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## Mother raises awareness with book

By Patrick Thornton  
Journal Staff

Many lasting memories stand out for Hilary Bilbrey and her husband Jeff of April 6, 2003.

That was the day their 18-month-old son Breck climbed into the family's bathtub, turned on the faucet and burned his legs and feet.

Jeff took Breck to the hospital and when Hilary got home she found an empty house and pieces of her son's skin still floating in the tub.

"The skin literally melted off his body," she said. "It only took a few seconds."

Breck went first to St. Michael's Hospital and was then flown by helicopter to the burn center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He had third-degree burns on his feet, second-degree burns on his shins and first-degree burns on his upper legs. He needed Ketamine for the pain. Doctors estimate the water temperature was more than 130 degrees when it hit Breck's skin.

"We went to the emergency room that night and it was like we never came back," she said. "One of the residents fainted when she saw him."

Breck underwent two skin grafts that replaced skin from his stomach to his feet. As he grows up he will need more to prevent his toes from curling up.

Breck is now 5 years old. He likes going on walks, playing with his brother and sister and fishing.

"He could fish for 10 hours straight on the dock," Hilary said.

As Breck healed, Hilary searched for a way to make sense of what happened.

"I almost felt like I was being buried alive. I felt like I failed my son and no one knew what I was going through," she said.

Hilary channeled her emotions into writing a children's book that teaches fire safety. The book, "Breckery Bunny Learns to Be Careful," is a collection of tips for parents and children based on Breck's ordeal. She is working to get the book into the hands of parents, school teachers, Realtors and anyone else who can help spread the word.

"I once read that in life you can either be a victim or a hero. I'm not ready to be a victim," she said. "Writing the book was an outlet for me. It helped me heal."

Breck brought the book in for show and tell.

"I tell other people to be careful when they turn on the water because they get burned," he said.

National Fire Prevention Week is next month. Hilary and Breck will be at CenterPoint MarketPlace in Stevens Point starting at 10 a.m. Oct. 6 along with the Stevens Point Fire Department to raise awareness about fire safety and money for the Wisconsin Burn Camp. According to the Wisconsin Alliance for Fire Safety, the very young and the very old are the most susceptible to burns.

"We thought we were doing everything right as parents," Hilary said. "I feel a responsibility to try and stop what we went through from happening again."

For more information on the book or fire safety, visit [www.wafs.org](http://www.wafs.org).

Thornton can be reached at 345-2257 or at [pthornton@cwnews.net](mailto:pthornton@cwnews.net).

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Hilary Bilbrey reads to her son, Breck, right, and his kindergarten class at St. Stanislaus School from a book she wrote after her son suffered burns when he was a year old. *Thomas Kujawski/Stevens Point Journal*  
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