



My Ginkgo Tree

The advent of spring was sluggish and I grew impatient for leaves to appear on my ginkgo tree; at last, it has foliage - a meager amount. I claim this tree as my own, since my husband would just as soon chop it down. Clearly, it lacks beauty when compared to our maples and beech trees. Less than a foot in diameter, this spindly tree stretches skyward above our house to a lofty 40 feet, but has the potential of achieving a towering height of 100 feet and 3 feet in diameter. At this point, it closely resembles a reedy telephone pole with a half-dozen scrawny limbs, but I have confidence it will become a handsome tree as it matures.

The ginkgo tree is classified as Ginkgo biloba and commonly known as maidenhair tree. My ginkgo is a male tree, so it does not produce fruit. Ginkgo trees are dioecious (having male and female reproductive parts on separate trees) and deciduous (shed their leaves in late fall); the olive-green leaves (2 - 3 1/2" wide) are a lovely fan shape with forked veins, easily identified. In autumn, the leaves change to brilliant yellow before they make their annual pilgrimage to the ground. Plumlike, the ripened golden fruit of the female tree is about an inch long and can be harvested. Enclosed in the core of the pulpy flesh is a large white kernel that can be roasted and eaten. People generally plant male trees, because the fruit of the female tree emits a particularly rancid odor as it decomposes.

What I find most fascinating about the ginkgo tree is that it is the only living representative of its family (Ginkgoaceae) and order (Ginkgopsales), dating back to the Mesozoic era. Three million years ago, the brown on our planet for 150 million years! When I gaze toward the top of my ginkgo, I visualize the lumbering gigantic dinosaurs munching on leaves and fruit of ginkgo trees - it's an awesome image of prehistoric times.

Indigenous to the Orient, ginkgo trees are considered sacred and have been preserved in Chinese temple gardens since the time immemorial. Besides the fact that ginkgo nuts are a delicacy in China and Japan, the leaves and fruit have been used for medicinal purposes for centuries. In the past, the leaves and fruit of the ginkgo were used for anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and vasodilatory effects, but today it is used to enhance concentration, alertness and short-term memory. Among the studies being conducted, there is promising hope of benefiting people who have Alzheimer's disease and specific forms of dementia. Since I don't know the outcome of this research, I probably won't be making tea from the leaves, yet.

I have such an affinity for this odd-looking tree and will encourage its growth with some fertilizer. Though I have no idea how long ginkgo trees live, I anticipate that mine will continue growing until it reaches its predicted height and girth... If I can convince my husband that my ginkgo tree is truly special.

Ellen Herscher is a resident of Farmington Hills.



STAFF PHOTO: KATY BACCHOFF

Sharon McGladdery is a strong advocate of labels on food on behalf of her son, Jacob, who has anaphylaxis.

Family fights for better labels

McGladderys say incomplete food labeling threatens son's life

BY JONI HUBRED
STAFF WRITER

In all respects, Jacob McGladdery looks and acts like a perfectly healthy child. But the Farmington Hills 10-year-old lives with something that affects all aspects of his life, from what he eats to where he can sit during lunch time at school. He's allergic to 11 tree nuts, mangoes, wintergreen and peanuts, an allergy so severe that even trace amounts cause grave illness.

It's called anaphylaxis, a word that literally means "without protection," explains registered nurse Anne Russell, who is executive director of Food Anaphylaxis Education in Plymouth. "It is a potentially life-threatening reaction," she said. "People have died from it."

Russell has a son with food-induced anaphylaxis, so she knows what Sharon and Marty McGladdery go through every day. Sharon carries a pack around her waist that contains Jacob's health information and medication that could relieve the symptoms of a reaction and allow precious minutes to get him to a hospital.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. Jacob's condition affects virtually every aspect of the family's life. "The way we buy food is I pick a product, I call them up, look at the website or mail them and ask what is their allergen policy," Sharon said.

She asks questions like whether the company lists trace ingredients on their labels. Canned tuna, for instance, contains casein, which is derived from milk and can cause a reaction. "Traces of allergens can also show up when companies manufacture different types of foods; food labels and company-provided information may not provide warnings about the possi-

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bility of cross-contamination. "We only buy from companies that list traces and allergens," Sharon said. "The companies that give me a quick response (when she contacts them about their allergen policies) that's what I buy from."

That can make life difficult for a kid bombarded with images of tasty treats every day. Jacob has adapted, however. He makes his own peanut butter cups, using soy butter. "The McGladderys' journey began on August 15, 1998. Six-and-a-half-year-old Jacob had just a taste of a mixed nut cookie and knew something was very wrong."

"Immediately his mouth was stinging," Sharon said. "He raised his mouth out. He didn't swallow any of it, but he still threw up and congested and coughed. He felt terrible. That's another sign of anaphylaxis, a feeling of impending doom."

Three hours later, Jacob was covered in hives, everywhere except below his elbows and knees. He got medical care before the end stage - when the victim's blood pressure drops to zero and breathing stops when the bronchial tubes close up.

