



MAJA KAZAZIC



MAJA KAZAZIC

PRESS KIT

Maja has enjoyed extensive coverage around the globe. Below is a partial list of media coverage.

Television	Print
NBC	Good Housekeeping Magazine (USA & England)
CBS	Reader's Digest (USA & other countries)
Discovery Channel	LA Times
ABC	The Philadelphia Inquirer
BBC	The Baltimore Sun
Fox	Bay Area Business Magazine
SBS	Twist Magazine, New York
MBC	The O&P Edge
RTM	Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation
CTV	Women's Word Magazine
TVN	St. Petersburg Times
	Tampa Bay Times



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MAJA KAZAZIC

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Day's Consumer

Rosie: Inspiring Others With Story of Hope, Perseverance

When she turned 16, she had no idea she'd be leaving home during the height of the Bosnian war. When a rocket-propelled grenade landed near her and five friends were sitting, the course of her life changed instantly, and she was injured, and her face and arm were

From that makeshift hospital, she made the decision to leave her father, who was also injured, and her mother and brother for an opportunity to go to the United States to get the medical care she desperately needed. "It was very difficult, and I knew there would be no way of communicating with them when I got there—but I knew I had to go to survive," she says.

From Bosnia, Kazazic traveled via Croatia and Germany to reach the United States, and underwent countless surgeries on her road to recovery. "At some point, I stopped counting surgeries in the hundreds," she says.

Eventually underwent a transbital amputation. I went on for two or three days and I was on the brink of giving up," Kazazic says. "I wasn't eating, and my best friend was near for me."





MAJA KAZAZIC



Kazazic receives her first prosthesis from Mark Treasure, CP, after the grenade explosion that resulted in amputation.



Kazazic, pictured with Brian Frasure, says when she first began learning to run again at a Hanger mobility clinic, it was a controlled process of falling

She eventually moved to Maryland where she met the first of many prosthetists. The first appointment was disappointing as she learned that months of inactivity had left her knee immobile, which made fitting her for a prosthesis nearly impossible. "I was devastated, but I told him to come back the next day and I would be able to move my knee," she says. "Literally all I did for hours was move my knee and push past the pain."

When the prosthetist returned two days later, he was surprised to find that Kazazic could move her knee. It was one of many events that would show her will and determination. "From the time I lost my leg, I'd think about a conversation I had with my dad in that hospital in Bosnia right after the injury," Kazazic says. "I asked him if I would ever be able to run again, and he said, 'You are going to come back here, you are going to be walking down a street in the neighborhood and amaze everyone—and imagine when they are all looking at you, and you just start running.' That was the driving vision I kept in my mind. I wanted to come back to Bosnia, and I wanted to run."

come easily. "I had totally forgotten how to do it. Walking is something we take for granted," she says. Kazazic, who now also wears an orthosis on her right leg, walked with a limp on her prosthetic side until she started high school and joined the marching band playing drums. She says the rhythm helped her learn to walk again.

"It was the same steps, guided by a drum beat, and the uniform helped to see that my legs were moving and where my arms should be," Kazazic says. "Going back to that cadence helped me even now when I lose my balance. She soon began playing tennis and other sports, but her prosthetic was a significant pain. "That was for me. I was doing everything with pain."

As people in Kazazic's neighborhood in Cumberland, Maryland, learned her story, a group called Veterans for America launched a campaign. "The whole town volunteered time, to make me who I am," she says. "I stayed at a surgeon's house and all of my needs were met. And he was allowed to be with me."

In 1995, her parents they met. During McD... word... ste... b...

Today's Consumer

to talk to those people." The answer to that question was Hanger, Austin, Texas, and it was at a WintersGel[®] liner and a new prosthetic socket that were game changers for her.

"A week later I was in a new socket, and ten days later I was running," she says.

The skin saver and liner combine to work as a custom liner, expanding and contracting as necessary to allow her leg to breathe. "For me that is what made a huge difference," she says. "If you can put a piece of wood at the bottom—that's really what it comes down to. If your socket and liner are bad, it doesn't matter what prosthesis you have."

