

From Three Floors Down

A bad fall leads Moraga woman back up to the top

By Chris Lavin



Amy Morosini of Moraga was the last person she ever thought would start running marathons and triathlons after a traumatic brain injury. But she has medals to prove it. The key she is wearing around her neck was designed by Jennifer Montana, 49ers quarterback Joe Montana's wife, and is called the "Endure Key." Morosini wears it always. Photo Chris Lavin

In 1997, Amy Morosini “fell” from the window of a third-floor apartment in San Francisco. She may have been pushed out by her then boyfriend. The only thing police could come up with for their report was “suspicious circumstances.” Amy herself couldn’t help much because, well, she had fallen three floors onto the ground, cracked her head open, incurred 20-something other bone fractures and ruptured several internal organs. She lay in a coma. Giving a report at the time was not exactly possible.

She almost died. When Morosini woke up, she had no idea what had happened. And it was right then, precisely right then, that her new world began.

“There is something about my story that needs to be told,” said Morosini, looking thoughtful and quite beautiful as she picked up her coffee cup in her immaculate Moraga home. She looked out the window onto the hills. She is speaking in public about her recovery, and she was featured in last month’s Prevention magazine. She’s now doing so much volunteer work that her kids, on their way to school in the morning, shout back, “Have a good day helping people, Mom!” The first time they said that, she said, she knew she was doing the right thing with her life, all around.

Morosini is the mother of three boys, happily married, but her past cannot be shed entirely. She had awoken in the hospital not being able to move, with doctors all around her saying she would need multiple surgeries to walk, to think, to write, to speak, in order to live a normal life. What they didn’t tell her – because at the time little was known about Traumatic Brain Injury or TBI – is that the emotional and psychological journey of putting Humpty Dumpty back together has little to do with the shell. Most of getting it back together, Morosini says now, is recognizing the emotional effects and actual physical trauma to the brain that makes something like walking again seem like a piece of cake.

“Everybody, including me, was focused on fixing what had happened to my body,” Morosini said. “So the doctors (who performed many surgeries) put my physical self back together, and that’s what I was focused on, too, but I didn’t realize that was only the beginning.” All those things, she said, were only Step One.

“The mental health journey is longer,” she said.

Morosini found that she was, as she says, throwing wide curves from the pitcher’s mound that weren’t going over the plate. What she intended wasn’t what came out of her mouth. “My mind was a Ferrari, but it comes out as a Ford,” she said about her newfound mental

acuity. “I had lost the ability to write and speak, and it’s still with me almost all the time.” Emotionally, until she learned how to control it, that resulted in being so happy about something good that she would excitedly call everybody and tell them about how great she felt, or else when something bad happened it was the worst thing ever, and now everything was terrible. “I was all over the map,” Morosini said. “It was either the best thing ever or the worst thing ever.”

And one of the worst things, she says, and most would agree, is that the medical establishment started learning a lot when the United States declared war on Afghanistan and Iraq and suddenly thousands of soldiers were coming home with TBIs caused by explosions.

“We’ve learned a lot, rather unfortunately,” Morosini says now. “We have so many veterans coming home and going through what I’m still going through.”

Morosini decided to do something about it, to help. She regularly volunteers at the Veteran’s Administration Hospital in Martinez and focuses on TBI patients. She also found a mentor, an unexpected hero of her world she did not expect to relate to – Scott Rigsby, who was the first person to become an Ironman athlete with two prosthetic legs.

“I said, ‘I wish I could do what you do,’ and he said, and I’ll never forget this, ‘Why can’t you?’” Morosini said. “And I thought: I have no excuse. If he can do it, anybody can.”

Enter Amy Morosini the Athlete. She started running – and she hated running in high school, even when she was a sports star – but she’s running now and loving it. It helped her to kick alcohol, she says, which led her to dropping extra unwanted pounds. She has completed marathons and Ironman events, placing in many, and she’s still running. She is the last person to have thought that a collection of ribbons and medals would be hanging from her arm.

“I still can’t believe it,” she said, looking at her plethora of awards.

As if that were not enough, Morosini is writing a book and, working with a ghostwriter, hopes to offer free copies for any veteran coming home with TBI. She is part of a unique publishing format that isn’t self-published but published when enough people order the book – a sort of reverse standard publication model. You can find her project at <https://pubslush.com/project/4429>, or get a link on her website, www.TBIchick.com.

“I’m in a really good place right now,” she said. “I’m ready to write this book.”



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