

A Night of Heroes

by John Register



Mona Patel was selected as a CNN Heroes top 10 finalist from thousands of nominations around the world

On December 17, 2017, Mona Patel walked across the red carpet in a beautiful, fuchsia halter neck, satin and lace gown with her sparkly prosthetic leg showing just below the high-low hemline. She had arrived with nine other CNN Heroes for a prestigious, star-studded evening hosted by Anderson Cooper and Kelly Ripa at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

Mona, who is the founder and executive director of the San Antonio Amputee Foundation (SAAF), was selected as a CNN Heroes top 10 finalist from thousands of nominations of amazing “do good” organizations around the world.

I caught up with Mona about her night, her lessons learned, and what’s next for the SAAF.

John: Mona, how was this amazing experience for you?

Mona: It was the honor of a lifetime! To be on a platform with these amazing heroes who demonstrate what an ordinary person can do to help a community reach their potential that they never thought they could reach, simply incredible!

John: Why were you nominated?

Mona: Dr. Karwin McCain is a wonderful colleague and friend, who has been following my work for the past decade. He sees the positive outcomes in his amputee patients who we help. Dr. McCain wanted the world to know all the good that we’re doing.

John: Take us behind the scenes. I know Anderson Cooper and Kelly Ripa were the co-hosts, but who did you meet that took your breath away?

Mona: Diane Lane took my breath away, timeless beauty! And Sterling Brown! They both came up to me and thanked me for my work. It was exciting to be approached by such high-profile figures and have them actually know about you!

I was captivated by sweet Brooklynn Prince, the little actress from *The Florida Project*. Her dad said, “My daughter’s been waiting to meet you; can you come over and meet her?” I was impressed by Brooklyn’s maturity and emotion for SAAF. She thanked me for the work that I did and told me that she was so proud of me! The sweetest ever!

These three really touched my heart.



Mona Patel and Brooklynn Prince of *The Florida Project*

John: I know that shows like this are on a strict schedule. Was there anything you wish could have been done differently?

Mona: The night was nearly perfect! I do wish we didn’t have time constraints during our acceptance remarks. It was very important to me to say the name of my organization aloud. The San Antonio Amputee Foundation was a dream that came to fruition and I wanted to be able to say it to the world with pride and joy! I also wish I had more time to thank a few more people, like my parents, my boyfriend, George, and Dr. McCain. The realities of live television and tight time constraints.

John: Despite not being able to get your organization name from your lips, SAAF had a great night?

Mona: Absolutely! Those who know me, know how much I’m on my phone! My phone has never blown up like it did that night! Hundreds of

notifications from CrowdRise donations from the second that the show aired. Subaru matched the donations up to \$50,000 for each of the Heroes. SAAF raised a little over \$100,000 just from that night – so exciting and so very grateful!

John: How are you thinking about using these funds? I know you wanted to start a more robust youth program.

Mona: Yes, absolutely! A youth program will be worked on this year. My vision is to find amputee youths to mentor to become ambassadors for SAAF. I’m hoping for future SAAF sustainability too! We may also use some of the money to host a women’s retreat. Inevitably, limb loss is loaded with emotional adjustments on many levels – self-esteem, self-confidence, body image, etc. The discussions at the Women’s Roundtable session at the Amputee Coalition Conference each year motivates me to do something special to empower women with limb loss. I think many women would benefit from a weekend retreat with other like-minded women wanting to feel validated and gain a new healthy perspective of who they still are despite limb loss.

John: If other amputees want to get involved with building their own foundations in their communities, what advice would you give them?

Mona: First, I would tell them how proud I am of them for looking beyond themselves and wanting to help others! I would advise them to be patient and persistent. Begin by finding a free meeting space, create a flyer, and hit the pavement to start networking. Your stories are powerful and full of grit and resilience. Use your stories to help people understand your mission to help others who are in the same frightened, perhaps dark, place you once were. Allow your passion to drive you and don’t give up! I started with five or six support group members – now, 20 years later, we proudly welcome 50-60 amputees each meeting! And I’m only an email away to help guide you!



More Information

CNN Heroes
cnn.com/specials/cnn-heroes

San Antonio Amputee Foundation
saamputeefoundation.org

Editor’s note: The January/February 2018 issue of *InMotion* featured an article titled “The Paralympic Games: Paving a Path for Athletes With Disabilities,” written by John Register. The byline incorrectly attributed the article to another writer. We regret and apologize for the error.