

# S1:E5 - shifting-gears-and-growing-through-adversity-jennife...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, sports, life, athlete, love, wheelchair, triathlon, years, paralympics, learn, story, hospital, fun, home, training, husband, women, drive, goal, skills

## SPEAKERS

Tricia Downing, Jennifer Malcolm

- J** Jennifer Malcolm 00:10  
Welcome to the Jennasis Speaks podcast The Transformative Power of Women's Stories, a platform that empowers women storytelling to promote collective vulnerability, acceptance and healing. I am your host, Jennifer Malcolm, self made entrepreneur, women advocate and life balance expert. Hey, welcome back everyone. This is Jennifer Malcolm, founder and president of Jennasis and Associates. Here's our podcast Jennasis Speaks: The Transformative Power of Women Stories, where every woman has a story, and every story matters. Today with me is Tricia Downing, who I actually met. And also a year ago, Tricia Downing went from being a competitive cyclist to a paraplegic, requiring a wheelchair for mobility. Her life was forever changed. But Tricia's competitive spirit and zest for life continued on. In addition to her athletic accolades, she is a community leader, disability advocate, and author. So welcome to the show.
- T** Tricia Downing 01:12  
Thank you. Thanks for having me.
- J** Jennifer Malcolm 01:14  
You're most welcome. So like I said, you and I met in Georgia know West Virginia, West

Virginia, Virginia, at a an event, an authentic event. And you had the opportunity to share your story a little bit there with that group. And your story just resonated and your smile and your warmth. Your eagerness to learn and to be involved and vulnerable in that space, you know, really resonated with me, and therefore, that's why I reached out to see if you'd be willing to share your story here.

T Tricia Downing 01:48  
Excellent.

J Jennifer Malcolm 01:49  
Awesome. All right. So tell us a little bit about who you are, and some of the changes of life over the last 15 2020 years.

T Tricia Downing 02:02  
Okay, that's a broad question. But usually, you know, like, throughout my entire life, when people have asked me that question, I usually tell people, first and foremost, I'm an athlete, because that's what I, that's where my biggest passion lies. And that's what really defines you know, who I am and what I do and how my personality has developed. And so I am a 2016 Paralympian. So I went to the Paralympics in Rio, and I am currently on the US National Shooting team. And I was training for Tokyo this year. And now I'll be training for Tokyo next year. And then Aside from that, I do a lot of public speaking. And my favorite is writing. Although right now I'm just finishing up a novel. And I'm in those stages, that is really not my favorite part. So it's hard to say that I love writing when it comes to being in the editing stage right now. But I actually really do love doing it. And it's a lot of fun.

J Jennifer Malcolm 03:07  
Awesome, and I can't wait till we get a little bit more into your work and your writing. Tell us about a day that really changed your life forever.

T Tricia Downing 03:18  
Well, I mean, I think there's a specific day that you're talking about. I was a competitive cyclist in 2000 and was competitive on the local level. And I had just finished doing a bunch of races around the country and was back in Colorado on a leisurely ride with a friend. And I took him to look out mountain in Golden Colorado, which is a really great climb. It's beautiful. It's a you know, you can see the great scenery of Colorado. And when

we were on our way home, we were crossing a side street and there was a car that was coming in the opposite direction that we were going and turned also on to that same side street and didn't see that we were there. And the my friend who I was with he actually got around the car, he was in front of me. But I didn't have time to make that move. And so I hit the car head on and flipped off my bike and landed on my back on the windshield of the car and then fell to the ground. And I knew immediately that something was wrong. But you know, it took of course going to the emergency room and having you know x rays, MRI CT scan to find out that I had fractured my back and it had impacted my spinal cord. So I suffered a spinal cord injury at chest level and and now paralyzed from the chest down. So that was nearly 20 years ago. It was in September of 2000. So it's you know, it's It was so weird to think like I mean, that that week that I was in the hospital. I was wondering when I was ever going to be able to, you know, sit up or be out of pain or, you know, any of those things. And here we are 20 years later, and I'm, you know, looking back on it, like, Wow, I can't believe how much has happened and how much is, you know, really gotten back to normal to,

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Jennifer Malcolm 05:16

And I remember part of your story. And I'm gonna, I'm gonna do broad detail because it's going to be a nod memory from when I first heard you speak was during that ride that day that you guys stopped at a restaurant and there's something about the news, or

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Tricia Downing 05:32

Oh, about it. Yeah, it was during the Olympics. And so we, there was a cycling race on TV at the bar, where we stopped to fill up our water bottles. And, you know, that was my goal was to go to, you know, well, that was my very big goal, my stretch goal, to go to the Olympics as a cyclist, but I would have settled for being a professional cyclist. Because that way at the time was just like, you know, I was eating, breathing, sleeping, you know, everything, thinking about cycling. And so, you know, that really, that accident really changed the course of my life in many ways. Not only, you know, personally, but professionally, in my sport. I mean, everything kind of was turned upside down at that time.

