

The novel: *Terry Fox: Somewhere the Hurting Must Stop*

1

It was the screams in the cancer ward that did it. How could I lie there at night and let those screams go on? I decided that I had to do something to relieve the pain.

So I decided to run across Canada. It was the only thing I could think of to try to raise funds. Ask every Canadian to give one dollar to stop the screams.

I'd read a magazine article about an amputee who'd run in the New York Marathon. How much money could I raise for cancer research if I asked people to sponsor me if I was to run a marathon every day? How many miles would that be, I wondered, as I tried to drown out the screams.

2

My leg was taking a pounding. Blisters on my feet; cysts on my stump; bone bruises, callouses, stress fractures, shin splints, ferocious pain in my hip. I would come back from a run with the bucket of my prosthesis dripping blood.

There are thresholds where pain is concerned. It comes in stages and it builds as you run. At times you think that you just can't take any more.

But then you cross a threshold, and your stubbornness equals your pain. The pain retreats to a place in your mind where it doesn't affect your thoughts. It's as if you run past the pain and leave it behind.

3

The only people that I let myself think about was the cancer victims. I was saved because of cancer research. More money for cancer research meant that we could save more of those people in the cancer ward.

That was what it amounted to. I was saved by cancer research. More research and we would be able to save more lives.

This is what I was thinking as I ran. There are twenty-four million people in Canada. I'll ask every Canadian to give one dollar for those kids in the cancer ward.

4

"His speech was really moving. Really heart-felt. It was just a small crowd. You got the feeling he only stopped for a moment to say hello and catch his breath. Only ten of us or so on that stretch of highway. Sweat was pouring down his forehead and on his cheeks. The steam was coming off his shoulders as he was talking. He told us about the run and about cancer and how the money was going to be used to help the kids. I had a cooler so I gave him a can of pop. As he was drinking I told him how much I admired him. Not everyone was willing to do what he was doing. Then I took off my Canada pin and offered it to him. He asked me to pin it on his shirt and I did. Later, I saw him running through the city on TV. He was giving a talk to what must have been a thousand people over a microphone and the camera moved in and there was my Canada pin."

5

"I had to get back to the office. And here I was sitting in my car. A grown man sitting and crying. That's what it did to me. I went more as a curiosity. I'd read about him in the newspaper. I was working

right downtown. Something to tell the kids that night at supper. There was talk of them getting out of school but it didn't work out. Anyway, I drove to where I knew I'd be able to see him. Almost close enough for me to reach out and touch. There was a crowd gathered to watch him. I stood on the sidewalk beside my car. Terry was running through the intersection. Then one guy started to clap. Then more started to clap and we all joined in. There was a grim look on his face. Concentration on the task. You could tell he was glad to be there. Just a hint of a smile and a nod. I didn't think I would be affected but I was. So that's why I just sat there and cried in the car. Next day, I took the kids out of school, phoned the boss to say I wouldn't be there, and drove us all to the next town to see Terry run."

6

"I gave him three hundred dollars. Now that's a lot of money. I'm a cleaning lady and it requires a lot of work to make that sum. I was saving it for a bus trip. You take a bus to Atlantic City – you get the bus and you share a room and you get a voucher for a couple of meals and you get to gamble for two nights and two days and then you come home. I counted it out and sent it off to the cancer people in town on behalf of Terry. I never had cancer myself. I know I'm never going to get it. I know I'll be cleaning people's apartments for a good long time. But the elderly lady I used to clean for died of cancer. She had it for quite a few years – a long slow decline. I used to help her daughter on my day off. Didn't have to do it – they weren't relatives of mine. But the lady was always so cheerful. Used to make me a cup of tea. We'd sit and talk in her kitchen. I insisted that I had work to do but she insisted we sit and talk. She wanted to sit at the dining room table but I insisted that the kitchen was fine. I used to spend the whole day there. The daughter paid me for half a day but I didn't mind. The cancer was eating away inside her as she was telling me about her life. She loosened me up so I was willing to talk about mine. So near the end, when it got so awkward, I'd show up on my day off and help the daughter take her to the clinic for the chemo treatments. She was old, this little old lady, but she always made me smile. And her daughter was pretty sad when she came to die. So when I read about Terry Fox, I just counted out my money – my Atlantic City money – and sent it all to the cancer people in town."

