



Boston Stronger

The bombings at the Boston Marathon one year ago left four people dead and 264 seriously injured. But Rebekah Gregory and Pete DiMartino didn't just survive—they fell in love. And on April 21 they'll be back at the race...this time as newlyweds.

By Ashley Edwards Walker

Photograph by Jeff Lipsky

AN UNBREAKABLE BOND

"We're in this together. I promise you," Pete told Rebekah as they recovered from their injuries.

On her: jacket, ACNE STUDIOS. Dress, ARMANI EXCHANGE. On him: sweater, EVERLANE. Jeans, LEVYS. Boots, CLARKS. See *Glamour's* Shopper for more information.

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April will be a busy month for Rebekah Gregory and Pete DiMartino. On April 4 they are getting married. Eight days later is her twenty-seventh birthday. On the 21st they will race in the Boston Marathon, with Pete pushing Rebekah in a wheelchair. Then, more than a year after the bombings that changed their lives and their love, Rebekah may amputate her leg.

While many survivors of the tragic bombing in Boston last April 15 are already walking on prosthetics and moving on, physically at least, with their lives, Rebekah—despite 16 surgeries to try to save her leg—has been stuck in medical limbo. Her heart, however, has never been more certain.

That day in 2013, she and Pete, 29, had been on only a handful of dates. Living more than 1,600 miles apart, they'd been seeing each other long-distance and had planned a weekend in Boston to watch his mom run in the marathon and to introduce her to Rebekah's six-year-old son, Noah. The couple had exchanged *I love yous* before that day, but it was only as they pulled each other through months of grueling recovery after the bomb blast—Rebekah from the decimated leg and a shattered hand, and Pete from a blasted Achilles tendon—that they realized they never wanted to be apart again. When *Glamour* visited them at their new home in Richmond, Texas, Pete expertly guided Rebekah on her "Boston Strong"-themed blue and yellow crutches before they sat down and opened up about returning to the finish line to embrace a whole new start.

REBEKAH: In March of 2012 I was in Rochester, New York, on business for my job at a corporate housing firm. The last night in town I had dinner at the restaurant where Pete was bartending.

PETE: I thought she was hot, and then I realized just how cool she was. She went home the next day, but I found her on Facebook.

REBEKAH: Soon we were FaceTime-ing and communicating every day. I thought, This is crazy. I live in Texas; he lives in New York. How is this ever going to work? But if you have that kind of connection, you should give it a shot. So in September I flew to Rochester for our first date.

PETE: I had a good weekend planned. She met my family and my friends—everyone loved her!

REBEKAH: My son, Noah, loved him right off the bat too. Soon we were flying between Texas and New York every month.

PETE: And then we planned a weekend in Boston for the marathon. My whole family was there to cheer on my mom. My dad wanted to wait right at the finish line, but the rest of us—Rebekah, Noah, my aunt, brother-in-law, sisters Gina and Kimberly, and I—all stopped to watch about 50 yards before that. We ended up being 10 feet from the first explosion.

REBEKAH: We were thrown back. Everybody was screaming and crying. My only thought was, Where is my baby? I could hear Noah's little voice

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saying, “Mommy, Mommy, Mommy,” but I didn’t know where it was coming from. My ears were ringing, and everything sounded muffled—the blast had burst both of my eardrums—yet somehow, maybe mother’s intuition, I could still hear Noah. Finally I figured out that he was behind me. I reached for him, but when I lifted my hand, there were two bones sticking out of it. Then I realized I couldn’t see my legs. It seemed like they were gone. I was in excruciating pain, short of breath, passing out. I didn’t think I was going to make it. I started praying, “God, if this is it for me, just let me know that Noah’s OK first.” Then Pete’s aunt set Noah down next to me. He was fine—just a dozen or so minor shrapnel wounds in his right leg and the back of his head. I took that as a sign God had heard me, that I really *was* going to die. I started freaking out. My heart was racing; I knew I was losing blood, and really fast.

PETE: My left shoe was blown off. And the fire from the explosion literally turned my jeans into Daisy Duke shorts. When I looked down, they were still burning a little bit. I could see people with limbs that were just gone.

REBEKAH: Pete’s sister Kimi was holding my hand. She was like, “Just stay with me. Tell me about your favorite memory of Noah.”

PETE: I saw Rebekah on the ground and Noah next to her, crying. Her leg looked really messed up, but I thought, We’re all OK; we’re alive. Then I noticed blood and skin hanging off the back of my right leg. I knew I needed help.

