

I ran the Boston Marathon on Monday, April 19, 1971. Again on *Monday, April 19, 2010*

By Dr. Walter Bortz, II, M.D.



April 19, 1971

April 19, 2010

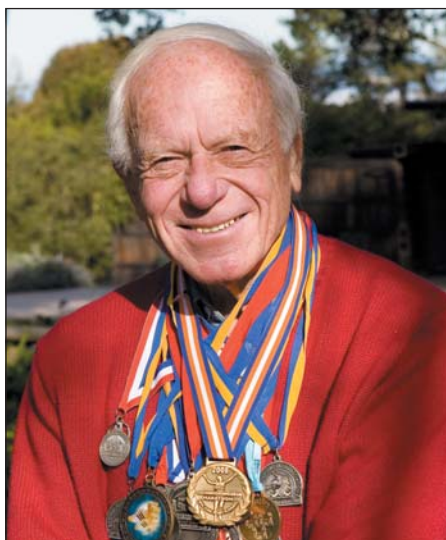
40 years and 40 consecutive annual marathons later, I crossed the finish line in Copley Square, Boston on April 19, 2010.

What a difference. The first time it took me 5 hours and 5 minutes to finish. I finished in silence. This last time, it took 7.5 hours, and I finished to the cheers of a thousand Patriot's Day celebrants with flash bulbs popping.

The first time I hadn't the slightest idea what the effort entailed and I was in tears. The last time, I was a grizzled vet who knew that the back spasm that I encountered at 24 miles was only a minor annoyance and nothing to halt the run. So I finished with a big smile.

Not bad for an 80 year old. I was beaten by 30,000 other runners including an 83-year-old woman. The winner, a Kenyan, broke the course record in 2 hours, 5 minutes. He could have lapped me twice.

The first run was done because my physician father, who was my alpha/omega figure for 39 years, died abruptly and I was devastated. But I was smart enough to know that running was a fabulous treatment for depression.



I'm a terrible runner. The iconic image of the runner is the fleet of foot whippet with wings on his shoes. My image is a slogger with

me. Except that a group of MDs under Ron Lawrence's leadership found an exemption for doctors because of our support services for the runners.

Shamelessly, I accepted my entry number, color-coded to identify my outlier services for the runners.

At the end of the first run, I swore that I would never again submit to the tortures of this 26 mile test. But just like childbirth, as soon as it was done, I searched for next year's opportunity. And the searching has led to runs in Athens, the original marathon, Dublin, New York, Australia, Beijing, Boston again—maybe 10 times—and Big Sur, California, my favorite. Despite its

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army boots on. Yet being a Walter Mitty type athlete, my father's death quickly spurred entry into the only world-class athletic event to which an ordinary Joe could aspire.

But then the organizers changed the rules and created the qualifying times which effectively excluded

hills, its scenery is spectacular.

So this marathon story is my highly personal odyssey of a life journey. It has virtually become my religion. Exploring it has many important derivative aspects. I've learned the thermodynamics of exercise, the anthropology of running and mostly about its

health benefits. As a geriatrician, the insight provided by these decades of commitment has defined a new way of looking at growing older.

Aging's principal pathology is frailty which is not a defined disease but is of immense importance. Its cause is to be found principally in lack of exercise.

Physical activity of any type from walking to marathon running is the preventive and treatment of frailty. It is cheap, safe and effective. What other remedy can make these claims? I'm already planning marathon, 2011.

You can email Dr. Bortz at DrBortz@aol.com or visit www.WalterBortz.com.

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