With a comfortable prosthetic solution in place, Kazazic returned her focus to running. She learned of a Hanger running clinic and attended. There, she met Paralympic gold medalist Brian Frasure, CP, who has a left transtibial amputation, and began learning to run again. "I was able to run my first 5K in 2009, and once I had done that, I felt like I was complete," Kazazic says.

Psychological Impact of Trauma

While things seemed to be as good for Kazazic as they'd been since that

terrible day in Bosnia, she began suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "I was afraid of wind. I was claustrophobic and agoraphobic at the same time," she says. "I was afraid to fall asleep. I was afraid to eat—it was really extreme."

Kazazic did not understand why she was having this setback now that everything was going well in her life. It wasn't until a physician explained PTSD to her that she understood that it's when things calm down and a person feels safe that PTSD can strike. "That made sense to me because I had just had one of my last surgeries; I was running; I had my own house; I had started my own company—I could relax. And then all of the [past] 15 years flooded over me," she says.

Last year, while at an appointment with Christopher Toelle, CO, at Hanger Clinic's

Sarasota, Florida, patient care facility, she discussed getting a dog to help with her PTSD.

"As I was talking to Chris, he said, 'There is this dog I want you to check out that I think would be great for you, and he gave me a link to check her out.'"

Kazazic says she knew that the dog, Rosie, was as perfect for her as Toelle thought she would be. "She's a Great Dane, which I had always wanted, and then when I went to the link to check her out, I realized that she was missing a leg, and I said to myself, 'This is my dog!' A week later, Rosie was hers."



Tennis is just one of the many sports Kazazic enjoys.



Kazazic knew from the moment she heard about Rosie that the two of them were meant to be together.

Today's Consumer

Toelle had learned about the Big Heart Dog Rescue through the Big Heart Dog Rescue. Rosie had to have her rear right leg amputated when she was three-and-a-half months old when her mother accidentally stepped on her. "Their foundation reached out to Pete DiPaolo, one of our CPOs in Fort Myers, Florida, for a solution that would allow them to avoid putting Rosie down," Toelle says. "Because she is such a big dog, losing a limb can be unrecoverable."

"We both see Chris so we go together, and whenever we go, there are children there with amputations, and they love Rosie. Seeing her makes them feel good," Kazazic says. Kazazic's PTSD symptoms have abated as well. "Rosie has made an unbelievable impact in my daily living," she says. Like Kazazic, two-year-old Rosie doesn't let her amputation slow her

protect her skin... prosthesis for longer... As for Kazazic, she... a transtibial pro... absorbing foot... wears a silicone... "This ha... Toelle so... slow h... play... th...

with... struggling... with depression... "I am a certified... don't think I can help... can," Kazazic says. "She is so... able on her prosthetic and it doe...



MAJA KAZAZIC

Woman's World

June 26, 2017
God Bless America
A great week made easy!

EMERGENCY CASH!

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WTV Life-Changing Friendship

"I truly believe we were meant to be together!"

After a terrible event that left Maja Kazazic with a prosthesis and severe panic attacks, her three-legged rescue dog taught her that love heals all wounds!

Living in war-torn Bosnia, 16-year-old Maja Kazazic was talking with friends outside when . . . BOOM . . . a bomb exploded in front of her. Maja, the sole survivor, was critically injured and rushed to a makeshift hospital. With few supplies, Maja's wounds became severely infected. Her left leg had to be amputated.

Finally, an aide worker arrived and Maja was flown to the U.S. With proper medical care, Maja recovered, and with her parents' blessing, she made America her home. She moved in with a host family, finished high school and college, then started a business.

With her state-of-the-art prosthetic leg from Hanger Prosthetics, the company that created a prosthetic tail for famed Winter the dolphin, she could play tennis, windsurf, kayak and run.

Maja was living a happy life in Palm Harbor, Florida, when, one day, her chest clenched in intense pain. "I'm having a heart attack!" Maja panicked. But after a battery of tests at the ER, doctors told her she'd actually suffered a panic attack.

Maja, they explained, had posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the bombing.

Rebuilding her life
Maja was shocked. It had been 15 years since the explosion. But the doctor explained that it wasn't unusual

for PTSD to show up later. Soon after, Maja was with friends when she felt her heart start racing again. Gripped with fear, she sank to the floor and burst into tears. "It was horrific," Maja recalls. "I felt like I was dying."

