



Sick at School: How Toxic Mold Impacts Student Health

Interview with the Lee and Strzewski Families

SPEAKERS

Kendra Seymour, John & Lindsay Strzewski, Patrick Lee

JS

John Strzewski

00:00

I mean the dizziness, fatigue, that's pretty common, and you can attribute that to a number of different things, but when she started having heart palpitations, her legs would start violently convulsing while in the gym, which we later found through testing, which we'll talk about, trichothecene in the gym. And so it would always resolve when she left the school, just like Patrick's son. And it got progressively worse. I mean, after Scarlett went through everything, all we asked for was a transfer. And instead of transferring her, they denied her, and they spent \$31,000 putting our daughter on trial, and they said the best place for her was at the school.

KS

Kendra Seymour

00:42

Hello, and welcome to Your Indoor Air Podcast brought to you by Change the Air Foundation. My name is Kendra Seymour, and I'm so glad you're here today. Now I want you to imagine being told your child has to go to school, but the very building that they're in every day is making them sick. What would you do? Who would listen? And how far would you go to protect them? So in today's episode, we're speaking with two families who face this exact nightmare in a school in the suburbs of Chicago. They believe that mold and water damage in their children's school triggered some serious health issues. They've spent the last couple of years searching for answers, advocating for safer schools and fighting to be heard. So I'm going to introduce to you today, Patrick Lee. Patrick believes his son was made sick by the school he attended. And also with us are John and Lindsay Straszewski, whose daughter went to the very same school and experienced health symptoms of her own during her time there. So thank you so much all three of you for being here, and not just for sharing your story, but for all the significant advocacy work that you're doing on behalf of not just your children, but all the children and the staff that attend those that school. So thank you.

PL

Patrick Lee

01:46

Thank you, Kendra, really happy to be here. Yes, thank you for having

KS

Kendra Seymour

01:50

So yeah, yeah, this episode isn't just about one school, because what we're seeing here is not a unique story. I have so many teachers and parents reaching out across the country concerned about this issue. So I think it's what we're doing today is is an important part of you know, raising awareness for parents and staff everywhere to be thinking about these buildings. But before we dive in, I do need to take a moment just to say thank you to two of our corporate partners, and it's their support who helps keep our resources free at Change the Air Foundation, so everything from our free downloads to our advocacy work to the research we fund. So a huge shout out, and thank you to Boulder Holistic and HNST Mold Inspections. We love partnering with companies just like them. So if you want to learn more about either of those companies, please head on over to [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org), and click on our corporate partners tab. Or if you're interested in becoming a corporate partner, you can find information there as well. So Patrick, let's start with you, because you were one of our first connections with this story. Gosh, it feels like over a year, maybe two ago, and I know when you first came to us, you, you came to us just as this father who just wanted his son to be well and be healthy and flourish as a kid in school, like like many of us want so but for your son, He was experiencing all sorts of symptoms. So can you talk to us about what those symptoms were and why you believe they're connected to the school environment?

PL

Patrick Lee

03:28

Yeah, it was in 2019 when he first started going to school healthy and then coming home starting with headaches and then dizziness. You know, he had developed tinnitus and ear ringing. Had multiple ear infections and and at one point, we had to pick him up and was in a wheelchair to figure out what's going on. We took him to all sorts of doctors. We took him to neurologists, to cardiologists, to allergists. You know, eight hospitals, three hospital systems and and no one could ever figure out what was going on with him. It was a long journey. And I will tell you it was, it was very painful. He, he suffered, you know, pretty, pretty badly. And, you know, we went through everything to figure out, is it connected to potentially some other autoimmune condition, is it, you know, the environment he's in. And we even went to the extreme of camping outside for a while, and once we kind of made a connection that it could be mold. So I gutted my house, turned everything upside down. We rented a camper trailer. We lived in that for almost six months and and it was, it wasn't until he healed and that parallel with having the home completely gutted and done whatever it was, that he was now consistently fine at home, after, after going through how many times that he would go to school and come home in a wheelchair and kind of get better at home, but it

