



## 2019 Personal Best Athlete Profile

**Ron Gauvin, 60**  
**Patti Gauvin, 58**  
Milton, New Hampshire

### Love Finds A Way to Hit the Mark

*When Ron Gauvin enters an archery competition, it's quickly noticed that something special is going on beyond shooting arrows. Despite balance challenges and a paralyzed right arm, Ron manages to get to the line and let fly using a stabilizer bar and a special strap attached to the string that allows him to release using his mouth. [Click here to see Ron demonstrate his technique in this brief video clip.](#)*

*What is more amazing than his performance, though, is the 27-year journey he and his wife and soulmate Patti have taken for his recovery and to become qualified for the 2019 National Senior Games presented by Humana. In fact, this is at its heart a love story, and because Patti also became a competitive archer and qualified in the process, this is a Personal Best profile for both.*



*Ron and Patti went to the same high school and both participated in track and field, but they never met until a matchmaker put them together when she was 25 and he was 28. Patti had become a nurse, and Ron had gone to work, choosing to pursue archery and a variety of other activities over college. They quickly hit it off, but since Patti had no interest in archery, Ron dropped the sport so they could do more things together.*

*Five years later, their lives were turned upside down when Ron developed a brain tumor. Through the treatment process Ron lost the use of his right arm, has difficulty speaking, and manages related balance issues. Amazingly, before the diagnosis Patti had decided to specialize in head injury nursing care, so she immediately knew what to do and applied her knowledge to help her husband navigate the health care system and regain as much function as possible.*

*When Patti showed Ron a picture of a woman using an adaptive device in archery, he immediately determined to find a way to return to his favorite sport. Not only did he succeed, he is delighted that his wife also caught the bug and picked up a bow. Their experience prompted Patti and a partner to write [Hope Through the Eyes of Love](#), a book detailing the Gauvin's journey to provide advice and encouragement to others facing similar challenges. They connected with the National Brain Tumor Society and have helped with support groups and advocacy. Patti even featured Ron's case for her master's thesis and developed a model for living through adversity.*

*In the following conversation, it becomes clear that Cupid's arrow did not miss Ron and Patti Gauvin and that they were destined to be brought together to laugh and cry and triumph. The bedrock for their successes is their love for each other and an insatiable love of life. Despite the serious subject, Patti (who speaks for Ron in interviews) tells their story in a positive, entertaining, and in the end, joyful and inspiring manner. Enjoy, and then take their advice to go out and make the best of every day – what we call pursuing your own Personal Best.*

### **Thanks for representing both Ron and yourself for this interview, Patti.**

He can't speak very well. He can answer yes and no and a few words here and there. Sometimes he'll throw out a one-liner that blows you away, and then other times you can ask his date of birth and he can't say it. So, I speak for him for things like this.

**When we heard about you two, it struck us as a love story as much as an inspiring athlete profile. Take us back and tell us how you two met, and how all this happened.**

That was 33 years ago, and it's kind of an interesting story. I was 25 at the time and had just finished my nursing degree. Ron was 28 and never went to college. After school he got a job at a manufacturing company that made sports equipment like shoulder pads and nets. He was too busy enjoying all the other stuff he was doing to think about college.

Ron and I went to the same high school but never met then. My sister was engaged to a gentleman from a big Greek family, and the mother of this guy was the match maker. Her older son had a friend who was single and she wanted everybody to be happy and married. [Laugh] My sister told her I was available and gave her my number. Ron and I connected on the telephone, and he had such amazing interests. He was an archer. He liked fishing and hunting and scuba diving. And he was very good at everything he did. I was just impressed and thought, "Wow – this guy will get me out of the house to do things." [Laugh]



*Wedding photo*

We went on a blind date and were talking about all the people we knew in high school, and he said he had been on the track team and did javelin, discus and shot put. I did discus and shotput too, and I vividly remembered seeing two boys back then playing "pass" with the javelin on the other side of the field.

**Pass??**

You know, one throwing it out and the other trying to catch it as it passed. At the time, I remember thinking "Who are those stupid people out there?" [Laugh] So I asked, "Do you remember Scott? Any chance you were the guy playing pass with the javelin?" He said, "Yeah." [Both laugh]

**It's clear Ron is a natural athlete. Was archery his best sport?**

He was a very good archer. He had gotten fourth place in the national archery championships before we met. I had never done archery before, and I wasn't at all interested in it. He had an archery shoot the next morning, but he canceled because he wanted to go out with me again. He actually gave it up to marry me.