It wasn't long before she was getting attacks several times a day. They became so severe that Maja was terrified of *everything*. She couldn't eat. Couldn't sleep. And when she finally passed out from exhaustion, she'd be jolted awake by night terrors.

Desperate for relief but hesitant to take medication, Maja began practicing yoga and meditation to help keep her calm. They helped reduce the frequency and intensity of her attacks, but didn't stop them completely.

Then one day, at an appointment with Hanger Prosthetics, she mentioned her panic attacks to her technician. "I have a dog that's perfect for you," he said. Maja's friends

had been urging her to get a service dog for her PTSD. "But I just didn't see how a dog could help me," Maja recalls.

Now as she watched the video the technician sent her about the Great Dane pup, Maja thought, "Maybe I can help this dog."

Rosie was only a few weeks old when her doggie mom accidentally stepped on her back leg, breaking it. Infection set in, and part of her leg had to be amputated.



"We're proof you can do anything!" says Maja, with Rosie.

Rosie's breeder wanted to put her down, but the veterinarian couldn't do it. He'd heard about Winter's prosthetic tail and contacted the company asking if they could make a leg for Rosie. With a custom prosthetic, Rosie could walk again. Now she needed someone to love her. "This dog was made for me!" Maja blurted, her heart melting.

Rosie the rescuer!

The first time they met, Rosie showered Maja with kisses.

As she helped Rosie adjust to her leg, Maja took the happy pup on walks and played tug-of-war.

Within a week, Rosie proved she was not just an ordinary dog. Maja was at home when she felt a panic attack coming on.

She paced around in tears when Rosie leaned against her. Maja gently nudged Rosie away. "I'm sorry baby," she cried. "I know you want to help, but you have to let me be for a minute."

But Rosie wouldn't give up. She came back again and again until Maja started petting Rosie. And as she stroked her, Maja

could feel her tension release. "You're such a good puppy," she said, hugging Rosie.

From then on, whenever she felt a panic attack coming on, Maja would lie down with Rosie, who'd snuggle in close.

"Listening to the rhythm of her heartbeat . . . she always calmed me," Maja marvels.

Maja even had Rosie registered as a service dog.

With training, Rosie learned how to recognize Maja's night terrors and tap her nose on Maja's chest to wake her up.

And with Maja's love—and a series of prosthetics as she grew—Rosie is now an active, happy 104-pound dog.

She loves kayaking with Maja, playing ball and racing around agility courses. And as for Maja? She still gets occasional anxiety, but with Rosie by her side, she knows she can get through it.

"I thought I was rescuing Rosie, but she rescued me, too," Maja beams. "She changed my life. I truly believe we were meant to be together."

—Rachel Cosma

"Keep your face always toward the sunshine and shadows will fall behind you."
WALT WHITMAN



How pets help ease anxiety!

Calming jitters! Playing with your pet for just 15 minutes is study-proven to induce calm—in fact, people who did just that before a medical procedure cut their anxiety by 37% in one study!

Creating a comforting routine! Research shows simply having a regular routine of walks, feeding and playtime helps you—and your pet—feel more balanced and calm!

Staying healthier! Just spending 20 minutes stroking Fido or Fluffy can lower your blood pressure by 10%, which cuts your risk of heart attack and stroke, studies show!

Our furry best friends can help us deal with life's stresses—like Rosie did for Maja—by:

Photo: Bob Thompson



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LIFE WELL SHARED

Reader's Digest

OCTOBER 2009

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The mutt was stubborn, angry, and a little nuts. One family loved him anyway.

118 Unlikely pair: Maja Kazazic draws inspiration from a disabled dolphin.

MAJA'S DREAM

Before taking the plunge with Winter, "I got goose bumps," Kazazic says. "It was very scary because even though dolphins look cute, they're still wild animals."

After losing her leg in a brutal war, Maja Kazazic thought she'd never walk without pain again. Then she saw the dolphin with an artificial tail, and her life changed once more.