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Jennifer Malcolm 06:19

So as your a week in the hospital, you know, getting your tests, you know, hearing some of the initial findings. What were you dealing with emotionally? What was it like numb and going in, in one year? And all the other was an anger? Was it grief? Like, how are you processing? And also, what type of support family friends did you have during that time?

T

Tricia Downing 06:43

Yeah, so I mean, really, when I was in the hospital, when I was in the ICU, the big thing was the pain, I mean, it was, I cannot even begin to express to you the pain of getting hit by a car and flying through the air and landing on the ground. So really, it was like really trying to keep my pain under control. And then, with the pain meds that I was on, I was having a lot of hallucinations. And those were frightening. So it was really hard and scary for me to be alone. The funny side of this story, as we look back, was that I had kind of two boyfriends at the time. So you know, everybody wants to rush to the hospital and be there. So I was sort of in the middle of a Oh, wait for and one way for him to kind of situation. And so that was a little bit uncomfortable. But I let my you know, three older brothers deal with that situation. And so and you know, in the beginning, it was really like pain control. And then when I got to rehab, then it was how do i do things like maneuver, like just get out of the chair and be able to transfer into the bed or transfer onto the couch and then get off again, because there was, there was one time in my room, it was after I had been working on my transfers with my physical therapist, I was in my room, and I transferred onto my couch. And it was it was low, and it was squishy, and I couldn't get back off again. And there was no call light next to my couch, it was next to the bed. So and my door was shut. And it was like these big, heavy doors, you know, very private rooms, well insulated. So like, there was nothing I could do. I mean, I was completely at a loss. And, you know, that was one of those pivotal moments where you break down and you're like, I am completely out of control of my life. Because I can't even get off this couch. And I can't get somebody in here. And you know, so it just made me feel like, you know, what happens if I'm really helpless when I go home and I can't do the things that you know, just basic things, you know, you know, be able to be able to get off the couch, what happens when I'm at home and nobody's around? And I can't get off the couch. That's a problem. So yeah, so those were the things that when I you know, when I was in the hospital and rehab and then was really not until I got home where everything really hit like, this is a very, very different life.

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Jennifer Malcolm 09:09

So like your life went upside down in a split second and what you knew and how to navigate and who you were, personally professionally was

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Tricia Downing 09:20

Yeah just all changed all change. So I am very fortunate. I did have a very strong support, you know, a support network. I have four brothers actually. One of them was at college, but the other three were here in town. My mom was amazing. She she was she and she and my stepdad were moving to the mountains because they had just retired and so they

were going to be living about two and a half hours away. So she moved into the apartments at the hospital, to be able to be right there with me and take care of me. And I had you know, my friends were there day in day out I had a couple friends who visited almost every single day. So That's really what helped me get through the situation.



Jennifer Malcolm 10:04

Because you're not only dealing with a physical change, you're dealing with emotions, you're dealing with your your mind and mental mental health and all of those aspects through the grieving process their anger through acceptance through, you know, empowerment all those things. And I can't imagine going through that alone can't imagine going through that a, but then not having a support system. So between your your love triangle boyfriend's All right. Which add like, under some meds, just go deal with it brothers, Lee and your friends. We know that that had to be a huge, at least calming ness or normalcy and encouragement to you. Yeah, one of the what are the next few months look like for you as you're transitioning, rehab learning? Well, I



Tricia Downing 11:01

Well, I had just started a new job at the end of August. So I worked that job, I started at a high school, and I was coordinating internships for high school students. So I started about three weeks before the accident. So you know, right there, that was just kind of a weird situation, because that, you know, I'm just starting this new job. And all of a sudden, you know, the new girl doesn't come back to school. And so I wanted to go back to work as quickly as I could, but I was in the hospital for four months. And so it was already the beginning of the second semester, by the time I got out of the school. And my doctor said, you know, you really need to go home and just kind of see how life is before you go back. And so I ended up taking the rest of the school year off, I you know, I got a condominium, I couldn't go back to the house that I was living in because it was not accessible. So my, you know, family helped me find an accessible condo, and I moved in there and just kind of did day to day life. For me, I actually looked a lot like what our lives look like in COVID, you know, like, I was at home, I was just trying to, you know, figure out what this kind of new normal situation was going to be. And I went to California for a little while to participate in at some spinal cord injury research, you know, just to see if there was an opportunity that I was ever going to walk again. And then I ended up going back to the school in September and just kind of picking up where I left off.



12:40

That's awesome.



12:42

During the condo, are you living alone or your year, give people living there with you? How are you facilitating that transition



Tricia Downing 12:49

No, I was going to live alone. And so, you know, I had to make sure that my skills were good. And that was one of the things that the rehab hospital, they, they don't discharge you until you know how to do those things. So you're not stuck on the couch, when you're at home or you're not stuck on the shower chair, you know, in the shower. So, you know, I had learned my skills well enough, but there was definitely a lot of, you know, honing, I you know, learning how to get into the car and then pull my wheelchair into the car with me and drive with my hands. You know, there were a lot of skills that I needed to really perfect and, you know, for the longest time you driving was like, okay, you, you know, push the handle down to go forward and you push the handle forward to stop. And, you know, like, I had to think of that I couldn't turn the music on I couldn't eat while I drove like all those things that I was, you know, accustomed to do. I like having a hamburger on one hand in one hand and the steering wheel and the other and driving a stick shift all at the same time. But you know, you have to you have to relearn all of that. And it takes time.



