

Terry Fox Attempted to Carry Hope to Cancer Victims Across Canada

Afflicted with Cancer that Caused the Amputation of His Leg, a Young Man Set Out to Prove that If You Take the Offensive, You're No Longer the Victim—Even of Cancer

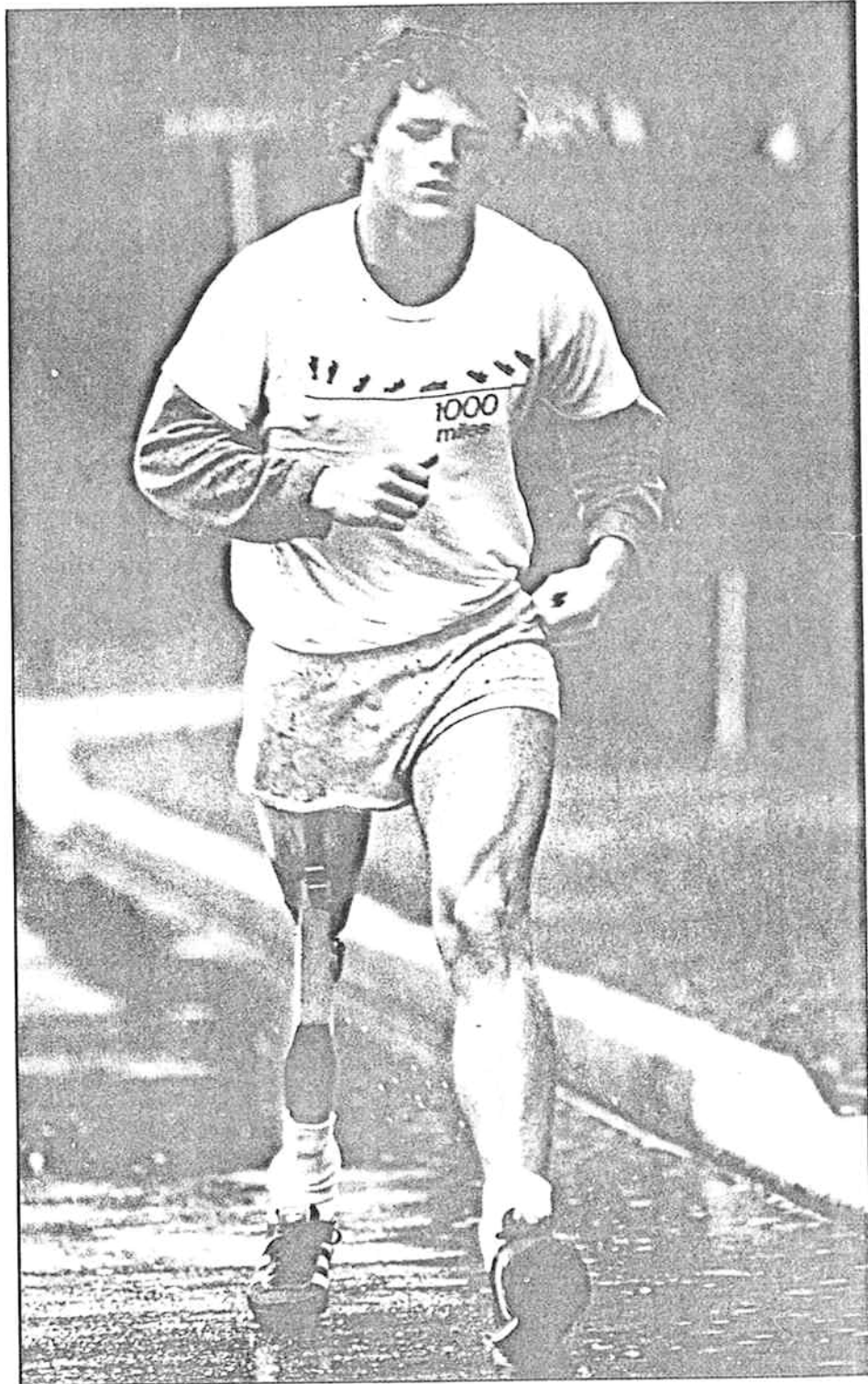
by Stan Shatenstein

Terry Fox, who inspired Canadians and people throughout the world with his Marathon of Hope, is receiving treatment for lung cancer in his British Columbia home. He granted an exclusive interview to RW because it was this publication, in 1977, that inspired him to begin a cross-country run as an amputee. Here is his story.

