



# GRETCHEN ROUS BESSER



Val d'Isère - 1976

For Gretchen Rous Besser, "Skiing has been the perfect mix of my intellectual and athletic life."

Gretchen Rous Besser first put on a pair of skis and slid down Observatory Hill when she was a student at Wellesley College. She admits she didn't know what she was doing, but she liked it enough to try again.

For her second trip, she borrowed Northland wooden skis from her cousin and went with a group from New York City to Bromley, Vermont. She remembers the weather was freezing cold and she fell—a lot—but she still loved it.

That love affair has lasted more than seven decades, and despite dislocating her shoulder a dozen times and two hip replacements, this petite and strong-willed woman still leaves her house in



the dark, at least three days a week, to earn first tracks as Stowe's "Dawn Patrol."

She joined the National Ski Patrol after witnessing a child, hurt under the chairlift at Smuggler's Notch Madonna Mountain. "My heart went out to the crying child and I decided then that I wanted to do something to help."

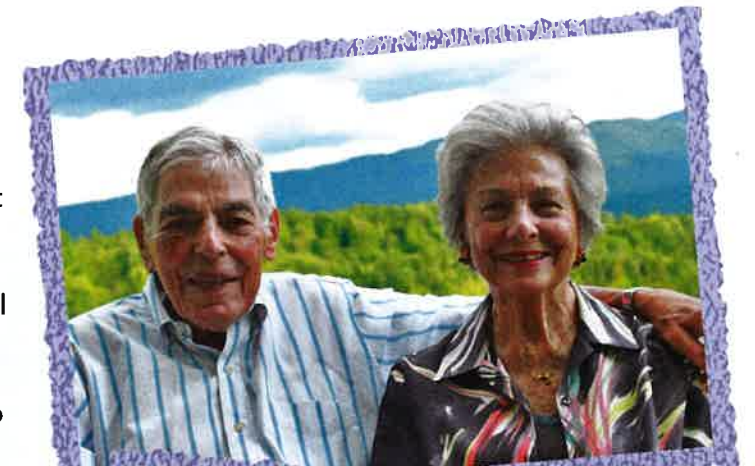
She started as a volunteer at Milton Snow Bowl in New Jersey. Then, in 1966, joined the Patrol at Smuggler's after earning her Emergency Medical Training certification. Finally, she was admitted to the Patrol on the Stowe side of the Notch. "They didn't allow women on the Patrol at Mount Mansfield," says Besser, "but we didn't make waves back then."

A Fulbright scholar who studied French Literature at the Sorbonne in Paris, and then earned her Ph.D. while teaching at Columbia, Gretchen was on an International Ski Patrol trip to Switzerland in 1975 when she started thinking, "What can I do for the Patrol that's different from teaching first aid and bringing people down the mountain?"

Calling on her writing talents, she proposed a book-length history of the NSP. The Board agreed and named her National Historian (the organization's first) and "The National Ski Patrol: Samaritans of the Snow" debuted in 1983. She wrote an updated version for the Patrol's 75th anniversary in 2013, the same year she was inducted to the inaugural class of the National Ski Patrol Hall of Fame.

In her role as Historian, she also managed the Patrol's archives at the Denver Public Library and designed the museum at the national headquarters in Lakewood, Colorado. After all, who better to manage the history than a woman who has written a column for the National Ski Patrol magazine since 1978.

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Besser has toured five of the seven continents on skis. In 1987, she went with a U.S. delegation to advise China on ski safety and developing areas like White Cloud near Jilin. "They were loading every other chair on the single chairlift at White Cloud," Besser recalls, "saying 'Americans weigh more than Chinese.' At the mid-station, however, the Chinese Racers were filling the empty chairs, sometimes even sitting on the armrests. The lift overloaded and started to roll back. We had to jump. I wasn't as concerned about the height, as I was the rocks underneath. But we all managed to land safely," she says adding, "The Chinese laughed and laughed."

Needless to say, Besser had to tactfully recommend better safety measures. "There was no such thing as risk management."

Because she could speak five languages, she served two years (1979 and 1980) as a hostess in the V.I.P. lounge greeting the racers at both the World Cup and Winter Olympic events at Lake Placid.

She also had a chance meeting with Jean Claude Killy at Gretchen's Restaurant in Sun Valley in 1978. She didn't recognize the famous Olympian, but overheard him speaking French and later learned they were both nursing dislocated shoulders.

Without a doubt, skiing has filled Besser's scrapbook with once-in-a-lifetime memories, and she, in turn, has devoted her head and heart to the sport she still loves. 🌟

In Honor of Gretchen Besser

**A SPECIAL CONGRATULATIONS FROM**

Jack and Carol Kindler • Nancy Gold • Joan Bick  
Bernard & Elaine D'Avella, Jr. • Doris Scheff



## **GRETCHEN ROUS BESSER** **Career Highlights**

**Born: December 1, 1928**

**1949-1950: Fulbright Scholar studying French Literature  
Sorbonne University, Paris**

**1966: Ski Patrol at Smugglers' Notch**

**1967: PhD Columbia University**

**1976: National Ski Patrol Historian**

**1978: Began writing "National Notes" for National Ski Patrol  
Magazine**

**1983: "The National Ski Patrol: Samaritans of the Snow"  
Published**

**1987: Ski Safety Delegate to China**

**1990: National Ski Patrol Distinguished Service Award**

**1997: International Ski History Association Ullr Award**

**2013: Inducted to the inaugural class of National Ski Patrol  
Hall of Fame**

**2015: Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum Hall of Fame  
Paul Robbins Award**

**The Dawn Patrol**

Art & Pauline • Tom & Natalie • Dave • Sam  
Steve & Carol • Ken & Jan • Don & Margo • Bob  
Lee & Jo • Tony • Tad • Big G & Sue