would take longer and longer and longer over time until it just got consistently severe. So once we had that all cleared, and everything is fine, we're like, okay, we reached out to the school. We said, we think we know what the problem is, and we think that, you know, there's an issue where he has high sensitivity to these toxigenic molds. So can you help us in any way? And at the time, they had no idea how to comment. You know, the one comment from the principal at time was, it's above my pay grade. I don't deal with that stuff. I said, okay, who do we talk to? The HVAC maintenance director was like, no, we're fine, here's your reports, and it's all the standard reports. So I said, well, can we come to school and see how he does before school starts? And sure enough, we went, and within 15 minutes, he had a headache and was dizzy. I had to kind of help him walk out of the building. So if right then from them, I knew that it was something, because he would go to other buildings. He would go to other places, indoor, in the mall, and have no problem. He would even go to the library or to other schools and visit them, and didn't have an issue. But with this school, it was very consistent, and so we fought tooth and nail to whatever we could do to get it, but at the end of the day, without those proper protections in place, that really is what needed. He was just coming home in a wheelchair for a long time.

KS

Kendra Seymour

06:26

I mean, I honestly can't even imagine, as a parent, what is going through your mind, right? And you're not finding answers. And when you finally start to narrow it down, and you think there's something going on with this building, because when he's not there, he does better. How long was this going on? Was this over a period of a few months or a couple years?

PL

Patrick Lee

06:47

Yeah, I think it was pretty much, you know, we tried to get through seventh grade. I think sixth grade was kind of covid. Seventh grade, they started to try and ramp back up, but he was still, it took two years plus for him to actually recover what from what I believe was a combination of things, but severe mold poisoning, with very high levels of of ochratoxin and patulin in his body and and then the eighth grade was the year where we were like, you know, we had some concessions that were made, but it was just continually still the same thing. The longer he went, the slower and slower he continued to get worse, until he just stay home for a little while and get better. And we had to just keep repeating that. It was hard because I didn't quite know 100% what it was and what the data was. And, you know, with everything we went through, I kind of felt it was but I wasn't getting all the answers that I needed to make necessarily the right decision. And it wasn't until I did finally do some very specific testing collection myself that after I had gotten that final data set, I said, you know, it's almost the end of your eighth grade, and you're done. We're not going anymore, because now I know that there's actually this very specific mycotoxin that I've

detected in the school, and I can't send you anymore. So once we pulled him out, he then subsequently healed completely.

KS

Kendra Seymour

08:16

Yeah, and we're going to talk to what what you ended up as a parent having to do to try to find answers in that building. But before we get there, John and Lindsay, your daughter, also goes to the same school, and what was she experiencing?

LS

Lindsay Strezewski

08:31

So it's funny. I mean, we know Patrick's story in and out, but hearing him talk about it again, I'm like, yes, we went through that, we went through that, but the difference between our story and Patrick's story was, we were able to learn a lot from Patrick's story. And naive as it might have been, because there's a little bit of an age gap between their son and our daughter, so we weren't in the school when he was actively fighting the school. You know, we live in a very large district, so we didn't know the story personally. But it wasn't until there was some talk around, like my neighborhood, when I was starting to mention to some neighbors that we weren't able to send Scarlett without her having all these issues. And a neighbor was like, oh, you should reach out to Patrick Lee. But for us, it went on for about two months, and we went through similar a similar situation where we were going from doctor to doctor, you know, it a lot of it was, well, you know, what's wrong with her? Let's do this test. Let's do that test. But the the big, major red flag was her symptoms were only at Woodlawn when she left, she, her symptoms resolved within an hour almost every time. So those were really the top the telltale signs that it really was the school environment. And so when we did speak to Patrick and heard a story, we said, yes, of course, we do know Scarlett has mold sensitivity. She does allergy shots monthly and so that was, actually her biggest hurdle with allergies, is mold. So it was no shocker to us that that had to be the issue as well, with the same symptoms that Patrick's son was experiencing.

KS

Kendra Seymour

10:12

Yeah. So tell us a little bit more, because I think sometimes people think that, like mold is just an allergy. Oh, it's just the sniffles and but your kids were really suffering here. This isn't like, oh, I'm going to take some allergy meds and I'm good to go. Did she have some other symptoms that kind of just really impacted her ability to learn and attend school?