*Patti in nurse uniform with Ron. 1986*

Ron was diagnosed with his brain tumor in 1991, five years after we married. He was given two to three years to live. But he just keeps living and living and living. [Laugh]

We've gone in for a yearly MRI to check out the status of his tumor. His neurosurgeon now says it's a lower grade tumor. They've always said that he had a "good tumor." He has never been so positive going to his appointments as now. We just know he is going to get good results.

**What exactly was his condition and treatment?**

It was an [astrocytoma](#) of his left temporal lobe that is involved with the functions of his right side. He's had seven brain surgeries and radiation. Ron actually had to wait for the radiation treatment because it had not been developed yet, and he was one of the first 18 people to get his type of treatment.

**Good that it didn't kill him, but it changed your lives and his abilities.**

The initial biopsy paralyzed his right side, but he's a trooper and recovered his function. About seven years later he lost some functioning permanently. The surgeries tried to reduce the size of the leftover dead tissue from the radiation. The damage in his brain most likely comes from the radiation.

He's been paralyzed on the right side since 1998 and lost the use of his arm. He can walk but he has some balance issues because of the weakness on that side. When he's on a flat surface it's not bad. It's more difficult when he's outside on uneven surfaces.

**Of all the people in the world for Ron Gauvin to marry, it's amazing you are a nurse and knew how to care for him and help him get back to doing things again.**

It's even more interesting than that. Before Ron was diagnosed, I changed my path in nursing and specialized in head injury rehab. [Chuckles]

**Wow!**

Yes. I learned how to work with people with significant brain damage. I've had a couple of people come out of a coma in front of me, which is a wild thing to witness. What I learned for caring and rehab was that you don't do anything for them. You have to wait to coach them and show them how to do things for themselves. People run over to help Ron do things. I say "No, don't touch him." Even when he falls down, I just stand there and watch him. [Laugh] And I can't get him up as easy as he can get himself up. He'll figure it out and he'll do it. And he does.

**So, you knew exactly how to react and help him rehab.**

Oh, my God. I knew what kind of rehab and what kind of doctors to ask for, where it was in the brain, what to expect for damage. It was like "Whaaat?" [Laugh] But me knowing was a double-edged sword. I knew, "Oh crap, this is going to affect his brain" but I was ready and quickly started planning. [Speaks faster like a train of thought] You gotta have this and this and this and this, you're gonna have rehab, you're gonna have this, you're gonna come home and I wanna take care of you and...[Makes garbled noise and laughs] But I've been able to manage the healthcare system because of my background.



**Ron must be a special patient for you, because you have to be dispassionate to help him. Whatever you did worked - just look at how Ron found a way to shoot arrows using his mouth!**

His attitude is what has gotten us through it. He is always willing to try new things and go places. He's like, "Gung ho, let's go."

All it took was me showing him a picture of a someone with an adaptive archery sling on Facebook and he says, "Let's go, let's try this out!" It took about two years before he was shooting well, because it took time to find people to help us get it right.

We found an introduction to archery course by Northeast Passage, who does outdoor adaptive sports. I saw a photo of a release mechanism on this woman's shoulder and we agreed to check it out. Shortly thereafter, we determined that a mouth release would probably be easier for Ron. It's like you take a dog leash, sew it together and stick it on a bow and go shoot.

He did *really* well when he tried it. He even got a [Robin Hood!](#) What?? [Laugh] We kept going back, and one time the instructor handed me a bow and said, "Here, try this." Needless to say, I bought my own bow one month later.

**That's great! In the process of helping Ron return to his favorite sport, you found it too.**

The first time I was out on the range, I didn't tell Ron I was going to do it. I was on one end and he was on the other. The look on his face was priceless, he was so excited to see me on the line with a look that said, "Finally, she's going to understand what it is I love about this." [Ron shouts "Yes!"]

I can't tell you how much I've learned about Ron's previous dedication to archery, and how much he loved me to give it up. Now that I'm doing it too, there's no way I'm giving it up for him! [Laugh]

### **After learning to shoot, Ron’s next goal was to compete again?**

Ron wanted to get back in tournaments, and we went to several different local outdoor and indoor competitions around New Hampshire and Massachusetts. We did our first Senior Games in 2017. It was our first-ever time together in a tournament. I did horribly, I didn’t even know what I was doing. It took awhile to find all of my arrows. But because I was the only barebow archer of my age I got a gold medal and would have qualified for Nationals. Ron did pretty good, but neither of us had shot at those distances before.

### **Your 2018 qualifying scores were good, and we’re happy you are coming to The Games in Albuquerque.**

That is absolutely the next step for Ron. This has really given him a sense of purpose in life now. I started with barebow and last summer I went to recurve. Ron’s doing compound bow. [\[Click here for explanation of archery types and bows\]](#) Both of us have improved, and the way he’s shooting right now I think there will be even more improvement.

