



The Republican.

Agawam tragedy prompts warnings

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AGAWAM - Caryl Schivley has the cookie that killed her son Brenton. A piece is missing where Brent took a bite of the peanut butter-based cookie.

A friend who was with him when he ate the cookie told Caryl that 16-year-old Brent said, "I shouldn't have eaten that." He took Benadryl, an antihistamine, which usually was all he needed to stop an allergic reaction to peanuts.

The cookie was actually a Little Debbie Nutty Bar, but it had been removed from its labeled box and placed on a plate when it was offered to Brent at a friend's house. Caryl said it looks very much like a chocolate wafer cookie, the kind Brent loved. The individual portions of the Little Debbie snack are packaged in plain wrapping.

When the shock and sadness lift a little, Caryl said she plans to advocate publicly in favor of increasing food warnings and ingredient lists on individually packaged items.

Brent would have started his junior year at Agawam High School this month. He died on Sept. 1. There are a few details that Caryl said are not clear, but after biting into the cookie, taking the Benadryl and seeming fine, he left with some friends in a car.

Later, Caryl got a call from Brent, asking if she could come get him. He gave her his location. When she got there, he was collapsed on the tree belt, alone and unconscious. He couldn't have walked to the spot where he was found, so she believes he was in a friend's car and is not sure why he left it. But ultimately those details don't really matter. They won't bring Brent back.

She had brought an EpiPen and tried to give it to him in the dark, tried to get the car lights to shine enough so she could see. But then the ambulance she called arrived.

She still believed he would be revived. She didn't think people, particularly her son, would die from a food allergy. Since only one person could ride with Brent, his father, Charles, went and she went back to the house of the friend to find out what Brent had eaten.

At Baystate Medical Center, there seemed to be 30 people working on him. They couldn't get his heartbeat to hold, she said. The cause of death was anaphylaxis from the allergic reaction, she said.

Caryl said that Brent did not carry an EpiPen, the auto-injector of epinephrine that can be used in a severe attack. She had pens at home and the schools had them. But an EpiPen had never been needed before for Brent, she said. And the injector was difficult for a boy to carry with him due to its size, she said.

Brent also had asthma and had an inhaler for that.

Her daughter Shelly has food allergies and carries the pen in her pocketbook. Caryl is trying hard not to be fearful about Shelly, who has just gone off to college, in light of what happened to Brent.

Caryl wanted to talk about the painful passing of her son, to alert other parents and to raise the issue of food labeling. She said the fact that extreme caution about eating and Benadryl had worked for so many years, since Brent had the allergies since about age 1, and there was "a false hope" that he would not die of his allergies.

The family is grateful to the emergency personnel from Agawam and the staff at Baystate Medical Center, as well as the Agawam school system, for their help and support.

Caryl works at Atlas Copco in West Springfield and Charles for the U.S. Postal Service in Enfield, Conn. Daughter Beth attends Western New England College.

"Our friends and co-workers, our church family, have been absolutely wonderful," Caryl said. "We know we have a lot of people supporting us, and that's the only reason we can stand."

She said Brent was not a high-profile child in school. He couldn't play sports because of asthma. He got good grades, loved the History Channel, was a natural student in science, math and history. He liked to cook and to fish and camp. He wanted to be a civil engineer.

The food allergy issue is starting to affect local schools. In Southampton, the William E. Norris School has been a peanut- and tree nut-free zone since the start of the school year. A meeting to explain the policy to parents was held on Thursday.

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