JS

John Straszewski

10:33

Yeah. So I mean, the dizziness, fatigue, that's pretty common, and you can attribute that to a number of different things, but when she started having heart palpitations, her legs would start violently convulsing while in the gym, which we later found through testing, which we'll talk about, trichothecene in the gym and so it would always resolve when she left the school, just like Patrick's son. And it got progressively worse, where each day would happen, you know, eighth grade or eighth period, then sixth period, then within like, an hour of her being this in the school,

LS

Lindsay Straszewski

11:08

We had to pick her up

JS

John Straszewski

11:09

MmHm and she was miserable.

KS

Kendra Seymour

11:11

Yeah.

LS

Lindsay Straszewski

11:11

I mean, she had to hold on to walls to walk through it. I have no doubt if we had kept, you know, had we not talked to Patrick and we kept sending her, like, thinking, oh, this is something to do with Scarlett. We have to work through this. She probably would have had to be in a wheelchair as well. So, I mean, yes, every issue. Respiratory issues weren't really the problem for her. And that's where the school, you know, unfortunately, just said, well, if it's a mold issue, why isn't it a nose, a runny nose, or why is her asthma not activated. And, you know, it's a tricky thing, and unfortunately, there's just not enough knowledge on this.

KS

Kendra Seymour

11:48

Yeah, and I think that's the challenge too. And we see this, whether people are getting sick at home or at work or at school, is not everyone's affected in the same way, right? It's not like strep throat, where, okay,

we're all going to get a sore throat, we're all going to get a fever, check, check, check. Mold related illness impacts people differently, and that's for a variety of reasons. We won't unpack that here, but we have other episodes on our website that talk about that, so it can make it that much more challenging. But what I think is so shocking here is the telltale sign is both of your kids would get better when they were away from school, and that screams environmental. So let's circle back to you, then Patrick, because you really did something that blew my mind when we first talked, you were like, I'm going to do my own testing. So actually, let's, let's back it up, though, did the school end up doing any testing? And if so, what did that look like, and what did it find? And why did you end up having to pursue testing yourself?

PL

Patrick Lee

12:46

Yeah, they had no actual mold type of testing on record. They did typical air quality testing, which are like oxygen, carbon dioxide, levels of humidity and and I said, I really need you to let me know if there's a mold problem here, I need you to do some mold testing. And they would not. They said, This is what we do. It's not there's no test. We don't have it, and we don't require it. And I continued to push for it, but I got just immediate resistance. So So I actually made some signs, and I try to raise awareness, because I really said we need to do something. And I stood out in the street holding a sign saying, I'm worried about toxic mold and the school. And it was at that point that the school finally decided to go ahead and do some testing and and they did do the non viable molds spore testing. Which it has some issues of its own, but it, you know, it has some data, and within the data, it actually showed levels of aspergillosis and penicillin and me, my eyes were like laser tuned to that mold, because my son had ochratoxin and passion, which is the poison or the mycotoxins that those type of molds can produce. And those are also indicative, I believe, of evidence of water damage and potentially a sick building syndrome. So I said, hey, I think there's actually this type of mold in the school, and I'm concerned about it. And I got an immediate fire back, because before I even got a chance to review the report, they said, yeah, we did it. Here it is. And I said, oh, that's great news. They said they made their conclusions, and the next day, they made a big splash to all the parents, saying, our school air is healthy. We're fine, no problem. But I looked at and I said, hey, I, I, what about this classroom? There's mold in this classroom. And I got fired back saying, no, there's no mold in this classroom. Well, you're reading the report wrong. You're misinterpreting and misrepresenting your results. And as I raised more results, they actually even fired back at me to tell me to, like, cease and desist, like I received from the superintendent from the school. And I said, what are you talking about, I'm just trying to understand and how you can confirm that this is actually not an issue for my child because everything that my doctors tell me is that it is.

KS

Kendra Seymour

14:56

Yeah, yeah. And I think too, for first of all. If people miss that, Patrick, literally had to stand outside with a sign, essentially like protesting, just public like awareness, hey, take me seriously in order to get them to take these steps. And when they did, they essentially did ambient air sampling, to my knowledge, Patrick, you had said there was no thorough investigation, like of the school, they weren't looking at HVAC systems. They weren't doing, you know, looking for those signs of water damage, correct. They were just going by some select air test. Is that correct?

