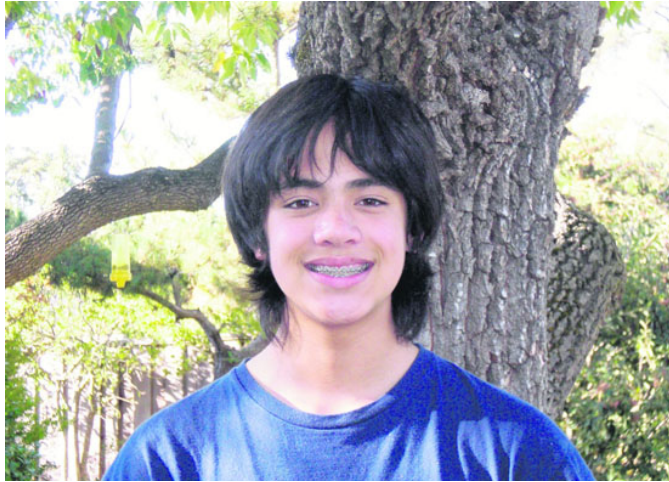


Published October 14th, 2009

Living a Full Life with Asthma

By Sophie Braccini



Justin Archangel Photo Carol Shenon

mucous production in their lungs. The alarming fact is that the number of asthma sufferers is growing. According to the Contra Costa Asthma Coalition, "The prevalence of asthma has been increasing steadily over the past 20 years with the largest increases in asthma among children under the age of five."

The causes and triggers of asthma vary from one individual to the next. According to the American Lung Association more than 50 percent of current asthma cases in the U.S. can be attributed to allergies. Secondhand smoke exposure in both adults and children is a risk factor for new asthma cases. Outdoor and indoor air pollution also worsens existing asthma.

"The cause of my asthma is an allergy to dust mites," explained Justin, "and those are found everywhere in a house, in carpets, upholstery, bedding, pillows, even stuffed animals." In the Nickelodeon program, Justin showed the reporters the specific bedding that his parents got him to remove further triggers.

"By making easy changes we've been able to improve the air quality inside our home," explains Shenon, who cleans very often using cleaning products that are as innocuous as possible. "For example, I buy large jugs of distilled vinegar that I dilute with water to clean my floors," she says.

But besides indoor air quality, there are outdoor air pollutants that can trigger asthma incidents, so Shenon started to research and advocate in her community and beyond.

In the district where her son goes to school, Shenon started advocating for the use of "green" cleaning products. "We've been working with Carol for some years now," says Moraga School District Superintendent Rick Schafer, "and we've asked all our schools to use only sealants and cleaning products that adhere to the State's environmental standards."

Bruce Leslie, Maintenance Supervisor of the Orinda School District, confirmed that the same type of policy was in place in Orinda. "We've been using zero-reactivity cleaning products in the schools for years," he said. "It's efficient and doesn't trigger asthma reactions." (The Lafayette School district did not return our calls in time for this article.)

"In movies, kids who are weak and nerdy are the ones who suffer from asthma," said Justin, "I wanted to show a different image." Justin continues playing the trumpet even though he was told at age nine he wouldn't be able to, he practices karate as his sport of choice and does not miss P.E. classes. "I have to be conscious of my asthma, but it does not run my life."

"No child should be prevented from living a full, active life because of his or her asthma," says Shenon, "and if we can all reduce the ways we pollute, with our cars, wood fire burning, the use of chemicals, etcetera, it could help stop this condition from affecting so many children."

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA

Justin Archangel would probably have preferred another reason to be on national T.V. rather than his asthma, but when Nickelodeon suggested that the 15-year old boy be featured in a program about allergies, he accepted and decided to take the opportunity to pass on some messages regarding his condition.

"When he was 10 months he got a cold, and I saw he had problems breathing," said his mother Carol Shenon. "I put my head on his chest and it sounded like a flock of seagulls." She took her son at once to the pediatrician who gave the baby a medication to open his airways and directed the mother to take him immediately to the emergency room for complete treatment.

Justin stayed there for 24 hours.

After that first episode he didn't have asthma attacks for a while, but it came back with a vengeance when he was seven.

"Asthma is a chronic condition that can be well controlled, but there is currently no cure," Shenon says. The American Lung Association reports that asthma is the most common chronic disorder in childhood, currently affecting an estimated 6.7 million children under 18.

Asthma causes the narrowing of the small airways in the lungs. Typically, asthma patients develop wheezing and have increased