Ron has been meeting with E. G. LeBre, a U.S. Paralympics archery coach, about twice a month to help him perfect the mouth release. Ron would really love to participate in the Paralympics. He has to have a minimum qualifying score, and he did not achieve that last summer. He missed the deadline to make the 2020 team so the next will be in 2024. Ron is convinced he will make it. [Pause and Laugh] Ron just heard me say that. He pumped his chest and said, “Right here!”

E.G. has been tremendous in watching Ron’s process and finding ways for him to adapt, small things like the placement of his thumb on the bow.

### **Archers are required to walk back and forth to retrieve their own arrows and count score, which Ron can manage. Are there any other adaptive issues?**

I found out that Ron is allowed to have an “agent” call his scores since he can’t speak very well. We usually ask an archer he is shooting with to help, and everyone has been wonderful about it. We’re still looking at whether he can use a stool to steady himself.

He does take up a bit more lane than others because he has to have a long stabilizer bar to mount his arrows. Sometimes he shoots alone from the group, or at the end of the line. That’s where we usually go. We don’t want to make a big deal out of it and want to respect other people’s space.

### **Your experience resulted in a book. How did that come about?**

When Ron went in for his last surgery in 2010, I started feeling like I needed to share this story and tell everybody how to manage the experience. I wanted to give people hope and help others put their situation into perspective. A lot of people get so hung up in their prognosis that they forget to live each day to the fullest as we have been doing. The fact he had a brain tumor was not going to define us. We were determined to live our lives and love each other.



*The Gauvins joined others in 2016 to educate lawmakers in Washington, DC.*

We were staying with a friend who knew a woman-Angel Logan-who had co-authored a book. We got the book ready in six months. We wanted to publicize and get it into the right hands. That’s how we got involved with the [National Brain Tumor Society](#). Working with them has given us the opportunity to advocate and encourage others.

### **We can’t imagine a more fitting athlete couple for a Personal Best feature. Our basic spin is that Personal Best is also an ongoing journey to pursue your best health and well being by staying active.**

It’s absolutely an ongoing journey. Ron doesn’t stop. Last week we had snow and what does Ron do? He gets up, puts on his clothes – mind you, with a little help from me with his gloves and hat and putting slip guards on his feet- and off he goes out shoveling snow with one arm.



**You know, there are these things called snow blowers you can get.**

[Laugh] Well, we do have a snow blower man, but Ron goes out before he comes and gets what he can clear. I pay the guy \$20 to do the job so I don't have to do it, but Ron just has to go out and do his part.

I have these moments where I stand back and see other people watching Ron shoot and they come up to me with tears in their eyes after the match saying things like "Oh my God, I can't believe he does what he does." Of course, I was thinking about the equipment problem he was having. [Laugh]

But it makes me think, "OK Patti, stop being frustrated." We're going to keep doing this because of the joy it brings him to do what others won't try, and to feel like one of the guys again with his archery.

**You obviously provide each other with love and support. your determination and spirit is an inspiration. You guys could have easily just caved in.**

[Pause] Joe Biden is often asked how he continues on after the tragedies he's been through. He said he stole this quote from someone else, but he said, "You need something to do, someone to love, and something to look forward to, to give you some purpose." We think that's awesome.

**We can't close this interview without noting how happy and joyful you are. I hear Ron laughing along with you. A positive attitude goes a long way.**

Having a sense of humor will get you through a lot of things, and help you understand what's important in life. I think I was always like that, and Ron, too. He's always had a good sense of humor and light-heartedness. And he understood my humor. That's what attracted me to him in the first place.

I come from a very big family of nine and you always had to roll with the punches. I am always trying to keep things light. I tell the others we shoot with that it's OK to joke with Ron and give him a hard time. You can tell him he's slow. [Makes exasperated voice] "You want me to pull these arrows for you AGAIN?" [Laugh] I think it's great for people, especially kids, to be exposed to this. Ron may not be able to talk much, but he'll let you know what he's thinking! [Laugh]



**Finally, is there any other advice you tell others facing life challenges?**

I actually made my master's thesis on Ron's story, and it focused on adversity and how you cope with it. I came up with a model of "real." You have to make it real. You have to be enlightened and learn everything you can about your situation. We never denied that he had a tumor and the challenges that came with it. But you don't want to waste a day if you only have two years to live.

So, we always did what we could to make the best of it. It's all about having a positive attitude and living and loving life. 27 years later, things are going well, we are still making the best of every day.

That is now our motto. Make the best of every day!