

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Penny Gillett — Finding "Miracles In the Darndest Ways"



More than a decade ago at the 1995 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Atlanta, Ga., the committee that selects the annual *Spirit of the Games* award winner bestowed the honor upon *two* athletes for the first time ever. That year, Penny Gillett, of Fresno, California, and James Torres, of Caguas, Puerto Rico, shared the special award.

Classified as IA – the classification for the most severely disabled athletes in the Games – Gillett, 51, has attended 16 of the Games, improving each year both spiritually and athletically. In addition to the coveted *Spirit of the Games* award, Gillett has accumulated a wide array of medals over the years, and has competed in a variety of events, including air rifles (marksmanship), the club throw (a special field event for quadriplegics), the motorized slalom (an event that tests skill and agility around a challenging obstacle course), and the motorized wheelchair rally.

Anyone who has seen Penny Gillett compete and has spoken with her for even a short time can attest to both, her excellence as an athlete at her competitive level, and her outgoing personality. Living with multiple sclerosis (MS) for many years, she has taken life's challenges head on and has truly conquered some incredible obstacles.

In her early twenties, Gillett was a U.S. Navy Corpsman stationed in the Great Lakes area. She began to develop chronic ailments such as back pain, weak legs, and shaky eyes. After only a year and a half, she was discharged from military service with a then-undiagnosed illness.

Gillett discovered she had MS, a disease that affects the central nervous system. She chose to continue her education in college and graduate school, earning her Masters degree in clinical psychology and a license in marriage, family, and child counseling. She established a private practice and dedicated her life to helping others who were experiencing adversity. Unfortunately, Gillett eventually lost the ability to speak and her muscles began to deteriorate. Because of this, she was forced to discontinue her practice, and once again deal with the adversity facing her.

A devout Christian, Gillett found her calling and began missionary work from the confines of her bed. With the assistance of volunteers, she began writing articles about her life and how to overcome a disability, based on her own experiences. With support from her family and the spiritual inspiration she receives from her faith, Gillett is now a published author, having written a book called, "*Miracles in the Darndest Ways.*"

"This is my 20th year competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games," she said this year. "I was introduced to air guns at the 1995 Games and have continued with professional shooting on a national level. This event is an absolute blessing; I get to see the country and compete with (not against) my friends. I like the camaraderie at the Games, which are a very important part of my life." Watching Penny Gillett, the spirit of the Games and the strength of the human spirit are evident — every time she competes.