

# ALLERGY MOMS



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Hello,

In this issue, we are sharing the story of BJ Hom as told by his father Brian. BJ lost his life to an anaphylactic reaction last summer. BJ's story sheds light on just how deadly food allergies can be and how quickly reactions can snowball.

My guess is that most of you here already know this. But many of you have friends, relatives, teachers or even spouses who don't quite "get it" yet. Articles like this one can sometimes be more convincing than we can be on our own, which is the whole point of sharing this with you.

Years ago, [Sabrina Shannon's story](#) enabled my family members to understand food allergies like nothing else could. My hope is that BJ's story will help you in a similar way. I know that Brian would like nothing more.

Take care,

Gina Clowes

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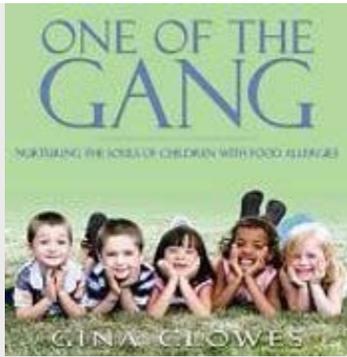
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## Seen and Heard

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[Ancient Cure for Food Allergies? Hmm.](#)

[Pregnancy Supplements Trigger Asthma in Kids](#)

[Does Staff Cause Peanut Allergy?](#)

[Accidently Jabbing Yourself with the EpiPen](#)

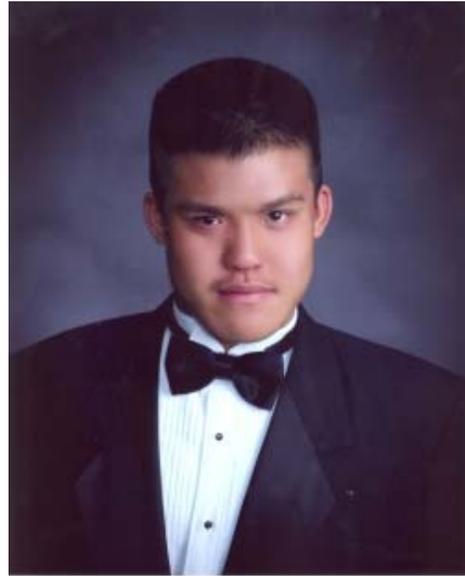
## A Parent's Worst Nightmare

By Brian Hom

I was invited to share the story of my 18 year old son BJ Hom (right) who passed away last summer on July 1, 2008 from an allergic reaction from peanuts while vacationing in Mexico.

BJ was a loving son and brother and a good loyal friend to all who knew him. As our first born son, he never asked for much. He was quiet and kind and very content with a simple life. BJ was known for his shy smile. If you tried to make him laugh, he would look at you indirectly and crack a small smile.

Last summer, our family planned a very special vacation to Los Cabos, Mexico to celebrate BJ's high school graduation and his 18th birthday. We had no idea then that the vacation we looked forward to so much would turn out to be the worst time of our lives.



"BJ" Hom

It started on July 1, 2008. We were so excited as we landed in Mexico at 7 pm and quickly checked into the resort. We put our suitcases in our room without unpacking and headed straight to a buffet dinner at the resort restaurant around 8:45pm. We finished a quick and uneventful meal by 9:20 and decided to walk around the resort to look at the pool and the beach.

It was just as we started our walk that BJ spoke his last words to me, "Dad my throat hurts. Can you buy me some cough drops?"

I bought BJ some cough drops from the resort gift shop and we separated after that. My other sons and I headed to the resort arcade while BJ stayed with my wife Kathy.

BJ told her "Mom, I don't feel well. Can we go to the room?" So they headed toward the elevator, but things quickly took a turn for the worse. BJ's lips turned blue, his face turned very pale, and he was grabbing his chest as he could no longer breathe. Kathy led him to a couch in the lobby to sit down but he collapsed on the floor of the lobby before he could make it there.

Minutes later, a lady came rushing in to us at the arcade and said "Your son is very ill and you need to come to the lobby!" I was very concerned but I didn't know what to think. I thought

he might have been choking on something, maybe on the cough drop.

When I got there, I couldn't believe what I saw. BJ's eyes were open but he couldn't talk and was gasping for air. The hotel staff was frantically trying to give first aid assistance. The paramedics arrived within ten minutes and continued in their attempts to help my son.

At one point, we knew he stopped breathing so my wife and I kept asking where the doctor was. When the doctor arrived, they continued with frantic attempts to revive him with oxygen and CPR. The paramedics gave us hope that he might be breathing again. So we kept asking the doctor "Is he going to be okay? "

Finally, the doctor responded to us. He hesitated for a minute, took a deep breath and said "Sorry" Then he closed my son's eyes and covered his head with a blanket. There wasn't much else he could do.

This was the worst and most heartbreaking day in our lives. Kathy and I felt like someone had reached into our chest and ripped out our hearts. To this day, I still can't believe it really happened. But it did happen and that is why I am on a mission now. I have two other boys at home, BJ's brothers, who have peanut [and sesame] allergies too. I want the world to know that food allergies are real and this is what can happen if you are not prepared to deal with them.