Jennifer Malcolm 13:58

Right? I get that to a point because my youngest is 15 she just got her temps and everything is you know, so minute like you, you look over your shoulder, the car goes that way and just you know it's muscle memory that as a new driver period, let alone haven't yet knew that all those things together. And now you're like, Alright, I'm gonna drive with my hands now. And so I do I do get the shoot my last driver, but gone through that whole new experience of muscle memory and learning things and zero distraction. Don't talk no radio. Yeah, other things so that you can learn. So how is your emotion during this time, your mental health as you're really focusing on fine tuning skills and learning how to live alone, going through rehab learning how to drive a car again, but where's your emotionality through that, like, are you?



Tricia Downing 14:53

Well, I mean, I think a lot of people can probably relate to it right now because, again,

going back to what we've been through with coming It like, you know, you can think of all these things that you want to do, you know, like, okay, I want to go get my hair done, I want to go, you know, stop by this place and buy that, and then I need to go to the grocery store and pick up a bunch of groceries and, you know, like, in in the COVID universe, you have to plan, you have to think ahead, some things you can't do, because either they're not open or they're not safe yet, you know, that kind of thing. And so, it was a lot like that, it was like, Okay, I have enough energy to get in and out of the car two times today, do I want to spend those two times on the grocery store, the dry cleaner, the gas station, the because, you know, keep in mind like I I got a Subaru after I got out of the hospital. So it wasn't like I was just rolling up into the ramp of a van, I was actually physically taking my wheelchair apart every time throwing the wheels in the backseat pulling the body of the wheelchair and sitting next to me in the passenger side. And it took not only strength, but it took coordination, it took time and all of these things, and I and I wasn't good at it. And so I had to, you know, learn and you learn with practice. But, you know, like two times going out in a day, it was like enough to just like, have me flat on my back at night exhausted. So it really took time to just, you know, plan my life out. And I realized that I did have to, you know, plan ahead of time and I had to think about, you know, what needed to be done and what just you know what I just wanted to be done. And I found every drive thru from the dry the dry cleaners through the liquor store. So that you know, that would like be an extra air and a bonus air and I could you you know, on a day without having to take my chair out of the car. No, that takes purpose and planning. It absolutely does. Yes, little things

J

Jennifer Malcolm 16:51

do you feel like you having So you started this podcasting? I'm an athlete first, do you feel like those skills as an athlete really helped on the foundation piece of learning new skills, the drive, the discipline, the tenacity that goes with being, you know, a professional athlete or on the way to, you know, the Olympics hopeful? Do you feel like that helped through the process?

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Tricia Downing 17:16

Yeah, that that was definitely a huge help. Because it I mean, a lot A lot, a large part of being in a wheelchair is, you know, physical awareness and understanding your body and, you know, understanding it both, you know, medically but also understanding it physically, and how to maneuver in space, and just you know, where your body is and what it's doing. So there was definitely that part. And then there was the part of being an athlete where, you know, a physical challenge is really, something that's fun for me, you know, like, I want to, I want to win, and I want to, you know, beat whatever is challenging

me. So I think that that, you know, thought in my mind that like, Oh, yeah, I can beat this, that that was really a big part of it. And then, you know, the mental part of being an athlete where, you know, you're like, Okay, this hurts, or this isn't fun, or this is hard, or, you know, whatever it is and saying, okay, that's, that's fine. And it's going to be uncomfortable in the moment. But you know, looking at the long term benefit, or the long term goal, and that's, I think that's something that athletes are really good at. And I think, you know, that's something that I'm what as I'm witnessing COVID I think that's where a lot of people are having a hard time because, you know, they don't see like, what you do in the short term is what pays off in the long term. And that just because you want the COVID to be over does not mean that it is over. So you can't let your guard down, you have to you know, you have to go the course you have to go to the finish line. And so, but I think with that, you know, as an athlete, you have to be able to have that delayed gratification where you're like, Okay, I'm training today, for something that's next year, you know, like now that Tokyo is a year away, you know, whatever I do today is not going to pay off until sometime next year. It's like, you know, it's a hard, it's a hard thing to do. And it takes a lot of discipline to be able to to do that and to think that way.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 19:18

Absolutely. And that's almost like, you know, when you talk about finances, like you're investing into something for retirement or for you know, the fruition, so the same thing is you're planting seeds, you're cultivating skills, you're being disciplined, and I'm sure that through this, that resolve and that foundation that you already had within you, you know, absolutely helped guide that for you. So do you come from an athletic family or is like, where does this athletic ism come from?

