



Maya McNulty

One Year Later

BY JENNA CAPUTO / PHOTOS BY TARA WILEY PHOTOGRAPHY AND CONTRIBUTED BY MAYA MCNULTY

Maya McNulty has always been a positive person, cheering on not only her family and friends in whatever endeavor they were pursuing, but also local businesses and non-profits. She would do anything to lift people up and help them on their way. She never thought she would need to turn that positive attitude onto herself as she struggled to live.

On a Friday in early March 2020, Maya attended her gym as usual. Soon after, she began to not feel well, and things quickly took a turn for the worst. By Saturday, she was at the ER on an IV for dehydration. Among other things, the hospital also tested for COVID-19. They sent her home to rest, and on Monday, she received the call she was positive. Her condition steadily worsened, and by Wednesday, her husband, Ron, rushed her back to Ellis Hospital, carrying her in since she could no longer walk. Her oxygen levels had dropped dangerously low, and her lungs collapsed for the first time. She ended up on a ventilator for six weeks, and she was in a coma for 30 days. After 35 days, she was transferred to Sunnyview Rehabilitation Hospital. Maya was in the hospital for a total of 69 days before they released her home. But that's when a new struggle began.

Just when they thought the COVID ordeal was over, they realized Maya was what is now called a COVID Long Hauler. Long Haulers are people who have had lasting effects from the virus that affect most of the body systems. Maya has since had issues with her heart, neurological issues, leg rashes, COVID toes, changed taste buds, headaches, dizziness, brain fog, low oxygen levels, a chronic cough, tremors, fatigue and has lost her hair as well as her voice. She has also battled bronchitis and an infection in the keloid scar left from the trach that was in her throat at the hospital. She can't yet walk more than six minutes at a time since it sends her heart into overdrive.

She does not remember most of her time at the hospital but found out later that her lungs collapsed three times. The doctors had told her husband to call their daughter, Alana, home from college to say goodbye. The care team didn't expect Maya to make it, but Ron knew what a fighter she is and had faith she would find her way back. Maya does remember having very vivid and bizarre dreams, including one where she was knocking at the gate. "I dreamt of fields of flowers, saw dead people, pets, fish. I swam in the ocean," Maya remembers. "I saw the gatekeepers, and no one spoke to me. I only heard a voice saying, 'It's not happening to you, it's happening for you.' I did meet up with my husband's brother, Bobby, who died at two years old. I never met Bobby. I knew it was him because my husband and Bobby looked like twins."

While still on the ventilator, Maya and her care team received a call from Dr. Fauci at the White House. He had heard about her from Governor Cuomo, who was very worried since at the time, they thought COVID only severely affected the older population. But Maya was a young, healthy woman with no pre-existing conditions. Since Maya could not speak because of the ventilator, Dr. Fauci talked to her care team to find out how she was doing and what they were doing to treat her. He left her his contact info so she could follow up later on, and Maya is looking forward to talking to him with her own voice once the dust settles from the transition into the new presidency.

Luckily, Ron never contracted COVID. He wore a mask and gloves while initially around Maya and was not allowed in the hospital once she was admitted. He called four times a day to check in on her. Alana contracted COVID in June while at college in Boulder, Colorado, but she has thankfully recovered completely with no additional complications.



It has been a tough road but the experience has forced Maya to put things into perspective and highlighted a new mission in life. “When I was hospitalized, I had plenty of time to think about what my new life and normal would be like. I thought about my life ending because I didn’t want to live as a vegetable. I was sad, lonely, depressed. I couldn’t see my family or friends. I gave thought to what will I do different with my second chance at life.” A new mission took shape, and as she slowly began to regain some of her strength back, she reached out to her medical team to see if they would be interested in helping. Things are now in the works. Maya wants to help other Long Haulers that have been blindsided by the long list of ongoing symptoms. Maya formed the Covid Wellness Clinic, LLC with the goal of creating a non-profit to help Long Haulers after they phase out of hospital care, so they will have a place to continue healing. While she gets things up and running, there is also a corresponding Facebook group where people can go for support in the meantime.

It is hard for Maya to take things slow, but recovery is now her full-time job. Her lungs are slowly beginning to improve, but her other organs are compromised, and she still needs a lot of help for everyday tasks. She’s had to relearn how to walk, talk and eat all over again. She has to wait until someone is home before she showers because if she falls, her legs are not yet strong enough to get back up. She is working hard to restore her body back to the strong, independent state it was pre-COVID, but it could possibly take years. The science is still evolving.

