Terry Fox
35 Years of the Marathon of Hope
Running to the Heartbeat of a Nation

By Tania Haas
Kids chased him. People who had a lost a limb were inspired by him. Communities rallied behind him,” says Sheldon Posen, curator of Terry Fox – Running to the Heart of Canada, a new exhibit at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Que.

“He was every kind of hero you can think of.”

But Terry Fox didn’t want to be a hero. He wanted to raise money for cancer research.

Thirty-five years ago Terry Fox dipped his artificial leg into the Atlantic Ocean in a Newfoundland harbour, and then set out on what he had planned would be a six-month run across the country. With a double hop stride that would come to represent his determination and grit, Terry started a run and solidified his icon status and faith in the human spirit.

He would run about a marathon a day through six provinces, and only stopped when he was sidelined by cancer in his lungs.

Terry didn’t want to be a hero but it was to be his legacy. No one who saw him run could be cynical about what he was doing. Just the opposite. There was a magnetic draw to support him.

In a pre-Internet time, Terry’s cause went viral in 1980 and has been trending ever since.

When his run was cut short in September 1980, the Marathon of Hope had raised over $2 million for cancer research. Over the next six months, while Terry underwent treatment, his hope of raising $1 per every Canadian was realized. Terry would die four months later, one month short of his 23rd birthday. The first Terry Fox Run was held that September.

Over the next three decades, races in his name would go on to raise over $650 million worldwide for cancer research.

Terry’s icon status is characterized by a special type of heroism.

“He allowed others to be a part of what he started,” says Posen. “And that’s very powerful.”

The new exhibit allows visitors to retrace Terry’s 143-day, 5,300-kilometre journey from St. John’s, N.L. to Thunder Bay, Ont. through interactive graphics, Terry’s daily journal entries, postcards and letters from supporters, artifacts, press clippings, interviews and photographs. Visit www.historymuseum.ca for more info.
Terry at the Scarborough, Ont. Civic Centre

Terry’s mom Betty asked little brother Darrell to join Terry and Doug on the road as an extra hand and because Darrell could make Terry laugh.

In Terrace Bay, Ont., Terry meets 10-year-old Greg Scott, who also lost a leg to bone cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy. Recalling his own cancer treatments, a tearful Terry says it’s people like Greg who are the real heroes.
At age 18, Terry, a kinesiology student at Simon Fraser University, is diagnosed with bone cancer in his right leg. In March, his leg is amputated 15 cm above the knee. During chemotherapy treatment he witnesses what he would later describe as “the faces with the brave smiles, and the ones who had given up smiling. There were feelings of hopeful denial, and the feelings of despair.” Terry comes up with the idea to run across the country to raise money for cancer research. He says, “I was determined to take myself to the limit for this cause.”

Eleven months after the amputation, Terry begins training for his run. Few people realize that he lifts weights, wheels up hills in his basketball wheelchair, and banks around 5,000 kilometres running on his new leg in preparation.

Terry's pitches the Canadian Cancer Society to support him and its first national campaign. At the time, bake sales, car washes and annual drives made up most of its fundraising efforts.

February 1979

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October 1979

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April 12

Terry dips his leg in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Newfoundland.

After a reception led by Mayor Dorothy Wyatt at City Hall, Terry runs out of Saint John’s. The Marathon of Hope begins. Terry is accompanied by his best friend Doug Alward, who drove the donated van escorting Terry on highways and rural roads.
May 6

The small coastal town of Port-Aux-Basques, population 10,000, raises $10,000. After seeing this total, Terry changes his goal from $1 million to $23 million: one dollar for every Canadian.

May 25

Terry runs through Prince Edward Island in three days. In one day on the road, the Marathon of Hope raises $600. Their best day so far.

June 22

As Terry runs into Montreal he is accompanied by Don Sweet of the Montreal Alouettes and several other runners and wheelchair athletes.

July 1

Canada Day Terry performs the opening kickoff at a CFL game between Ottawa and Saskatchewan. More than 16,000 fans leap to their feet for a roaring ovation. The athletes commend Terry on his stamina and skill – a personal highlight for Terry who saw himself first and foremost as an athlete.

LEFT One of the toughest obstacles Terry anticipated was Montreal River Hill, 110 kilometres north of the Sault in northern Ontario. He ran the hill, which rises 567 m and is close to 5K long, wearing a T-shirt that read “Montreal River Here I Come” and “I’ve Got You Beat” on the back.

BOTTOM LEFT Young fans and brothers, Craig and Andrew, greet Terry in Blind River, Ont., on Aug. 8.

ABOVE On July 2, Terry, Doug and Darrell met Pierre Trudeau in Ottawa’s Parliament Building. Two children, Kerry Anne and Patrick Vigars, were sitting at Terry’s feet looking on intently while the two chatted. Trudeau looked at the kids and said “And, who are you?” Both stood up, told him their names and shook his hand.

BETWEEN Terry had jitters before appearing at an Ottawa Rough Riders game on July 1, 1980, worried about how he would be able to kick the ball while maintaining his balance. He managed just fine, according to a roaring crowd.
July 11

Terry speaks to a huge reception in Scarborough, Ont. where he emphasized the run wasn’t about him but the idea that cancer could be beaten.

August 21

Near Marathon, Ont., Reg Essa, the OPP officer accompanying Terry at the time, notices that the route planned for the next day included a stretch of road under construction. When the construction workers learn that Terry Fox would be running the next day, they worked through the night to pave over the loose gravel. As Terry runs by hours later, the same construction workers throw cash into the police cruiser’s open window.

July 11 and 23

In Toronto, Terry speaks to the largest crowd to date, 10,000 people in Nathan Phillips Square, wearing a Toronto Maple Leafs jersey.

August 26

Terrace Bay, Ont.: Greg Scott, a 10-year-old survivor of the same cancer that had struck Terry, and fellow amputee, flew up to Terrace Bay, where the two get to know each other over dinner (Terry was known to go into a local diner and order one of everything, and then finish that all off with cake) and swimming in the lake. The next night, Terry gives a speech in Terrace Bay where he calls his day with Greg “the most inspirational day of my life.”
September 1

Terry stops running outside of Thunder Bay, Ont. Cancer had spread to his lungs. Before returning to B.C. for treatment Terry said, “I’m gonna do my very best. I’ll fight. I promise I won’t give up.”

September 2

Isadore Sharp, chairman and CEO of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, telegrams the Fox family with a commitment to organize a fundraising run that would be held every year in Terry’s name. He writes, “You started it. We will not rest until your dream to find a cure for cancer is realized.”

The number of shoes Terry wore over 143 days and 5,373 kilometres; 1 for his prosthetic, 8 for his left foot.

Shoe Goo

Used by Terry on the underside of his shoes to build back the sole from the wear of running that many miles.

Adidas Orion

The style of Terry’s navy, low-cut trainer. The distinct trefoil design was remarkably grippy.

6,500