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## Eagle Scout candidate to retire worn flags, raise public awareness

BY KYLE BROWN May 12, 2015



Loren Elliott

Joshua Arri, 17, holds a Scout salute for a portrait Sunday in front of the Columbia Public Library. Arri has recovered from a brain tumor and worked from behind to receive the Eagle Scout rank before he turns 18.

COLUMBIA — Joshua Arri remembers being barefoot when he made the decision to pursue Scouting again.

Arri's friend had brought him to an Eagle Scout court of honor ceremony, but Arri left his shoes in the car. The two sat through the ceremony, and as they watched, they reminisced about the times they shared while in Boy Scouts.

Arri likened himself to Frodo Baggins in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

"Frodo began on a journey but got separated from his friends," Arri said. "And there he was, barefoot and alone with his best friend, Sam. He needed to finish what he started, and I thought to myself, 'I want to finish what I started.'"

So after a two-year hiatus from Scouting for medical reasons, the 17-year-old chose to get back in the saddle and work toward reaching the highly sought Eagle Scout rank.

Getting there would be no easy task. Only about 5 percent of Boy Scouts who join a troop earn the rank of Eagle, according to the National Eagle Scout Association, and he was already a couple years behind.

But now, two years later, Arri has nearly completed plowing through the ranks and is knocking at the door to becoming an Eagle Scout. All that's left is for him to complete is his Eagle Scout project, Scouting for Flags.

Until May 25, Arri is gathering worn U.S. flags at six locations throughout Columbia, and he will burn them in a retirement ceremony on Flag Day, June 14, to cap off his project.

**A patriotic affair**

Arri got the idea for his project when he saw that there were few places in Columbia where people could retire their U.S. flags.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion both accept flags, but Arri decided he wanted his project to increase public awareness for retiring flags in a respectful way.

The U.S. flag code states: "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

And although the fitness of a flag for display is subjective, the flag is considered a symbol of the U.S., and its proper retirement reflects that.

Arri's respect for the flag comes in part from his family's history of military service.

One of his grandfathers served in the Army, the other in the Navy and other family members died in service.

"Ever since a young age, I always had a deep respect for the flag as a symbol, but also for the veterans who have fought for it, the ones who come home and the ones who don't," Arri said.

Joshua Arri's mother, Shelley Arri, said his respect for veterans started when she took him and his brothers to a military funeral. There were three soldiers doing a 21-gun salute because the man who had died was a World War II veteran.

"I took the boys up to the funeral and explained to them that these three men had all served our country and paid for our freedom with their service," Shelley Arri said. "They went up, and each one shook the gentlemen's hand and thanked them for their service. Ever since then, every time they see someone who is military, they go up and ... just thank them."

### **'Truly a miracle'**

In 2010, Shelley Arri decided to consult Joshua Arri's pediatrician about a series of symptoms that didn't make sense for someone his age. He was unusually tall, for example, and experienced back pain.

Before meeting with the doctor, Shelley Arri had looked up her son's symptoms online, and one of the ailments that matched them was a pituitary tumor. She worried about her findings and shared them with the doctor.

Even though she expected him to tell her not to take Internet results seriously, the pediatrician told her there were too many symptoms present to ignore the possibility of a pituitary tumor. So he ordered an MRI.

The results came back showing that Joshua Arri did have a pituitary adenoma, a benign tumor, but the MRI showed that something else was wrong. At the base of his brain was a chiari malformation, a condition in which tissue at the back of the brain protrudes down into the foramen magnum, the opening in the bottom of the skull for the spinal cord.

In severe cases, chiari malformations can lead to neurological complications.

The doctor told them to keep an eye on the malformation, and if there were any more symptoms, they should return. He didn't want to do surgery unless it was necessary, Shelley Arri said.

Six months later, Joshua Arri returned for another MRI. This time, the neurosurgeon found that the tumor had shrunk and the malformation had lessened, Shelley Arri said.

After diagnosis, the overwhelming majority of chiari malformations do one of two things: grow or stay the same. A 2003 medical report, however, referred to a 39-year-old Russian man who had a type I chiari malformation that resolved itself.

The first reported spontaneous resolution of a chiari malformation was in 1990. Between 1990 and 2003, there were 30 known cases of chiari I malformations fixing themselves. And according to the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, slightly fewer than one in 1,000 people have some type of chiari malformation.

After returning for a third MRI a year later, Joshua Arri's condition turned out to be one of these rare resolutions. In pediatric cases such as Joshua Arri's, resolutions are associated with growth in the back of the skull, easing compression of the brain.

Another year later, an MRI revealed that the pituitary adenoma had also disappeared. With no medical intervention whatsoever, both of Joshua Arri's brain conditions had been resolved. Shelley Arri said the neurosurgeon fumbled for an explanation.

