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Lafayette resident pens memoir after tragedy strikes



Photo provided

From left: Stephani Reilly, Tony Low, Casey Sasner, Cathy Sereno, Leslie Hagel in the back, and author Francie Low at book signing event on Feb. 2 at Papillon Coffee & Tea in Lafayette.

By Kara Navolio

July 31, 2010 started off a normal day for Lafayette residents Francie and Tony Low. He was working in the morning then going out for a training ride. Francie left the house about 30 minutes after her husband to run errands. Then she got a call on her way out; the caller ID said Tony was calling, and she assumed he had a flat tire on his bike and needed her to pick him up.

But it wasn't her husband on the other end of the phone; it was her friend Damon, a local firefighter. He happened to be called to the scene of an accident, and as soon as he saw the custom bike, he knew it was Tony's. "Meet him at the hospital," he told Francie.

"I knew he was alive, but I didn't know what else," Francie recalled. It turned out that Tony, hit by an SUV on Danville Boulevard, had nine broken ribs, three cracked vertebrae, a punctured lung, a separated shoulder, a concussion and a lacerated eyelid. He spent 12 days in the hospital and 15 months rehabilitating. During this time Francie, who was already a lifestyle blogger, kept a blog to keep friends and family updated on Tony's progress and her thoughts as she went through the ordeal.

"The whole community swooped in, brought meals, drove the boys around, mowed the lawn, everything.

It's really hard to let people help, but you learn quickly that it's the only way you get through it. I call all these people angels."

People often asked her how she got through this tragedy. "I decided to write about our experience, hoping to help others," explained Francie. It took two and half years, many lattes at Papillon Gourmet Coffee and Tea in Lafayette, and the support of her writing group to turn her blog into a manuscript. In December "Alive and Fixable: A Road to Love and Recovery" was released. "The title came from sitting in the ER, not knowing what was wrong with my husband, and I thought, 'Well, he's alive. I know that.' Then I got the list of awful injuries and thought, 'Well, he's fixable.' And it went from there." Francie found professional editors and designers on Reedsy.com as well as the book cover artist. She was honored that Andy Bridge agreed to design the book cover. He also designed the book cover for "The Life of Pi" by Yann Martel. Francie said, "The cover is beautiful. Andy has a background in cycling, so he was a perfect match."

Papillon hosted a book signing event on Feb. 2 where approximately 75 people came in to purchase and/or have the author sign their copy. Mark Hennigh, a Lafayette resident who stopped in for a cappuccino,

sat down and started reading the book. "I was drawn in immediately," he said. Another man came in to meet Tony and Francie and share his own cycling story with someone who would understand. The former cyclist was not as lucky as Tony and now needs a wheelchair. Both Tony and Francie were humbled by the connection the book had with others.

Francie stated, "I am so grateful to Brenda and Tom (Oum) for inviting me to host my first book signing here (at Papillon)." She donated 10 percent of the sales that day to Brenda's favorite charity, Cambodian Orphanage Fund.

The book can be found at Orinda Books or through online booksellers. Contact Francie for book clubs or speaking events at: Francie@francielow.com.



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Local schools offer parent education on vaping and juuling

By Sora O'Doherty

A special program to educate parents about vaping and juuling is being offered jointly by the Acalanes Union, Lafayette, Moraga and Orinda Union school districts. Parents are invited to join an interactive discussion with local school leaders from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 27 in the Miramonte High School Performing Arts Center. The program is entitled, "Having courageous conversations with your child in an age of accessibility." As the event is open to parents from multiple school districts, attendance is by reservation only as space will be limited.

The city of Lafayette is currently considering adopting an ordinance prohibiting the sale of flavored tobacco products, which are available in such child-friendly flavors as "cotton candy." The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is considering how new regulations can fight what FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb, on Feb. 11 called "an epidemic-level rise in youth e-cigarette use," which, he says, "is threatening the progress we've made toward reducing youth tobacco use."

Gottlieb stated that "[a]ccording to the data released today, approximately 4.9 million middle and high school students were current

users (used in the past 30 days) of some type of tobacco product in 2018, up from 3.6 million in 2017. This increase is driven by an alarming surge in e-cigarette use. More than 3.6 million middle and high school students were current (past 30 day) e-cigarette users in 2018, a dramatic increase of more than 1.5 million students in one year." In his statement, Gottlieb notes that "the study authors suggest - as the FDA also noted at the time of the initial release of this data in the fall - that the rise in e-cigarette use in the last year is likely due to the recent popularity of certain types of e-cigarettes, such as JUUL."

"The signs that we're seeing are not encouraging," he concluded. "They point to continued growth in youth use of these products. No child should be using any tobacco or nicotine-containing product." Gottlieb addressed the conflict between making anti-smoking products available to adults, but trying to prevent youth use. "The FDA has repeatedly affirmed our collective view that e-cigarettes may have promise as a tool for helping currently addicted adult smokers quit smoking. But, with the staggering data on youth trends, we're struggling to preserve these opportunities for adults while addressing the youth epidemic. I simply won't allow their sale

to come at the expense of addicting a generation of kids to nicotine."

In addition to other regulatory approaches, Gottlieb announced that as one part of the youth e-cigarette prevention campaign, the FDA has "joined forces with Scholastic to expand distribution of youth e-cigarette prevention posters to every public and private high school in the U.S. and released new resources for doctors, youth groups, churches, state and local public health agencies, and others on the dangers of youth e-cigarette use. Additionally, our work with Scholastic to provide educators with resources to help them engage with students about e-cigarette use has helped reach more than 2.7 million students so far."

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Info: The link for reservations for the educational presentation at Miramonte is <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/vaping-and-juuling-having-courageous-conversations-with-your-child-in-an-age-of-accessibility-tickets-55682970263>

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