TERRY FOX

In the fall of 1979, 21-year-old Terry Fox began his quest to run across Canada. He had lost most of his right leg to cancer two years before. Fox sent letters to various companies soliciting their sponsorship. The final sentence of his letter was: "…I'm not saying that this will initiate any kind of definitive answer or cure to cancer, but I believe in miracles. I have to."

With that dogged spirit, Fox would begin his dream --- one that would take him half way across Canada and touch hundreds of thousands of lives at home and abroad.

Terrance Stanley Fox was born July 28, 1958 in Winnipeg, Manitoba to Rolly and Betty Fox. He already had an older brother, Fred. Another brother, Darrell, would be born four years later and sister Judith in 1964. In 1966, the family moved to Surrey, B.C. and then to their last destination, Port Coquitlam, two years later.

Fox's parents remember him as a determined little boy who never liked to miss a day of school. Fox blossomed into an athlete during junior high school, the same time he met his friend Doug Alward. The boys played baseball, rugby, and basketball. By grade 12, Fox and Alward would share the Athlete of the Year Award. Fox graduated from Port Coquitlam High School with distinction.

Fox wanted to be a physical education teacher and enrolled in Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Vancouver. There, he tried out for the SFU basketball team. Player Mike McNeill said Fox outshone players who were more talented because he showed more drive.

### Discovery of cancer

Terry Fox's bright future turned a corner in March 1977. He came home complaining of a searing pain in his right knee after running around the track. His mother took him to the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster. X-rays confirmed he had osteogenic sarcoma, a cancerous tumour that makes the bone go soft. With his family at his side, doctors gave him the news. As his family wept, Fox said: "I'm not ready to leave this world."

To stop the spread of cancer, doctors amputated his leg --six inches (15 cm) above the knee. Fox learned how to use an artificial leg, and three weeks after surgery, he was walking. Soon after, he played pitch-and-putt golf with his dad. Always a competitor, Fox kept raising the bar. He said he felt fortunate to have beaten cancer. What he didn't know at the time was that stray sarcoma cells often end up in the lungs and don't show up on scans for some time.

In July 1977, Fox joined the basketball team of the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association, and met Rick Hansen, who ran the program. Hansen was impressed by Fox's energy, not knowing at the time that he was undergoing chemotherapy. Fox would go on to play in three national championship victories with the team.

Fox never forgot an article he read the night before the surgery to amputate his leg. It was a feature about amputee Dick Traum, who had run the New York City Marathon. At the start of 1979, he devised a training schedule. His prosthetist developed a better running leg using a pogo stick with a motorcycle shock absorber. Even with an improved artificial leg, his stump would be covered in cysts and bleeding sores after every run. In August, his friend Doug Alward, also a runner, took him to a marathon in Prince George. Fox finished last, 10 minutes behind the last two-legged runner. The other runners watched him, crying and clapping as he crossed the finish line.

### The Marathon of Hope begins

That fall, Terry Fox hatched a plan to raise money for cancer research by running across Canada. His goal: $1 for every Canadian. Betty called it a crazy idea but knew her son could not be stopped. The Canadian Cancer Society said they would help him but only if he had corporate sponsors. Fox sent out letters describing his dream. Ford donated a camper van; Adidas provided the shoes; Imperial Oil the gas, and Safeway, food vouchers and cash. Fox's plan was to start in St. John's, Newfoundland on April 12, 1980 and to finish on the west coast of Vancouver Island on September 10. With more than 3,000 miles (5,000 km) of running under his belt, he was ready.

On the morning of April 12, as a cold mist hugged St. John's, Fox dipped his artificial leg in the Atlantic and began his Marathon of Hope. As Fox reached the outskirts of the city, Mayor Dorothy Wyatt decided to join him, outfitted in a polka-dot pantsuit and her robes of office. Doug Alward would drive the van one mile (1.6 km) ahead and stop to wait for Fox, giving him some water when he passed by.

The people of Newfoundland were welcoming and generous. Fox and Alward were treated to many meals at people's homes. The town of Port aux Basques, with a population of 10,000, raised $10,000. Unfortunately, Alward and Fox started to fight, and sometimes spent a day without talking. Fox wanted Alward to set up media interviews; however, Alward was reluctant.

In early May, Fox arrived in Nova Scotia and few people greeted him. In one harrowing incident, a freight truck hit a CBC vehicle with a film crew inside, forcing it off the road. Fox was just running ahead of the truck. One of the crew fell out of the truck and was seriously injured.

Around the middle of May, Fox and Alward were not getting along. Fox called his parents, who flew out to Halifax. Betty said it was better to yell at each other than to stop talking altogether. It helped a lot. In his May 29 diary entry, Fox referred to a speech he made in Dartmouth: "I couldn't help but cry when I said how Doug had to have courage to put up with and understand me when I'm tired and irritable."

At the end of May, Darrell joined his big brother in Saint John, New Brunswick. He was a prankster and helped to lighten up the mood of the Marathon of Hope. Around June 7, Fox would hit his all-time high of 30 miles (48 km) a day.