BY JENNIFER RAWLINGS PHOTOGRAPHED BY RON HAVIV

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OCTOBER 2009 \$7.99

nearwater, Florida, Maja Kazazic visited the Clearwater Marine Aquarium. For two years, she had a bottlenose dolphin named Winter. From a distance, the dolphin looked like any other. Still, as Kazazic prepared to take the plunge, a little panic crept into her excitement.

The young woman eased herself into the pool. Despite her fear, she felt strong wearing her new leg. She was ready to make good on a pledge from long ago. In second grade in Mostar, Yugoslavia (now part of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Kazazic lost her five-year-old cousin, Jasmina, to leukemia. After Jasmina's death, Kazazic vowed she would honor the little girl by swimming with a dolphin, an animal that both girls adored. "Jasmina never got the chance [to do it]," says Kazazic, 32. "So I decided that someday I'd do it for her."

In high school, sports—soccer, basketball, tennis—were Kazazic's passions. She planned to become a professional athlete. Then in 1993,



As a girl, Kazazic reveled in sports and nature. Right: She visited the site of the explosion in Mostar, Bosnia, 15 years after a Croatian mortar shell maimed her.

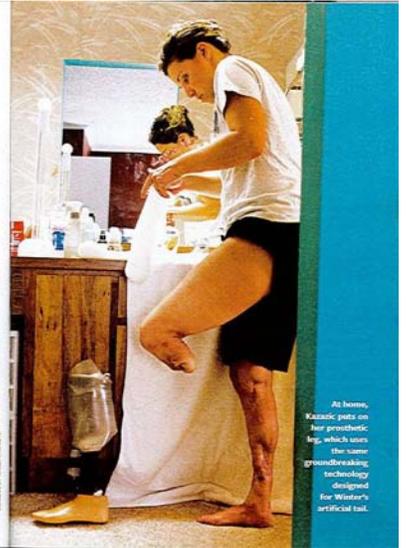
For weeks, her parents kept vigil by her bed. British activist Sally Becker, who evacuated many children during the war, arranged to bring Kazazic to the United States for treatment. Kazazic spent nearly two years in a hospital in Cumberland, Maryland, watching doctors work on her leg. "I injured my mother a lot for him a brother. I'd loved her. There was there was right leg a intensely managed school. At moved in low refuge. Her par

to unwind, she'd watch the dolphins play at Clearwater Marine Aquarium, near her home in Palm Harbor. A young dolphin, Winter, who had lost her tail in a crab trap, caught Kazazic's eye. "She swims more like a shrimp than a dolphin. I identified with her." After one doctor's visit, Kazazic showed up at the aquarium feeling morose. Trainers were fitting Winter with a high-tech tail—a flexible steel joint covered in silicone plastic, with a gel lining designed to protect a dolphin's delicate skin. When they were done, Winter streaked off through the water. "Kazazic was mesmerized. If she can do this, there's no way I can't," she thought. She approached the trainers, who put her in touch with the inventors, Hanger Prosthetics & Orthotics in Bethesda, Maryland. Within ten days, she had a new leg. With its soft liner and built-in microprocessor that adjusts the fit for different activities and terrains, "for the first time in almost 16 years, I was pain-free."

Her mother wept at Kazazic's triumph. "When Maja says she is going to do something, she always does it."

Eight months later, Kazazic was ready to keep the promise she had made in honor of Jasmina. Her mother, Azra, and father, Mugdim, accompanied her to the aquarium. "After being in a war zone, this should be a piece of cake," Kazazic said as she lowered herself into the tank. She held out a hand to Winter, who approached cautiously, then glided away. After a few minutes, the dolphin let Kazazic stroke her back. Finally, Winter nuzzled up to her shoulder. Then the two embarked on an hour-long swim around the pool. Her mother began to cry. "When Maja says she is going to do something, she always does it," she said. When Kazazic climbed out, her parents embraced her. She would have shouted with joy had she not been aware of dolphin sensitivity to noise. Instead she quietly said, "I feel like I owed somebody something, and now I've paid my debt." Out in the parking lot, she got into her car and whooped till she was hoarse.