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Tricia Downing 19:56

I think it comes from a lot of places. I mean, I started sports It's because my mom wanted all of her kids to learn how to swim, just based on safety, you know, she wanted us if we were around the water to be able to swim, and that was something that she did not know how to do. And that made her uncomfortable enough that she said, You know, I'm going to make sure that my kids feel comfortable in the water. And so she put us into, you know, swimming lessons. And I just really took to it or loved it and became a became a competitive swimmer. And so we did that in the summer. And then in the winters, I was a gymnast, my mom put me in gymnastics class in the wintertime. And so it just, you know, I just kind of naturally gravitated toward that. And it just was part of me that it was what I was really interested in, you know, I also took music lessons and did other kinds of extracurricular activities. But sports was where I really like, I knew I was good. And I knew that I liked the challenge. And, you know, it was just really fun.



J

Jennifer Malcolm 21:06

No, that's great. So as you have over the last 20 years, how have you brought that athleticism, um, you know, almost two decades later, to where you're at today. So the last, you know, several years as you're still competing, and still training and still, you know, have an eye on goals that aren't in fruition tomorrow or the next day. But so what does that journey look like?

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Tricia Downing 21:33

Well, I started when I got out of the hospital, I knew that I wanted to get back to sports, primarily just to like, give my brain something to do and to give myself something to look forward to, you know, because a lot of other things that I might have wanted to do, were not necessarily, you know, open to me, you know, so I wanted to just do something that I kind of had some control over. And so I got adaptive equipment, I had a hand cycle and a racing chair, and I learned how to swim again. And so I put all those sports together and started doing the triathlon. And that was really fun, because there weren't really a lot of athletes with disabilities doing triathlon at the time. So it was really kind of a novel thing, you know, I'd show up at races and people would look at me and be like, what's up girl doing over here in a wheelchair at a triathlon, you know, and I got a lot of like, I was like, this big spectacle, and I got a lot of attention, and a lot of cheering and, you know, everybody was just, like, so supportive, and so fun. And, and that really helped me mentally get through, you know, the other six days of the week where I was, you know, dragging, because, you know, I was bombed that my life totally changed and bummed that I couldn't do a lot of the things that I used to do, you know, but when I got out on the racecourse, I was like, I'm just plain old Trish here. I'm just, you know, Trish who wants to get from start to finish and be the first person there. And so that was really fun getting involved in triathlon. And I did that for just about 10 years until my shoulders kind of started hurting. And then I switched sports to rowing, which was with the intent of building my back and the back of my shoulders. Because I was used to building like, my, the front of my upper body was built, the back was not so that that lack of balance was what was causing the pain. But with the rowing, I just like, it was a little too gung ho and I pushed too hard, too fast, and ended up having two, three back surgeries and one hip surgery after that. And that ended my rowing career, and it ended my sports career, and I ended in chronic pain. And that was another really hard transition. But I just kept, you know, not taking no for an answer. And so I just kept looking at, you know, what, if I change my diet, what if I get therapies, like, you know, massage and acupuncture? What if I, you know, do some extra stretching? What if I, you know, try to do some lifting, like I just did everything physically that, you know, a person could do. And, you know, it's me, it's taken years, but I'm, you know, I'm finally back even though I still experienced chronic pain. Now, I'm finally back to where I've just done my first couple of triathlons within the last year. And so it's

been really awesome. But in the meantime, you know, when I wasn't doing any sports, and I was just kind of like living day to day trying to figure out how to get out of all this pain. I decided I wanted to go back to competition, and I was trying to figure out what sport I could do. And so I looked at all the sports words that are part of the Paralympic Games. And I saw shooting and I was like, What seems to me like, that wouldn't kill my body, you know, like, I think I'll try it. So I called the National Shooting coach and asked, like, you know, how do I get involved in this sport? What, you know, what's the gun? Like? What do I, you know, what do I need to do and he was really nice and invited me to a camp. And I learned about the rifles and the pistols and, you know, I'd never shot a gun, didn't know what I was doing. And, but I had some had some good help, and I ended up just becoming a pistol shooter, just very random out of the blue. And, you know, here it's six, seven years later that I've been shooting and looking forward to trying to make my second Paralympic game. So it's, it's been a wild ride.

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Jennifer Malcolm 25:54

You're just like, Okay, let me just look through this list. And no, no, no, let's try guns.

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Tricia Downing 26:00

Right? Kind of, it's kind of strange. But, you know, I feel like people who are, you know, really athletic and comfortable and confident in the way that their bodies move their athletic across the board, you know, so you put them on the soccer field, you put them on the track, you put them on, you know, in another sport, and, and it's more the confidence of knowing that I have these transferable skills, and I can make these skills work in this sport. And I feel like I really have that when it comes to individual sports and, you know, just particular sports that rely on you know, your strength, or your concentration or your speed, something like that. For me, that does not translate to a sport that has any sort of a ball attached to it. So basketball, soccer, softball, you will never find me doing those sports, because I have like, no hand eye coordination in that way. You know, but these other sports, I'm like, you know, I've got the strength and the endurance from triathlon. So it, you know, rolls over to rowing. And of course, you have to learn the technique, and that takes years to master, but it doesn't take years to like, learn it, and just be able to keep, you know, working your way up. So it's just, I mean, it's just, it's the same thing as if you were, like, looking for a new job in a different field. It's not like you have no skill, you just have to learn how to use skills differently.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 27:30

No, that's awesome. And so clarity. And when you talk, we're talking about your triathlons.

