

Kaw Valley **Senior Monthly**

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INSIDE

Amazing Aging!
For Seniors and Those Who Love Them

A free publication of the Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging, Inc.
Advocacy, Advice and Assistance on Aging for Shawnee, Jefferson and Douglas Counties

Fall 2015



JAAA's Team Combats Fraud

KEVIN GROENHAGEN PHOTO



*Byron Edmondson:
Running the race
set before him.*

See story on page three

The Fall 2015 issue of *Amazing Aging* is included in this month's *Senior Monthly*. See inside.

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Edmondson participates in Marine Corps Marathon

(Editor's note: We went to press with the November issue of Senior Monthly two days before Byron Edmondson was set to participate in the 40th Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C. We will publish an update in the December issue.)

By Kevin Groenhagen

Byron Edmondson, Lawrence, ran in the 40th Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., on October 25. While preparing for the marathon, he followed Jeff Galloway's six-month program in *Marathon: You Can Do It!*

"Galloway emphasizes just completing the marathon as opposed to setting some time goal," Edmondson said.

In some respects, Galloway's advice concerning a 26.2-mile run has been appropriate for other aspects of Edmondson's life.

Edmondson, 69, spent the first months of his life in the central Kansas.

"My father was overseas at the time I was born, so my mother was living with my grandmother in Holyrood," Edmondson said. "He was active duty during World War II and then stayed in the reserves. He had a lifelong com-

mitment to the military."

After the war, Edmondson's father earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Arkansas, a master's degree from Oklahoma State University, and a doctorate from University of California at Davis. Then he went to work for the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. Edmondson lived in the D.C. area from the middle of his elementary school years until he graduated from high school. He then returned to Kansas in 1963 to attend the University of Kansas (KU), where he was on the track team as a long-distance runner. While at KU, he also worked for Cooper-Warren Mortuary and, later, for a privately operated ambulance service.

"I ended up dropping out of school," Edmondson said. "If you weren't married and you weren't going to school, you were drafted. So I decided to volunteer and went into the Navy."

In the Navy, Edmondson became a hospital corpsman. Corpsmen work in a wide variety of capacities and locations, including shore establishments such as naval hospitals and clinics, aboard ships, and as the primary medical caregivers for sailors while underway. In addition, corpsmen are often the only medical caregivers for Marine units in the field. The Navy assigned Edmondson to a Marine unit when he arrived in Viet-

COURTESY PHOTO



Byron Edmondson running in the Marine Corps Marathon in 2010.

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Kaw Valley
Senior Monthly

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Editor and Publisher

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Byron Edmondson

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nam in 1968.

“My father was in the Navy during World War II, and I was officially in the Navy, too,” he said. “However, we both served Marines. I was a hospital corpsman. I was in Marine uniform, under Marine command, so I identify more with Marines. My father was a landing craft captain who delivered troops to various locations in the Pacific Ocean. He went to Iwo Jima. Someone took a picture of him standing on the boat there with Mt. Suribachi right behind him.”

“They sent me to what they called the 1st Shore Party Battalion,” Edmondson continued. “I then went with a minesweeping team with the Marines south of Da Nang. They would walk along on the route, and I would follow in a jeep. We would sweep the roads every day before making use of them. We had a Vietnamese family—a father, mother, and two children—that would

wait for us to finish, and then they would come in where they operated a laundry service for the Marines. One day we swept the road, opened it up, and that family started down the road with their jeep. They got a couple of hundred feet down the road, and somehow our minesweepers missed a mine. The family hit it. The father was killed immediately. The mother was badly injured. The children, who were in the back seat, were injured, but not quite as bad.”

“A similar thing happened with a truck that was full of Marines,” Edmondson continued. “We opened the road, they came down the road, and the truck hit a mine. It fell over on its side. We were at the end of the road, so we turned around and ran back to the truck. I was the first one there. The fuel line had broken and there was a really bad fire. One Marine was under the truck. I yelled at him to come out, but he said he couldn’t. I grabbed a rifle and stretched it out to him. He grabbed it, and I tried pulling him out, but he just wasn’t coming. A sergeant was

able to grab his hand, but he couldn’t pull him out. The fire was getting worse and worse.”

Unfortunately, one of the truck’s tires had trapped the Marine’s foot underneath it. He burned to death in the fire as Edmondson and the others helplessly watched.

And then there was the time when the corpsman himself needed medical caregivers.

“One night we were attacked,” Edmondson said. “We had bunkers in front of all our sleeping facilities, which were cabin-like structures. Mortar shells were flying in. We ran out to get in our bunker.”

While in the bunker, Edmondson started feeling some pain. When he got out of the bunker, a Marine friend shone a flashlight on Edmondson and saw blood. “Oh no! Doc’s wounded!” the friend shouted.

