

I ALMOST DIED EATING A PEA!

Chapter Three

INGREDIENTS

Water, Carrots, Red Lentils,
Potatoes, Cauliflower, Leeks,
Peas, Cornflower, **Wheat**
flour, Cream (milk), Yeast

ALLERGY ADVICE

See ingredients in **bold**.

By Chris Soul

With illustrations by Rosie Soul

Raising awareness for Anaphylaxis UK as part of Chris Soul's London
Marathon 2024 fundraising:

<https://2024tcslondonmarathon.enthuse.com/pf/chris-soul>

Chapters 1 & 2: <https://www.chrissoul.co.uk/i-almost-died-eating-a-pea>

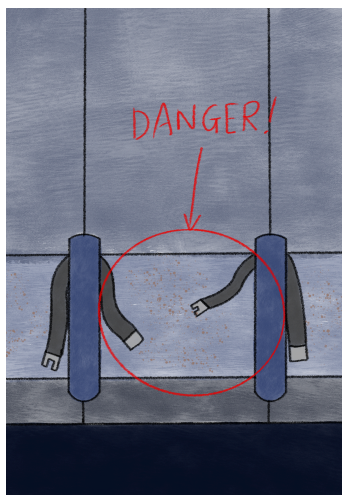
Chapter Three

After school, I walked home feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders. I mean, worrying about a **Dine and Disco** wasn't exactly the world's top problem, but to me it was huge.

Everyone goes on about *mental health*, yeah, but not everyone talks about the causes. Sometimes I get *huge* anxiety caused by my allergies or the situations that come up with food. Sometimes, well, I just seriously *panic*.

Once, Mum, Dad and I were going on holiday for the first time in ages. I was so looking forward to it. We were going to Greece. We had this stunning resort booked and we had trips planned to Athens to see all the ancient stuff. But boarding the flight we had a major problem. Mum freaked. And Dad went berserk. Like, seriously.

“When we booked this flight we were assured that **no nuts** would be served,” Dad said, his face getting redder by the minute. “My daughter is **severely allergic to nuts**. And look... I see crumbs of nuts all over that seat!”



The air stewardess opened her mouth but no words came out. Mum's face crumbled into worry.

Dad sighed and then spoke so loudly all the passengers glared at him. **“What are we supposed to do then?!”**

My heart pounded. This flight was definitely unsafe for me. I could almost feel the threat of nuts tingling against my skin, closing up my airways.

Eventually the air stewardess in charge, an older lady, slipped down the aisle and spoke to my Dad in this matter-of-fact tone. It so annoyed my Dad I wondered if his head was going to explode right there and then.

“Sir, please can you keep your voice down. I do not know who provided you the information but this is not a nut-free flight. Packets of dry-salted peanuts are available as part of our in-flight bar offer. The best we can do is swap your seats for some right at the back.”

Mum looked at Dad and Dad looked at Mum. They both looked at me. I think my face must have gone completely pale

because they both caressed my arms at the same time and said,
“*You okay, Suze?*”

I shook my head. Panic shot through me like venom.

“This is not good enough,” Dad said, trying not to explode. “We can’t take this flight and we’ll have to... take out a formal complaint.”

The air stewardess in charge nodded at someone else’s tickets and then said, “Well, you better hurry off then. We’re already

DEPARTURES →



late to depart and this is only delaying us further.” She tutted. Like we were a problem. That I was a problem.

So that was it. We didn’t take the flight.

Back in the airport, Dad tried to re-book tickets while Mum and I sat down to calm ourselves. I rested my head on Mum's shoulder, feeling so upset it made me nauseous.

We never went on holiday. Because of the type of economy seats we'd booked. To change flights meant we'd need to pay cancellation fees. We couldn't afford that. Dad tried to complain but the airline kept saying: "in our policy, we can't always guarantee flights that cater for all allergies." But... *nuts!*

Nuts are such a common allergy!

As I walked home, I thought about the gut-wrenching disappointment of that non-holiday experience. It wasn't fair. *Well, living with allergies isn't fair.*

"Hi, Suze!" Mum said, as I traipsed through the front door. She frowned. "What's up? Has something happened?"

I slumped onto the sofa, dropping my school bag on the floor.

"There's going to be a Year 4 Dine and Disco," I said. "But no-one mentioned anything about making it allergy safe. And it's the same day as Shariah's birthday so I *have* to go."

