

Happy Holidays, Everyone!

kids with food allergies

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news, views and supportive information for families raising children with food allergies

Winter 2007

Nathan Wagner: Born to be Wild

By Tanya Bumgardner

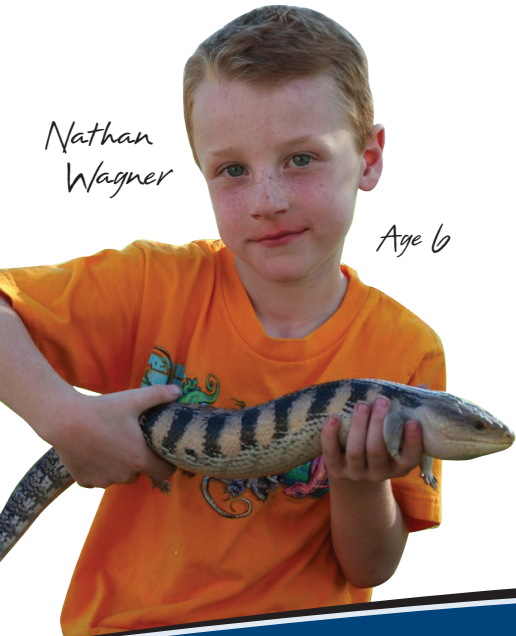
Crikey! Nathan Wagner, this month's KFA Rising Star, already knows what he wants to be when he grows up. He would love nothing more than to be a herpetologist so he can work with reptiles and amphibians.

How does a 6-year-old boy know that he wants to be a herpetologist, much less understand what that means? Nathan has been drawn to animals like his heroes, Steve Irwin and Jeff Corwin, were at one time. And if a career in herpetology doesn't work out, he'd loved to be the owner of the San Diego Wild Animal Park or a PETCO employee. This youthful animal lover is the child of Mark

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Nathan Wagner

Age 6



RAISING A WELL-ADJUSTED CHILD

Who Happens to Have Life-Threatening Food Allergies

By Linda Marienhoff Coss

A few months ago, a mother of a recently diagnosed, food-allergic toddler, observed that my 16-year-old, food-allergic son seemed to take his allergies in stride. He wears his fanny pack, brings his food to parties, follows our family's food safety protocols and so forth. All without making an issue of it. In short, he is what many parents of young, food-allergic children believe is not possible: well-adjusted.

"How did you do it," she asked me. "Can you give some advice so others can do the same?"

Well, although some of the credit has to go to my son and his personality, I also have to assume that I've done something right. Here are my words of wisdom...

IT STARTS WITH YOU

How well your child copes will be heavily influenced by how well you cope. Take a close look at your attitude. Whether you like it or not, your attitude will have a significant affect on your child's attitude and self-esteem. We all know that managing a child's life-threatening food allergies is a constant challenge,



but there's a big difference between "rising to meet the challenge" and "feeling overwhelmed by the burden."

Someone once said to me, "God gives the average children to the average parents, and saves the extraordinary children for the extraordinary parents." So there you have it – you're not burdened, you're privileged!

NEVER LET 'EM SEE YOU SWEAT

Especially when he is young, don't let your child realize how much effort you put into keeping him safe and making things work. Although you will have to make major adjustments in your life to accommodate

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RAISING A WELL-ADJUSTED CHILD

Adjusted continued from front

his needs and keep him safe, and you will often need to go through a lot of advance preparation when your family wants to go somewhere and to do something, your child does not need to know this. This knowledge can make him feel as though his mere existence is a burden for you.

MAKE YOUR HOME A SAFE HAVEN

Most books and articles about living with severe food allergies recommend physically making your home a “safe haven” where you and your child do not have to worry about allergenic foods on the dinner plate or allergenic residue in the toy box. Take this a step further and make your home an emotional “safe haven” as well. Teach all of your children that in your family you treat each other with love, respect and acceptance – and then model this behavior yourself.

DON'T LET FOOD ALLERGIES DEFINE YOUR CHILD

Food allergy is a medical condition not a personality trait. Make your child feel so loved and accepted as she is that the allergies do not define her, your relationship with her or other people's relationships with her. She is not “allergy girl” – she is an amazing, wonderful, beautiful, much-beloved and appreciated child.

DON'T MAKE YOUR LIFE REVOLVE AROUND FOOD

Create a healthy, loving and enjoyable lifestyle for your family that doesn't revolve around food – a good idea even without food allergies in the picture, now that obesity has become such a problem in our nation. Foster an attitude in your child that “food isn't everything” and “it really doesn't matter if you can't eat a particular thing.”



EXUDE CONFIDENCE

When your child is old enough to understand the inherent dangers of severe food allergies, don't give him reason to worry. Let your child know that you are in control of the situation. Discuss some of the precautions you and other caregivers take to keep him safe, such as reading labels, washing hands, keeping medication handy, etc. The message: You know what you're doing, and you always do everything possible to keep him safe.

REMEMBER THAT EVERYONE IS DIFFERENT

Teach your child that everyone is “different” and there is nothing wrong with being different. Every person has something different about them...from hair and freckles to skills, talents, beliefs, personalities and more. Food allergies are just one of the things that make your child unique – but not as unique as she might think. As of this writing, it is estimated that one out of 25 school-aged children in the United States have food allergies! The world would be much duller if we were all the same.

ARM YOUR CHILD

Of course, since not everyone understands that “different” is OK, you'll need to be sure that your child is prepared for both polite questions and hurtful teasing. Role-play with your child. How will she answer the questions her classmates might

raise such as, “Why do you always bring your lunch?” “Why can't you have ice cream?” or “Do you want to try the cookies my Grandma made?” Hopefully your child will not be the object of teasing, but in case she is, explain that the teasing is likely to stop if it doesn't get the desired response. Practice delivering snappy comeback lines with an attitude.

DON'T BE LEFT OUT

Do everything you can to ensure that your child has as “normal” a life as possible. Your child deserves to have positive school and extra-curricular activities experiences and an enjoyable social life. Work “behind the scenes” to make it happen.

EMPOWER YOUR CHILD

As your child gets older, empower him to be increasingly responsible for staying safe. As his maturity increases you should teach him to read labels, advocate for his needs, carry his own medications, order in restaurants and explain his allergies to others.

IN CONCLUSION

Just like every other aspect of managing your child's life-threatening food allergies, helping him or her to be well-adjusted “in spite of it all” requires forethought and effort. Know that you can do it – and that there's a whole community of people here at Kids With Food Allergies available to help you.

Linda Coss is the author of two books on food allergy: “How To Manage Your Child's Life-Threatening Food Allergies: Practical Tips For Everyday Life” and “What's to Eat? The Milk-Free, Egg-Free, Nut-Free Food Allergy Cookbook.” Both books are available through Amazon.com.