

Giving *Cancer* A Run For Its Money

A chat with Darrell Fox on
Terry Fox's legacy

By Yasanthi Devi



Just a couple of months back, Darrell Fox led the start of the Terry Fox Run in Kepong Metropolitan Park, Kuala Lumpur. To get to the finish line, participants had a variety of options, including running, jogging, walking, skating, and even dancing. In exchange for contributions greater than RM 35, a t-shirt with the words 'I'm not a quitter' with Terry Fox's face printed on it was offered.

For 2022's Terry Fox Run, over 3000 people registered for the marathon in an effort to raise money for cancer research as well as with hopes to spread awareness about the disease. This marathon was a joint collaboration between Cancer Research Malaysia and the High Commission of Canada. Joining Darrell Fox as a guest of honour was Ryan Baerg, Senior Trade Commissioner of the High Commission of Canada.

The Terry Fox marathon was a regular annual effort by Cancer Research Malaysia (before the pandemic) to raise money for Malaysia's cancer research initiatives and help raise awareness of cancer. Prior to the pandemic, over 7,000 people participated in the Terry Fox Run in Malaysia, which helped to raise more than RM 2,000,000 for cancer research in Malaysia.

In 2022, the Terry Fox run successfully garnered funds of over RM130,000. Darrell Fox who was also the face of the



event is the brother of Terry Fox and he has had a long history of involvement with the legacy founded by his brother.

1Twenty80 had the opportunity to sit down with Darrell Fox to discuss Terry Fox's legacy, impact, and history.

1Twenty80:

What are the impacts Terry had on you?

Darrell Fox:

People always ask me what it's like to be Terry Fox's brother. I've always and have only been Terry Fox's brother. Terry was 4 years older than me and I idolised him. He had some pretty interesting qualities.

Every morning I wake up and I pinch myself because I get to be a part of his run. A very small part. It's a collective effort with people who care about this around the world and it's all about coming together. I like being a part of it. It's like having an extended family.

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1Twenty80:

What are the changes in cancer research you have noticed over time?

Darrell:

What has been difficult for me sometimes is getting close to cancer patients because I'm worried about the potential outcome. There's someone whom I know very personally, who's a little bit younger than Terry when he was diagnosed. This person was 15 years old when he was first diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma. The same bone cancer that Terry had.

He had surgery to remove a part of his tibia to keep his leg. The key difference here is from not having an amputation to having surgery to remove a part of his tibia. He's living proof that the investment is working. He's still with us and I think I'll have a friendship with him forever.

It's quite a unique relationship. It's one story that I can have close to me to prove that cancer research is making a difference.



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1Twenty80:

Is it challenging for you to discuss your brother's legacy and life story years after his passing?

Darrell:

It's hard dealing with a loss. I can't do this twenty-four seven. I can't be out there publicly all the time talking about my brother because it can get tiring and exhausting. However, the rewards are immeasurable. Even though I run a lot, this is extremely more challenging and draining than running because I'm constantly talking about someone who's no longer here and it hurts.

Then again, I value stories such as the individual I mentioned earlier who managed to survive osteogenic sarcoma. Knowing that he's alive because of what we've done for the past 42 years makes it all worthwhile.





1Twenty80:

What are some of the future plans for the Terry Fox Foundation?

Darrell:

We want to raise more money for cancer research and we're also looking forward to the research programme that we recently launched with the (Canadian) Federal Government. It's really unique because Canada is based on universal health care and this offers us the opportunity to bring funded research where we bring research teams together.

Now, with the Marathon of Hope Cancer Centres Network, we're bringing cancer organisations, universities, hospitals and institutes together.

No one thought it would be possible because these entities are usually competing against each other. However, if there's one thing that can bring us together, it's Terry Fox, the brand. That's what's happening. Organisations are coming together, they're sharing resources and data to improve outcomes for cancer patients.

It's going to be fascinating to see what comes out of this because ultimately it'll be better outcomes.

It means we'll be treating the right patient with the right treatment at the right time.

As opposed to giving everybody the same treatment, not knowing whether it's going to work or not. Circumstances

will now be able to be determined based on the data we're collecting, whether

a particular treatment will work for an affected individual and that's very exciting.



1Twenty80:

How has the Terry Fox Foundation and Marathon evolved over time?

Darrell:

The Foundation is more prominent now than it was in the 80s and one of the reasons may have been because, in Canada, it's a huge activity and huge event.

Back then, Terry also ran across the country for another organisation and they were a wonderful organisation but they had other fundraising activities. The Terry Fox Run was just one of many events they were organising.

So, it may not have gotten the attention it perhaps deserves or could've warranted.

Therefore, my mum, Betty Fox, and Isadore Sharp (the President of Four Seasons Hotel) decided to create the Terry Fox Foundation in 1988. That first year, we doubled the revenue. This shows that we were on the right path. That started the evolution and growth of the foundation.

We grew a lot throughout the 90s and early 2000s. A lot of it had to do with the school programmes. Initially, we might've had about 2000 schools participating. It then grew to have the participation of 8,000 schools. So, that's where the growth really came from.

To go back to the 1980s, we were raising approximately CAD 3,000,000. Now, we raise close to CAD 30,000,000 a year. This is made possible because we're a little bit more sophisticated and knowledgeable because of our experience and how we share Terry's story as well.

1Twenty80:

What are your aspirations for the Terry Fox Foundation and Marathon?

Darrell:

I want to see the run flourish. When we see the run flourish, so does the money for cancer research. We want to raise more money for cancer research.

We want to share Terry's story because it's a powerful story. I'm biased but I think it's a very powerful story that can be translated into every language in the world. Terry was an average Canadian as goes for any other average Malaysian.

We're all, in most cases, pretty normal individuals, but look at what Terry was able to accomplish through hardwork and determination. We think that Terry's story is a story all nations could benefit from.

To sum it up, firstly, sharing the story and secondly, raising more money for cancer research and that's what we hope to accomplish.

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1Twenty80:

During the course of your involvement with the Terry Fox Foundation, are there any memorable events or significant turning points that stand out to you?

Darrell:

Do I have to pick one? (Darrell laughs) It's really difficult!

I think becoming independent and creating the Terry Fox Foundation probably would've been a very significant moment for us. I think the growth of the school programmes is important too. Now, we have a whole generation who wasn't even alive when Terry was running, children of today who are going to be learning his story and they're going to be the Terry Fox Run organisers in the future.

They're also going to be our donors in the future. So, I think introducing Terry in schools, which was the idea and belief of Sharpe, is one of the key moments for us.

Darrell also expressed great pleasure in collaborating with Cancer Research Malaysia for the 2022 Terry Fox Run. Cancer Research Malaysia is an independent and non-profit cancer research organisation based in Malaysia. Funded by donations and research grants, they research niche cancers often found in the Asian population.

To know more about Cancer Research Malaysia and its impactful initiatives (like this one) on cancer research, you can check out www.cancerresearch.my.

About Terry Fox



Terry Fox was an athlete and advocate for cancer research in Canada. He was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma just above the knee, which eventually led to the amputation of his leg in the late 70s, at the age of 18.

Terry started training and planning for his cross-Canada run to raise funds. In April 1980, Terry dips his artificial leg into the Atlantic Ocean and begins one of the most significant moments in history. He runs an average of 42 kilometres a day (26 miles) through six provinces. After approximately 143 days, Terry was ultimately compelled to call it quits due to the progression of his cancer.

Terry was determined to achieve a massive goal of his which was to raise 1 Canadian Dollar (CAD) from every Canadian to fight cancer. This goal was ultimately reached before Terry passed away on the 28th of June, 1981. ■