

ALUM PROFILE

Toys Gone Bad

Father-daughter consumer advocates keep the toy industry honest

AMONG THE MODERN traditions of the holiday season, the Ten Worst Toys List is already a classic. Released at the start of every shopping season for the last thirty-five years, the list reads like a Santa's workshop gone bad: pirates whose swords can actually stab, toy guns that can really hurt, and baubles that look like candy and are coated with dangerous levels of lead paint.

The list is compiled by World Against Toys Causing Harm (WATCH), a nonprofit founded in 1973 by Edward Swartz (LAW'58), a Boston litigator. His daughter, Joan Siff (LAW'91, COM'92), left a flourishing legal career in 2000 to become WATCH's executive director. "It's in my blood," she says.

Swartz's involvement in consumer advocacy dates back to his stint as editor of the *BU Law Review*, when he began writing some of the first articles on product liability law. He realized just how underregulated the toy-and-game industry was when he testified before the National Commission on Product Safety in 1968. The lack of government oversight and the "ticking time bombs" in his own children's toy chests inspired Swartz to write two books on toy safety, *Toys That Don't Care* and *Toys That Kill*.

"Up until that time, no one had written one negative word about toys," Swartz recalls. "When the industry didn't like it, I knew it was very effective."

A large part of WATCH's work is trying to keep dangerous products out of the hands of consumers. Swartz and Siff note that it's easier and less costly for a company to recall a toy that's already been sold to millions of parents than it is to remove unsafe features during a toy's development. It's more expensive, for instance, for companies to check for lead in the many products that are made overseas. A recall puts the onus on parents to send a toy back, if they hear about it at all.

"In the six months following our last toy conference, there were thirty-seven toy recalls," Siff says, "which represent over 3.6 million toy units that are out there already in children's toy boxes. Not all of those toys are sent back to the manufacturer."

Still, the situation is improving. "Safety's not the first thing the industry thinks of, but it used to be the last thing

Edward Swartz and his daughter, Joan Siff, keep an eye out for dangerous toys.

LEAH FASTEN

they thought of," Swartz says.

Swartz and Siff hope that the Ten Worst Toys list has played a part in that success. Some of the products on last year's list, such as the Rubber Band Shooter, seem like obvious dangers. Others, like the My Little Baby Born doll (whose easily detached pacifier is a choking hazard), could catch even vigilant parents by surprise.

"One thing that unfortunately doesn't surprise us is that we see a lot of the same hazards year after year," Siff says. "We see toys that are toxic from lead, toys with small parts, toys with sharp edges that can injure children."

The ten toys they pick each year aren't the only offenders on the market; the list, they say, is really just a way to promote a heightened awareness of how dangerous many commonplace toys can be.

They stress the need for parents to research toys before they buy, something that they fear is becoming harder to do in an era of Internet shopping. They're lobbying to have the same warnings and age recommendations that appear on toy packages listed on retailers' Web sites.

Despite their passion for the cause, practicing what they preach couldn't have been easy for the Swartz family. Surely Siff received at least a few toys as gifts when she was a child?

She laughs. "Just sweaters," she says. **KATIE KOCH**

chanted Self Press, 2008), a fictional diary of a tween girl. Barbara, one of the first researchers to apply positive psychology to the study of women and girls, wrote the book to help girls and their mothers connect.

1966

HUGH HENNEDY (GRS'66) of Portsmouth, N.H., published a book of poetry, *Variations*

on a Natural Theme: A Loon Year (Hobblebush Books, 2008). The collection is centered on the theme of bird-watching.

1967

MARTY MORGAN (CAS'67) of Gloucester, Mass., a full-time potter, runs a craft gallery and teaching workshop on the Mill River in Gloucester. Since 2001, she has helped run

the annual Empty Bowl Dinner, a benefit for the Cape Ann Food Pantry. Last year's event drew 822 people and raised more than \$20,000. She is also a founding member of Cape Ann Artisans, which is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its Studio Tour. Marty is married to Mark Lindsay, a sailor and boat builder; she enjoys sailing on the river and in Ipswich Bay when she isn't in her studio. Visit www.martymorganpots.com.