Mum understood straight away. She always gets it.

“That sounds tough, Suzie. I’m so sorry. I did see it all announced in the newsletter that was just sent out. Come to think of it, though, I didn’t see anything that mentioned allergies. Did Mr Benson say anything about it?”

“No. I tried to speak to him, but he was too busy.”

Mum sighed. “I’m sure the school would try and make these Dine and Disco things safe.”

I raised my eyebrows. “Really? Do you remember the Summer Fair, Mum? There were loads of stalls of snacks and sweets and cakes and ice creams and nothing was labelled. Wayne had to scout it all out for me. And he told me not to go near certain areas. Even though nuts are banned at school they still showed up in cakes and other snacks. Then the bouncy castle got littered and it got too much!”



Mum sidled next to me on the sofa and gave me a hug. “Oh, kiddo. I’m sorry. You’re right. We can never take things for granted, can we?”

I thought about the flight full of nuts again and the cancelled holiday, all because of my stupid nut allergies. The tears I’d held back earlier came bursting out and trickled down my cheeks.

Mum kissed me on the forehead and gave me another squeeze. “Look, do you want me to write an email to the head teacher? Or something like that?”

“Maybe,” I said, sniffing. “But we’ve tried that before with things and Mrs Johnson always passes on your concerns to the catering team or Miss Dyer. Then nothing ever happens.”

Gently pulling up my chin and dabbing up my tears, Mum looked me in the eyes all serious and strong. Like a she-wolf or something. “Then maybe, Suze, this is an opportunity for you to **step up and take some action for yourself**. You’re in Year 4 now. Why don’t you ask to meet with Mrs Johnson? Speak to Mr Benson. Make demands.”

“Do you think they would listen?” I asked. I’d never been very good at sticking up for myself. Maybe Mum was right. It was time to stick up and step up and take action for myself. After all, I can’t

always rely on Mum and Dad to vouch for me. I have to do it for myself too.

“I’m sure they’d listen, love. That’s their job. What’s the school motto again?”

“Learning to live and love through body and mind,” I said, rolling my eyes. It was such a lame motto.



“There you go,” Mum said. “You use that motto to get what you need. It’s *your* body. How can you live and love if the school doesn’t keep you safe with your allergies?” She offered me a tissue to wipe my eyes.

Mum was right. As always. I nodded and felt a ripple of hope rise up inside me.
**Step up. Stick up.
Take action. Vouch
for myself.**

“I’ll do it!” I said. “I’ll get the school to listen.”

“Good on you, Suze,” Mum said. “I’m proud of you.”

Then it made me wonder. If it’d been me rather than Dad who’d made the fuss to the airlines, would we have had our holiday, after all? Can kids change things more than adults? I had to hope so.

My mission now was to change the school’s attitude to allergies. *Bring it on!*

Wiping away my tears, I tilted my head and listened to the house. It was strangely quiet.

“Where’s Dad?” I asked. “I thought he was home early today.”

Mum smiled. “He was, but... He’s gone out.”

“Doing what?”

“Well, that I can’t say, I’m afraid.”

“What? What’s Dad up to?”

But Mum wasn’t going to give anything away. Her lips were royally sealed.

Susie's Guidebook to Allergies and Anaphylaxis Part 3 Food Labelling

Food labelling is really important, but can be such a pain to check. It is a legal requirement (the law again, right?) that

INGREDIENTS
Water, Carrots, Red Lentils, Potatoes, Cauliflower, Leeks, Peas, Cornflower, Wheat flour , Cream (milk), Yeast
ALLERGY ADVICE
See ingredients in bold .

the 14 major allergens are highlighted in bold on food packaging. This can be really useful, yeah, but it does mean that I (or my parents, mostly) have to

check every ingredient on every package of food. What's tough, though, is that allergens that are not in the major 14 aren't in bold, so you have to really carefully check every single

ingredient (and sometimes the text is soooo small). Like, I'm allergic to peas, yeah, but in my drawing above you might easily miss that peas are an ingredient.

Sometimes Mum has to ask waiters at restaurants to bring out the packaging from the kitchen to double-check. (Hopefully the restaurant is nice and lets you!) Annoyingly, some restaurants will only list the major allergens so it's soooo hard to know for sure if what you're being served is safe. Ugh. It's tough.

One small little ingredient, like a pea, and you might go into anaphylactic shock. So you just have to check! Because your life depends on it...

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