

# Evergreen Times

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## Current Headlines in Evergreen

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### An untimely tragedy

*Trip to Cabo San Lucas takes a tragic turn*

By Bill Highlander

Editor

"Mom, I'm not feeling well."

A comment often heard by mothers from their children, but on July 1, the complaint turned deadly.

Brian Hom, II and his family had just arrived at Royal Club Solaris resort in Cabo San Lucas, checked into their room and gone to the buffet for dinner. The vacation was to celebrate Brian's recent birthday and his graduation from Evergreen Valley High School. Everyone was looking forward to having fun.

After dinner, the family was strolling through the hotel lobby and Brian said his throat was sore. Within minutes, the 18-year-old collapsed to the floor, struggling for air and passed out. The hotel staff tried to help and emergency personnel quickly arrived to administer CPR. It didn't help and Brian succumbed to anaphylactic shock.

Brian had eaten a dessert containing traces of peanuts, a food to which he was allergic.

The family knew of the allergy and took precautions to avoid any foods that could start a reaction. Food labels in the U.S. require listing any peanuts or peanut products. But food in restaurants and particularly buffets are almost impossible to discern. And there was no indication that the dessert had peanuts or had been made with anything containing peanuts.

At international resorts, it is even more likely that information about food, ingredients and preparation will be lacking.

Brian also suffered from asthma, causing additional complications from the allergy. Asthma makes treatment more difficult. The reactions can range from hives, rash, tingling, drop in blood pressure, difficulty in breathing, unconsciousness and death.

About one percent of the U.S. population is allergic to peanuts, that's one in 200 Americans who have to be extremely careful about what they eat. Between 50 and 100 people die each year from a severe reaction. There are 15,000 emergency room visits



Photo (left to right) Brian Hom, Kathy Hom, Brian Hom II, bottom left Brandon Hom and Steven Hom.

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every year.

In April 2006, it was widely reported that a Canadian teenager died after kissing her boyfriend who had earlier eaten a peanut butter sandwich. The coroner later disputed the cause of death, stating it was an asthma attack. But several cases of death have been reported as asthma brought on by an allergic reaction to peanuts.

A year later, in Cincinnati, a mother and daughter were shopping and stopped at the food court for lunch. The 13-year-old girl had a chicken wrap, a sandwich she had enjoyed many times. Within an hour and a half, as the shopping trip continued, the young girl went into anaphylactic shock and died. It was determined that the sandwich contained peanut protein.

The girl's family has a Web site ([www.foodallergyangel.com](http://www.foodallergyangel.com)) to educate people about the dangers of the allergy and established the Emily Vonder Meulen Foundation as a memorial.

Brian Hom, Sr. also wants to educate the public and share the story about his son's untimely death. Many friends, teachers, coaches and neighbors attended the memorial service and understand the dangers of the peanut allergy, but Brian, Sr. would like for more people to be aware.



*Brian Hom, II (inset, above) and his family were visiting the Royal Club Solaris resort in Cabo San Lucas (above).*

Brian encourages everyone to have a simple test to determine if they have the allergy, to know the symptoms of a reaction, to realize the pervasiveness of peanuts in the food supply, to help protect their children's friends by knowing if anyone has the allergy and to support efforts for restaurants to warn patrons if food contains peanuts or peanut products.

If a person does experience a severe reaction, an injection of epinephrine can save a life. Epi-Pen is one well-known brand that is available by prescription, but it can expire so it is important to keep it up-to-date.

Avoidance is the only sure protection. The Hom family remains vigilant, for a younger son also has the peanut allergy. Shortly after Brian's death, the younger son had symptoms and an injection of epinephrine probably saved his life.

The Hom family is well known in Evergreen. The children attend Evergreen schools and the father is active as a volunteer youth coach at Chaboya and the East Valley YMCA. He was Volunteer of the Year for the East Valley YMCA in 2001.

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