

# More than a decade after her mother accidentally backed over her, Clayton's Miracle Molly and mom begin to heal

By Matthias Gafni Contra Costa Times Posted: 01/11/2012 08:36:26 PM PST Updated: 01/12/2012 06:40:24 AM PST



*Molly Avilez, 15, of Clayton is giving back to the community that helped her 14 years ago by organizing the "Keep paying it forward blood drive" held through the Red Cross as she helps at the registration table at Diablo Valley Middle School on Thursday Jan. 5, 2012, in Clayton, Calif. When Molly was seventeen months she body after she was run over by a car and*

*lost half the blood in her received numerous transfusions. (Susan Tripp Pollard/Staff)*

CLAYTON -- Molly slides her hand across the coffee shop table and clasps her mother's hand.

"I didn't want to bring it up with her because I knew it was an emotional subject," Molly Avilez said, locking her big brown eyes with her mother's. "It was something we never talked about."



*File photo from 1998 with Diane Avilez holding her granddaughter Molly Avilez as a toddler. Molly Avilez now 15, of Clayton is giving back to the community that helped her 14 years ago by organizing the "Keep paying it forward blood drive" held through the Red Cross. (Dean Coppola/Staff)*

Fourteen years ago, Monica Fraga accidentally ran over her infant daughter, nearly killing her while backing out of their driveway. "Miracle Molly," as doctors dubbed her, survived the accident and fully recovered. Her mother's emotional recovery, however, did not come as quickly.

The close-knit pair spoke about their recoveries last week, a day after they collected 86 units of blood (each unit slightly less than a pint) for the American Red Cross in their annual drive. Their story is one of survival, but physical and emotional scars remain.



As Fraga put it: "It was a hard thing to recover from -- physically for her and emotionally for me."

Three years ago, that all changed with a single act of kindness from her daughter. Molly, who at 17 months old lost more than half her blood after the accident, worked with her mother to sponsor a blood drive. Friends, family and neighbors donated more than 100 units of blood, but the cause had a more profound impact. Mom and daughter, who talk about everything, finally began talking about the accident.



"It's been really hard. I think as a parent you try and hold up as best you can, and we were lucky because we had great family support," said Fraga, 40, of Clayton. "I never really dealt with it. I suppressed everything. As a mom, you have to pick up the pieces."

'Yours did not'

On the evening of Sept. 17, 1997, Fraga and her family were headed to a Bible study class. She backed her car out of their Pittsburg driveway, as her husband wheeled the garbage out to the curb. Both parents thought the other strapped baby Molly into her car seat.

Just as Fraga pulled back, Molly -- who had started walking only two months earlier -- bent over to pick up a rock. One of the car's rear wheels rolled over Molly's back.

"I heard him screaming and I thought he was screaming that I almost hit her," Fraga said. She pulled forward and ran over Molly a second time.

Her husband performed CPR, while she called 911. A rescue helicopter flew Molly to Oakland Children's Hospital with tire marks on her back.

"I don't remember much after that," Fraga said.

Doctors gave Molly less than fifty-fifty odds of surviving the night. Her liver was severed in half, and she had four broken ribs and a punctured lung. Doctors worried her other organs would shut down.

After five hours at the hospital, a team of doctors exited the surgery room. Fraga, only 25 at the time, braced herself for the worst.

"If you believe in miracles, then this is one," Fraga recalled the doctor saying. "Three children were supposed to die tonight, including yours, but yours did not."

"I don't know if I was mature enough to wrap my head around it," she said.

Three days after the accident, Molly had a second surgery. She left the hospital after two weeks.

#### Healing

Molly has no memory of the accident or the frantic days at the hospital. She only remembers returning for her emergency surgery at age 4 to remove scar tissue that blocked her intestines. She still has the stuffed bunny she clutched in the hospital.

Now 15, Molly has completely recovered. When in her bathing suit, she gets stares at the scar stretching from her chest to her stomach, but gets a kick out of seeing strangers' faces when she relays her story.

"I don't see it as a bad thing," Molly said. "I think it's helped make me who I am today. I'm still sure if it didn't happen I'd end up a good person, too."

Her mother said, "I kind of feel that out of something bad, something good has happened. The good is she survived and she has tried to help others."

In 2009, eighth-grader Molly was in a school leadership class and needed to complete 10 hours of community service. She wanted to give back, and called the American Red Cross to ask about hosting a blood drive.

"No one thought I'd be serious," she said.

Fraga felt pride but also a wave of emotion. Until then, Molly had discussed the accident with her grandmother, uncle and other family members, but not with her.

"I don't know if I would have had the mental capacity to reflect on it if Molly would not have started this," Fraga said. "It's begun our healing process."

Similar emotions return when reading about other children hit accidentally by their parents' vehicles, including an Antioch boy who died the day after Christmas when his father ran him over and a Vallejo 3-year-old girl struck by her mother two days earlier. At least 50 children are backed over in driveways and parking lots every week in the United States, and two of them die, according to national nonprofit child advocacy group KidsAndCars.org.

"I know what they're going through," Fraga said. "We can really connect with them on a whole different level."

The Clayton Valley High School sophomore and her mother plan to continue hosting annual blood drives, but Miracle Molly has higher aspirations.

"I was thinking that I want to become the next CEO of the Red Cross."

Contact Matthias Gafni at 925-952-5026. Follow him at [Twitter.com/mgafni](https://twitter.com/mgafni).

#### **Molly's video**

Watch a public service announcement featuring Molly Avilez at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcDGh2x2y3E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcDGh2x2y3E)

#### **How to donate**

You can still donate on behalf of Molly Avilez until the end of this month at the Pleasant Hill Red Cross Donor Center, 140 Gregory Lane, Suite 120. For details or to make an appointment at the Pleasant Hill center or any other facility, call 800-RED-CROSS.

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