

100 Years of Walking Step by Step

Donald Bean lived for 40 years before he truly developed an active living lifestyle and in the almost 60 years since he has continued to live a life of jogging, and now walking, almost every day. Mr. Bean grew up in Newark, New Jersey and moved to Philadelphia in 1945, the year of the birth of his first son. He practiced law in the city until his retirement. He is the husband of 70 years to the late, Fahnya Bean and the father of three sons and 3 daughters-in-law. His family lives in New Jersey, New York, and Virginia. He has seven grandchildren. Mr. Bean will turn 100 years old this June and still gets out to walk at least 40 minutes on every day there is nice weather.

A Walking Legacy

Fifty-nine years ago Donald Bean's youngest son was born. Mr. Bean was 40 years old, living in Philadelphia with his wife and their two older boys, and he decided that he needed to take steps toward a long life. He wanted to improve his chances of a long, healthy life so he decided to go for a jog and now, with three sons and seven grandchildren, he has accomplished what he set out to do.

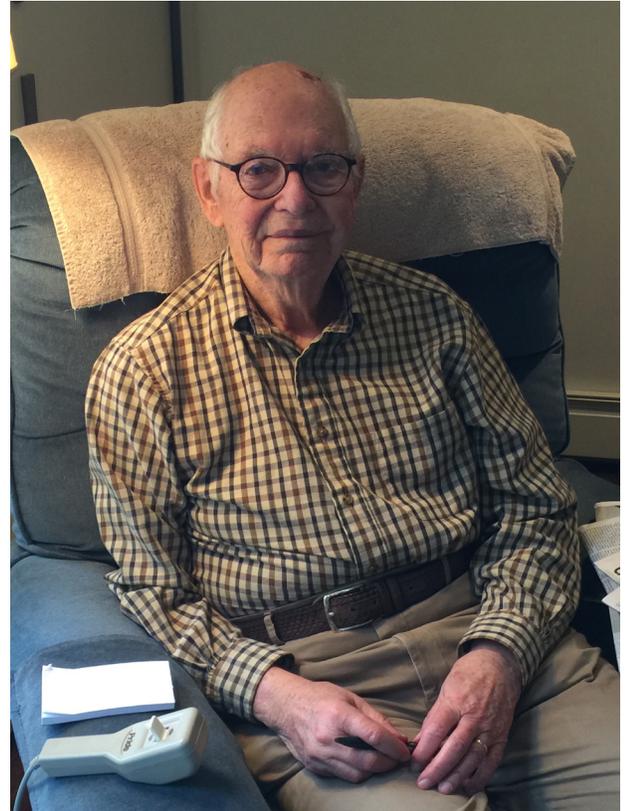
Thinking back on it now Mr. Bean says all of his children have integrated walking into their lives in some way. He feels that he and his wife set a strong example of that as they made walking an important part of their lives.

Fahnya, his wife of 70 years and dedicated mother to their children, passed away in 2013 at 94 years of age. Mr. Bean says he "was lucky to have found her." As often as he jogged, she walked. They traveled the world on their four feet, traveling to many places including Europe, Asia, and East Africa, always choosing walking over a car. He says when you go to a place like Paris and you travel by car or limousine you don't really see Paris in the same way as when you walk.

Almost 60 years after he went for that first jog, Donald Bean has not stopped moving and he doesn't think that he would be this close to experiencing a century of life if it wasn't for his continued active lifestyle. "I walk every day when the weather is decent for about 40 minutes," he says; "I attribute my long life, at least in part, to that."

A Long, Walkable Life

The benefits of walking extend far beyond the long lasting connection to his family and into overall personal and community wellness. Mr. Bean speculates that the walking has been beneficial to him both physically and mentally. "You walk today so that you can walk tomorrow and if you skip it today you may begin skipping it," he explains. He feels noticeably different on the days when he skips a walk due to bad weather and he says that when he walks quietly and thinks about things that concern him he is often able to solve problems during his walk. He says that he feels he missed something when he chooses not to walk or can't get out and walk and gives himself credit for each day he gets out to walk..



AMERICA WALKS

Making America a Great Place to Walk

Walking isn't just good for Mr. Bean, walking is also good for the community. He speculates that if more people walk there will be fewer cars and more bicycles and pedestrians and that the increase in bikes in Philadelphia has been remarkably high in recent years. This goes hand in hand with the dedicated bike lanes painted green throughout his community.

On most days Mr. Bean and his aide Paula walk a common route through the neighborhood. One with fewer intersections and that they both find comfortable to walk. The part of the city they walk is free of the heavy traffic of places like City Center and is safe and attractive. There are small shops, houses, apartments, churches, schools, and plenty of sidewalks. Over time walking this route Mr. Bean has met other members of his community and is able to spend some time chatting with those whom he sees often, adding a social aspect to his peaceful walks.

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Sometimes, like the day prior to when I met them, they change their route and walk to an appointment or a meeting in a different part of town. On these longer walks they see different places and different people and are sometimes out for well beyond their normal 40 minutes. Mr. Bean jokes that he is responsible for them both being in such good shape. Paula laughs but surely doesn't disagree.

Making Walking Part of the Daily Routine

For Mr. Bean, creating a walkable community takes place in his home as well as his neighborhood. Like many differently abled Americans, Mr. Bean cannot take his daily walks without some assistance. The assistance of Paula and some more practical assistance in the form of his walker. When he is taking his walks he generally uses a 4-wheeled walker that is stable enough to support him and also has pouches for his belongings and a seat for any rest needed along the way. When he is in his home or travelling to places where there is less space, like the theatre, he takes an easy to maneuver 3-wheeled walker. Mr. Bean even has a walking aide for when he is spending time on the beach with his family. No matter the situation or the surface, Donald Bean continues to make the choice to walk. Aside from some poor weather, there doesn't seem to be a way to curb his walking. Even though he is unable to walk unassisted, he still chooses physical activity over a sedentary life and attributes this activity to his long and healthy life, turning 100 in June of 2016.

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When asked what advice he would give to new walkers or to those that want to walk more, Mr. Bean says, "start walking and don't interrupt it; do it every day; do it at a convenient time and give it the time it needs. If you're young enough you ought to jog." He explains that you're hardly aware of it when you're in the habit of doing it and then walking becomes the easy choice. "Walking is a way to get you somewhere that you need to go while getting the benefits of walking," he goes on.

Mr. Bean also thinks that promoting the benefits of walking to children is incredibly important. This is echoed by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) who recommend 60 minutes of physical activity for children each day. He believes that if we young people and provide them with opportunities to walk and jog it will lead to better health and active adult lives.

For Mr. Bean walking is not just an effective form of transportation around his community, it is the exercise his body needs and it is wellness for his mind. Mr. Bean is proof of the power that walking can have on an individual's life. His daily walks are part of a personal and community connection that has kept him active well into his 10th decade of life. Donald Bean is a walking advocate worth celebrating today and every day.