persons and asked it to inform baby-sitting grandparents who might be using recalled cribs.

"Linda's a wonderful woman," says Shoenberger, "and no one should have to bear this. I have no question that the dedication that inspired her to go into teaching will also give her the drive to do something about this horrible situation. Maybe the point of Linda's story is that if everyone does a little bit, it can make a difference."

Some of the people who sat shiva with Linda and Boaz have also begun working on the issue. One of them, a journalist, is writing an article for a parenting magazine. Another, an expert in marketing, is helping Linda improve the flyer that she circulates.

"Sometimes I look at this issue and I get overwhelmed," says Marla Felcher, a former senior lecturer at Northwestern's Kellogg Graduate School of Management and a friend of Linda's who joined the team. "I think it's never going to work. Then I talk to Linda and get back to work."

At some point soon, Linda says, she would like to start looking at big issues. Last summer Kids In Danger won a 1998 Allstate Safety Leadership Award for the Illinois region. Kids In Danger has already hired a part-time communications consultant. Before long, Linda and Boaz hope to expand their board of directors and hire a full-time executive director.

Then the organization might begin pursuing some of its long-term goals, such as working with parents and caregivers to establish a reliable network for the communication of lifesaving information; working with manufacturers to develop strategies for designing safer products; and working with government to craft better legislation to protect children from defective items. Linda and Boaz say they would like to see companies pressured to spend more money advertising recalls. In September, Linda testified before the Illinois House Committee on Children and Youth, suggesting that the state provide recall information when would-be day-care center operators apply for licenses, and that the state send newsletters containing recall lists to all licensed daycare providers. State officials vowed to implement the recommendations.

How Danny Died

“In a bizarre way, it’s been an incredibly optimistic thing, to see the depths of people’s caring and compassion,” Linda says. “It really gives me hope that something good can come out of this tragedy.”

JUST WHEN LINDA AND BOAZ WERE BEGIN-ning to feel as if they were moving steadily ahead, beginning to get the nonprofit in gear, and beginning to cope a little better with their anguish, the moment they had been dreading arrived. The big lead ball caught up with Linda.

Late one day in August, while he was at his baby sitter’s house, ten-month-old William Curran, of Fair Haven, New Jersey, was strangled when a Travel-Lite crib collapsed and crushed his throat. William’s baby sitter had bought the crib in 1992 and used it ever since, never learning that it had been recalled.

Kolcraft issued another press release, much like the one when Danny Keysar died. “This is a terrible tragedy we had hoped to prevent when we voluntarily recalled the Playskool Travel-Lite in 1993 and immediately began extensive public awareness efforts to urge consumers to stop using the products,” Thomas Koltun said in his written statement.

When Russ Rader of the CPSC got the news, he blamed the media. “It breaks everybody’s heart [when these accidents occur]. They’re deaths and tragedies, but they’re preventable. We got the call the other day from the local newspaper [in New Jersey], but it turns out that newspaper had never printed anything about the recall roundup earlier this year, and they didn’t print our reannouncement after the Chicago death. Of course, now they’re doing front-page stories. Maybe if they had printed something when they had two opportunities this year, it might have changed the outcome.”

Linda got the news two days after William Curran’s death. She had left work early and driven home, where she found the message on her answering machine.

A few minutes later, she had a hard time expressing her feelings. “I’m in shock,” she says. “We had so little time. Our whole campaign was to prevent the next death and we . . .” She never finishes the sentence.

“William Curran,” she says softly, and then gathers herself and goes on.

“Now we’ll just have to prevent the next one.” ■