PL

Patrick Lee

15:32

Yes. So, so I took it a step further, I don't believe. So I had two independent mold inspection companies look at the school reports, and they both agreed with me that it didn't seem like it was done right. It was done when the building wasn't occupied, and other things like that they had mentioned. So both of them actually came to support to speak on our behalf at the school board meeting, but they were met with kind of scoffing, and I felt that, you know, they weren't really being listened to or considering these factors. So I said, I don't know what else I can do, because clearly this testing is not necessarily good. So I did some research, I looked up and I found ERMI testing or EPA 36 testing, and I know there's issues with the criteria, but I said, well, DNA testing is DNA testing, so let me get that data and see if there's actually evidence of this type of mold, which I did, and I shared that with the school, and still they wouldn't do anything. So I continue to do a raise raise awareness, and still they wouldn't do anything. And I knew it was indirect, and I had to find something. So I did actually find a test that was ELISA based testing, which is the same 30 - 40, year type of testing due to test for these poisons in food. And they had adapted a test to test for these poisons in the air. It was the A, M, E, A, airborne mycotoxin environmental analysis testing. And I said, well, sure enough, if I get this and I show this, this would either really prompt the school do something on my kids behalf, to protect him. So I went in and I actually set up the tripod with an with a, you know, OSHA, or I forgot the term, but the certified air collecting sampling device and pulled the air in the school gym, and I sent it in, and it was during a championship basketball game series that I want to go attend. And the data showed the trichothecenes and and you read it, what that does and it, and I was just appalled. I looked at I never heard of I don't know what trichothecene is, and I don't know how it is, but there it is in this test report, and my kids suffering from muscle loss of muscle coordination and issues like that. And sure enough, you go on the Illinois Department of Health and the symptoms that that could generate if they suffer from type of systemic poisoning of trichothecene, watch out for loss of muscle coordination, right? And among many other things that were very scary, and the worst case, including death, was on that list. So you can imagine how, how shocked I was that, even as I shared this data that the position was still no our school air is healthy. We're fine. There's no problem, and nothing's wrong.

KS

Kendra Seymour

18:22

Yeah, yeah. And we're gonna dig into a little bit more about the what has happened since then. But John and Lindsay or Patrick, can you guys, these are just you two children, right? Have you heard from other students in the building, or other staff in the building who've had complaints of maybe failing health or mysterious symptoms that they can't explain.

LS

Lindsay Strezewski

18:46

So our story took a little while to spread throughout the school. I mean, we didn't go public with it until this year, and this for us, happened in 2024 a few months into Scarlett being homebound because she had to finish off half her seventh grade school year at home. People started parents started asking questions, and then talk started happening amongst parents. So I did get a handful of parents that reached out to me, whether it was now I'm putting two and two together and realizing this was what was going on with my child when they were at Woodlawn or or at the school, or whether it was current symptoms happening. So one of my daughter's really good friends, her brother, was having really severe issues, and continues to have you still at the school, more severe than almost Scarlett's were. So yes, and again, like as we talked about, the symptoms are always streamlined. You know, with each child, they're a little bit different, but there's no question, there's a correlation of the air quality. So and then as the story went public, we had even more parents come forward. Um. We had created a Facebook page to create awareness. So we had people privately messaging us, sharing some of their concerns.

PL

Patrick Lee

20:08

I will say I've had, I mean, I started raising awareness in 2020 and I've gone to the school board having to say this about four times, five times now, almost every year, I said, if you don't take any action and really take the time to understand this issue and how it is potentially affecting these children, you're going to have another story come and another child is going to be affected like my child. So then year after year, we shared a story of actually a child who was older than my son. When hearing his story, she told his mom, her mom that, oh my god, mom, this is why I, like, literally, had to ditch school so I could use my like, I could breathe. Otherwise, she's using her inhaler like 20 times during the day, and since leaving her asthma has disappeared, resolved. There was another family that stepped forward. Said, my, my older daughter has developed a thyroid condition. My younger son has developed a skin disease, which is also symptomatic, related to some of these toxicogenic molds, both of them, from what I've learned and understand and reporting that during covid or summertime, the symptoms didn't progress. They didn't worsen, but it only worsened as they returned and they these parents continued to support us at the school board meetings, another family member came forward and said, like their second grader daughter, had developed alopecia,

and again, same thing, hair loss during the school year. During the summer, hair grows back, and then hair loss again once the school starts,

