

“All You Have to do is Hit One”



by

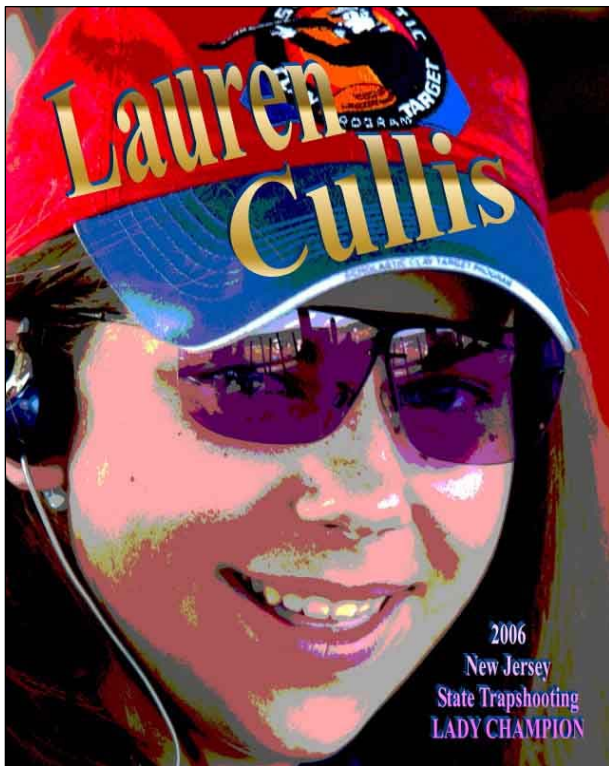
Lauren Cullis

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Editor's Note

December 2008: Lauren Cullis is a freshman at West Virginia University and has just completed her first semester with a 4.0 GPA. She wrote the attached essay for a English 101 assignment in September.

In 2002, at the age of 12, she joined the Delaware SCTP team. Over the next five years Lauren would win many titles including Sub-junior, Junior and Lady at numerous regional and state shoots.



This is a loving tribute to her trapshooting coach, and former Delaware Trapshooting Association President, Ron Cahall who died suddenly in January 2007.

Lauren's praise of Ron and "the secret of trapshooting" he conveyed to her is warmly recounted. Perhaps even more important, a greater message that the life skills which make her a champion in trapshooting are directly transferrable to the classroom and workplace where she will also succeed.

Invest a few minutes to read this and perhaps you'll notice an improvement in your trapshooting, studies, or career.

“All you have to do is hit one.” Ron Cahall would tell me this before I shot in every competition and each round of practice.

When I started trapshooting, I rarely hit targets and I became easily discouraged. Ron’s spirit and optimism were the main reasons I kept shooting. He taught me most of what I know about trapshooting and treated me like I was his daughter instead of just some kid that he coached. I owe him for much of my successes in trapshooting.



Ron was one of the best coaches I knew, but when he said the phrase, “All you have to do is hit one.” I had no idea what he meant or how it was even relevant to trapshooting. Years later I would come to realize how silly I was for not understanding that simple phrase.

My brother, Christopher, is six years older than me. When I was younger this meant if my mother could not find a babysitter (and it was rare that she could) I would have to attend every extracurricular activity in which my brother participated. Every baseball game, football game, or Boy Scout event, I was along for the ride. In 2001 my brother joined the newly formed Delaware Scholastic Clay Target Program’s trapshooting team. The following summer they competed in the 2002 Grand American World Trapshooting Championship. I packed my bags yet again and joined Christopher and my family to watch his competition.

This competition, however, was much different than any baseball or football game that I was forced to attend. I was actually interested in this sport. As we pulled into the parking lot of the Grand American, my nose and hands were pressed up against the glass of the car window. I was left speechless by what I saw.

A mixture of five men and women stood on what they called the “trap line” which is a concrete arc on the grass. One by one, the competitors loaded their shotgun with a shell, mounted the gun on their shoulder, and yelled into a microphone that stood in front of them. At that time, a neon-orange clay target would be released into the air from a little trap house 16-yards in front of them. As they saw the target come out, each competitor gracefully swung their gun toward the target, pulled their trigger, and if they did it correctly, the target would explode into a poof of smoke. It was one of the most incredible things I had ever seen in my life. This was the first time I could not keep my eyes off of one of my brother’s events. I was amazed every time Christopher or one of his teammates pulled their trigger.

I knew on that day in August of 2002...I was going to join my brother's team and become a trapshooter.

I didn't realize how difficult trapshooting would be. It looked rather simple. All I had to do was move my gun toward a target, pull my trigger, and the target would break. After my first day of practice with the team, I realized that it was not so easy.

