



The sound and the fury

Misophonia sufferers hypersensitive to noises

BY SHEENA FAHERTY
THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Bridget Sharkey set down the letter on the couch. The words, written in the near-perfect handwriting of a 14-year-old who is serious about her studies, seemed alien coming from this soft-spoken girl.

"I sat there with my insides burning, hearing the sounds that bothered me the most: chewing and swallowing," she wrote. "More and more sounds bothered me, and this time it gave me a new reaction. It made me angry."

For Bridget, dinner with her family in their Schwenksville home was becoming a nightmare.

Her father, Michael, describes her as the "ideal, passive baby," he said. "She never cried. We never had an issue with her."

But two years ago, Bridget started morphing into a girl who was almost unrecognizable to her parents. A girl who said she wanted to hurt her younger sisters at dinner, a girl who had to quit the softball team she loved so much, a girl whose hopes of getting into the National Honor Society were slipping away as her grades plummeted.

Bridget learned through an Internet search that her condition had only recently been given a name. She called it the "m-word," but researchers in the field know it as misophonia, literally translated as "hatred of sounds."

Jennifer Jo Brout, a sufferer herself, directs the Sensation and Emotion Network and Misophonia International Research Network, both dedicated to understanding auditory over-responsivity. She said the disorder begins with a negative response to repetitive stimuli, called triggers. Usually the sounds are familiar at the dinner table, such as chewing or lip-smacking, but repetitive visual cues can be triggers as well.

Zach Rosenthal, associate professor in the department of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Duke University Medical Center, said the label for this condition is not ideal.

"It's suggestive of a hatred of sounds, and I think that hate is the wrong word," he said. Rather, he suspects the condition is a result of survival circuitry gone haywire.

The limited body of research on misophonia



MICHAEL BRYANT | PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER | TNS

When Bridget Sharkey, 14, sat down with her family for a meal together, the sounds of her family eating and drinking began causing her great anxiety. Now the only way she can cope during meals is to wear headphones that muffle the sound and sit in a different room — such is life with misophonia.

demonstrates that when people with it hear repetitive sounds, they enter into fight-or-flight mode — a heightened state of arousal in response to perceived harm.

But for sufferers, the experience is more living nightmare than "fight or flight."

Here's how Bridget described the experience: "It makes me immediately stop what I am doing. It makes me want to scream and yell, or physically make the person stop the trigger."

Jeff Gould, 55, a videographer from Long

Branch, New Jersey, who has been suffering with misophonia for 48 years, described the feeling when he hears a trigger as "physical pain," although he said anticipating the sound is an even bigger ordeal.

"It's like a plane crash," he said. "Going down is worse than the actual moment."

And Kathy Reynolds, 58, a New Jersey resident who works in a clinical lab, describes it just as vividly: "Most people don't like nails on a chalkboard. It sends a shiver up your

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When a child has cancer, how do siblings feel?

When Daniel's dad tells him his sister, Kate, has cancer, the boy doesn't understand. She doesn't look sick. "Will she be better by Saturday for the parade?" he asks.

Daniel and Kate are fictional characters in a book that Maine artist Sally Loughridge wrote and illustrated. But the scene has played out for real in countless families.

It happened to a friend of mine, who is a mother of three — two sons and a daughter. At the age of 5, her daughter, the youngest, was diagnosed with Wilm's tumor, a rare kidney cancer that primarily affects children.

Sally's book, "Daniel and His Starry Night Blanket," is about a little boy whose world flipped upside down when his sister got cancer. His parents struggle to balance the needs of both children.

Kate is seriously ill and needs care and Daniel often feels afraid, angry, jealous and left out.

Love, support and Daniel's beloved starry night blanket help him

and Kate get through the ordeal. Before she became a professional artist, Sally was a child

psychologist. Her original idea for the book was to trace a child's emotional growth, but the storyline changed after she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010. During her radiation therapy treatments, she kept a written and visual diary of the experience, which she turned into another book, "Rad Art."

When I read Sally's new book, I thought of my friend. I sent her a copy and asked if she'd comment and share her family's story. She agreed but wanted to remain anonymous.

Her daughter was first diagnosed in 2012. She had surgery to remove her kidney and then six

months of chemotherapy. In October 2013, her doctors said she was in remission, but a year later they discovered another tumor. This time, she had surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy. She finished her treatments last March and has been doing well ever since.

I sent my friend a list of questions. These are her answers.

How did you tell your other children about their sister's diagnosis the first time?