REBEKAH: When the first responder arrived, he looked at my leg and said, “This is really, really bad, but we’re going to take care of you.” He put me in the ambulance and screamed, “We have an amputee!” It didn’t sink in—I was in so much pain. From looking



THE DAY LIFE CHANGED

Above and top right: Rebekah and her son, Noah, head to the race with Pete to cheer on his mom. Right: Pete (on stretcher) and Noah are rushed to the hospital.



“One night I told him, ‘I want to get through

at Pete and Noah, I knew they’d be OK, so I was kind of at peace. Pete and I said we loved each other—I thought that was the last time I would ever see him. It was so chaotic; Pete, Noah, and I were each taken to different hospitals.

PETE: My sister Gina was taken too, for a leg wound. The rest of my family had only minor injuries. It’s amazing that Noah was so close to Rebekah and, apart from a couple of scratches, he was OK.

REBEKAH: He needed only a few stitches—that’s all. They say my body shielded him. I still get chills when I think about what could have happened to him.

PETE: I found out I had a serious Achilles tear and second-degree burns on more than 10 percent of my body, and both of my eardrums were burst.

REBEKAH: Huge chunks had been blown off my left leg—it looked like a shark ate me for lunch—and my left hand was completely broken. My body swelled so much that when my mom arrived at the hospital that night from Texas, she told the staff they’d sent her to the wrong room. I was basically unconscious for the first seven days. Later in the week [accused bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev] was brought to the same floor of the hospital that I was on. Every time I would go to surgery my mom had to look at the guard standing outside his room—she just wanted to go in there and kill him, you know? My dad had gone to stay with Noah. If I’d know my baby was at another hospital, I would have been a crazy person. But he was discharged by the time I came to, and he was just so happy to be with me. He kept saying, “I’m so glad I’m here! I’m so glad you’re here, Mommy!” It broke my heart. The fact that he’s been through all of this and remained so strong and courageous is amazing.

PETE: When I first came to, I was in a lot of pain. There were surgeries to repair my Achilles. Friends and family started stopping by.

I kept asking about Rebekah. We finally got to FaceTime, but it was hard to talk because I had a tube down my throat.

REBEKAH: When the doctors talked about my injuries, they never said, “You’re going to be able to keep your leg.” It was always, “You may be able to; you may not.” At first I begged them to go ahead and amputate because I felt like being in the hospital was taking too much time away from being with Noah. But my surgeon said there could be just as many complications if we did amputate.

EDWARD K. RODRIGUEZ, M.D., REBEKAH’S ORTHOPEDIC SURGEON IN BOSTON: Amputation is certainly quicker if you want to get back to your life, but prosthetics can be costly over a lifetime, and you never know how a patient will do as she gets older. Still, rehabilitation can be a very long process, and the limb will always have some form of limitation when compared with what the normal limb was like. Rebekah has been very stoic—an outstanding patient through it all.

REBEKAH: At first, when I thought about my leg, I remembered jumping on the trampoline with my son and going into a store and picking out a supercute pair of heels, because my favorite thing in life is shoes. But I made the decision early on that I was going to be fine either way. All I wanted to do was hug Pete and be reassured we were going to be OK. After three weeks and 11 operations, the doctors thought I should try rehab and transferred me to the facility where Pete was. I finally got to be with him!

PETE: It was hard to see her because she was so frail, and it was the first time I really got a look at her injuries. It was also kind of awkward because I was in a wheelchair and she was in a bed with rails. Trying to hug somebody over all these, like, contraptions isn’t the easiest thing in the world!

REBEKAH: And then we had only 23 hours together because my leg got infected and I had to go *back* to the hospital.

NOAH IN WHEELCHAIR: CHARLES RUPA/PHOTO PROPOSAL; KIMBERLY KILGORE; ALL OTHERS COURTESY OF SUBJECTS

PETE: To be honest, after the bombings, I kind of distanced myself from everybody, including Rebekah, and just tried to figure out what was going on with me.

REBEKAH: It was hard *not* to distance ourselves from each other. Pete was getting back to his life and didn’t want to talk about everything that happened, our injuries—but I was still in pain and having surgeries. One night I told him, “I want to get through this with you, but if it’s too much, I understand.” Every ounce of my body hurt with the thought of losing him. We took 24 hours to think about it.

PETE: The next day I told her, “I don’t ever want to hear you say that again. We’re in this together; I promise you.” Once I processed what happened, I think it made our love much stronger. The day I left Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, May 23, I got to throw out the first pitch at the Red Sox game. My dad is a die-hard fan, and my grandfather, who had passed away about a week before the bombings, was too, so that day was emotional for me. Rebekah came by ambulance from the hospital, and we both sat in our wheelchairs on the field, holding hands. Before I went out there, my dad said, “When you get to the mound, I want you to look around and see that every single person in this stadium is cheering for you.” It was incredible. The day after that I went back to Rochester and started staying with my parents. Rebekah was still in the hospital.