I was only twelve years old when I started shooting and being such a petite girl, finding a shotgun that fit me correctly was difficult. Because I was using a shotgun that was too long for me, I would leave practices with my right shoulder and cheek either cut or bruised. A round of practice consisted of shooting at twenty-five targets. In the beginning of my shooting career, I could barely shoot at fifteen targets without becoming too tired to mount my gun or I would be in too much pain to finish the practice round. Most of my coaches thought I might not be back for another practice. But my one coach, Ron, had a great deal of faith in me and he knew that with a little more practice, a proper-sized gun, and a lot of encouragement, I could become an excellent shooter.

Ron gave me a great deal of advice and each and every bit of it was helpful. His advice would not come in big long speeches, but in short, straightforward phrases. For example, to explain what to look for when determining when to pull the trigger, he said, "See it, pass it, shoot it."

After hearing that, I easily understood that when I looked down the barrel of the gun and called for the target to be released, I must look for the target, pass the target with the barrel of my gun, and then pull my trigger to break the target.



Ron and Lauren

Ron had many other phrases similar to this one and I understood them all until the day he told me, "All you have to do is hit one." All I have to do is hit one target?

In a competition I was required to shoot at either one hundred or two hundred targets. If I only hit one I would lose the competition! I would always question why he said this and he would always respond by telling me that one day I would understand. I was still extremely confused. But, I let it go and continued practicing and getting ready for each competition with Ron's lessons in mind. Even the phrase I didn't understand, "All you have to do is hit one."

In 2004, I started to win various trapshooting events and my trophy collection began to grow. My father, all my coaches, and especially Ron, were exceedingly proud and impressed with how far I had come. In 2005, I competed in Delaware's state competition and won my division. Because of this, I was entered to compete in the Champion of Champions event at the 2005 Grand American -- the same competition my brother shot in just three years before.

The morning of the competition I was very nervous and arrived at my specific trap house early. Ron could tell how nervous I was. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small, velvet box. Inside was a silver pin in the shape of a broken target and he presented it to me while once again saying, "*All you have to do is hit one.*" I loved the pin and put it on to my shooting vest before the competition started.



Ron Cahall and Lauren Cullis shooting "protection" together after a practice session.

I still had no idea what his special phrase meant but I was only concerned with shooting my best. Every target I saw that day seemed to slow down and it seemed rather easy to break the targets. As I shot my ninetieth target, however, my concentration broke and I missed it. I hit every target after that and I ended up breaking my first score of 99x100. It was a day I would never forget.

Even though I did not win the Champion of Champions because two other competitors broke 100x100, I could not have been happier with my performance. I was so thankful I had both my dad and Ron's support and, every day after that my passion for trapshooting grew larger and larger. For the next two years, I would compete in numerous competitions and win a great number of them.

With my father's support and Ron's coaching techniques, I felt unstoppable. I became awfully competitive and sometimes even stressed out too much if I shot a below average score during a competition. Whenever I was upset Ron would always reiterate his (at the time meaningless) phrase, but it did not make me feel any better. Unfortunately I would never hear that phrase again. He had suffered a heart attack and Ron Cahall passed away on January 4th, 2007.

I became depressed and even let my grades fall to the point where I almost had to repeat my junior year of high school. I thought that shooting would not be the same anymore because I would not see Ron. I would not hear his unique laugh anymore or have him sing to me with his remarkable voice. I would not hear him call me "Amelia" (my middle name) or "baby doll" or "sweet girl" anymore. I did continue to shoot, but it was not as fun without Ron Cahall.

In my last year of shooting as a high school competitor, I thought I would make an effort to do my best and try to have as much fun as I did when I shot with Ron. During a competition as I waited for my turn to shoot, I thought of how much I missed Ron and how I could really use his advice. I looked down and played with the pin he had given me, which I had turned into a necklace after he passed away.

As I looked at my necklace, I thought of that famous saying and I remember how he said in his strong and bold voice, "All you have to do is hit one."

A light bulb flickered on in my head. All I had to do was hit one target (at a time).



That is the main concept of trapshooting. Each and every time a target came out of the trap house my objective was to hit that target and that target only. I did not have to worry about how many targets I broke out of one hundred. I was supposed to focus on each target individually and put all my knowledge and skill toward breaking that one target. It seemed so simple and easy I actually laughed a little.

For years, I thought Ron was a mad man for saying this and yet it now made complete sense. Many competitors believe success in trapshooting is due to what type of shotgun a shooter owns or what type of ammunition a shooter uses. I felt as though I held the “real” secret to trapshooting!

From then on, I knew Ron was with me in spirit as I shot in competition or just shot for fun. He was still coaching me even though he was not there in person. I had regained my passion for trapshooting one shot at a time. Realizing the meaning of the phrase not only helped me in trapshooting but it became a philosophy of my life.

Now when I face an obstacle in life, whether it be preparing for multiple tests or missing a few targets in a competition, all I have to do is remind myself of that simple phrase:

“All you have to do is hit one.”



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