

"This has been a life-changing experience. It gave me a reason to live."

JAMIE MORHAIM
FORMER DERMATOLOGIST TURNED ARTIST



SECOND CAREER: Jamie Morhaim was a dermatologist until a severe injury damaged the nerves in his arm, thus ending his ability to perform surgery. He now devotes his time to art, creating such vivid-hued portraits such as his wife's in the background. **Photo/Erin Wigger**

The Art of starting a new life

An accident and debilitating injury ends a promising medical career, but opens a new door for self-expression.

BY SALLIE JAMES
STAFF WRITER

PARKLAND • Jamie Morhaim grew up painting, but the veteran dermatologist defined himself by the medicine he practiced, not the art he created.

Then a freak accident Feb. 2, 2001, robbed Morhaim of the use of his left hand, and suddenly, his medical career was over.

"It was a shock. That [was] it," said Morhaim, 47, who shattered his arm and incurred permanent nerve damage when he toppled off a kitchen counter. "I never actually got back to [dermatology] at any level."

Morhaim had to quit practicing because the majority of his doctoring involved surgery, and with nerve

damage, Morhaim no longer had two functional hands.

Now his hobby is the cure that is making Morhaim whole.

"That fact that I can paint is really very helpful. I was in the middle of a practice doing well. I had no choice. It takes time to come to grips with that," Morhaim said. Multiple surgeries, chronic pain, the need for medication and an inability to do the job he trained for made switching gears hard.

As he battled depression, Morhaim found solace in his painting.

His art is realistic with a touch of impressionism. Morhaim's paintings are filled with glowing oranges, iridescent

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pinks, apple greens and sun-kissed golds. He loves bright colors and the walls of his Parkland home are aglow with his creations.

"It's not photographic," he said of his work. "I make it bolder, brighter than it is."

Many of the paintings that decorate his home were on display in his Coral Springs doctor's office, which served as an informal gallery. Among his favorites are bold portraits of his wife, his daughter, Elizabeth, his son, Jonathan, their two dogs and several still life paintings. In the past, he has sold some of his work.

Framed ribbons from various art shows stand tribute

to his skill. Included are a first place from the Broward Art Guild in 1994; an honorable mention from the Coral Springs Artist Guild, also in 1994; a blue ribbon from the Broward County Medical Association in 1997; and several others.

"My patients used to wait for another painting," Morhaim said. "My office was like a captive audience."

During his recovery, Morhaim's patients would constantly ask him about his painting when he encountered them around town. That helped Morhaim gain the courage to pick up a paintbrush and start painting again.

"They were instrumental in encouraging this," he said. "It was the only thing people

uniformly felt was important. Art was a natural consequence."

"They validated his talent," said Morhaim's wife, Orna.

Because of Morhaim's shoulder injury and the nerve damage in his hand, he couldn't hold a paint palette, so instead he set it on a nearby table. And even without use, his left hand sometimes becomes swollen and needs to be elevated. In addition, a reflex condition causes healthy nerves in his arm to act up as a result of the physical nerve damage, he said.

That being said, Morhaim still loves to paint.

Usually, he whiles away the hours in a plain, unfinished room off his garage, accompanied by his pet macaw, Maximus.

Inside, dozens of partially crushed paint tubes covered a paint-smeared table. Next to an easel, a vibrant picture of a yellow rubber ducky against a blue background is in the making. An old couch stands against a wall, surrounded by framed canvases, some blank, some painted.

One picture depicts yellow, purple and green paper airplanes. Another painting shows a light bulb inside a brown box, against a glowing background of pinks and oranges.

Morhaim hopes to soon return to showing his work in juried art shows, as he often did before his injury.

"This has been a life-changing experience," Morhaim said. "This made a difference in what I do. It gave me a reason to live."