“Doc” is the colloquial form of address for a corpsman. In the Marine Corps, this term is generally used as a sign of respect.

It turned out that Edmondson had

been hit by three pieces of shrapnel while he was running to get into the bunker.

“I didn’t even know I had been hit,” he said. “I was in such a panic that I really didn’t know what was going on. They collected all the wounded people and put us in one little clinic area until morning. Then they brought helicopters in and medivacked us to hospitals.”

After being wounded, the battalion assigned Edmondson to a medical civic action program.

“Our crew took a jeep out two days a week to provide medical care to Vietnamese civilians, mainly children, including at a nearby Catholic orphanage,” he said. “I also worked at our battalion rear area medical clinic the rest of the week. I did this until my year of duty was finished.”

After leaving Vietnam and getting out of the Navy, Edmondson returned to KU in 1970 to resume his studies.

“On campus, there was a lot of stuff going on during the 1970s,” he said. “I

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Byron Edmondson

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came back opposed to the war. I joined Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Not only did I get involved with that, I also got involved with other stuff that was, I'll say, immoral."

During this period, Edmondson got married and dropped out of KU for a second time.

"I knew I had to do something to make money, so I started doing auto repair work," he said.

Edmondson and his wife also had a daughter, Andrea. However, the marriage ended in a divorce shortly after Andrea was born.

"My parents set a good example, and I wanted to follow their example," Edmondson said. "When my marriage fell apart, it was very disturbing."

Edmondson fell into a deep depression. Fortunately, lending a tool to a friend ultimately led to an end of that depression and a new purpose in his life.

"Since I worked on cars, I had some

tools," he said. "A couple of months before my divorce, an old friend of mine had borrowed a tool from me. When he brought the tool back, he said to me, 'If you ever want to stop by for some conversation, feel free to come by.' I knew where he lived, but I wasn't that close to him, so I didn't think I would stop by. But when this divorce came, I was in bad shape. I couldn't sleep at night. I couldn't eat. One Sunday afternoon, I was driving by his house and remembered his invitation. I decided to stop. I walked up and knocked on their door. I didn't know what I was going to say to this guy and his wife. When they opened the door, I just started crying. They didn't know what was going on. They didn't know what to say. The wife asked me in and asked if they could pray for me."

After consoling Edmondson, the couple invited him to live with their family temporarily.

"They brought me in almost as if I were another one of their children," he said. "They took me a couple of times to this one church. I just sat in back and cried while everyone else

danced and sang. At another meeting, this guy asked, 'Who wants to give your life to Christ?' My thinking was that no one else wanted me because my wife had rejected me. That was my interpretation, although it really wasn't true. My parents cared about me and I had friends who cared about me. I thought if Jesus wanted me, I'd give my life to him. So I raised my hand. That's when I became a Christian."

Edmondson eventually became the head deacon of his church.

Edmondson also started his own auto repair business, Byron's Autohaus, and remarried.

"The church I belonged to had recommended that I'd wait two years before remarrying," he said. "I thought, 'I'm not waiting that long.' I ended up waiting nine years."

Edmondson and his new wife eventually had six children together. Although his family life and business were both doing well, he strongly felt he had to

complete something he started nearly four decades earlier.

"I felt like I had disappointed my parents by dropping out of school," Edmondson explained. "I decided to sell my business after running it for 18 years and went back to school. I spent another two years at KU, got straight A's this time, and earned a degree in Communication Studies in 2003 along with minor degrees in African American Studies and Leadership Studies. My father died just a month and a half before I graduated, but I had sent my report card to him every semester. Earlier that semester before I graduated, he wrote me a letter congratulating me."

"I actually graduated with honors," Edmondson continued. "But when I walked down the hill, I had no idea what I would be doing two weeks after that. But then I heard that the City Union Mission in Kansas City was hiring a shelter manager. As part of my

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Byron Edmondson

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schooling, I had to do some volunteer work at the mission. I applied for the job and got it. I worked there for a year and a half. During that time, there was a group of churches in Lawrence getting an organization running called the Leo Center. The center was centered around medical assistance, but they were also developing a food pantry and a financial benevolence ministry. Because I worked at City Union Mission, had been a deacon at my church, and knew of number of pastors in town, I got the job of being in charge of the food pantry and the financial benevolence ministry.”

Edmondson worked at the Leo Center for five years. Then he did something he said was a bit unusual for someone his age.

