

Hold the peanuts

Mom's book, Web site educate people about a deadly allergy

By JENA PASSUT
Of The Daily Oakland Press

Grant Ureel was just 3 years old when a horrifying event changed his life. "He took one bite of a peanut butter cookie, spit it out and said his lips hurt," says his mom, Jessica Ureel. "Thirty minutes later, he started sneezing and developed hives all over his body. Soon after, he began wheezing, having difficulty breathing and his lips started swelling."

He and his family learned then that he was deathly allergic to peanuts. That anaphylactic reaction sent him to his doctor, where he was given epinephrine, benadryl and a breathing treatment then sent by ambulance to the hospital.

Because of his allergy, Grant, now 9, lives a cautious life.

His mom home schools him. She carefully controls what foods he is exposed to and reads every label on everything that comes into her house — not only food, but lotions, shampoos and more. When she takes Grant to a party or other outside

event, she brings him food from home. They avoid ice cream parlors, bakeries and bulk bins at grocery stores.

Grant carries an EpiPen — self-injectable epinephrine — and Benadryl wherever he goes.

And Ureel decided to write a book to help children with the allergy called "The Peanut Pickle."

She also started a Web site for the project. "Many people do not fully understand peanut allergy and their lack of knowledge can literally cost a child his life," she says. "Children need to be their own advocate."

Grant is one of about 1.5 million people nationwide with peanut allergies — the deadliest of food allergies, allergists say.

According to the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network, more than 600,000 children in the United States have peanut allergies. And the number of peanut allergies has doubling since 1997.

That may be because it's more recognized.

"We can detect it better," says Dr. Duane Harrison, an allergist with Clarkston Allergy and Asthma Clinic in Clarkston. "People are more aware of it than they used to be."

Harrison says peanut allergies can be more severe if a child has other ailments as well.

"Having asthma is a risk factor for having more severe allergies, because when you do have a reaction it seems to go right to the lungs," he explains.

Ureel says another goal of her self-published book is to promote understanding from people who do not live daily with peanut allergies, either themselves or around others.

"Many people do not understand that a trace amount of peanut protein is enough to cause a serious reaction," she says. "Or that for some children, just touching peanut butter is enough to send them to the emergency room."

Symptoms can progress from a tingling sensa-



The Daily Oakland Press/VAUGHN GURGANIAN

Jessica Ureel of Orion Township wrote a book about peanut allergies, inspired by her son, Grant, 9. Because it is so dangerous, Grant carries medicine with him in case he's exposed to peanuts.

tion in the mouth and swelling of the tongue and the throat to hives, difficulty breathing, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness and death. Symptoms typically appear within minutes to two hours after the person has eaten the food to which he or she is allergic, according to the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network.

While there are ways to diagnose peanut allergies, most people are diagnosed after suffering a reaction. One of the fastest groups to recognize peanut allergies is schools, which have been establishing peanut-free zones and promoting more understanding about the deadly allergies. Still,

PLEASE SEE PEANUTS/PAGE E-4

Stuffy noses, sneezing at flu-stricken where beging out make me better?" A dedicated few no matter what. T school of thought t out" with a good w Others equally c fit with regular ex agree. They believ and rest are more of a relapse. So which is it? J cold or flu sympto whether you shou up" rule is a good exercise rule of th

When you feel cr it better to work o abstain from exer but it's better to i rience symptoms neck. Cold symptom sneezing, watery usually are mild treat them and c well throughout, exercise, though, your intensity d Flu symptoms mon cold sympt fatigue, fever, co gestion, head an severe and warr exercise session activity will just to fight infec ity to fight infec

Scripta Howard Illustrat

Caution, however, is the rule for below-the-neck symp- toms. The recommen- dation from the Ameri- can College of Sports Medicine is to avoid exercise when you're expe- riencing these more severe symptoms. So, while "sweating it out" is a common myth, it i bodies fight of with our immu no amount of virus from you In the next cold and flu r shelves of dru If you're tot malades, kee rule in mind. you should, an

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Columnist turns her life into a book

By DERRICK SOBODASH
Special to The Daily Oakland Press

Juggling work and home life in suburbia isn't easy.