*This article is dedicated to the loving memory of my son Brian James Hom II.*

#### Q & A with Brian Hom



**The Hom Family**

I know that many of you will have questions about BJ's story so I'm grateful to share my interview with Brian Hom with you.

**Gina Clowes:** Brian, thank you so much for talking with me. I know it must be difficult but you've also shared with me that you're determined to share BJ's story in the hopes of protecting others.

**Brian Hom:** Yes, and I am in a unique situation in that I have two other sons at home, BJ's younger brothers, who also have peanut allergies. I have to protect my son's.

GC: Let's talk a little bit about your family's history. Do you or your wife Kathy have allergies?

**BH:** No.

GC: How did you find out that BJ had food allergies?

**BH:** When he was two years old, he ate something that he reacted to in a restaurant with hives, some redness and swelling on his face. A few years later at preschool, he bit into a piece of candy and had another reaction. Neither time did he have breathing problems.

GC: Did he ever have to go to the emergency room for treatment of his food allergies?

**BH: Oh, no.**

GC: Was he prescribed an Epi-Pen?

**BH: He did when he was younger, but later it seemed manageable without it. We figured an epi-pen was necessary for extreme reactions.**

**If I had any idea or would have seen what happened that day, I would have carried it with me. I can't tell you how much I wish he was going to get a second chance. I never had any idea that something like this could really happen.**

GC: You told me that BJ's anaphylactic reaction in Mexico was completely different from the few previous reactions that he had. How so?

**BH: His previous reactions were visible reactions on his skin. He'd get hives, and redness. He had never, ever had this difficulty breathing. This last time, he had *no hives*. In fact, he was completely pale.**

GC: When BJ asked you for the cough drops, did you think that he might be experiencing an allergic reaction?

**BH: No, no. He asked for cough drops occasionally. Looking back now though I wonder if these could have been other milder reactions that even he was not aware were allergic reactions.**

GC: Had BJ ever complained before about his throat hurting as a symptom of food allergy?

**BH: No, never. We were so used to see a rash on his face.**

GC: What did you think when BJ asked for the cough drops?

**BH: I was thinking: *How could he have a sore throat? We just flew from San Jose and he was fine.***

GC: What types of reactions had BJ had in the past?

**BH: He would always get hives. His face would get red and swollen. We thought that this would be the way reactions would happen for him.**

**This [last] reaction was so dramatically different. He had no hives, or redness. Yet this time he died within minutes of finishing his last meal.**

GC: Did you believe that BJ had a "mild" peanut allergy?

**BH: Yes. I had heard stories of people dying but I didn't think we were dealing with that same thing. BJ had had hives on his face once and swollen lip but we gave him Benadryl and they went away.**

**Now, I meet people who have kids with allergies, and I think they're in denial about how serious it can be. Maybe I was in denial too. We never ever imagined that anything like this could happen.**

GC: Do you believe you know what caused BJ's anaphylaxis?

**BH: Yes, it was a chocolate mousse dessert from the buffet. I warn families now to avoid buffets.**

**We only put this together later when my other son started to experience itching and swelling. He was quickly treated with an injection and some pills. (We assumed the injection was epinephrine.) BJ and my son Steven both ate the same dessert.**

GC: What do you think or feel when you hear the backlash against food allergy families or accommodations for these children?

**BH: Let them lose a child and see how they feel and they'll see it differently.**

**It's easy to say "My rights are being violated" because you don't really believe it's real and so you don't understand the reason for the accommodations.**

GC: How are you and your family doing?

**BH: It's so painful. My sons are sad, sometimes angry, sometimes scared.**

**There is not a day that I don't think about him. My wife and I are heartbroken. We visit him every week at the cemetery. The lifelong living without your child and having to bury them. You don't want your worst enemy to have to experience this.**

GC: Are your sons being given appropriate accommodations in school?

**BH: Yes, they are. Thank you. And we feel better about that now.**

**We planted a tree and put a memorial there to Brian James Hom II and we had the plaque state that he died of an allergic reaction to peanuts. We want people to know.**

GC: What are your hopes for the future?

**BH: That there is going to be a cure. That nobody out there has to die from a peanut allergy or a food allergy.**

GC: Your family's story is heart-breaking. I know it can't be easy to talk about this. Why do you do it?

**BH: I think of him constantly so whether I talk about it or not, it is always there. If telling my story will help someone else, I want to do that.**

**Sharing this story and having it happen are so different. This shouldn't have to happen.**

GC: What would you like to share with other parents?

**BH: In this case, the loss of my son to peanut allergy and witnessing his death in front of our eyes was horrific. We were totally helpless.**

**I still remember like yesterday being by his side in the delivery room with my wife when he was born and I will always remember being by his side with my wife when he died. The total pain, and sorrow of setting up the funeral services and burial within days of his death were unbearable.**

**Now, I have to do everything in my power to protect my younger sons. Their brother died so that these guys can live. It is a lesson learned for us and for them. We live daily with the loss but if I can prevent this from happening again to anyone, anywhere, I want to do that.**