“I got a one-year, temporary job with the National Park Service as a park guide on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.,” Edmondson said. “I had to make presentations at the various memorials, so I had to learn a lot about history in really short order. To me, one of the most meaningful memorials is the Lincoln Memorial,” he continued. “The statue of Lincoln is sitting, and there are speeches that he gave on the walls, and those speeches are very meaningful. As I worked there, people would often ask about a rumor that Robert E. Lee’s face is engraved on the back of Abraham Lincoln’s head. I don’t think they would have done that. However, I’d take them outside the memorial, stay on the top level, and walk around to the back of the building, where we were standing right behind Lincoln. When we looked across Arlington Memorial Bridge over the Potomac River, we would see Arlington Cemetery. Right up the hill in Arlington Cemetery is the Custis-Lee Mansion, which is where Robert E. Lee lived before the Civil War. So, in that sense, Robert E. Lee is symbolically right behind Abraham Lincoln. I would take people out there to show them that view and say, ‘If the Civil War had turned out differently, there might not be a bridge there connecting all

the memorials in the Arlington Cemetery area with all the memorials on the Mall. We might be looking across the river at another country.’”

According to Edmondson, park guides had certain guidelines about what they said during tours, but they were given a little freedom to be creative. The walk behind the Lincoln Memorial was something he developed. He would also talk about the symbolism he saw in the Lincoln Memorial.

“Lincoln is looking straight down the Reflecting Pool at the Washington Monument,” Edmondson said. “In the Reflecting Pool, you can see the reflection of the Washington Monument. In that sense, Lincoln is looking to his past. I would tell people, ‘That’s what we need to do. That’s why we’re here. We need to put ourselves in the position of Abraham Lincoln and look to our past and learn from our history. The Washington Monument stands on a hill, and at the bottom of that hill is the World War II Memorial. It’s not quite as visible, but I would point out that, therefore, Abraham Lincoln is also symbolically looking toward his future. We need to do that, too. We have to consider what part we will play in our nation’s future. That was very meaningful to me, and I tried to pass that on.’”

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial also has special significance to Edmondson.

“All the names of United States military personnel killed in Vietnam are listed on the wall,” he said. “It’s a pretty long wall with more than 58,000 names on it, but if you put up a wall with the names of all the people killed during the war, that wall, instead of being almost 500 feet long, would extend the full two miles of the Mall all the way to the Capitol Building.”

Edmondson and his family continued to own their home in Lawrence while he worked in Washington, but he bought an RV trailer to live in while he was out east.

“I was able to bring my family out to see the area,” he said. “We home school, so we have flexibility in what we do and when. A big portion of my family spent at least six weeks in the



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Byron Edmondson

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area. We also took some time to go to Gettysburg, Philadelphia, and New York.”

While working as a park guide, Edmondson, who has also run in the Bataan Memorial Death March Marathon in New Mexico, ran in his first Marine Corps Marathon.

“I badly injured my leg at the 20-mile point,” he said. “I had to walk the last six miles, but I did complete it. My main purpose this time was to just complete the marathon since it—as well as sharing it with my family—has a lot of meaning to me. It starts by Arlington National Cemetery, loops around the National Mall and all the memorials and museums, goes back by the Pentagon, and finishes by going uphill to the Iwo Jima Memorial.”

This time, Edmondson ran as a member of the 2015 Semper Fi Fund Marine Corps Marathon Team. The

marathon was limited to 30,000 participants, so a lottery system was used to determine who would get to run. As part of the Semper Fi Fund Marine Corps Marathon Team, Edmondson bypassed the lottery system, but was required to raise a minimum amount of contributions to the Semper Fi Fund. The fund provides immediate financial assistance and lifetime support to post-9/11 wounded, critically ill, and injured members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families.

During several points in his life, Edmondson wandered off the road, got injured, and just felt like giving up. However, he believes his faith has given him the strength to complete literal and figurative marathons. He cites Hebrews 12:1 as a source of inspiration: “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

survey asking the Seniors themselves. The question is do the facts line up with the assumptions?

The results were telling and really had very little to do with health issues; 88% of the families surveyed said the number one reason for moving was safety and security. Second to that, at 84%, was a social life, then the ability to age in place and lastly convenience. Families are witness to the fact that their parents were lonely and more isolated. They are thrilled to see their parents back in the swing of things! When the residents themselves were asked: 73% said staying fit which tied with lifelong learning, 69% said choices and options in life and 67% said eating well! What a different picture that paints. It clearly delineates the advantages of living in a community. It has to do with a lifestyle that allows real independence and freedom to live an active lifestyle that is right at your fingertips and eliminates the burdens of home ownership. This isn't about being old and sick, it is about making the rest of your life the best of your life. When you have questions about Great Living call the experts at McCrite Plaza 785 267 2960.



Just the Facts

By Connie Michaelis, Marketing Director
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One might assume that Seniors move to retirement communities when they have health issues that make staying at home impossible. Much is being published today that indicates that the majority of elders prefer to stay in their homes as long as possible. Only 2.8% of people between the ages 70-74 moved between 2010 and 2011. Reluctance to move was especially high with those that owned their home with no mortgage. The assumption is that everyone wants to stay in their home because there is no advantage to moving. Interestingly the same study included a survey asking the children of Seniors why they believed their parents moved and then another

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