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**Somersaults Aren't For Stairways**

**By Valerie Zilinsky**

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Yesterday, my daughter arrived home from a visit with her grandparents. My heart broke when I saw her, wearing a huge lump on her forehead, tears streaming down her face. It seems she did a somersault – on a stairway. Actually, my son had let his ball roll down the stairway accidentally, and she was trying to be nice and retrieve it for him. As she neared the bottom of the stairs, she tumbled forward down three steps.

It's moments like that when we wish we were magic. Why couldn't I say "Abracadabra!" and make all the hurt go away? I think the bump and scratch bothered me more than it did her. She kept telling me that it's ok, she was fine. She sure didn't look fine! Aren't I supposed to be the protector? Why wasn't I there to catch her, or to keep her away from the stairs? Speaking to my mother on the phone yesterday evening, I found I wasn't the only one feeling guilty. I had to reassure my mother that it wasn't her fault, while battling my own feelings of guilt.

The truth is, no matter how hard we try, we can't protect our children from every fall. But we can be there to pick them up, dry their tears, and help them to keep going. And things could have been much worse. I keep having dreadful thoughts of how badly she could have been hurt. We were extremely lucky that the worst she got was a lump on her head.

Every time my children are sick or hurt, I feel I should be able to fix it all. My daughter makes it clear to me that she doesn't need me to be "supermom" – she just needs to know that I'm there for her. With the maturity that her almost-five years has brought her, she kept telling me that she was okay, it didn't hurt, and the lump was getting smaller. Who was reassuring whom here? I was re-learning another truth of parenthood at that moment... we are not only here to teach our children, but our children are here to teach us. My daughter was reminding me that all she needs from me is my love, and the rest will work itself out.

I held her tight and hugged her, put ice on her forehead, gave her some medicine for the pain, and finally tucked her into bed last night. It was a long and restless night, and I did not feel better until she woke up this morning with a smile on her face, with nothing more than a scratch to remind us of her

fall.

She's constantly teaching me lessons. When life happens, and we take a tumble, we will get back up again and keep going. We will help each other, because that's what families are for. Today, I found myself being overprotective of her, like she is more fragile now than she was yesterday. Part of me wishes I can keep her hidden under my protective wing forever, but I know I must let her live and experience life, while reassuring her that I'm right here when she needs me.

As I helped her zip up her jacket and put on her mittens and hat to go play with her brother today in our backyard, I had to remind her that somersaults are only to be done in gymnastics class, not on stairways. This got a chuckle out of her, as she replied, "But mom, it WAS a good somersault!"

She's always the optimist – the sunshine of our lives.

Valerie Zilinsky is a married mother of two young children, and 'WebMom' of <http://www.RaisingOurKids.com>

### **Iron Balusters: When Form Follows Function**

**By Shawn Capell**

Well-made banisters and railings are a requirement for safety if you have an exposed stairway, but they don't have to be purely functional. Why not dress up the space with lacy, elegant iron balusters?

Iron doesn't only belong outside. Since it can be shaped into an unlimited number of designs, iron can add fluidity and grace to the plainest stairways. And its strength and resilience satisfies the most stringent safety needs.

Although we're just beginning to see iron used indoors, this trend was also popular in 16th and 17th century France and Italy. When combined with sweeping stairways and ornate ceilings, iron balusters and banisters have a rich and elegant appeal.

If made of iron, balusters (the vertical elements that prevent users from slipping through the stairs) are an ideal place for a little self-expression in decorating. They are available in innumerable shapes and many colors, and can even be custom made. If you can draw it, there's an artisan who can make it. You can create a look to work with any decorating scheme.

Combined with a wooden handrail, iron balusters can still be affordable. Wood/iron combinations keep the price down, yet still provide the beauty and elegance of iron. Iron rods with twists, scrolling rods with lacy "baskets," filigree designs, and shapes from the botanical world are just a few of the options when you're considering iron.

Special attention can be given to the newel posts—the sturdy structural posts at the top and bottom of stairways. A more elaborate design at these junctures is both beautiful and structurally sound.

## Somersaults Aren't For Stairways

Wrought or cast? Should you choose wrought iron or cast iron? There are advantages and disadvantages to both.

The term "wrought iron" refers to iron that has been heated at a forge, then hammered, twisted, bent, forged, or otherwise worked, most frequently for ornamental purposes, by a blacksmith or expert metalworker. Wrought iron is commercially pure iron with a very small carbon content, but usually containing some slag. It is tough, malleable, ductile and can be easily welded. However, it is not as strong as steel, which has a higher carbon content.

The rarity of true wrought iron is due to its production being extremely costly and labor intensive. Wrought iron is rarely completely pure. It is a fibrous material with many strands of slag are mixed into the metal. These slag inclusions give it a distinct look when etched. Also due to the slag, it has a fibrous look when broken or bent past its failure point. Ornamental ironwork today is often referred to as wrought iron, even though it is more likely to be made from mild steel.

Cast iron, on the other hand, is much more regular in appearance. It is iron that has been heated to a liquid form and poured into a mold, or "cast," at a foundry. Its main advantages include the fact that it can be poured at lower temperatures than those required by steel, in its liquid form it is more fluid than steel (which allows for complex and varied shapes), and it is less prone to casting defects than steel.

Produced for hundreds of years, cast iron is often viewed as a low-end, rather cheap material. But in the last fifty years or so, better and more comprehensive knowledge of its qualities have been gained. One of the most important improvements has been the standardization of its manufacture. The different types of cast iron are now viewed as choice materials for decorating and construction.

The next time you see a sweeping stairway, try to imagine it with balusters of iron. Iron balusters can truly open up the space and bring elegance and grace to what was once purely functional.

Shawn Capell operates [StairWarehouse.com](http://www.stairwarehouse.com).

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