RUNNING WITH GASTON at the NYC Marathon

by Addie Lee, Michel Carriere and Laurence Wright

We did it. We ran and completed the New York City Marathon with 51,000 other runners on November 6, 2016. It was an amazing experience guiding Gaston Bedard, a deaf-blind 64-year-old runner, through the biggest street party in the world.

Gaston is from Aylmer, Quebec and began planning this special NYC adventure with his son Marc over two years ago. Our team ran in the marathon as members of Achilles International, based in New York City.

On Friday evening, we attended an amazing pasta dinner with over 300 Achilles International athletes and their guides. We took some great photos with 75-year-old Dick Traun, who participates in five marathons per year in a hand cycle and was the first amputee to complete the NYC Marathon (in 1976). Dick inspired Terry Fox to pursue his Marathon of Hope across Canada.

At the expo in the Javits Center, Russell Koplin set us up quickly, with the New York Road Runners booth a few feet away. Within minutes, Gaston had his bib and race kit, we all had our race shirts, and we received our bright yellow Achilles guide shirts.

At the start on Staten Island, the Achilles athletes and their guides were greeted by ovations and cheers from other runners waiting for the next wave. This kind gesture made the whole team feel really special.

We were led by the Achilles group to the start line—wave one of four, with approximately 10,000 runners per wave. We were part the green line, which meant we started on the lower deck of the Verrazano Bridge, with two other lines on the upper deck. We ran through the five Boroughs of New York City (Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx, and Manhattan), each with their distinct personalities.

We kept to Gaston’s game plan and the strategy of remaining in the middle, with the guides venturing off. This is the same guiding strategy that Gaston used with his guides at the 2015 Boston Marathon and the 2014 Scotiabank Ottawa Marathon.

Gaston’s son Marc tracked our progress so he could meet up with us via the subway system, and by texting with Addie who was running just behind Gaston. Gaston was thrilled give Marc three big hugs during the marathon, at 13K, 24K and 34K.

It was fun guiding Gaston up and over all the bridges and hills which include the Verrazano Narrows Bridge at the start, the Pulaski Bridge at the half, the Queensboro Bridge before the 24K mark, the Willis Avenue Bridge just before the 20-mile mark, the 24th mile up 5th Avenue and the last two miles in Central Park. It felt so wonderful to cross the finish line, the four of us holding hands with arms held up high and with big smiles on our faces.

We collected our finisher’s medals and got our team photo taken in front of the race banner before making our way to meet up with Marc at the Achilles International family reunion tent, near Central Park. Eleanor had our bags and gear ready for us.

Thank you to Gaston, his son Marc and to Achilles International for a weekend we will never forget. Thank you Melinda Lee for connecting us to Team Gaston. Many thanks to Bank Street Running Room (where Laurence is the manager) and the Orleans Running Room for the excellent support and routes throughout the training.