

Moraga-Orinda Fire District Firefighter on the Rebound

By Nick Marnell

Kelly Morris heard the train zoom by near the Orinda BART station and she had a premonition: "I hope there's not going to be a train derailment today, or something," she thought.

"Or something" was less than a mile away.

The 36-year-old MOFD firefighter-paramedic responded with her partner Steve Gehling in Medic 45 shortly after 9 a.m. Dec. 2 to an emergency call – a four-car non-injury pileup on Highway 24. Exiting on Wilder Road, the paramedics turned around and navigated eastbound on the freeway 1,600 feet to the accident scene, parking the ambulance by Engine 43, the first MOFD emergency vehicle to arrive.

The rain was so fierce, with the water and the mud nearly 4 inches deep, Morris said the people involved in the accident were ushered to safety into the back of the ambulance. "I've never seen it come down that hard, and I've lived here my whole life," she said.

Caltrans set up flares outside the east end of the Caldecott Tunnel, yet Morris watched vehicles continue to fly out of the tunnel. Two cars sped by the scene, fishtailing, barely missing Engine 43. The next car didn't miss. A Toyota struck the engine, skidded to a stop next to the ambulance, and the rattled driver jumped out of the car and ran toward Morris. He indicated he was all right, likely saved by his airbag.

Gehling moved Medic 45 farther east on Highway 24, away from the fire engine and the Toyota. Morris and the Toyota driver stood near the shoulder. A Chevrolet Tahoe spun out of control along the freeway, and Morris and the Toyota driver scrambled out of its path. But the Tahoe clipped the parked Toyota, and the Tahoe flipped and rolled over, along an alternate route. "I looked back, and I could see the vehicle bearing down on me," she said. "It was like in slow, slow motion. Just like the movies."

Morris knows what it feels like to be injured. During a Campolindo High School basketball game against San Ramon Valley, Morris played through a spiral fracture of her right hand. At Saint Mary's College, she soaked her sprained ankle at halftime and returned to the court for the second half. But this was different; she was struck by a moving vehicle, and tossed into the lane of traffic. And she couldn't move.

The impact knocked the wind out of her. She fell backward, onto her tailbone. Afraid she had internal injuries, but more concerned about being hit again, Morris scooted along the road, on her elbows, until an MOFD engineer, John Whittington, and a bystander pulled her by the arms to the side of the road.

Morris lay immobile next to the Toyota driver, who appeared to her to be unconscious. A nurse, another of the growing group of bystanders, offered to help her. "I'm fine," Morris



Kelly Morris

Photo Andy Scheck

said, and she motioned toward the man beside her. "Help him."

The cars continued to whiz by, until Highway 24 was closed down. Morris was strapped onto a gurney and helped into the ambulance – the same ambulance in which she arrived at the scene – and she was transported to John Muir Hospital in Walnut Creek.

She remained at John Muir for two days. She suffered a broken right fibula– sliced clean through – three fractures in her right foot, a left knee fracture, and possibly (she's not yet scheduled for an MRI) right knee ACL/MCL/meniscus damage.

She went home to begin the tor-

turous rehab – and to prepare for the birth of her baby, due in July.

Former Campolindo Cougars' coach Scott Espinosa-Brown described Morris as "an absolute warrior, with a tremendous work ethic."

MOFD Fire Chief Randall Bradley echoed the praise, and he stressed the compassion and dignity with which Morris treats her patients. "She always has a positive, upbeat attitude and is a valued member of our organization," he said.

Kelly Graves, her Saint Mary's basketball coach, summed up the character of his star competitor. "If anybody will make it through this," he said, "it will be Kelly."



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Lamorinda Reads – "A Hologram for the King"

By Sophie Braccini



From left: Jeanine, Susan, Dick, Beth Girshman and Paula came to share their opinions of "A Hologram for The King"

Photo Sophie Braccini

When asked why the three Lamorinda librarians chose Dave Eggers's book, "A Hologram for the King," for this year's Lamorinda Reads program, Orinda librarian Beth Girshman explained that they were looking for a newly released book by a local author that would be relevant to residents and would trigger wide discussions.

At the Feb. 7 Lamorinda Reads discussion group at the Orinda Library, everyone agreed that "A Hologram for the King" fit the bill. The events continue through the month of February, culminating in an evening with Eggers on Feb. 28.

"A Hologram for the King" is a quick read and the latest production by Eggers, who also wrote very well received books such as "What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng" and "Zeitoun." Editors of The New York Times Book Review named "A Hologram for the King" in its 10 Best Books of 2012 list, "after we chose it for our program," said Girshman.

Lamorinda's three libraries obtained 750 hard cover books that were given to the first who came in and asked for them. "Everything was gone within a week," said Girshman, "but we have other books in regular circulation that people are borrowing and circulating." She added that the three Friends of the Library organizations contributed generously for this purchase, and that they were able to buy the books at a good price.

At the Feb. 7 book discussion or-

ganized at the Orinda Library, readers had a lot to say about the book. Susan noted that the book reminded her of two previous reads, Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" and Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman."

"The book evokes those themes, the whole issue of 'is God dead?'" she said. She added that in this book the 'God' they're waiting for is a King who will finally end up with the Chinese, "which is what is happening to us now, and God is not choosing America anymore," she said with a smile.

All the readers around the table agreed that the book is a very good allegory to what is happening to this country. "What is interesting, too, is that the main character is not even selling reality or objects anymore but a hologram," said Paula.

"This is such a lampooning of Dubai," added Dick. "There is nothing tangible, and the main character (Alan Clay) gets so many signals that this is going to fail, but he does not do anything; he is such a loser."

Others did not agree with him. Patsy thought that Clay simply lacked any form of faith. "He had no foundation throughout his life to base his decision on," she said. "He is always looking for approval from others; he has no inner strength or code."

"This is what our modern world values; you are as good as what you can sell," added Susan.

Two of the readers, Dick and Paula, had experience in the Middle East where the book takes place.

They both commented on the accuracy of the depiction of that society.

"My husband went to another middle-eastern country in the '90s with a group of Berkeley professors to evaluate the programs of a newly constructed university," Paula said. "While there, they realized that they could not deliver any comment of substance; that they had been asked there just for show." Paula brought a picture of the group of scientists and local officials in front of the building; it looked just like one of the sites in the book.

Although there is no trace of redemption at the novel's end, all of these participants enjoyed reading the book and they are looking forward to the discussion with the author at 7 p.m. Feb. 28 at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building. "There are no reservations, seating will be available on a first-come basis," said Girshman.

Other upcoming Lamorinda Reads events include Telling Your Story: A Memoir Writing Workshop from 1 to 4 p.m. Feb. 19 at the Orinda Library. "We organized this event because Eggers and educator Ninive Clements Calegari co-founded 826 Valencia, a nonprofit writing and tutoring center for kids ages 6–18 in San Francisco in 2002," said Girshman.

Two more book discussions are scheduled at 7 p.m. Feb. 21 at the Orinda Library and at 6 p.m. the same night at the Moraga Library. For more information, visit: guides.ccclib.org/lamorindareads.

Submit stories and story ideas to
storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com