KS

Kendra Seymour

21:50

Yeah, yeah. It's it's really shocking, because when you're young, like, that's when you're in your best health. This isn't someone who's closer to our age, and you can like, oh, you're overworked, your stress parent, that happens when you age? I mean these, these are children in their prime and in their youth, and we're talking about a lot of like physical symptoms, but it also has cognitive impacts on retention and your ability to learn. It can affect anxiety and depression and all of these things that you know you are mentioning, have been connected to mold and damp buildings. So you guys, you said, Patrick, that you have you over the years now, because it's 2025 and you started advocating for this in 2020 and you've been to multiple school board meetings. There's even been media coverage, you guys have had some success recently getting some news stories done on this situation. How have you felt about the response you've received so far from the school, and if you could speak, maybe directly to the school administrators or policy makers, if they're listening, what would you want them to understand about the importance of environmental safety in our schools?

JS

John Strezewski

23:03

Yes, I would say that. I mean, after Scarlett went through everything, all we asked for was a transfer. And instead of transferring her, they denied her, and they spent \$31,000 putting our daughter on trial, and they said the best place for her was at the school. So the school refused to speak to us. The school board did. The superintendent refused to speak to us. We've never had a two way dialog with them, and that is why we went public with our story, because we needed to create awareness about what was happening. And it was on NBC, CBS, the school just continues to deny, deny, deny. And their slogan is, every school, every student, every day, or every something like that, but they don't care about their students. They're not going to put them their health first. And it's just unfortunate,

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Kendra Seymour

23:58

Yeah, I mean, and you had mentioned something, and then I'll let Patrick jump in. But you know, \$31,000 spent right on legal fees, I saw your daughter on the news story. She was incredibly brave to speak so publicly about what happened to her. And I mean, honestly, I get a little choked up. And you know, she's not even my child. And instead of putting, I don't know, that money towards solving the problem or bringing in someone who can do an actual investigation. They they fought to block her transfer, and really

ended up doing a disservice to her and to everyone that's still in that building. Patrick, did you want to add to to what Lindsay and John had mentioned?

PL

Patrick Lee

24:41

Yeah, yeah. I mean, what can I say now that I haven't said, I mean, I would start with the same, basically, is that, you know, these children can't speak for themselves and and there's, there's data that you can get. It is informative. Yes, some of it, I feel, is more direct, and it's gaining momentum in terms of the validity and the standardization of it. I mean, it's very valid. It's the ELISA air testing. And so, you know, the more you take inaction, the more children will be suffering, and that's the only outcome that will come from your inaction. There's nothing wrong and nothing that could happen to you that would be worse than what could happen to a child if you don't just try to make it safer. Yeah, with everything that you can that we are asking you to do, there's no harm for you to find the data, even if it does show that there is poison and that you take active action to try and resolve it, the only outcome is that the children, and then that this next year and beyond, are not going to have to face any of these potential risks that our children and previous children have gone and been exposed to. So please, please do something. And I guess the other message I would say is, you know, I, as you know, my other piece of it has been trying to change the laws in the state of Illinois, working in partnering with you, Change the Air Foundation. And I just really hope it doesn't take a law to change for you to realize really what the right thing is to do. And our testimony to Congress already been heard once will be heard again as we try and push another bill through, and every Congress person has responded unanimously that, yes, this is unacceptable. This has to change. We have to protect these children.

KS

Kendra Seymour

26:42

Lindsay, you were starting to say something. Did you want to add a thought?

