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Mayhaw blossom helps student win scholarship

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Applying for college scholarships comes with a lot of tedious requirements, such as trying to answer brain-wracking essays, obtaining letters of recommendation and sitting through strenuous interviews with a panel of people trying to evaluate you in one sitting.

But what if finding a Mayhaw blossom could assist you in procuring a scholarship? Well, that is exactly what Mariah Mason, of McCrory, needed to help her achieve the status of being a distinguished honor graduate, which would in turn help her gain scholarships to attend college.

In order to become a distinguished honor graduate at McCrory High School, Mariah had to end her high school with at least a 3.75 grade point average and enroll in five advanced placement classes, which can transfer to college credit.

As graduation approached, she knew she would meet the five AP class requirement and all she had to worry about was making sure she maintained

her GPA.

Sharon Mason, Mariah's mother, said that becoming a distinguished honors graduate was something Mariah desperately wanted to do.

"She really wanted this accomplishment, and she was willing to work hard to do it," she said. "She was working toward becoming a distinguished honors graduate so she could speak at her graduation."

During her last semester, Mariah was enrolled in a rigorous biology class that required her to do a project that involved collecting 50-75 wildflowers and pressing them. She also had to gather information about each flower.

Her teacher told the students if they could collect a Mayhaw blossom, they would automatically get an A on the project, which was worth a majority of the points in the class.

Mariah knew if she could obtain the flower, it would lead to her having one less thing to worry about - achieving an A in biology.

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Contributed photo

Prized blossom: Galen and Sharon Mason show the Mayhaw blossom they traveled four and a half hours from McCrory to El Dorado to collect to help their daughter, Mariah, receive a college scholarship. Paul McLaughlin, who has a Mayhaw orchard near El Dorado, provided the blossom to the Masons.

Student

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A Mayhaw is a bright red fruit that is usually found in low, wet and slightly acidic areas in southeastern states. Traditionally, Mayhaws have been harvested in backwoods sloughs, swamps and river bottoms. Sharon, who could not find anyone in the McCrory area who harvested Mayhaws, knew she would have to do some research in order to find the coveted berry blossom.

So, she got in contact with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission who referred her to Paul McLaughlin, the only person in Arkansas who plants, sells and grows Mayhaws. He also sells Mayhaw jelly, pepper jelly, Mayhaw syrup and Mayhaw berries.

With the berries he grows, McLaughlin has been known to make jelly, ice cream and even wine.

McLaughlin was at his wedding shop when he received a call from Sharon in May asking if he had a Mayhaw blossom in his orchard.

According to McLaugh-

lin, Mayhaws typically begin blooming in March and April, and in May they are bearing fruit.

McLaughlin told Sharon although it's rare to see a bloom in May, he remembered he saw a bloom the previous day and that he would go back to the orchard to look again.

"I went in my orchard and went down every row looking for a bloom," he said. "On the very last row, I found one blossom."

McLaughlin called Sharon back and told her he had found what she was looking for - a Mayhaw blossom.

Sharon and her husband, Galen Mason, said they drove about four and a half hours from McCrory to pick up the blossom.

Upon arrival, McLaughlin expressed to them how rare it is that he was able to find a single bloom in May.

"I told her she was one lucky person to find a blossom this late in the growing season," he said. "And she said that it wasn't luck, she had prayed about it."

Sharon left that afternoon with Mariah's bloom

and a little something extra - some Mayhaw jelly.

She said when Mariah returned to school with the Mayhaw blossom, students and teachers alike could not believe their eyes.

"Everyone was really excited that we found the Mayhaw," she said. "It had been a while since a student had brought back a Mayhaw. Even the teachers were talking about how incredible it was."

Thanks to the Mayhaw blossom, Mariah passed biology with an A and got to speak at her graduation as a distinguished honors graduate. She was also accepted to and received the President's Scholarship from Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Okla., where she will be attending this August. Sharon said she received a science and mission scholarship among others.

While Mariah is currently on a mission trip in Sierra Leone in Africa, Sharon said she did want to express how exceptionally proud of her daughter she is for being accepted to the university, especially be-

cause of its credibility.

"Ninety-eight percent of students who go there with the intention of going to medical school afterwards get accepted into medical school," she said. "We wanted her to get as many scholarships as possible, because we know she wants to attend medical school, which will be very expensive," she said.

When McLaughlin received an e-mail from the Masons in May stating that Mariah had graduated as a distinguished honors graduate, he said he couldn't believe how a little Mayhaw could have such a big impact in somebody's life.

"It's a good feeling," he said. "It's uplifting, and I'm glad I could give a positive story instead of the usual stories you hear about robberies, rapes and murders. I would rather people read something good, something positive that is happening in the community."



A Mayhaw blossom

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