Terry Fox was about to lose a leg. Doctors at the Royal Columbian Hospital in New Westminster, British Columbia, had seen bone cancer on an X-ray just a few days earlier. It was March 1977. Fox was 18, a student at Simon Fraser University and a member of the school's junior varsity basketball team. He enjoyed school, sports and life at home with his family. He had never heard of osteogenic sarcoma and he didn't really know what cancer was, either. But he understood perfectly well what amputation meant. He understood, he cried and then he prepared himself emotionally and mentally so that life after the operation would resemble, as much as was humanly possible, life as it had been before.

A friend came by to offer strength and encouragement on the last evening before the operation. He brought Terry a copy of the January 1977 issue of *Runner's World*. In it, there was an article about Dick Traum, an above-knee amputee who had run the New York City Marathon. The friend's efforts to inspire Fox were successful. Quite. Terry had yet to undergo surgery, let alone the rehabilitation that must follow, but he already had a goal. He was going to run across Canada! He didn't know how long it would take, or when he'd be able to start, and he wasn't even sure that it could be accomplished. But he was going to try.

After three years taken up by school, chemotherapy and training, Fox felt he was ready. On April 12 of this year, he ceremoniously dipped his artificial right leg into the Atlantic Ocean and began his run. He was in St. John's, Newfoundland, and bound for Vancouver, British Columbia, where he intended to touch the shores of the Pacific. And he had a second goal. Terry decided he would raise \$1 million for cancer research by seeking



Colin Price/Canadian Cancer Society photo

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The summer months rolled by and Fox was in good spirits. He was more than halfway across the country, averaging almost 24 miles a day, and increasingly confident of achieving what he had set out to do. The \$1 million mark had been passed and he was now talking about \$10 million for cancer research. And the run was going unbelievably well. He figured he could be in Vancouver by November.

September 1 was Labor Day and it started in fine fashion. Fox was up at 4 a.m., as usual, and was on the road by 5 o'clock. The miles clicked by easily and he had logged 13 before taking a major break. Then he was back on the road at noon and another five miles flew by. A routine water stop and he'd be out for more, he thought. But, suddenly, something was wrong. Terry started coughing heavily and felt pains in his neck and chest. He didn't know what was happening. He hoped to run it off but, after two more miles, nothing had improved. Perhaps some rest would be good, he thought, and he took a 15-minute nap. No help. He was really feeling sick, but there were a lot of people lining the route to cheer him on, so he gave it one last try. Terry Fox wasn't going to quit in front of everybody. He ran until the crowds disappeared, completed that one last mile, and then, all alone again, he stopped.

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Terry was 22, and for the second time in his young life he would have to focus all of his energy on his health. He would have to try to become well again. After having run 3339 miles, he would have to go home, rest and receive more treatment. And though he didn't know how or when,

he vowed that he was going to try to get back out there and complete his run.

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Terry Fox was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and moved west to British Columbia when he was 7. He did his growing up in the town of Port Coquitlam where he still lives with his parents, Rolly and Betty, his younger brother and sister, Darryl and Judith, and a cat named Bimbo. His older brother Fred lives on his own.

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When he got to high school, Fox began running. He followed a tough training regimen for both cross-country and track, doing endless series of repeats at 100, 200 and 800 meters five times a week. On weekends there was at least one long run thrown in. Terry didn't have much success running the 800 and mile on the track, but he became fairly adept at the longer, cross-country distances. In his last two years of high school he abandoned competitive running in favor of soccer, which he had been playing for years, and basketball, his new-found love. Although his powerful build and average height made him better suited for soccer, he came to excel at basketball. Through practice, dedication and patience, he progressed from bench-warmer to first-string. As he graduated from Port Coquitlam Senior Secondary, Terry shared the school's Male Athlete of the Year award with his best friend, Doug Alward.