Because anaphylaxis is unpredictable, Sharon urges anyone who has had even a mild reaction to a food to consult a good allergist and get tested. She's heard stories about people who died because they failed to get help for an anaphylactic reaction.

That's why she's adamant about a couple of things. First, that Jacob is always within reach of an Epi-Pen. The device, which is cased in a plastic tube, immediately injects epinephrine into the bloodstream.

"You pop off the gray safety cap and then throw it on the ground," Jacob said, holding the case. "Then you take this thing and jab it into your thigh at about arm's length and you jab it in until it clicks."

The shot will provide about 15 to 20 minutes of symptom relief, time enough to transport Jacob to an emergency room. Time enough to save his life.

Sharon preaches the gospel of prevention as well, educating other parents and students, who may wonder why Jacob can't even sit near a child who's having peanut butter for lunch. Sensitivity to a food can be so great that even touching trace amounts can cause a reaction.

She's also lobbying for the Food Allergen Consumer Protection Act (HR 4704 and S 2499), a federal bill that would improve food labeling through mandatory regulation, as opposed to the voluntary compliance that now exists. To learn more about the bill, go to www.foodallergyinitiative.org/section_switch.cfm?section_id=16

"There's just so much education that needs to be done," Sharon said. "I've been lobbying all summer."

In addition to the time it takes, the

PLEASE SEE LABELING, C6

Organization provides support, education

BY JONI HUBRED
STAFF WRITER

Plymouth resident Anne Russell has a personal stake in her job. As Executive Director of Food Anaphylaxis Education, she works to increase public awareness of potentially life-threatening reactions to certain foods, like those her own son experiences.

"I've been a nurse since 1979," she said. "I always knew I wanted to specialize in pediatrics."

Working with patients who have food allergies is a subspecialty of that field, one to which Russell felt naturally drawn.

"I saw this vision of these issues that had to be improved by the time my son was grown up," she said.

As a nurse, she'd been trained to know that certain foods are the most likely to cause an allergic reaction: milk, eggs, fish/shellfish, wheat, soy, peanuts and other nuts. She waited until her son was 4 years old before introducing him to peanut butter, because she knew he was allergy prone.

"At 4, he had his first lick of peanut butter, and within 11 minutes, he was in the emergency room," she recalled.

In the last two years, FAE has become a lifeline for about 200 families who've had similar experiences. Though primarily in southeast Michigan, Russell says the local group is growing. The primary national organization was formed only 10 years ago.

"Not every state has an organization like this," she said.

A registered 501(c)(3) non-profit, FAE advocates for food labeling reform and early diagnosis of food allergies.

"The way we'd like to see it happen is the kids are identified early on as allergy-prone, and hopefully they visit an allergist and get testing," Russell said.

Education outreach includes a website (www.faeinfo.org) and newsletters during the school year, which include a section to which members can contribute their stories. "Listening to the children" gives kids an opportunity to share their thoughts about the issue.

Plymouth-Canton school nurse Mary Huber, RN, also writes a column that deals with the school experience for kids with anaphylaxis.

"We try to have representatives from a multi-disciplinary approach," Russell said. "We're very much involved in getting into the Michigan Association of School Nurses conference. The whole idea is to get the facts out so that when families go to their schools, there isn't that look of disbelief."

"On the outside, the kids almost all look perfectly fine. There's an air of unreality, and to a certain extent, I can understand this. What's hard on the families is, it's one thing to be ignorant. It's another to ridicule. A lot of snap judgments are made. People don't always take the time to think it through."

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Bollin Memorial Award helps those with epilepsy

BY TONY BRUSCATO
STAFF WRITER

From the day his daughter died in a car accident almost a year ago, Bill Bollin, owner of Bollin Electric in Plymouth, has been working vigorously to make certain her death is remembered in a positive way.

Leah Bollin died Aug. 16, 2001 when she suffered an epileptic seizure while driving to work. Leah had dealt with epilepsy since third grade, and suffered learning disabilities as a result. However, that didn't stop the 23-year-old, who died just two weeks before starting her junior year at Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie, from achieving her goals.

In honor of her spirit and determination, Bollin and his wife, Sharon, of Farmington Hills, have begun the Leah Marie Bollin Memorial Award, a fund that will award scholarships to students with epilepsy and its related disorders.

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Bill Bollin
Father

"For years we saw how Leah struggled with learning disabilities as a result of epilepsy," said Bollin. "It threw her off task easily, but she never gave up. She always bounced back, refocused and redirected herself. It became important for her to graduate college."

A bowl-a-thon and silent auction are being held Saturday, Aug. 3, at Drakeshire Lanes in Farmington Hills, to raise money for the endowment.

The goal is to raise \$100,000, which will fund four, \$1,000 scholarships annually to students with learning disabilities. The scholarships are renewable each year, as long as students remain academically eligible at Lake Superior State.

"For kids with learning disabilities, there's no help out there," said Sharon Bollin. "There's not much they can't

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Bill Bollin and his wife, Sharon, have established a scholarship fund in memory of their daughter, Leah (above), who died in August 2001 after suffering an epileptic seizure while driving her car.