Like these are not para triathlon, these are like what, you know, people signed up for, and they're cheering you on, because you're coming up in a wheelchair. And there's a lot of curiosity.

**T** Tricia Downing 27:44  
Yes.

**J** Jennifer Malcolm 27:51  
I ran out. I've only run a half marathon. But the community aspect in that to cheer people on to encourage strangers, people you don't know help out is monumental when you're when you're racing. And I can't imagine like all that, like goodness, and joy and encouragement going your way.

**T** Tricia Downing 28:15  
Yeah, it really was fun. And you know, now 20 years later, triathlon is in is a sport in the Paralympics. And there are a lot of triathletes with disabilities. And so it's not as unusual as it was 20 years ago, but that's what made it so fun is that it was unusual. And people were always curious, you know, about my equipment, how do you do this? And how do you do that? How do you swim, you know, all this distance, and, you know, so it was just really a it was fun in it. And it made me mentally more upbeat, just to be able to be involved in that community.

**J** Jennifer Malcolm 28:54  
I love that. And even that piece of you were a forerunner for what was to come 1015 years later, where it's more normal now, but you are really breaking through some of the barriers that you know, a lot of people haven't explored yet. And so you're training now you're a pistol shooter and what is it what does a week look like for you when you're training with a gun,

**T** Tricia Downing 29:31  
Um it really depends, I mean, I probably am at the range four or five days a week. But for me that's it's really mentally draining it because it does take a lot of concentration and it is very much a mental sport. So I for in my personal training, I try to add in as much you know, cardio and endurance activities as I can. So you know, if I can get on my hand cycle three to four days a week, then You know, I'm a happy person, or if I'm in the pool or, you

know, whatever that might be, so I try to balance it out. And not every shooter probably balances shooting with, you know, the endurance activities quite the way I do, but it's just, you know, it's just what I need to be happy, like, my husband can tell when I haven't worked out for a few days, he's like, you know, you're really crabby, maybe you should get on the bike and go for a bike ride. So, it's pretty evident when I don't get my workouts in,

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Jennifer Malcolm 30:30

you train alone, or do go with people and train alongside?

T

Tricia Downing 30:35

I mostly train alone. You know, sometimes we'll have shooting camps where we'll have, you know, the whole team together. But I like to train alone. It just is kind of like, especially with shooting, it's a it's sort of like a meditative sport, because you really are like, in your head, and like just trying to like, I don't know, it's just so mental, that it's, it can be really relaxing, because you, you can't think about anything else while you're doing it. Like you can't be running through your grocery list in your mind while you're shooting. Whereas like, when I'm out on my bike, I might be like, Oh, I wonder if I should make chicken when I get home, or if I should have fish tonight, you know, so it's, it's a lot different. So I just, you know, I could just enjoy being out there by myself. But this summer, since there has been no competition going on, my husband and I have been finding good hills to climb or mountains. And we've gone hill climbing on our bikes. And so he's on a regular bike, I'm on a hand cycle. And so he's way ahead of me, but we just pick an amount of time that we're going to be gone for. And then we both turn around at, you know, two hours or whatever, and meet back up on the way down the hill. So, you know, it's fun to go together. But we're not riding together.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 31:52

So tell tell our listeners about your journey with your husband, because you went from being in this triangle love. Hospital, right on yours layers. So when did that become a part of your story as well?

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Tricia Downing 32:06

Yeah, so I had to get out of the triangle. By the time I got out of the hospital because I actually going into it. Even going into the hospital, I was kind of like done with both of them. But I met my husband at a bike shop where he used to work. And it was about four years after my accident we met and he actually had been a mechanic for a mountain bike

team of paraplegics who are riding mountain bike hands cycles. And so you know, he was kind of we knew the same people. Even though we didn't know each other, like, it's kind of funny that our past had never crossed. But we just had a lot in common a lot of experiences in common friends and common things like that. And we just kind of hit it off in the beginning and dated for a year and got engaged and then got married. Later, like, I think about nine months after that. So yeah, it's been great, because we just, you know, we have that cycling, background in common and just both really enjoy it.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 33:12

I love it. I love my husband and I are jointly doing kayaking right now. And we're joining me on the water in being together and getting exercise. We have not been bike riding. But it says that, that place of community and love and exercise and being outdoors and doing something besides sitting around watching TV type scenarios. And so through this, this journey over the last 20 years, what are some of the things that have risen to the top of things you've learned about yourself as gifts throughout this process? You know, it was a major pivot, and you're strong, you're beautiful, you are smiling, you're active. So what are some of the things that you really learned about yourself or, or something grew out of, you know, a heartbreak.