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of medication to combat it. He didn't know it at the time, but he had been given nothing more than painkillers.

Fox recalls those days vividly: "I figured I was all right again. There was no more pain and I had finished taking the painkillers. I always remember running seven laps around the track. I came home and all of a sudden the pain in my knee was getting worse again. The next morning, I woke up and that was it. I couldn't get out of bed. I couldn't walk or put any weight on the leg."

That same morning, Terry went with his father to the Royal Columbian Hospital for X-rays. He still thought it was a ligament or cartilage problem, but when the doctors decided to keep him overnight, he started to worry. The next day, his family and doctors came in to see him and he learned the truth. He was shocked. Cancer was, perhaps, too much of an unknown to terrorize him, but he was devastated by the knowledge that he was about to lose a leg. Terry was told that he would undergo above-knee amputation of the right leg because of osteogenic sarcoma — primary cancer of the bone.

After the operation, Fox received many visitors, all doing their best to cheer him up. He decided, then and there, that he was going to show these people he could beat it. His attitude speeded the rehabilitation process tremendously. The hospital staff was amazed. Just two months after the amputation was performed, Terry was playing 18 holes of golf. When that wasn't enough, he'd play 27, going so far as to claim that the artificial leg had helped improve his game.

Thanks largely to Terry's determination, life remained much as it had been for the Fox family. Terry admits that "there was worry, but we didn't show it. You've just got to live. If you sit there and worry, and then something goes wrong, you're going to wish you hadn't worried and just enjoyed the time you had." His life was full. He had completed his first-year university studies while in the hospital, and by fall he was taking courses on campus. Though he had to enter the hospital frequently to continue chemotherapy, there was still time to coach his old basketball team and to play on a wheelchair squad himself.

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"I went back out the next day and did a half-mile. In the beginning I didn't run every day, but I progressed slowly. I gradually built up, running four days and then taking a day off." By the end of the summer, Fox was running 11 miles a day, six days a week.

On September 2, Terry went up to Prince George, British Columbia, to run a 17-mile race, six miles more than his longest training runs. He finished last, but it took him only three hours and nine minutes to complete the distance, at an impressive pace of 11 minutes per mile. He proudly recalls how he was just 10 minutes behind the last two-legged runner. Even more encouraging to Fox was what happened at the finish line. Everyone waited for him, cheering him on, and he felt inspired. He was now more determined and confident than ever that he would attempt to run from coast to coast.

When he got back to the Vancouver area, Fox approached the Canadian Cancer Society for support. It approved his fund-raising plans but was skeptical enough to suggest that he'd have to line up his own sponsors. While doing that, Terry began to run seven days a week, getting used to what he'd face on the trip. By Christmas he had run 101 days without interruption. Every week he would add a half-mile to his daily run, eventually building to 20 miles a day. He was unstoppable. "At times I had shinsplints, bone bruises and swelling in my foot. I lost toenails, I had chafing and sometimes my stump was bleeding. I went through bad weather and snow, and every day I completed the mileage; I didn't miss a day. I knew then that if I could do it in training, I could do it when it counted."

As 1980 began, Fox busied himself lining up sponsors and eventually got a stronger commitment for backing from the British Columbia and Canadian cancer societies. These activities cut into his training, but he was still running between 15 and 26 miles a day. He lifted weights to strengthen his back and upper body, and he had an extra leg and spare knee parts made. With exactly 3149½ miles meticulously logged in his diary, Terry felt he was ready.

It was bitterly cold when he left St. John's and Fox wasn't prepared for the chilling westerly winds. He found it difficult making progress while bundled under three layers of clothing. On just his fourth day out, it snowed heavily. The roads got

so icy that he had to stop. Terry felt helpless. Then the weather improved and he was still able to make 16 miles that day. He knew that he could make it the whole way.