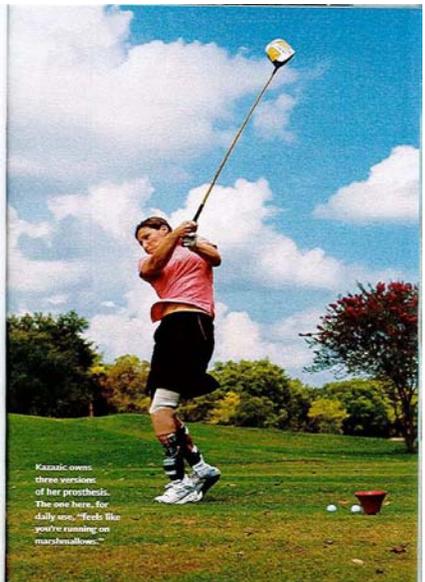
Kazazic owns three prosthetic legs. The one here, for daily use, "feels like you're running on your own toes."



At home, Kazazic puts on her prosthetic leg, which uses the same groundbreaking technology designed for Winter's artificial tail.

Without a tail, Winter "swam more like a shrimp than a dolphin. I identified with her."

"There are the moments I live for," says Kazazic. "I am aware of everything. I can see my parents sitting there. I can still feel my little cousin's hair on my cheek."



Kazazic owns three prosthetic legs. The one here, for daily use, "feels like you're running on your own toes."



MAJA KAZAZIC

Good Housekeeping

Saved Her Life

continued from page 155

Free medical care at what was then Memorial Center in Cumberland, MD. She underwent around 150 surgeries — “I stopped counting at 100,” says Maja — and thousands of hours of therapy to help her left leg stump to heal, save her right leg, and repair her damaged left hand and

arm. For two years, she was cared for by medical workers and dozens of nurses from the town. Maja had no word of her parents or brother for six months. Later she learned that her father, along with about 20 other injured patients, had been taken to a hospital in Montar to begin trying to get to the U.S. It took much wrangling and paperwork, but finally, they received political asylum and, two years after Maja had arrived, they all settled in Cumberland. The transition was difficult: Refugees who’d been driven from their homeland by war, they had suffered losses and now had to find jobs and housing and learn a new language and culture. Yet they were grateful to be

in the U.S., says Sally, still sounding amazed. “She spoke perfect English, and she looked healthy and beautiful. I was just thrilled! I never knew what had become of her.”

“I’m 33, the same age as Sally when she rescued me, and I want to help the world in the way she did”

captured by the Serbs and sentenced to 30 days in prison. Ironically, it was that experience that eventually brought Maja and Sally together again. After her release, Sally was watching newscasts about her capture when suddenly she was astounded to see a familiar face,

Adriatic Sea—to raise money for prostheses for Bosnians who need them. “I’m now 33, the age Sally was when she rescued me, and I want to help the world the way she did,” says Maja.

Not that she isn’t already doing her part. Her friends in Palm Harbor, FL, where she moved after college, call her “Bosnian Unlimited, Inc.,” for her work with refugees in the Tampa Bay area—helping those from her homeland find jobs and become U.S. citizens. Maja herself owns Vela Business Solutions, a company that develops websites—and she is in demand as a speaker, sharing her life story as a way to help others achieve their dreams.

But now it is Maja who holds her attention. The two will spend a week together in Palm Harbor, and they say they can’t imagine ever being out of touch again. “Maja keeps saying she has to thank me for what I did. But what else was there to do? It would have been a tragic loss for the world if she had not survived,” says Sally.

Elsewhere, there are new wars and natural disasters and injured children. But this afternoon, a courageous woman and the child she rescued, now a generous-hearted young woman herself, allow us to believe that everything can be made right in the world. ■

Sally still lives in England and has remained committed to humanitarian projects. When the war ended in Kosovo, she established trauma relief centers for women and children, and in 2006 she traveled to the Midwest to help victims of the Lebanon/Israel conflict. She is involved as a Goodwill Ambassador to Children of Peace, a multifaceted charity dedicated to building friendship, trust, and reconciliation between Israeli and Palestinian children. And she devotes more of her time to her original calling—her painting—and to daughter Billie-Jo, “the love of my life,” she says.



“That’s the only picture I now have of me with two legs,” says Maja, who, before the war, enjoyed fishing at a river in her native Bosnia. Today, thanks to a special prosthesis, she is just as active, running and playing tennis and golf.

back and forth, back and forth. The pain was unbearable. I felt it in every nerve of my body.”

