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**What?** Food allergies are a growing health concern across the world. In the United States, over 15 million people suffer from food allergies. Unfortunately, there isn’t a definitive cause for food allergies, and the number of allergy sufferers is increasing. What researchers do know is there is no cure for food allergies and the resulting allergic reactions can be deadly. People with these life-threatening allergies are protected under the American with Disabilities Act to ensure safe working conditions and equal opportunities independent of their disability.

I am disabled by a life-threatening peanut allergy. My passion centers on raising awareness about this disability and finding a cure for peanut allergies. By exploring my passion, I have the ability to potentially help not only myself, but people all around the world. In raising awareness about allergies, I hope to erase the stigma and isolation that people with allergies experience. I also hope to diminish the anxiety of dealing with an allergic reaction. Through allergy advocacy, a greater understanding of allergies can be achieved and the allergy sufferer will have greater acceptance in social settings.

**So what?** Raising allergy awareness is so near to my heart. My passion for this subject began at age 12 when I was diagnosed with a severe, life threatening peanut allergy. I consumed a Rice Krispie treat that contained traces of peanut butter. Immediately I experienced massive hives from my head to my toes. This accidental consumption of peanuts led me to the allergists and a nut free lifestyle. Now, every time I put something in my mouth, I put my life at risk. I am haunted with the threat of cross contamination and the potential of traces of peanut found in my food. Each time I eat, I’m reminded that the ingestion of less than one tenth of a peanut caused me to experience anaphylactic symptoms. This scary situation was the impetus needed for me to take control of my life. In reading labels and investigating restaurants, I have discovered that peanuts are everywhere. For example, Chick-fil-A, Graeter’s, and plain M&M’s are potentially deadly choices for me due to their food processing procedures. Because of the threat of cross contamination, social situations that involve food are very difficult to attend. Daily life is a struggle for peanut allergy sufferers all over the world, and I want to make a difference.

**Now what?** I am committed to an active role to raise awareness and find a cure for this terrifying allergy. As a participant in a peanut protein patch study through Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC), I’m helping to find an effective method to desensitize the immune system to peanuts. In June, I agreed to extend my study participation and wear the patch that has shown the greatest results in desensitization. While the patch causes me discomfort, it helps me raise awareness about peanut allergies when people question me about the patch. I want to learn more about the efforts of researchers in the area of peanut allergies. I also want to share my story with others as they learn to cope with their disability. I’d like to create a blog about my experiences in dealing with restaurants, social situations, and allergy bullies. In this blog, I would include the places that I have had allergy triumphs as well as trials. I would also explain how I’ve learned to handle these food situations living away from home. I’d also keep current with research and post websites that have helped me understand my allergy.

While this allergy has haunted me for the past seven years, I am passionate about raising awareness and making a change for future generations. I have dedicated an overwhelming amount of effort and thought to this topic by sharing my story and through my participation with CCHMC. I am confident that my blog can further my passion and make a difference for others!