I explained to her brothers, who were then 9 and 10 years old, that she had been diagnosed with cancer, but that it was a very treatable kind of cancer — and al-

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DIANE ATWOOD

Robbie Foundation hosts No Limits Run-Walk-Roll

BRUNSWICK — The Robbie Foundation will hold its third annual No Limits Run-Walk-Roll on Sunday, Sept. 27, at the Bowdoin College Field House.

The event is a celebration for people and children of all abilities.

The opening ceremony is set for 9:45 a.m. with the event scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. Participants can register from 9 to 9:45 a.m. on the day of the event or online at RaceIt.com/Register/Groups/default.aspx?newgroup=true&event=31325.

The Robbie Foundation has raised more than \$200,000 for special needs children and young people across the state. The organization has provided adaptive equipment, therapy treatments and other services not covered by insurance. The money raised from the No Limits event will continue to help hundreds of families of kids with developmental disabilities throughout Maine.

Everyone participating in the run will receive a medal. Prizes also will be awarded. Pre-registration costs \$25, and on race day \$35. For information visit

robbiefoundation.com/rf/events/upcoming-events/3rd-annual-5k-runwalkkids-fun-run/.

Hospice to host annual Twilight in the Park

PORTLAND — Hospice of Southern Maine will light up Deer-ing Oaks Park at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 26, at its annual Twilight in the Park event.

The community fundraiser celebrates the lives of loved ones, friends and families who have passed away and honors

people who presently bring meaning to our lives. Thousands of luminaria are lit representing loved ones. The public is welcome to attend.

To order a luminaria, visit HospiceofSouthernMaine.org/Twilight or call 289-3643. There is a suggested gift of \$10 per luminaria and multiple purchases may be made.

The event is sponsored by State Manufactured Homes Inc. and MaineHealth, among other community sponsors. Proceeds support the organization's mission of compassion, caring and comfort at the end of life.

Do you have a 'chemical imbalance'?

In the book "Anatomy of an Epidemic," author Robert Whitaker chronicles the epidemic of mental illness in the last 50 years, including schizophrenia, depression and anxiety.

In 1955 — the year Thorazine, the first of the drugs to treat mental illness, was used — there were an estimated 355,000 adults hospitalized for mental illness; 30 years

later the number had jumped to 1.25 million. By 2007, the number increased to 4 million, an increase of over five times, considering the population almost doubled during the same time.

Especially troubling is the huge increase in these problems in children. The number of young people on disability because of mental illness increased by a factor of 35 from 1987 to 2007, from 16,200 to 561,570. While mental illness has been around for centuries, there has been nothing in history to compare to this explosive increase in the last 50 years.

What is fueling this surge?

The author reaches a very worrisome conclusion: That the cause of this epidemic is the very drugs used to treat these conditions. Initially hailed as miracle cures for mental illness, it appears these drugs have long-term benefits for only a minority of patients. For most, they offer only limited, short-term relief and devastating side effects with longer use.

Whitaker has his critics, including one expert who questions his numbers on the rise of people on disability and his interpretation of research.

Studies have shown fewer relapses, and less dependence on disability or welfare, among patients who are not given these drugs. Dr. Martin Harrow, a researcher in this field, found that while 40 percent of schizophrenic patients not on medications were considered "recovered" after 15 years, only 5 percent of those taking meds reached this point. He commented in 2008, "I conclude that patients with schizophrenia not on antipsychotic medication for a long period of time have significantly better global functioning than those on antipsychotics."

It seems most patients who have an episode of mental illness recover after a time, but that recovery rate is much lower if they are treated with meds in the early

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MICHAEL NOONAN

Maine man sues makers of Tylenol PM

BY JACKIE FARWELL
BDN STAFF

A Lincoln County man has sued the makers of Tylenol PM, alleging the medication caused his liver to fail.

Melburn Knox of Whitefield filed the lawsuit Aug. 27 in the U.S. District Court Eastern District of Pennsylvania against McNeil PPC Inc., McNeil Consumer Healthcare and Johnson & Johnson. He took the medication from July 1, 2008, through Sept. 13, 2009, resulting in acute liver failure, according to the complaint.

The suit accuses the companies of negligence, fraud and violation of consumer protection laws, and seeks punitive damages.

We need to tell you something (and you're going to love it!):

In two weeks, this section of your Bangor Daily News will become **Business**.

It will be a more prominent section with a focus on Maine's business scene.

Columnist Deb Neuman will appear here, alongside features that will help readers navigate financial issues and decisions.