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Tricia Downing 34:07

Um I've learned to be flexible. I've learned that there's always more than one way to achieve a goal. And, you know, when I think back to how badly I wanted to be an elite cyclist, you know, I never got to the level that I wanted to as a cyclist, but I've gotten there, you know, as a shooting sports athlete, so you know, How weird is that? You know, I actually went to the 1996 Olympic Games as a press officer. So I worked at the games and I wrote press releases for the United States table tennis team of all things. And so I was at the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games and I was watching all the athletes marching and you know, like while I was so happy and excited. I was also like so envious. I'm like, Oh my gosh, they get to represent their country, and they get to be in the Olympic Games. And this is like, so amazing. And, you know, I would give anything to, you know, be down there and be one of those athletes. Well, you know, careful what you ask for. Because, you know, 16 years later, I am actually more than that, because that was the 96 games. But, you know, I am one of those athletes down on the field marching in at the Paralympic Games, and, you know, representing my country, and I was, like, you know, it was wasn't the same sport, it wasn't, you know, my body wasn't the same. It was, you know, it was very different, but it was the same thing, you know, I made it to the Paralympic Games, I'm a, I'm a Paralympian. And that, you know, like, really sunk home to me, like, that's a really different way to achieve that goal that I was after. So, you know, so

being flexible and achieving goals, different ways, I think, one of the things that my mom used to say that I was going to learn whether I liked it or not, was patience. And, to a certain extent, I have gotten better. But I'm not that patient of a person, I really am trying. And then, you know, like, once I had the accident, and I started doing the traveling, that people wanted to hear my story, I really had to learn to be able to share my story and to be able to talk about it, and to, you know, like, I never would have gotten up in front of a roomful of people to speak before. And then all of a sudden, I find myself as a professional speaker as my career. And, you know, so I had to learn new skills, and I had to shed some of the my fears and just, like, jump in and make it happen, because it just, you know, was gonna happen, I guess, with or without my consent. It seemed like so, you know, I mean, it's amazing that what we can do when we're pushed to do it, but it's hard, I think, for all of us to push ourselves and have the confidence to just do it. You know, when it's a self inflicted change, you know, when it's inflicted upon you, you know, you have to find that next level no matter what, like, that's, like, there's not an option of finding the next level. Whereas on a day to day basis, we have that decision, you know, to make, am I willing to push myself to the next level? Or am I not

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Jennifer Malcolm 37:25

a piece of being willing to push yourself and to be uncomfortable through that transition? So Exactly, yeah. It's not like you're training you're through being a professional speaker, and athlete, like, they're not overnight successes, you're not going to do something, and then you achieve those goals. So you have a, you know, patient with yourself and having tenacity. So when you speak, who do typically speak to what type of audience Do you have, themes that you typically speak on or about,

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Tricia Downing 37:57

I mostly, and speak about, you know, the some of these lessons that I've just told you, you know, of my own story, and how I learned them and how I approached them and, and what I've, you know, gleaned from from having those challenges in front of me, and, you know, I speak to corporate audiences and nonprofits, you know, I like to, you know, use my sports analogies in in the business world, because I think there are a lot of similarities. And I think that people really, you know, they really like to hear from athlete athletes just because, you know, we're all just driven to that, like, underdog, you know, ending up on top and I think that that's a theme that is universally just loved, you know, because we all at one time or another, feel like a total underdog and yet we can see what we want. And it's just a matter of like, you know, are you willing to put in the hard work that it's going to take to get there to, you know, grow that business to, you know, reach that weight goal to you know, there's just all these goals that we have and you know, some people are better

than others at at disciplining at, you know, working hard at, you know, seeing the finish line instead of, you know, how far there is left to go. And you know, so I think it's just it's fun to get out there and be able to share that with people.

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Jennifer Malcolm 39:25

You know, and and as a business owner myself, like those messages are encouraging and you know, I've been asked throughout the years you know, what, what keeps you driven you had my business 10 years, know what still get you out of bed every morning to do the work that you're doing. And part of it is like because I have to I have to pay the bills, and I have to work. Where is the accountability like I'm accountable to my team I'm accountable to our clients are accountable to our community, and that piece of self awareness and be accountable to Other people has helped, you know, not every day Do I want to get up and, you know, write a marketing strategy or be on a zoom call, God help us with all these beautiful zoom calls. But thank God for the technology as well. So I get that. And I think that piece of encouraging, you know, business owners in the corporate world of the underdog, coming through rising to the top, but I also wanted to hit on that you, you pivoted your dreams, so the way you thought your life was going to look like, through this, you pivoted, you shifted, and, you know, going to the Paralympics was never, you know, obviously, in the grand plan of your life, but that you still had the resolve to fulfill a dream and, and that piece of, you know, encouraging women to, you know, life may look differently, through self inflicted choices through choices outside of our control. But the dream still can be fulfilled, even though it looks a little bit different,