Local columnist Cindy LaFerte knows all about these challenges, having raised a son and played neighbor-hood mom for over 15 years.

But her career as a columnist was forged in her career as a mom.

LaFerte's new book, "Writing Home," is a broad collection of 93 of her columns from the last 12 years.

Before writing columns, LaFerte was editor of Insider, a Ferndale-based travel magazine, from 1985-91. But writing travel stories and being a full-time mom proved impractical.

Her free-lance work with features for local magazines and newspapers led to a career as a columnist for The Mirror and then The Daily

Tribune in 1994. "If I hadn't been a mom, I wouldn't be doing the kind of writing I do," she says.

Her oft-interrupted life as a mother made short pieces easier to handle. "I wrote around being a play-ground mom, an at-home mom, the mom who had all the neighborhood kids over — I was one of the few moms who were home all the time," she says. "You don't get a lot of time to write when you're a mom."

But at the same time, her son Nate's presence made her writing what it is.

"(He) really forced me to look at the world through a child's eyes," she says.

Her column ideas come from her readers' letters, or just living life.

"Anywhere I am, I feel very lucky," she says. "I think in Oakland County we don't realize how much abundance of



The Daily Oakland Press/DOLUG BAUMAN
Columnist Cindy LaFerte cuddles Booger, one of her cats.

culture we have here. "I've had some unfortunate things happen to me, but having gotten through those things I've learned to look for a lot of the joys and blessings we have."

But sometimes writing with a spiritual angle has brought a backlash from readers. "One time I wrote, 'God, in his or her infinite wisdom, trying to be politically correct. I got mail from someone asking

PEANUTS

FROM PAGE E-1

'It's a matter of life and death' with food allergy

everybody's learning together. All we can do is keep Shane aware of his surroundings.

You just do what you can." Melinda Miller's son, Ethan, wears a medical alert bracelet to his daycare. Like many mothers of allergic kids, she

don't let my child play in the middle of Woodward Avenue, and I don't let him near peanuts. It's just a way of life with us now."

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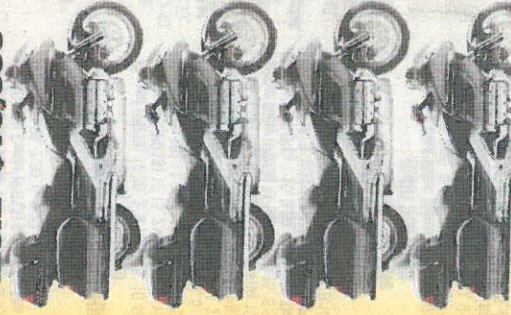
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how dare I imply God is a she." Nipping and people who write only to inform her of a mistake make LaFerte sad.

"People are so quick to criticize, but even when they want to make a compliment they won't do it," she says.

"I've noticed among my generation, we were so outwardly focused on success and getting somewhere we neglected a lot of the niceties of life, like a home and community," she adds.

"I was always thinking there was something bigger than what I already had. My life was dripping away looking for something bigger. Writing these kinds of stories forced me to sit down and look at what I had."

LaFerte hopes readers of her book will take away this appreciation.

Reflecting on her career, she says she wouldn't change anything, though she admits sometimes she wished she worked in an office job.

"There were times I thought I couldn't do it," she says. "It would have been so much easier to just call up (a job opening)."

Her son and his friends inspired material in the book. "I got the best letters of congratulation for my book from the young people mentioned in it," she says.

That, she feels, is worth more than even 100 shining book reviews.

Today, her son has moved on as a 19-year-old at the University of Notre Dame. His departure has left a new void in LaFerte's life.

Compiling this book, and starting to work on a novel, has been LaFerte's way of coping with the emptiness.

She lives in Royal Oak with her husband, Doug, and continues writing columns for "The Good Life," section in Saturday's Daily Oakland Press.

She is a member of Detroit's Working Writers, the oldest.

writing organization. A portion of it from her new book donated to organ fitting Oakland C less.



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