LS

Lindsay Strezewski

26:46

And, I know I wasn't trying to interrupt you, Patrick, I just had this thought that. And I had this thought over the winter when I was just ruminating over this. I could not stop thinking about it. I mean, we're sending our kids to a really great school. I mean, we're supposed to be in one of the best districts in the state of Illinois, and one of the biggest things they teach our children is to be advocates for themselves and to speak up. And it's exactly what Scarlett did. And it's just it's been mind boggling to me that they could silence not only her, but you know, not only us, but her as well. When she's, you know, tried to tell her story and say, this is making me ill, or even she also spoke at the school board meeting and spoke very strongly, and she's very, very well articulated, and said to them, you know, point blank, like I the principal made a

comment stating that this could be anxiety that I'm having, and that this could be positioned, that I've been told that this mold is an issue when it's not. But she says, I know, you know. She knows herself. She knows her body. She's a very well spoken young lady. And the fact that they could just dismiss her, and I just have no words, it doesn't add up to me at all.

KS

Kendra Seymour

28:13

Yeah, so not only did she, like, go through this incredibly challenging thing, like, physically and emotionally and mentally, yeah, now these grown ups are saying, I don't believe you.

LS

Lindsay Strezewski

28:24

Right. No, you know, and that that's that was a huge hurdle for us to get through with her over that five month period that she was home from school and couldn't be with her peers. It was a lot of her second guessing, or I should have tried harder. I should have, I should have tried harder to last longer in school, and maybe it is just in my head. And he said, no, it's not! So, and we've talked about this, but you know, parents have to trust their gut. They have to trust their instincts, and we know our kids best. So

PL

Patrick Lee

28:56

Yeah, there, there was a there was a time to every doctor and their brother, because of all the testing and the inconsistent symptoms on and off, and it all depended on how much exposure and when the you know, they're like, hey, what is this thing is in your head, maybe? And I do know it's you as a parent, you're like, like, okay, I sat down with my son, I said, hey, is this in your head, what's up? He's like, no, Dad, like, literally, it's not working. Nothing's working. And he could be laughing, having the best time his life, no stress or anything like that. And all of a sudden something becomes paralyzed in his body because of the over exposure that his body couldn't handle anymore. Yeah, and it was, it was a very conscious decision, I think, as parents and advocates for your children. That's something that nobody, nobody's talking about this as much, and this is why I'm so thankful for you, Kendra. I'm thankful that the Straszewski's heard our story so that they could really have awareness and make decisions faster to protect their children. And it starts with like, hey, I'm going to believe you. I'm going to start to look and listen what's going on. And if you do and you listen, you realize there's a problem, and it can be fixed, and the schools need to fix it.

KS

Kendra Seymour

30:10

Yeah, what I think is so incredible with everything that you guys have been through is neither of your children are there anymore, yet you are still fighting for this school to recognize this issue, to protect the staff and children that are still there, which is just incredible. So a question for both of you, Patrick, why don't you go first? How's your son doing now? And kind of like both physically and emotionally? Because I imagine, you know, we've talked about how this is not just a physical thing, but the really affects you as a family, too. So how is he doing now?

PL

Patrick Lee

30:45

Yeah, they I mean, the instant he left and stopped, he completely had healed. He started the high school in the fall, and from day one, it's like, Dad, can I stay till like six or seven, because I want to work out the gym all day, every day. He's been on the honor roll ever since, and actually, even just last semester, I said, look, if you if you get straight A's, he's 16, I said, I might buy you like, a little better Jeep if I can ever afford it one day, like, you know, but the better you do, and he's like, oh, so he almost pulls off straight A's, like, oh, I better save up my money, right? But, you know, again, he is, he went in there with an IEP because of us trying to just fight for him, to get, you know, purification for him, trying to use that pathway. And as soon as he went, they like, Hey, what are you even here for? Let me, let's figure out how to kick you out of this special education plan, because you don't need it. And, yeah, and he was the, the center of social attention, of being a leader, helping elevate other students as well, and doing great and full time water polo right now. He did what he did, volleyball and water polo, both last year together and just non stop everything. Sports, fully athletic. 100% healed, living as if you know it's never was there since he left the school.

KS

Kendra Seymour

32:05

Yeah, yeah, the intervention he needed was healthy, indoor air, safe, indoor air, right? And the power that has, how's Scarlett doing.