### Breakdown in Quebec

Crossing into Quebec on June 10, Fox was charmed by the pretty little towns along the St. Lawrence. But none of the boys could speak French. They had no idea how to ask for a shower and went five days without a wash. In mid-June, as he neared Quebec City, Fox hit bottom. Drivers ignored him, speeding past. In his journal entry, he would vent: "… people are continually forcing me off the road. I was actually honked off once … It is wearisome. Mental Breakdown." Things improved considerably when he arrived in Montreal. The boys stayed at the Four Seasons Hotel courtesy of company president Isadore Sharp, who had lost his teenage son to cancer. The boys relished the luxury; Fox took an hour-long shower. On June 23, after 73 days of running, Fox would have his first day off. The Ontario wing of the Cancer Society told him to hold off on his entry into Ontario; they were preparing big things.

On the last Saturday in June, Fox entered Ontario at the town of Hawkesbury on the Ottawa River. It would be the start of a fundraising avalanche. The town held a welcoming party with a brass band and thousands of balloons. In early July, he arrived in Ottawa. He met Governor General Ed Schreyer. He enjoyed a standing ovation from fans at the CFL game between Ottawa and Saskatchewan, kicking the opening ball. On July 4, Fox had a date with then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. Unfortunately, no one had prepped Trudeau, who was just back from an Italian trip; the meeting was awkward. Fox asked him to run a ½ mile (0.8 km) with him, but Trudeau declined.

As Fox headed to Toronto, momentum soared. A singer had crafted a song -- "Run, Terry, Run" -- and donated all proceeds to cancer research. Crowds lined the streets and roadways. NBC's "Real People" TV program did a piece on him. At a mall in Oshawa, girls screamed as he walked past. As Fox ran towards Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto, he was joined by Darryl Sittler, the former Toronto Maple Leaf hockey captain. A crowd of 10,000 was waiting. Actor Al Waxman introduced Fox and Sittler presented him with his 1980 all-star NHL sweater: "I've been around athletes a long time and I've never seen any with his courage and stamina." The Cancer Society estimated it collected $100,000 that day.

Fox made his way through southern Ontario hitting Oakville, Hamilton, London, Kitchener and Guelph. Despite the 38-degree temperature, he kept to his 26 mile (42 km) a day pace. During his southern Ontario stretch, he was kissed by British actress Maggie Smith at Stratford; a musician gave him his $500 guitar; and Bobby Orr presented him with $25,000 from Planter's Peanuts. Fox said the Orr meeting was the highlight of his trip.

Fox celebrated his 22nd birthday on July 28 in Gravenhurst, two hours drive north of Toronto. After his brother Darrell presented him with a cake, Fox started throwing handfuls of it at him and began a food fight. The people of Gravenhurst (pop. 8,000) raised $14,000.

### Darkness on the horizon

As Fox headed towards Georgian Bay, his health changed. He would wake up tired, sometimes asking for time alone in the van just to cry. In Parry Sound, Bobby Orr's father gave him his son's Canada Cup sweater. He passed the half-way point of his journey just before Sudbury. By August 12, Fox had raised $11.4 million.

On August 31, before running into Thunder Bay, Fox said he felt as if he'd caught a cold. The next day, he started to cough more and felt pains in his chest and neck but he kept running because people were out cheering him on. Eighteen miles out of the city, he stopped. Fox went to a hospital, and after examination, doctors told him that the cancer had invaded his lungs. His parents came out to Thunder Bay the next day. Fox, holding his mother Betty's hand, held a news conference and told reporters he had to go home. He had run 3,339 miles (5,376 km).

"How many people do something they really believe in?" said Fox at the news conference. "I just wish people would realize that anything's possible if you try. Dreams are made if people try."

Fox flew back to B.C. and to the Royal Columbian Hospital, where his cancer fight has started in 1977. Darryl Sittler and the Maple Leafs offered to finish the run for him, but Fox declined. He wanted to finish it himself.

He wore his Marathon of Hope t-shirt for the first few weeks in hospital. The tumours had spread; one was the size of his fist. He had a 10 per cent chance of beating the cancer. The country rallied. A fundraiser was broadcast with such celebrities as John Denver, Elton John and Anne Murray. This broadcast put another $10.5 million into the Fox Fund. All over the country, people raised money through walk-a-thons, stitch-a-thons - even Ontario strippers donated a day's proceeds.

As he endured chemotherapy, Fox would be given many honours. Governor General Ed Schreyer flew to B.C. to make him the youngest Companion of the Order of Canada. B.C. Premier Bill Bennett also granted him the province's highest honour: the Order of the Dogwood. Canada's sports editors gave him the Lou Marsh trophy for outstanding athletic achievement. Fox also appeared in educational films for the Cancer Society.

By the new year, Fox's health worsened. The tumours had spread to his abdomen. Thousands of letters and telegrams from Canada and around the world flowed in to his hospital room. By February 1981, Fox had raised $24.17 million, equaling Canada's population of 24.1 million at the time.

Looking back at his run, Fox would reflect: "People thought I was going through hell. Maybe I was partly, but still I was doing what I wanted and a dream was coming true."

Terry Fox died, with his family beside him, on June 28, 1981. That September, the first Terry Fox Run was held in Canada and around the world. More than 300,000 people participated, raising $3.5 million. Terry Fox Runs are held yearly in 60 countries now and more than 360 million have been raised for cancer research. His legacy lives on.

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