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Tricia Downing 41:05

right. And I think it's really important to be able to detach from outcomes, a lot of times, you know, we get on this like, path of like, this has to happen this way, you know, like, I have to marry this man, and I have to live in this house, and I have to have this job. And those are great things to work toward, and, and you should work toward them with all your heart, all your soul and everything you can, but at the same time, you have to say, Okay, if, you know, the track takes me this way, instead of that way, go along for the ride, you know, like, let that be a journey and let it you know, be open minded to what could happen on that journey. And, you know, know that, like your life is taking you that way. And it I think it takes you there on a you know, for a purpose. And you know, it might be a lesson you need to learn it might be that that guy was the wrong guy, it might be that that job was the wrong job, you know, so I think it's really being open minded to change and, and not looking at change, like it's bad. And I, you know, I see through again, through the, you know, the COVID situation, you know, people are losing their jobs. And, you know, and that's difficult. I'm not saying don't get me wrong, the money situation and needing a

paycheck and all that that's very difficult. But I think that the people who are going to do the best in this situation, are going to be the people who say, Okay, this is not working, how can I change my life? How can I change my course? Is it you know, are there some Can I be taking some classes in this time where my business is shut down? You know, are there some things that I could be learning? Or do I need to pivot my business? Like, for example, all of my speaking engagements got canceled, you know, so I've spent the last few months thinking about ways to pivot other things to do you know, am I going to do virtual speaking engagements? Do I want to do coaching? Do I want to do a completely different job altogether? Do I mean, maybe I want to start applying for different jobs. So it's, you know, I think that if you can see it, as you know, this is a new adventure, this is a new journey, instead of thinking of it as this is the worst thing that has ever happened in my life, then, you know, your mindset is really what is important.

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Jennifer Malcolm 43:30

And I love that. So that piece of being open minded and flexible. I'll share a quick story. When I was I'm dating sites, four or five years ago, looking for someone to partner in the second half of my life, because I have three children for my first marriage. And I've been divorced for 1011 years now. And I was adding, like, I knew I knew the type of man I wanted. He had to have children because it needed to know how to be a father. He had to own a home because he had to understand responsibility and finances. And he This is a little little light, but gotta be significantly taller than me because I have fabulous celebs. When I met my husband, Chad, he has no kids. He did and he's about an inch and a half taller than me. And so it was like, okay, so all the things that I was like, here's my, here's my must have, like, everything else could be a little flexible. He didn't have any of those. And what I learned from it was he's a professor of early education, so he understands child psychology, and it was very easy for him to blend into our life without having a blended family and other kids to try to navigate. Easily canceled his apartment and Right, do I house. And then third, he doesn't care if I were stilettos and taller than me, like he's like, it's not, not a big deal. So again, it's that mind shift if you're so like, here's how it has to be. And unwilling to see like, Alright, maybe, I don't know what's always best for me, or maybe there's things better down the road that I'm not aware of yet and be open and flexible to those. I think you're hitting it right on.

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Tricia Downing 45:26

Yeah, and maybe you'll just learn something new. And I, you know, I same with my husband, I like he's totally the opposite of anybody I had ever dated or ever anticipated marrying. And as it turns out, like all those guys who were my type are the ones that broke my heart. And, you know, then I find this guy, like, He's not my type, oh, but here's 12 years



later, we're still together. So, you know, like, sometimes you have to let go of that, like, really rigid. You know, this is how it has to be because it doesn't, you know, like, I mean, you couldn't have told me 30 years ago, you're going to be such a happy person living life in a wheelchair, you know, but I mean, my life is been, you know, really very rewarding and exciting. And I've gone great places and met great people and had great accomplishments. And so, you know, it's just different. It's different than I envisioned. But it's still like, really pretty awesome.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 46:23

It's so damn good. Yeah, yeah. So what else do you do besides exercising and getting out with your husband? And basically do you do to keep your tank full to motivate yourself? authors, you read podcasts you might listen to what do you do to kind of fill up your soul? In that regard,

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Tricia Downing 46:42

I do a lot of writing. I, I love to read, but I don't read as much as I would like to. I do like podcasts. But when I'm not because I work from home, you know, my podcast time is in the car. So you know, I occasionally get to do that. But you know, right now, when I'm training and, and working, that really pretty much absorbs most of my time. And that was actually one of the things I was looking forward to the games being over this year is, you know, I want to take some classes, I am not a cook. So I'd like to learn how to cook. I really love dessert. So I would love to take classes to you know, learn how to be a pastry chef for I don't know, just I like anything that's fun and creative like that. I want to learn how to sew. I mean, there's so many things on my you know, to do bucket list. But first I want to get through, you know, my sports goals and see them all the way to completion. And then we'll start on the next, next phase of life.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 47:49

And so tell us about what are your readings, I think that you're in the process of writing a book.