REBEKAH: I was there a total of 39 days in Boston, then I was airlifted to a hospital in Houston for three weeks. After that, I moved into my parents’ house. I had to wear a metal contraption called a fixator, with rods going through my bones. It was extremely painful! I couldn’t do anything, and I lost almost 50 pounds.

PETE: All September I wasn’t allowed to fly because I’d had surgery

and realizing we could have lost each other...I just didn’t want to spend another day of my life without him. We were on the phone one day, and he said, “I’ll always be here for you.” And I was like, “But you’re not here; you’re in New York.”

PETE: I hung up. I packed all my stuff. And at 5:30 in the morning on Tuesday, October 1, I jumped in my car and headed south.

REBEKAH: He was so vague the entire week. I’d call and ask, “How was your day?” “Oh, uneventful.” I was worried because he seemed distant. I had no idea he was driving down here!

PETE: I got to Richmond, Texas, after driving for three days. I had asked Rebekah’s mom to help me surprise her. When she wheeled Rebekah in, I was shaking like a leaf, and Rebekah started crying. **REBEKAH:** He didn’t give me time to register that he was actually in Texas. Then he dropped down on his knee, and I was like, “What are you doing?” I was bawling my eyes out. He got out the ring. He didn’t even ask me to marry him and I said, “Yes, yes!”

PETE: We have been through so much together and learned so much about each other. Her strength and the way she doesn’t let this get her down are amazing. I couldn’t ask for a better partner in all this.

REBEKAH: I can’t imagine what I would do without Pete. Right now he and Noah are living in the house we just finished building—we did small modifications like wider doors for the wheelchair—and I’m staying at my parents’ place until the wedding. Noah’s done surprisingly well. I hope he’ll remember the bombing for the good things that came from it. Even though something terrible happened to our family, we’re closer now; we appreciate things more. Pete is getting ready to look for a job, but I still can’t bear weight on my leg. I just had a sixteenth surgery, which my doctor hopes will alleviate some

this with you, but if it’s too much, I understand.”



to repair my eardrums. [Rebekah will have the operation later.] But we talked every day.

REBEKAH: At the end of September I was having a really tough week. I’d gone to the doctor to finally get the fixator off, but he said we had to leave it on. I’ve always been pretty optimistic, but suddenly I just felt stuck. And I wasn’t doing well being separated from Pete. The long-distance thing was a lot easier before the bombings. Having that experience together



AFTER THE BLAST
Above left: Pete sends a love message to Rebekah in the hospital. Above: She, Noah, and Pete (not pictured) attend a Red Sox game. Left: Pete drove from New York to Texas to propose.

of the pain. If not, after the wedding, I’m ready to amputate.

PETE: At first I struggled with that. But seeing her in pain is hard for me, and I’d do anything to help her feel better. Now I’m at peace with Rebekah losing her leg.

REBEKAH: I realize that even if I do amputate, there’s a long road ahead. I mean, there are still bad times. I’ve had panic attacks since the bombings. Loud noises get to me—it happened when we saw *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. By the time we got home, I was crying. Pete just held me, and I was like, “Does this ever go away? Is this always going to be with us?” And he said, “I don’t know.” But with my leg the way it is, we’re so limited in what we can do, we wouldn’t have any more kids. Amputating could open many more doors. And I’m done waiting. I want to *live*.

WILLIAM C. MCGARVEY, M.D., REBEKAH’S ORTHOPEDIC SURGEON IN HOUSTON: It’s her decision. She’s put a lot of effort, time, and commitment into trying to get well, but her injuries continue to cause her difficulty.

REBEKAH: For now the only thing that matters to me is getting to walk, hop, roll, or *something* down the aisle to Pete!

PETE: And then we’ll do the marathon. Ever since I’ve been able to run again, it’s been my goal to do it this year. We decided that I would push Rebekah in her wheelchair so she could do it too. It’ll take some of the strain off my legs. Together we’re both stronger.

REBEKAH: Just to go there and do it and have that kind of closure—I think that’s what we all need right now. I’m sure the day will bring a mixture of emotions. Parts of it will be scary, and there will be sad points. But this whole situation has made me appreciate myself, and us, more than ever. I’ve got huge scars, but at the same time, every time I notice them I think, I’m a survivor.

Ashley Edwards Walker is an editor at Glamour.