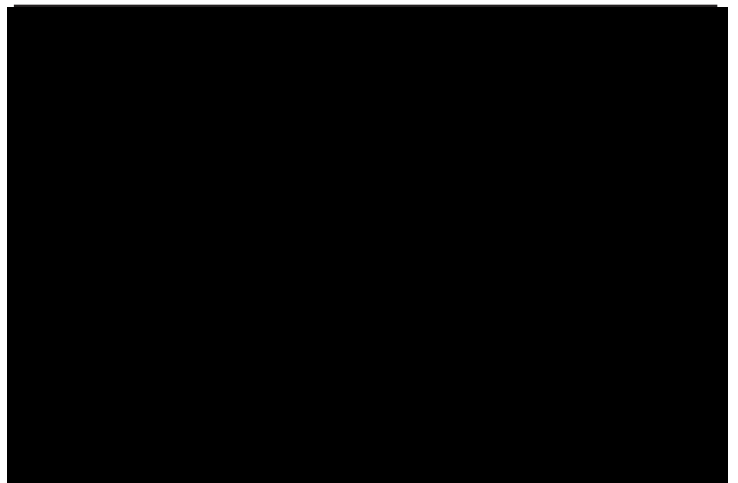
Her days now consist of getting ready in the morning (stopping multiple times to rest so her heart rate can go back down), then heading to her afternoon doctor and therapy appointments. She is not yet able to drive, so a family member or friend brings her to each place. Since she is still very weak, she naps after therapy until Ron gets home from work and they have dinner together. She jokes that she is a science project as the medical system struggles with treating this new disease with an “old” way of medicine. Maya has participated in several studies through the Mayo Clinic, Mount Sinai Hospital and Indiana University School of Medicine in the hopes that her experience may help find a cure for COVID. She chronicles her experiences on Facebook as well, and is writing her third book, *Miracle*, about her journey.

Maya has always been a positive and ambitious person. Born in Georgetown, Guyana in South America, Maya and her family came to the US when her uncle received a military scholarship to study medicine at UCLA, then Northwestern University and NYU before his residency in Schenectady. Maya, Ron and Alana found their dream home here in Niskayuna and have lived here for 18 years now.

Before COVID, Maya was an active entrepreneur and volunteer, working with organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Special Olympics, Boys &



Girls Club, and she’s also an ambassador with the Capital Region Chamber. She has written two bestselling books—*My Favorite Quotes For Entrepreneurs: Your Inspirational Guide To Inspiration and Empowerment* and *Fundraising Secrets*, which is geared toward non-profits looking to maximize their fundraising efforts by thinking like an entrepreneur. Maya should know. Over the years, she has owned several businesses including two Curves For Women franchises, the Village Boutique dress shop in Glenville, and her current business, UpTheBiz, a marketing and advertising agency. Her husband also owns Executive Tile, LLC, a local construction company that has been involved with many local establishments including Rivers Casino, Dunkin Donuts, Panera Bread, Price Chopper and Iroquois Apartments, just to name a few.





Maya graduated with a BS in Marketing from the Laboratory Institute of Merchandising in NYC and an AAS in Fashion Merchandising and Design from Bay State College in Boston. “Entrepreneurship is not something that is taught in a classroom,” says Maya. “It’s gut, grit, burning desire, faith and passion to keep going. Pick yourself up ten times even if you’ve fallen eight. You just keep dusting yourself off and never, never, give up!”

Maya also developed the app, Where to Shop & Dine, which connects colleges and communities with safe places to shop and eat in the college’s region. She even tried out to use it on the TV show, *Shark Tank*, in Maine. Unfortunately, she made a rookie mistake of not having a backup in place in case of a poor internet connection, and it never made it past the second round and onto the show, but she has more plans for the app after the pandemic dies down.

Pre-COVID, she hosted the Schenectady Cable Entertainment News & Events (SCENE TV) cable show for six years, featuring local businesses and how they champion their community.

Most of her business activities are on hold for now, but she still occasionally speaks to organizations and podcasts about post COVID-19 recovery. During her free time, she loves to boat, fish, swim, ski and snowmobile. She collects vintage books that are 100 years or older and enjoys sitting fireside at their summer home on Sacandaga Lake.

Maya is looking forward to life after the pandemic once again including travel and getting back onto national stages with her Fundraising Secrets seminars, as well as opening the brick-and-mortar location for the COVID Wellness Clinic.

Alana is now 20 and a Dean’s List junior studying Neuroscience at the University of Colorado Boulder. She was a standout soccer player at Niskayuna High School. Ron and Alana love to cook, spending many hours in the kitchen together. As a very close family, the pandemic has proven to the McNultys that they can’t live without each other. They volunteer together throughout the community and are Disney aficionados, travelling to Disney World over 15 times, Disneyland once and Maya has also been to Euro Disney when she was studying fashion in Paris during college. “I guess what I love most about Disney is the magic,” says Maya. “The hope of ‘Believe in magic.’ If a man and a mouse can create an empire, so can I. You just have to believe!”

She attributes her success in both business and life to a positive attitude. As her mentor, Sharon Burstein, says with her trademarked “ABCs”—Always, Be, Confident. “I think with that kind of attitude, anything is possible!” says Maya.

As Maya slowly gets her strength back, she is looking forward to returning to her business ventures after the pandemic. She urges everyone that despite the fatigue the pandemic has brought to all of us, to remain vigilant. “It’s not political,” she says. “I have no preexisting health conditions, and COVID-19 nearly took my life. Please wear your mask, wash your hands, social distance and reach out to someone. Ask them if they are okay.” She also reminds us that the pandemic doesn’t mean we have to give up on our dreams. If anything, it should urge us forward even more to chase our passions.

“If you want to become your best self, don’t make excuses; you are always one step closer to progress. Follow your dreams. Just do it. Have a positive mental attitude, look for the work to be done. Get up and dust yourself off and keep going. If you don’t do it for you, do it for someone else. I’m doing it for all those who died too soon from this illness, because their stories are not told. The world needs their special gifts. I’ve chosen to live happily and in peace. I believe love wins.”

For more information about the Covid Wellness Clinic, visit them on Facebook at @covidwellnessclinic.

