

Dangerous candy back in some Ontario stores

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

A York Region doctor who saw a Thornhill pre-schooler choke to death on a popular Asian jelly candy is infuriated the banned sweets have made their way back on to some store shelves.

"I was obviously quite upset this would happen," said Dr. Warren Goldstein, who helped convince the federal government to ban the treats last year.

"But to tell you the truth, I'm not surprised. You make laws, (such as) somebody made laws about speeding, but people still speed. You need enforcement."

With children out trick or treating for Halloween tonight, the York Central Hospital neurologist wants to ensure parents are aware of the dangerous choking hazard the candies pose to youngsters.

The sweets are the size of a coffee creamer. Because they are covered with a sticky jelly, they are extremely difficult to dislodge once they become stuck in a child's windpipe.

The candies, which have also been banned in the United States, have been linked to 15 deaths globally and to 80 non-fatal choking incidents.

Dr. Goldstein is working with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to have them outlawed internationally.

Dr. Goldstein, who also helped lobby the Israeli and U.S. governments to ban the candies in those countries, said his cru-

sade stems from witnessing the death of four-year-old Roxanne in April 2000.

"I was there. I saw it. To a lot of people, statistics are statistics. You have children die and you think 'How horrible.' Or you see a photo of the child in a newspaper even. But I was there. I saw that child. I saw that mom."

He will never forget the sight of the girl's hysterical mother clinging to the body of her dead daughter.

Roxanne — her family asked that her last name not be published — choked on a mango jelly candy at her home.

According to the little girl's aunt Maria, Roxanne's mother was upstairs caring for Roxanne's little brother who had the chicken pox.

Maria ran upstairs when she heard her sister-in-law screaming over the lifeless body of Roxanne.

"I asked what was wrong and she said, 'She's not breathing.'"

Maria called 911 and then made several futile attempts to dislodge the sweet from Roxanne's throat.

Paramedics arrived and rushed Roxanne to the hospital.

Dr. Goldstein was treating a patient in the next bed as physi-

cians tried desperately to bring Roxanne back to life. He will never forget the sight of the girl's hysterical mother clinging to the body of her dead daughter.

"The entire emergency department was just devastated by the tragedy. The mother was holding her daughter and screaming. It was a scream and a sound I will never forget," he told a news conference at the hospital last year after learning the Canadian Food Inspection Agency had banned the candies.

Last November, the agency agreed to outlaw the sweets after Dr. Gerald Goldstein — the pediatrician who tried to revive Roxanne — took his plea directly to Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

But last week, the food inspection agency issued an alert that the candies are again being sold in southeastern Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia.

While the agency cannot stop the candy from being imported under existing laws, it can pull them from store shelves.

The banned candies include the ingredient konjac, which is the binding agent of these products.

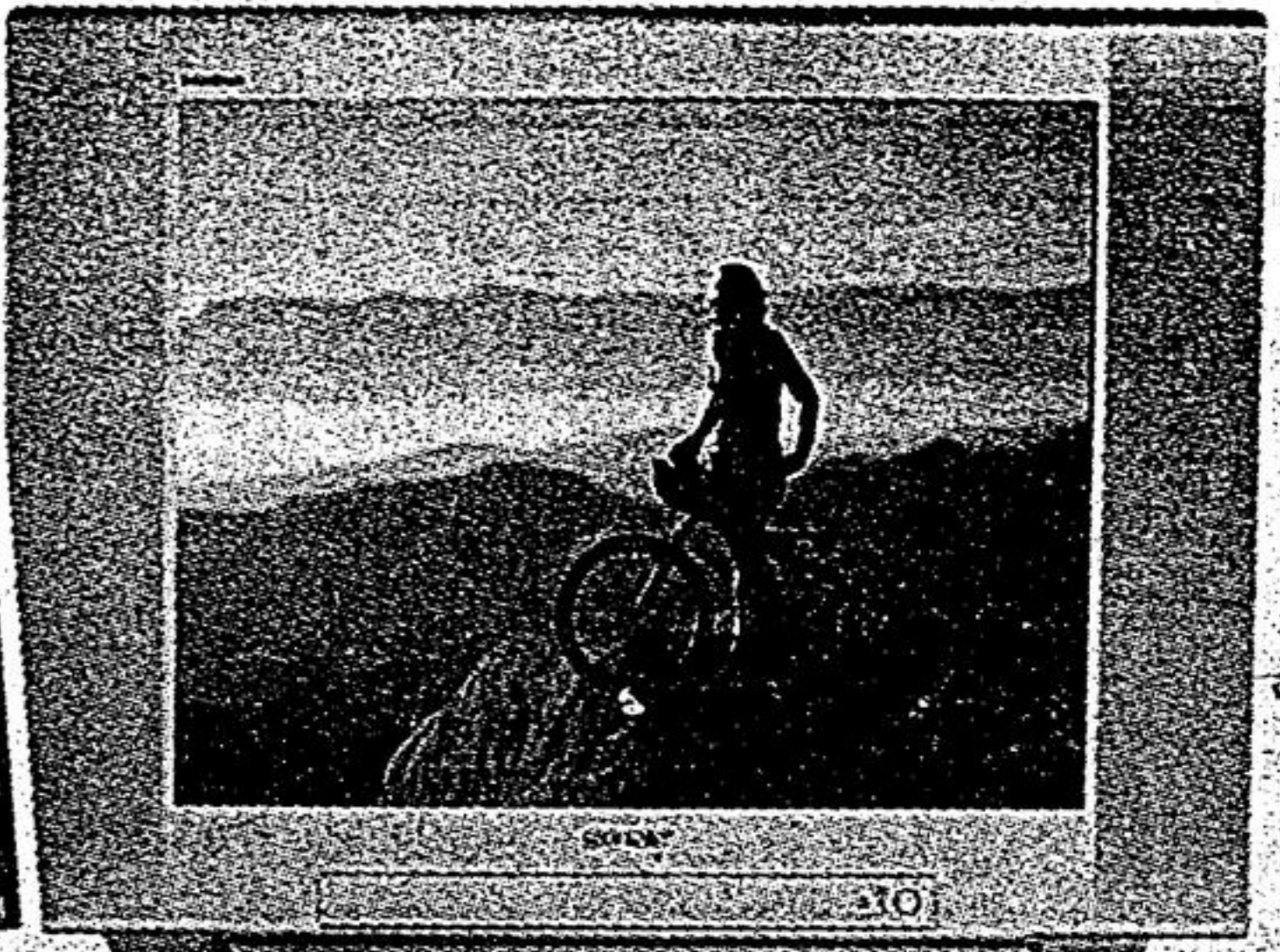
Brands of candies that have been recalled include BB Fruit Pop Jelly Snacks in a variety of flavours, TenTen De Coco Konnyaku Pudding, Nata Decoco Fruit Poppers and Fruit Poppers Tropical Blend.

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