People started paying attention to what he was doing. The donations poured in as the miles rolled by. His unique running style became a familiar sight. He took a stride with his left leg, and then a hop, giving his artificial limb the time to follow through. Terry's gait became known as the Fox Trot. It made people think of Walter Brennan as Grandpa Amos Mc-



Fox's courageous 3339-mile trek, which is responsible for raising over \$14 million for cancer research in Canada, earned him that country's highest civilian award — Companion of the Order of Canada — and the admiration of millions around the world. Most important, he's given new hope to cancer victims. Not a quitter, Fox insists, "I want to live. And if I can get out there again and finish the run, I will."

Coy. What characterized his running most, though, was the look in his eyes. A battle was being waged there between determination and pain, and determination was winning the day.

Hoping to raise as much money as possible, Terry had selected a route that would take him to all the major eastern cities. His strategy worked as the campaign really got going during some out-of-the-way runs in the Maritimes and southern Ontario. Yet, as a proud athlete, Fox was hurt by the way his indirect route was causing people to underestimate how far he'd come. It was reported that he stopped just past the halfway point, yet he had well over 3000 miles behind him and less than 2000 ahead. Had he been covering a direct route across the US, he would have made it to the Pacific Ocean and then some.

As he covered all those miles, Terry would combat fatigue and pain by setting intermediate goals. To the next corner, to the next landmark, he ran. From the striking, barren landscape of Newfoundland to the fertile shores of the St. Lawrence, and through uninhabited regions north of Lake Superior, he ran.

For Fox, the best times were when he ran alone in the pre-dawn hours, going step for step with the rising sun. He found it more difficult to make progress when he had company; he would get distracted and lose his rhythm, making the miles seem longer. Even worse, he couldn't resist the temptation to compete against his companions, which made him more tired at day's end. He was also unprepared for all the time he would have to spend giving interviews and attending receptions in his honor. When the strain became too much, Terry would become irritable with his brother Darryll, his friend Doug Alward, and Bob Vigers of the Ontario Cancer Society. But they were his support crew and understood what he was going through, so they didn't mind. Terry kept running and everyone was happy.

It appeared that Fox would be able to run forever. He got the flu, but he didn't stop running. His stump bled, but still he ran. As many as 30 miles a day, he ran. Finally, after four months on the road, he was forced to stop by tendinitis. The downhill running finally caught up with him, and he received treatment and rested for two days. Ironically, he had been halted near the town of Marathon, Ontario.

Everything seemed fine as he started

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out again, but less than two weeks later the Marathon of Hope was interrupted in heart-breaking fashion. Terry made the announcement himself. His cancer had returned, and he would have to go home for more treatment. He had ignored fatigue, vanquished pain and overcome tendinitis, and his run had continued. But this time it was going to be much harder. "If I can get out there again, I will," he said. But Terry knew that it was no longer certain he would complete the journey.

Since first being struck by the disease, Terry had come to learn a great deal about osteogenic sarcoma. He knew that metastasis, or spreading, of this cancer usually occurred within six months of the original diagnosis. Unsuccessful chemotherapy could conceivably increase that gap, but Fox had gone 3½ years since the amputation. "There was no way in the world it could happen," he thought. Because his heart was slightly enlarged from medication he had taken, Terry was even prepared to suspect a minor heart attack. But he couldn't believe that the pain in his chest might have been caused by cancer. Sadly, it was.

Terry's reaction was the same as it had been the first time. After the initial shock, and the sadness, there was a renewal of his resolve to fight. "I had to continue with the attitude that I had been trying to spread through my run — of not giving up, and fighting and trying to beat cancer." For now, that'll mean living as normal and as healthy a life as possible.

For the Fox family, much time is spent reading through the thousands of letters that come every day. Words of prayer and encouragement come from every city in Canada and the US, and from countries on every continent. Cancer victims share their hopes and fears with him. The crippled and their families thank Terry for showing that just about anything is possible if you want it badly enough. Yet it is the children who write the most touching letters. Some send him every penny they own so it can be used for cancer research. Some send drawings and jokes to cheer him up, and others simply send their love.