Later, when dead flesh was carved away from the wound, she clenched a blue teddy bear in her teeth to help her endure the agony. Miraculously, she survived the barbaric procedure. But another kind of miracle was needed to save her life.

The stench of death was overwhelming,” says Sally, describing the conditions in which she found Maja at the makeshift hospital. “The floor was slippery with blood, drip lines dangled from hat stands, and patients waited on endless lines.”

Sally, an artist at the time, was living in the south of England, where she was following the plight of civilians caught in the war. Wanting to help, she went to Bosnia and, entirely on her own, not working with any group, brought food, water, and medical assistance to the elderly Jewish community in West Mostar. The Croats didn’t allow foreign aid workers into the city at that time, but because Sally was Jewish, she was seen as neutral.

She had been providing aid for three months when a U.N. representative asked her to help get permission for the evacuation of a lone medically needy child out of East Mostar, the besieged side of the city. The Croats gave her the OK to evacuate all wounded children and mothers, and even loaning her an ambulance and putting a cease-fire in place. She had less than 24 hours to carry out the rescue, after that, shelling would resume. Nonetheless, Sally’s ambulance was shot at repeatedly by snipers.

Finally, shaken but alive, she arrived at the hospital. “Maja was lying on a stretcher in the basement,” says Sally. “But so sick as she was, she radiated strength. She smiled even in her pain.”

It had been weeks since Maja had been injured, and she

was near death. By then, her father was also a patient at the hospital, having sustained head and chest injuries in a grenade explosion. Her mother spent her days darting between the two, while also trying to care for Maja’s younger brother at home.

Sally was to evacuate Maja as well as four other wounded children and their mothers, but unexpectedly, a tactical maneuver by the U.N. threatened to derail her mission. The U.N. had brought a humanitarian-aid convoy into

East Mostar three days later. Sally wanted its mission as she was there as a means to help. When the U.N. group followed drive to a were quite mobile he

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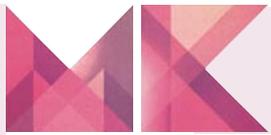
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“How do you thank someone who saved your life?”

Seventeen years ago, a rescue worker brought a desperately wounded child out of war-torn Bosnia. Now, the two meet again. By **Ronnie Polaneczek**



Photographs by Jensen Larson



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PRESS KIT



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MAJAZIC@BARM.COM

These are difficult times for many in our country. The economy is down, foreclosures are high and jobless rates are rising. Be it a recession or a depression, it can be downright depressing...depending on your perspective.

improved process

Perspective is something that Maja Kazazic (pronounced My-ya Ka-za-zitch) uses to drive the success of her business, Vela Business Solutions. The company's mission involves helping businesses identify sources of waste or inefficiency while suggesting affordable solutions eliminating wasted time while increasing productivity. "Ultimately, our aim is to increase client profitability," she says. "In this economy, it is critical that a company's processes and workforce both function at the most efficient level they possibly can."

Chief among the services that Vela Business Solutions provides are two. One is the Systems and Workforce Analysis (SWA), which includes ROI projections. "Our comprehensive SWA has several components," Maja says. "First, we'll interview the workforce. We'll even purchase your product or engage your service, putting ourselves in your employees' and customers' shoes. Next is an in-depth review of your workflow processes and systems, which shows how they currently advance, or hinder, your business goals. The result is a customized recommendation on how to maximize your organizational efficiency and a return on investment projection to support that recommendation."

The second service revolves around custom systems development and implementation. "If a client wants to pursue our recommendations, Vela provides full support for development and implementation of our proposed solution including everything from new workflows to employee training," says Kazazic. "Our products are famous for ease of use and lack of need to train new employees. This has provided major cost savings for our clients."

In distinguishing itself from the competition, the two-year-old Palm Harbor company offers clients some additional features and benefits. First, the company takes justifiable pride in pointing out that every Vela solution is custom built. "Every business is unique, and so are many of their challenges," she says. "Our competitors offer an application, product or system that they have already developed. They try to force fit their clients' solutions into this generic product while charging ongoing licensing fees and update costs. Clients end up with a solution that may not fit their specific situation, and ongoing overhead costs that represent a liability to their organizations. We provide custom web-based solutions tailored to fit each individual client exactly."