JS

John Strezewski

32:16

So, yeah, for her eighth grade year, we elected to take her to private school. And so private schools are usually very small classes. So she was the new in eighth grade in a class of about 25 children. So that was very difficult for her at that age. But it took her a few months became accepted, and now she has some of her, you know, lifelong friends from that school. We have two other children, one of them would be going to that middle school as well, and one's in kindergarten, going to first. So the emotional toll that took on

our family, not just Scarlett, but also all of us, the countless hours of emailing and advocating to the school or basically to a wall, really, it was difficult, and so we're putting our other two children in private school as well, just so we can move on from at least fighting the school. And we'd rather fight the battle at a higher level. We'd never realized how much of a stigma or how people would shy away. And the only way we can, you know, make strides, is to band together. So working with Patrick is the first step, but we'd love to band together well beyond that.

KS

Kendra Seymour

33:25

Yeah, and I think too, there's an element we haven't touched on so much and don't have time to get into, but the fact that the financial burden now, just to have your kids in a place where they're healthy, you had to go to private school in order to do that. Patrick's, you know, son, aged out, ended up in a different building for high school. It is astronomical. And there, there was a quote. It's a professor from Harvard, and I'm going to paraphrase instead of quote him, but he talks about that there are only two places that we require children, you know, people, to spend time in. One is schools, and the other is prison. And when I first heard that, I was like, that's crazy, you know, because if you don't send your kid to school or they miss too many days, then you're getting, you know, truancy notifications. And you know, there can be trouble on that side too. So what advice is we kind of bring this to a close would you give parents or teachers or staff in other parts of the country? Because, like I said, I hear stories all the time. If they think something is going on in their building, what would you tell them?

LS

Lindsay Strezewski

34:30

I think that, as John mentioned, there is a definite stigma around this. I'm not, I can't still wrap my head around why there is. But as I said before, parents do have to trust their gut, trust their instincts, and you know, we do know our children best. And at the end of the day, I think for us, you know the situation is unfortunate, but Scarlett grew so much from this situation, and as Patrick's son developed leadership skills, Scarlett developed a lot of confidence, because, you know, she spoke her truth, and I just saw a change in her from that. And I you know, there are probably some parents that would look at us and say, oh, you know, you put her in this limelight. And you know, you didn't have to, but of course, she wanted to, even though we said, maybe this isn't a good idea, and she has no regrets, and I think that parents can learn from that, that it doesn't have to be a scary place to go up against a school district. It's one of those things that you're, you know, empowering yourself and your children you know at the same time, and it's all a learning experience. But we have no regrets. And I think more parents need to find that inner strength and do what's right, stand up for the kids, not just their own, but all the children.

KS

Kendra Seymour

35:51

Yeah, yeah, Patrick, did you want to add anything to that?

PL

Patrick Lee

35:58

Yeah, I'm in a, I mean, I'm encouraging parents to be very bullish on this. This is your child's health. It is unexcusable for any school district to not address this, and if the concern is there, they have an obligation to find out and really determine if there's a problem or not, not hide behind, well, we're not required to do any testing or not required to do this or or come up with ways to for inaction. It's very clear what can be done. And there are more and more studies showing that if a child is suffering and they're in a building and they leave a building, and they're better, they're in a building and they're not feeling well, and they leave a building, they're better. It's pretty much better. It's pretty much probably a problem with that building and and something can be done. So learn about the first get your your child checked for their mycotoxin poison levels, and embrace it. It's data. You know, you don't have to listen to everything potentially that the doctor says what to do, but what you have to learn is what works and what how does, and when does your child feel better? And you'll start to realize that, hey, this is making sense, because I'm seeing it in my own child. I don't need to hear from experts. I don't need to hear from this person or that person I know my child and and do everything you can to protect them, whatever it takes.

KS

Kendra Seymour

37:23

Yeah, yeah. And, and I think that is the one of the most valuable things, like as a parent, obviously, our situation didn't involve a school, but you really have to be your own advocate. No one is going to care about your health as much as you and so it you know you, which is always hard on top of not feeling well, if you're the one being impacted, have to really be the voice. And sometimes I hope there's no other parents who have to go to the extreme, Patrick that you did, where you're having to, like, bring in your own testing and do it yourself, just to to get the schools to listen. Because I have seen schools who are doing the right thing and are taking it very seriously. So this is not all schools are this way, but it certainly is a big problem. And if you're listening to this episode, we do have, this is part of a whole series on schools, and we hear from other teachers who've been sick and other school buildings and other expert advice on things that people can do. So I hope that people, if you haven't already, you know, head on over to ChangeTheAirFoundation.org, and sign up for our newsletter, because you'll be notified as those of those episodes as they drop, you can like and follow us on social media. We share everything there as well, because we really want to provide the tools and resources. So as we wrap up, Patrick, I know because you've been doing this for almost five years now, you actually have a website and stuff. But if people had follow up questions or wanted to get into contact with you, Patrick, how could they do that?