For Blair MacKenzie, director of the British Columbia Cancer Society, those letters reflect the best result of Terry's run and the greatest good to come out of his illness. He was forcing people to be aware of cancer, to talk about it and to think about their health. His peers could relate to what happened and, even more important, he was reaching the kids. For

everyone, the story of Terry Fox taught meaningful lessons. His experience spoke eloquently of the need for cancer education and of the importance of early detection. The Marathon of Hope bore poignant witness to the slogan "Cancer can be beaten." And, unfortunately, the recurrence of the disease was a grim reminder that cancer can strike anyone. Terry, despite being an amputee, had appeared an unlikely candidate for illness as he raced across the country. But not even he could be immune.

As Fox announced that his cancer had spread, the response to the Marathon of Hope went from strong to overwhelming. When he ended his run near Thunder Bay, money and pledges received totaled \$1.7 million. The figure now stands at over \$14 million. Much of that amount was raised during a unique tribute to Fox on the Canadian Television Network, CTV. Entitled *Terry Fox: The Marathon of Hope Continues*, the telethon featured the likes of Anne Murray, Glen Campbell and John Denver, and managed to attract some \$10 million to the fund. Terry was honored by Simon Fraser U. as it announced plans to strike a Terry Fox Gold Medal, to be given to the student who best exemplified his qualities of courage in adversity and dedication to society. Finally, the Canadian government named him a Companion of the Order of Canada, the country's highest civilian award.

Fox continues to defy cancer. "It'll never beat me spiritually," he claims. Those who pity him don't know or understand him. "I'm really happy — with my attitude, the way I've taken things. I really feel like I'm strong. I think I've been successful."

The Marathon of Hope also allowed him to learn much about himself. Greedy potential sponsors made Terry outrageous offers, just to have their names associated with his. "I could have become rich out of it, but I had no lust for material objects," he said. A car dealer offered to give him a vehicle. All Fox had to do was run that last mile to the Pacific, then jump into the company's car and drive off. Terry's response was simple. "I was not going to let myself be used. There was only one thing I wanted to publicize and that was cancer — and cancer research and the fund-raising for it."

Fox is once again undergoing chemotherapy while his doctors contemplate his future treatment. Terry is considering going to work for the Canadian Cancer

Society if his health permits. He wants to continue educating people about cancer, and recounting his life story as an example of how, with enough drive and determination, anything is possible. "People were calling me a hero and looking up to me and thinking so much of me, but I really feel I'm no different. I've got nothing that can't be acquired by anybody. I really feel that each person has to believe that they're of importance. If everybody felt that way, that their vote or their belief counted, then the accumulation of it all will have an effect."

A certain religious conviction helps Fox retain his sanguine world view. "I believe my pathway — what's happened to me — is not just at random. I think there's been a lot of purpose to it and it's been planned this way. No matter what happens, I believe that I can accept anything, and I can use it to try to help other people." There are no regrets. "If people could experience what I have, without actually being in that situation, it would add so much to their lives."

Terry is already dreaming about finishing the run but, "at the same time, if I'm not able to, I've got to accept it. If I did die of cancer, I don't want people just to forget it and say, 'It was a great thing but now it's over. He tried hard but he's gone now. That's it. We'll forget him.' I think that, by my attitude, and by the effort I've put in, I've got something to offer that shouldn't be forgotten, no matter what happens to me. I hope that's something that I can impress upon people."

Terry Fox had a dream of running across Canada and raising money for cancer research, and to a great extent it was realized. Yet something more important, something he couldn't even dream of, also happened. It was the way people responded, the feelings that were shared. "The caring and loving and the letters that I got have shown me that the Marathon of Hope really has affected people. That was something I couldn't even think of. It's really touched people in a lot of different ways."

What's touched people most about the Marathon of Hope has been the indomitable will of Terry Fox. His intense desire. "I want to live. I love life and I really appreciate it, especially because of what I've been through. And if I can get out there again and finish the run, I will. It'll be even greater than the first time." The whole world will be watching and waiting and hoping that Terry makes it. □