When pituitary adenomas disappear, it is most often the result of necrosis, in which most or all cells in an organ or tissue die from injury or lack of blood supply.

Shelley Arri attributes the disappearance of both the adenoma and the chiari malformation to faith.

"We prayed," she said. "And not everybody that you pray over gets healed, but there was no other explanation. God just healed him."

Joshua Arri, too, believes his full recovery came with the help of God.

"It's truly a miracle when you look at it," Joshua Arri said. "... I do give credit to God for healing me with the power of prayer."

### **Soaring through the ranks**

Joshua Arri's brain conditions took him out of Boy Scouts for two years, from 2011 to 2013.

After going to his friend's court of honor, Joshua Arri approached Ron Rumpf, the scoutmaster of Troop 705 at the time, and told him he wanted to get to the Eagle rank.

"He said, 'You're 16 now. I think you can do it before you're 18, so let's do this,'" Joshua Arri said.

Joshua Arri was a Tenderfoot, the second Scouting rank, when he returned to his troop. From there, he quickly worked his way up through the ranks of Second Class, First Class, Star and Life Scout. He has earned the 21 merit badges necessary to graduate to the Eagle rank.

"He's just been gung-ho ever since," Shelley Arri said. "The scoutmaster ... said, 'He has advanced faster than anybody else I've seen.'"

The quick ascension was a necessity since Boy Scouts cannot earn the Eagle rank after age 18. Joshua Arri turns 18 in August.

"He's just been at it, and knocking things out left and right and finishing merit badges and advancing in rank, and now he's almost to the point of completing his project," Shelley Arri said.

He did it with the guidance of his parents. Apart from giving him rides to all his Scouting events, his parents were actively involved in troop leadership and helping him reach his goals.

Joshua Arri's father, Matt Arri, even made binders holding all of the paperwork and spreadsheets listing all of the requirements for each rank.

"Nobody gets an Eagle on their own," Shelley Arri said.

That's not to say that he hasn't worked hard, though.

"He has worked tremendously hard to knock stuff out," Shelley Arri said. "A parent can get behind him and kind of prod him along, but the individual has to be motivated themselves. If they don't want to do it, it's not going to happen."

### **From trial to triumph**

Joshua Arri said his past medical complications have given him a new perspective on life.

"One thing that suffering does, if you let it, is it will help you build your character, and it will make you a better person," he said. "If you don't let it do that to you, it will just make you a bitter person, and you'll think of yourself as a victim. But I chose, even though it hurt, I wanted to become a better person."

Having an understanding of suffering has not only given Joshua Arri compassion for what others might be going through but also a boost of strength to keep going.

Music was one thing that motivated him to overcome his tumor and chiari malformation. Joshua Arri said "Till I Collapse" by Eminem was his anthem when he was dealing with those medical issues.

"Because when you have something in your head, you don't know if you're going to fall over if you're shopping or you're talking to someone, because it could happen any time," he said.

Joshua Arri has been through instability at school because of his medical issues. With doctor visits in St. Louis and other follow-up appointments, it was difficult to stay on top of school work.

He hopped around to different schools. He spent his freshman year at Heritage Academy and his sophomore year at Rock Bridge High School. That's when he and his parents decided he should spend a year of schooling at home. He was supposed to spend his senior year at Christian Fellowship School, but with enough credits in hand, he opted to graduate early instead.

"I decided I wanted to move on with my life because bouncing between schools is difficult because you're always going into a new class with new people, and you don't know them, and then just as you're about to get settled your roots get ripped right up, and you get transplanted to a new place," Joshua Arri said. "And if you have that happening for four years in a row, it's not fun."

Since he has no school during the day, Joshua Arri has been able to dedicate his time to his Eagle project. He said when he started laying the groundwork for his flag collection by going to his neighbors' houses, he got funny looks from people asking why he wasn't in school.

Joshua Arri admitted that as a 17-year-old, he doesn't know all he can do for his community, but he sees Scouting for Flags as a stepping stone for things to come.

"When you have an opportunity to take something, or you see an opportunity, go for it," Joshua Arri said. "I see this opportunity here about how I can help people with flags, and I can help people learn about that. I can also help them with this service."

He said helping people is what Boy Scouts are supposed to do every day, and this project is a part of that outreach.

After he is done collecting flags and has burned them on a pyre, Joshua Arri will need to submit his project to a national committee. If it's approved, he must pass a board of review that will judge whether he is worthy of becoming an Eagle Scout.

"I do feel like through these years of trials and triumphs, I believe that I am Eagle material," he said.

And once an Eagle, always an Eagle.

*Supervising editor is Scott Swafford.*

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