PL

Patrick Lee

38:52

Yeah, I actually have my website that is clean air, the number four, kidz with a z.org

KS

Kendra Seymour

39:05

We'll link to it in the show notes, so people have to hunt for it.

PL

Patrick Lee

39:09

And there, you know, I try and keep it updated with some of the stories I heard, and there's a link to our petition, but I have my email and phone number on there. Again, I'm just I also volunteer on many of the support groups. I try and share our healing story. I do believe everyone can find the healing path, and I think this is one of the most difficult aspects of it, because it's invisible and it's so tiny and and so you know, any way I can do to help. You know, if you have questions, feel free to reach out. I'm I am just very passionate about this, because, especially when it comes to children, we have to stop this. We have to help kids heal. And if it's got to be one by one, you know, if it's got to be one by one, it's got to be but I do feel we could get to where society and our governments and the schools figure this out to a level where we don't have to worry about this for any channel.

JS

John Strezewski

40:06

Yeah, and I would just add, like, until there's mold standards, it's hard to drive change and force them to take the necessary actions. And so we'd love to band together to, you know, start driving towards those standards. And so our Parent Advocacy email that we created was woodlawnparentvoices@gmail.com so if you'd like to join the advocacy effort from us, you know, it's not a middle school problem, it's not a state problem, it's a national problem. So we'd love to hear from you.

KS

Kendra Seymour

40:34

Yeah, and for everyone else listening, we are one of the things we're doing at the foundation. We are tackling this at a state and federal level to change the laws we are working in 22 states, our first success, in part, thanks to Patrick Lee, we had our first law passed. More to come, hopefully. And so if you want to learn more about the policy work, because I think most people would be really blown away to know that mold and water damage is not regulated in most states, whether it residential, in your home or in public

spaces, and since there are no federal or national thresholds, or sometimes they're called permissible exposure limits for mold indoors, it really is just the wild wild west out there, schools are allowed to and others public spaces, you know, kind of make their own rules and and, you know, address the issue how they see fit, and that doesn't necessarily align with what is best from a scientific perspective, what is best from a health perspective, or what is best from a healthy building perspective. So thank you the three of you so much for sharing your story and for all the work you've done over the years, fighting for your children and for all the children in that school and the staff. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. We really appreciate it.

PL

Patrick Lee

41:53

Thank you for having us. Kendra, just really the work you do to raise awareness. I wouldn't have learned so much, I will tell you, and I told you before, and I'll say it again, I never felt so alone in this. And in your group was the first group that really I felt like I wasn't alone. I mean, I know there were support groups, was all anonymous, but, but being able to work with you, knowing that, that I'm not alone in this, and now with the Straszewski's and everyone else said that we have to stand together and we fight. So thank you for everything you do. And really just let me and hopefully other parents who are struggling with this that you're not alone, we will figure this out together and fight together.

JS

John Strzewski

42:33

Yeah, I mean, I truly. I mean, it always shifts and forms it's a breath of fresh air to speak to people that understand and want the same things that we do. So you and your organization have been a blessing.

KS

Kendra Seymour

42:47

Well, thank you so much. Yeah, together, we're gonna we're gonna solve this and create healthier, indoor spaces for for everyone so and if you're listening, please, please, please, do me a favor, help us get John and Lindsay and Patrick's message to more people, hit that like and follow button, share their story. And if you want to make sure that you are up to date on healthy homes and healthy buildings and all all the things that you need to know, please head on over to [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](https://www.ChangeTheAirFoundation.org), and sign up for our newsletter, because it really is the best way to get great information and free guides and downloads and tips from doctors and IEPs and remediators and advocates and real stories of healing and hope and all that can be sent directly to your inbox. Thank you so much. We'll see you next time.