





# On the Road to Reco

## THE STORY OF RON GUILMETTE

**B**LINK ONCE FOR YES, TWICE FOR NO... This is the first thing Ron remembers after collapsing and being found unresponsive in his doctor's office parking lot. Ron Guilmette, 42, an avid Boston Sports fan, has faced many challenges in his life, but none as complicated as the road he was about to face. On April 28, 2005 Ron's life was forever changed.

As doctors continued to ask Ron to blink, he realized the lack of feeling in his legs was not a dream. He was paralyzed from the waist down. After undergoing a host of complex medical procedures, the doctors noticed an abscess on his lower back. After

surgery was completed to remove the abscess and decompress his spine, he was placed on a respirator. Then he required a second surgery to remove tissue compressing the spinal cord in his neck. "I was completely taken off guard," Ron recalled.

"You don't wake up expecting to be in this situation."

In June he was transferred to Boston Medical Center's Rehabilitation unit where he stayed until November when he was weaned off the respirator.

Along with the paralysis and other medical issues, Ron remembers the weakness he felt in his arms as well as the spasticity in his legs. "The weakness made it a little more difficult to undergo rehabilitation," stated Ron. "These issues had to be addressed before

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*With the help of his therapy team, Ron makes his way down Whittier's corridors on the Second Step Gait Harness.*

thing special," remembered Laurie Faust, Director of Rehabilitation at Whittier. "He has always been very driven and very focused. He is a tremendously hard working, motivated individual, that was very inspiring to all of us."

His daily therapy included stretching of his legs, sitting balance activities and strengthening exercises for his back, abdominals and arms. He progressed steadily with range of motion, endurance and strength in his arms, which made him able to transfer with the assistance of only one other person.

Holly Vaughn, a Physical Therapist at Whittier, felt the small improvements were only signs of positive things to come. "Ron's a very serious and intense person," said Holly. "He's a perfectionist. No matter how big a step Ron makes he always wants to take one more. He's not a quitter."

When Ron began therapy at Whittier, he also was introduced to Whittier Home Healthcare Agency. Carolyn Bova, HHA began working with him immediately. Carolyn describes Ron's well being when she began visiting him. "He was very good natured mentally, a real person."

Carolyn continued working with Ron twice a day on his stretching and range of motion. Such exercises are

crucial to his outpatient therapy success.

"This was a very difficult time for Ron. You must continue to do the same thing each day, but approach it differently. You must approach rehabilitation with smiles and a positive outlook."

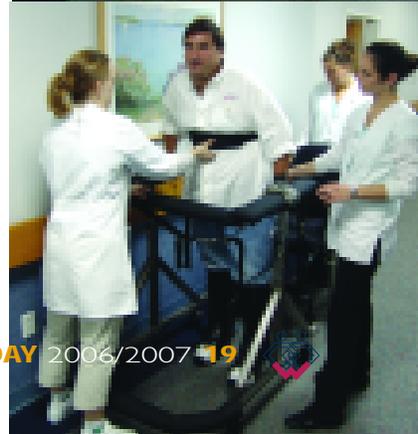
Whittier Home Healthcare worked on activities of daily living like getting in and out of bed and other daily routines.

Ron is an amazing person," smiled Bova. "At Whittier you become part of a family, where we all work together. Ron is like family to all of us. I love what I do. I find Home Health is very rewarding because of patients like Ron."

In February, Ron was introduced to the standing table. This would allow him to bear weight through his legs and increase his arm/trunk stability while in a standing position.

Although Ron continued to increase his leg strength with daily therapy, his debilitating spasms lingered. He required Baclofen, a medication commonly used to decrease spasticity related to multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injuries, or other neurological diseases. This made it much harder for him to stand. His muscles felt weaker and Ron became frustrated. "Ron has subtle ways of letting you know he's frustrated,"

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by Jeff Ventola

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we could even begin to work on some of the more complex treatments."

After Thanksgiving, Ron was to become a patient at Whittier's Outpatient Clinic in Haverhill. When he arrived in the outpatient department, the weakness continued and required the assistance of two therapists to transfer him from his wheelchair to a mat. He was unable to move his legs and his arms were still very weak. "When Ron arrived you could see he was some-

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added Gillian Medieros, OTR/L. “Ron is very easy going. You can talk to him about anything.”

As time went on therapists incorporated electrical stimulation which produced great results. Another foot-ball season came and went

and things were about to change for Ron.

Earlier this year, Ron took a “step” that some people thought he would never take. In February he started to stand in the parallel bars and eventually progressed to walking with assistance.

When each therapist was asked what their most memorable moment with Ron was, they all mentioned the first time in the parallel bars. Ron himself, feels this was the turning point in what was a long road to regaining functional independence and proving to himself that he could do anything. “The parallel bars were the most memorable moment I’ve had at Whittier,” said Ron. “The therapists believed in me and when I made that walk, it made everything I’ve been through worth it.”

“Ron uses specific circumstances to motivate himself, so we knew we were going to witness something special that day,” remembered Medeiros. “Ron was very focused. He looked straight ahead, he wouldn’t look in our eyes. He gets an adrenaline rush when others are watching him, it motivates him.

Ms. Vaughn remembers the look in his eye. “He was very serious. The first thing he said was that he was disappointed he didn’t go all the way to the end of the bars.”



*Carolyn Bova, HHA, Whittier Home Health Care Agency*



*Gillian Medieros, OTR/L, Whittier Rehabilitation Hospital - Haverhill*

“It was an amazing moment. It was unbelievable. We were blown away.”  
—Gillian Medieros



“He was very serious. The first thing he said was that he was disappointed he didn’t go all the way to the end of the bars.”

—Holly Vaughn

He is now walking 150 feet with a special walker. As he passes other Whittier staff and patients they exchange words of encouragement. A trip that a few weeks ago lasted approximately 45 minutes is an excursion which now lasts only 15 minutes.

He loves softball and football and currently resides

in Methuen, with his brother Richard, his wife Mary and their daughter Renee.

Ron is a real hero, a humble person with courage and drive, a person who inspires us all not to quit. A person who can make us believe anything is possible.

If asked, do I believe... I blink once. ■