"Life after Vela is organized and efficient. Our employees are happier, and our customers have commented on the positive changes we've made."
—Michael Lington

"How rare to find a company that keeps their promises, and delivers more than expected. Vela has become a trusted partner!"
—Rick Nichols



intentional approach

Another way in which Vela is unique is its intentional approach to turning solutions into client assets, rather than liabilities. Once the company designs and builds a custom solution, it belongs to the client, not Vela. Maja says, "There is a one-time development and implementation cost, and we turn the final product over to the client for ongoing enhancement and development that keeps pace with their organization. Since we provide web-based applications, they never become obsolete and changes to the systems are easily made." She points out that Vela's solutions integrate and communicate easily with existing client systems, regardless of how old or new they may be.

More than any other single thing, what truly makes Vela and Maja Kazazic unique, comes back to that issue of perspective. Perspective is all about how a person's life experiences help form their view of the world. In this case, if you attach a business filter to that view, you can understand how that person's perspective gets applied to business matters. Under Maja's leadership, and working from her personal perspective, Vela Business Solutions is a company driven to be the best in its niche, possessing a gritty determination to succeed regardless of the less-than-perfect circumstances in the current business climate. It is a company built to overcome obstacles.

This stems directly from Maja's life experience. Born in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, she was 16 years old in 1993 when the war that ripped her country apart became more real for her than ever before. She suffered severe injuries, including the loss of her left leg. Separated from her family and left clinging to her only possession—a t-shirt—she was airlifted first into Croatia, then Germany, and finally into the United States for treatment and care. Confined to her hospital bed for the next year, and undergoing hundreds of surgical and medical procedures, the young woman watched TV to pass the time between procedures, eventually becoming fluent in English.

While these events form a wave of tragedy that might overwhelm the most mature adult, not to mention the sometimes fragile self-esteem of an attractive teenage girl, the young Maja gritted her teeth and set about rebuilding her life. Her initial goal was to be reunited with her family, and after two years of laboring through paperwork and bureaucracy, she was reunited with her father, mother and brother in Maryland in 1995. "It was such a long process to get them to the United States," she recalls. "The week before they came, I actually took a week off school. I was so nervous and excited. The drive to the airport took only three hours, but it seemed like forever. I saw all three come off the plane at the same time, and couldn't stop smiling. I was amazed that my little fourteen-year-old brother had grown so much and his voice had gotten so deep in the two years we'd been apart! I left when he was a boy, and he came off that plane as a young man. Of course, finally hugging and being hugged by my parents was beyond words. Somehow, we had all come through this terrible time. We took separate paths to be sure, but we ended up together and became a stronger family because of it."

Her next undertaking was in 1995 when she formed her own company, Eclipse Web Design, focusing on building websites for the medical community. Then came college, putting herself through Saint Francis University. While in college, Maja also had the opportunity to become part of the Center of Excellence for Remote and Medically Under-Served Areas (CERMUSA) team. CERMUSA was one of the first telemedicine and tele-education labs in the country, created through a partnership between the U.S. Navy and the federal government. Kazazic was one of five team members selected to build the lab from the ground up.

Finally, in 2000, with her degree in hand and an incredibly diverse technological skill set for someone so young, Maja set off to officially start her corporate career, signing on with UCL, a large insurance broker. Maja had been hired to design their website. It started a lifelong fascination with using technology to improve business results. "In addition to maintaining their website, I ended up managing the information technology for over 70 sales and marketing people," she recalls.

She learned that, while everyone wants technology, being responsible for developing and delivering it can be stressful. "Every large sale seemed to include a commitment to go outside our normal processes and provide a unique deliverable, everything from a customized enrollment site to a quick turnaround on newly filed products," says Maja. "Since we eventually served over 400 clients nationwide, these deliverables became quite a challenge!"

She soon found herself face-to-face with the modern management challenge: getting it all done and still having a life. "That position quickly became unmanageable, and I often found myself working 18 hours a day, 7 days a week," she says. "To solve the problem, she reverted to her knack for finding ways to overcome obstacles. She states, "Almost out of self-defense, and to reduce the time I needed to devote to routine technology support, I began suggesting—and then developing—business systems for several departments to automate and streamline their standard processes and make them run more efficiently."