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Tricia Downing 47:54

Yeah. So I'm finishing up my second novel, it's going to go to the editor probably next week. And I love love stories. And I love you know, the movies that I pick or the chick flicks. And so I want to write love stories. But I also want to write characters who have disabilities. Because one of the biggest questions that I get asked, When I tell people that

I'm married, is, well, did you Did you meet your husband before your accident or after your accident? And people are very curious, that, you know, we met after my accident, because I think it's, it's still not a known thing that, you know, people who are able bodied fall in love with people who have disabilities every day. But people think it's like, like, Oh, well, your husband must be so amazing, because he's fell in love with you and I so I just, there's a lot of stereotype around individuals with disabilities and falling in love, like it never happens. And so to me, that's frustrating. And so I have characters who have disabilities, and they fall in love despite them, but there is also you know, the ups and downs of real life in you know, in the meat middle, because it it gets messy for all of us, you know, any kind of relationships, you know, have their messy moments. And so my first novel is called chance for rain. And my main character is a woman who's a paraplegic and uses a wheelchair like me, and goes online to find the man of her dreams. And it was really fun to write this book, I have a character who is blind. And he's actually not the main character this time, but there's a woman who is hot on his trail and, you know, is falling in love with them. And so they're kind of their relationship together is is the forefront of this. So it's really fun. It's been you know, Hallmark type or very chiclet type, I guess you would say, it's still hopefully a well written novel. But it's all about falling in love So,

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Jennifer Malcolm 50:13

and I love that you're hitting on the stereotype, you know, like people's assumptions. And that through, you know, love stories that we all, you know, jump into, that you can bring awareness and education through that and bring that conversation to the surface that, no, my husband met me after this.

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Tricia Downing 50:38

And even still likes me, you know, he's okay with the fact that I use a wheelchair.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 50:43

I'm worthy, I'm beautiful. I'm, you know, intelligent, I'm strong. And that doesn't matter if you're in a wheelchair or not, like he fell in love with you as a person. Right? And being able to educate people like, Oh, this is normal life, too. And I'm sure you guys fight have your fights and ups and downs. No, does like every normal marriage. And I think that's brilliant to bring that to the conversation. So is your first book is already published?

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Tricia Downing 51:11

It's already published, it's available on Amazon. So some chance for rain, what was that,

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Jennifer Malcolm 51:18

that will put the information for our listeners, as well. So

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Tricia Downing 51:21

yeah, so um, then I also published a memoir, that kind of covers the period of time during my accident. And that is called cycle of hope, which is also on Amazon. And this new one, the working title is back in sight. But that's subject to change, you know, depending on what happens through the editing process. So

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Jennifer Malcolm 51:43

that's the painful part.

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Tricia Downing 51:44

Yeah, it's hard.

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Jennifer Malcolm 51:47

When you're expecting that book to be released, probably this fall, perfect. So we'll get all that information together for our listeners as well. So moving forward, you you feel like this next chapter next few years, you're still going to be focusing on your training. And Paralympics is very open, it sounds like to what the next journey of your life could be. And that will be fun to kind of watch unfold, what are some closing remarks that you want to leave for listeners, because I can sit here for another two hours and chat, there's so many different nuances that we can go on. But what are some things that you really want to hit home with our listeners.

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Tricia Downing 52:31

Um I think it's just important that people, you know, really take a look at who they are and what they want, and believe that it's out there for them. And, you know, get on the path toward your goals and get on the path toward your dreams. But like I said, Be flexible and let them you know, let it take you on all kinds of different rides, you know, like, you always keep your goal in mind, you know, because it might be that you do take the straight path to the goal. But, you know, sometimes life takes you on curves. And and it's just kind of, it's

a way to get the most out of life is to be open to what comes your way. And you know, what happens in your life. So I just encourage people to not get so, you know, focused on this is right, this is wrong, this is good, this is bad. And to kind of live life in that, you know, gray area a little bit.

**J** Jennifer Malcolm 53:28

I love it, because people do like to pick, pick a side or pick a path. And that piece with this podcast in with the Jennasis Movement is to bring all those voices together and all the stories together. And whether it's stories of shame and regret from self inflicted choices, shame and regret, and anger from things that have happened to us that were outside of our control. It's finding women where they're allowing them to speak their truth, speak where they're at, with no judgment, and without just with open arms of acceptance. And so that's the heart of this is that we're not looking for, hey, you have to be in a career path. Or you have to be you know, a mom, or you have to be, you know, this religion, or this sexual orientation or any of it. It's just that we're women, encouraging women, and your story is going to unlock and bring courage to other women through this as well. So thank you so much. I really appreciate your time. You're welcome forward to deepening our friendship and continuing to cross paths over the next several years of authentic events and alignment with what you're doing. But we will also give all of your information for listeners and where they can find your book, your website and learn more about you as well.

**T** Tricia Downing 54:55

Sounds great.Thank you. It's been fun talking.

**J** Jennifer Malcolm 54:58

It's been fun. Thanks. again for tuning in today. Thanks Tricia Downing for your story. We're looking to connect all women, where every woman has a story and every story matters and that means you to tune in next week for the next powerful story. Subscribe to the Jennasis Movement to empower women's voices and reclaim the power over your own narrative.