

GNYC Eagle Scout Accomplishes Rare Feat of Earning All 121 Merit Badges

Eagle Scout Shawn Goldsmith has done what few Scouts have ever done, earning every Merit Badge offered by the Boy Scouts of America, all to fulfill a pledge made to his dying grandmother.

To achieve the elite rank of Eagle Scout, a young man must earn 21 merit badges, and each one achieved requires time, hard work and proven skill mastery. Earning 121 merit badges is an almost unheard-of feat that requires an overwhelming commitment of time and effort to learning life skills such as lifesaving, orienteering, auto maintenance, medicine, cooking, oceanography, athletics, environmental science, surveying, bugling, horsemanship, and over one hundred other areas of study.

Shawn had until his 18th birthday, on November 28, 2008 to complete his race against time: he was fighting to earn every merit badge by both his 18th birthday (the deadline for earning merit badges) and also for his grandmother to witness his accomplishments.

In spring 2008, Shawn had learned that his grandmother was gravely ill, with lung cancer. She was the mother of an Eagle Scout and truly appreciated the effort involved in achieving not just the esteemed Eagle rank, but in Shawn's quest to fulfill his much more challenging labor of love before she passed away. By the spring, he had earned 62 merit badges, already significantly more than the amount required to make the Eagle rank. The remaining 59 badges, however, were earned in quick succession after Shawn learned the gravity of his grandmother's illness. Shawn enabled his grandmother's last days to be filled with hope and joy before she succumbed to lung cancer. When she ultimately passed away he still had 18 badges to earn, but still, he raced against time to complete his promise to her and did in fact earn this unusual distinction just over a month before his 18th birthday.

When Shawn needed further inspiration, he drew strength from the words of his Scoutmaster, Joseph Acquafredda of Greater New York Councils' Troop 240 in the Bronx, who said, "If you can see it, you can be it." The slogan was derived from the National Youth Leadership Training (NYLT) program, which Mr. Acquafredda led and for which Shawn was a troop guide. The slogan's meaning became Shawn's motivating mantra that enabled him to fulfill his commitment. It helped him brave roaring rapids in flimsy canoes, climb steep mountainsides, fight monstrous fish in tumultuous ocean waters, survive the bitter cold of night in his self-made shelter and sleep under the stars.

Few Scouts have ever earned the maximum number of merit badges in the Boy Scouts of America's nearly 100-year history, less than one-tenth of 1% of all Scouts. Hard work and impressive accomplishments, however, are not new to Shawn. Last year,

as a senior in high school, Shawn served as Editor-in-Chief of his school's newspaper while holding other leadership positions in various organizations. He was also selected as one of the youngest interns ever to serve at the Long Island office of U.S. Senator Charles Schumer. Shawn's latest endeavor is to coordinate "Parks Day" with Nassau County Legislator Denise Ford in an effort to attract young people to Long Island parks by improving parks' appearance and facilities.

Of all of Shawn's involvements, his participation in Scouting has had the greatest impact on him. Shawn said, "My life efforts have always been to attain the most that I can while giving back to the community that has given me so much. Scouting has enabled me to do just that. My grandmother would be so proud."

All of us at the Greater New York Councils, Boy Scouts of America are proud of you as well.