Thus was laid the groundwork for Vela Business Solutions. "We just turned the corner on our second year in March," she says. "I am still thrilled that I am no longer an employee but am truly an entrepreneur in control of my own future. I am amazed at how much investment Vela has required, not only in money, but in time and personal commitment. I now work 7 days a week, and love every minute."

Along the way, she met long-time Tampa Bay entrepreneur and noted philanthropist, Ray Murray. Impressed with Maja's drive and vision for Vela, he became her mentor. "I am privileged to have Ray Murray as my mentor," she readily acknowledges. "People that know Ray will appreciate how fortunate I am. He has opened doors and exposed me to the way he lives his life as a philanthropist. Ray's personal story is amazing and provides a true inspiration for me. As a mentor, Ray concentrates on four areas: mental, physical, spiritual and financial. He makes sure that I am growing in a balanced way, paying attention to all four of these areas."

Part of her growth in life stems from her commitment to helping others make necessary transitions in life. She is actively involved with several charities and organizations. "Vela gives money to different organizations once a month, such as WEDU, PBS or ASPCA," she says proudly. "Additionally, once a year we choose a local non-profit organization and provide a project pro bono, whether it's a new website design or business process reengineering consultation."

She is also on the board of, and works as a counselor at, Camp No Limits, a camp for amputee children that allows them to play and interact with other amputees of their own age. Maja is a member of the Challenged Athletes Foundation and just completed the Gasparilla 5K run in Tampa to support their mission. Lastly, she is an Amputee Certified Peer Counselor and as such, she visits new amputees to help with their transition into amputee life. As part of this effort, she has built a new website called AmputeeAthletics.com, a website for amputees by amputees.

There is one more activity she's involved in that has helped her form a unique relationship with people who have lost a key body part. "Once per week I volunteer at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium," she says. "I was a frequent visitor when their star dolphin Winter was brought in. Winter lost her tail and the Aquarium has been working with Hanger Orthotics and Prosthetics to create a new tail for her. I began volunteering last year, and I feel lucky to watch Winter grow and to contribute my experience as an amputee to the Aquarium. Winter's connection also led to Hanger O&P becoming my prosthetist of choice, enabling me to have a great quality life and enhancing my love of athletics."

To say Maja enjoys sports is a little like saying Winter the dolphin enjoys swimming. The young woman immerses herself in activities of all kinds. "When I need to stop the ball rolling, I play 18 holes of golf by myself," she says. "The fresh air, the beauty of the surroundings helps me focus on what I need to do, to regroup. When I need to let frustration out, I play tennis. I burn a lot of energy, get those endorphins going and I always feel refreshed afterwards." Like Winter, Maja is drawn to the sea. "I love the water and always have since my childhood vacations on the Adriatic. I've always wanted to buy a boat and spend time on the water, and I'm working to get there. In the interim, I appease my love of the water with windsurfing and kayaking whenever I have the time."

Time. It's a commodity that, in her life and in her work for her clients, Maja has learned not to waste. She believes in making every second count. "I believe that the universe strives for balance: things happen for a reason, and when I am presented with a problem, I look for the opportunity that the problem may present," she says, confidently. "This is really how my clients benefit from my work with them; I know there is a solution to every problem, and I am confident that I can find and implement that solution."

Having faced mortality at such a young age, Maja Kazazic has developed an appreciation for the small things that most people take for granted. "This has allowed me to enjoy life much more than I would have if I had not literally been through a war and seen how tenuous life can be." You see? Success in life, as in business, is all a matter of perspective.





MAJA KAZAZIC

PRESS KIT

Maja has been featured on numerous television shows, programs and news. Click on the video play button to watch samples of some of the programs on YouTube.



Discovery Channel - TV Series - (Part 1) - (6 min)



Fox - Maja Helps Rescue Children ISIS Victims - (2 min)



NBC - Daytime TV Show - (6 min)



1 Hour Special on "Happiness" - (15 min)



About Maja - Various Clips - (5 min)



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