The Journal: *The Making of Somewhere the Hurting Must Stop*

1

Terry Fox was a young Canadian who was leading what seemed to be a normal life for one of his age, when, at age 18, he was stricken with cancer. His right leg was amputated in an attempt to prevent the spread of the cancer to the rest of his body, and he searched for ways to continue his life in as normal a way as possible. At a certain point, he decided that he would run across Canada – on one good leg and one artificial leg – in order to raise awareness of the need for cancer research. Canada stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean and through many kinds of terrain and weather, and his run generated an empathetic response from the Canadian community. The publicity which his run generated raised much money for cancer research and he became an example of heroic dedication in a selfless cause. He ran a marathon a day for 143 days, until the cancer – which had spread to the rest of his body – stopped his run about half-way across the country, and he died shortly after. His story appeals to the imagination as one of courage, self-sacrifice and hope as a response to the worst that life has to offer, and has been an inspiration to millions, not only in Canada, but around the world. Every year, across the world, there are thousands of runs which are dedicated to promoting cancer awareness and raising research funds and which are organized in the name of Terry Fox.

2

The Terry Fox story appeals to me because it is a story in which a community comes to see itself as a unit as a result of the actions of one of its own, in seeking to running across the entire width of a continent in order to serve his fellow citizens. What is pleasing is that what can truly be called a Canadian myth (the disabled Canadian boy who runs a marathon a day in order to save his fellow Canadians from harm) can easily serve as a universal myth (the disabled boy who runs a marathon a day in an attempt to save his fellow cancer victims and all potential cancer victims from harm) without having to remove or ignore anything that makes it a national myth of his own country. The spread of the run for cancer to many countries of the world (eighty countries as of the year 2016) under the banner of the Terry Fox Run for Cancer Research testifies to the universality of the Terry Fox myth.

3

It is interesting that when the historical Terry Fox reached Ontario, people began to see him as a tragic figure. It was as if Sisyphus was rolling his rock through Southern Ontario, on TV every evening and soon to come to a street-corner nearby. Hence he found himself telling the media and the crowds that he was enjoying himself. It was hard for him to explain that although it was true that he was in constant pain, he was also able to enjoy himself in the carrying out of the task that he had taken on.

So I worked that paradox into the novel: that a life of great pain might serve as a means of great satisfaction. He was not an ascetic; short of abandoning the run (the solution of many admirers and sympathizers), he sought out ways of easing the pain (such as having his artificial leg worked on in every province) and seeing non-cancer-probing doctors along the route, but he insists, despite the pain that cannot be controlled, that he is doing what he wants to do.

4

Part of the attraction of the historical Terry Fox is that he developed his ideas about himself and the run early and stuck to them. The sixteen months during which he prepared for the cross-Canada run must have been as much a mental development as it was a physical development, both as preparation for the demands of the run. He was remarkably consistent in his attitude towards many of the topics which arose and developed, and his attitude towards the money which he was collecting was as consistent as his attitude towards other topics: he was collecting the money for cancer research; all of the money was to go to help the kids; his expenses were to be kept to a bare minimum; he was uninterested in indulging in any luxuries; sponsors could donate but they could not use the run for advertising or for making money; and he was not interested in getting rich or famous from the run.

I see no evidence that the historical Terry Fox was ever tempted to allow himself any luxuries and have built that attitude into the fictional Terry Fox. It has to do with the definition of the self. It was such a core element in the personal makeup of Terry Fox the historical figure, and is of Terry Fox the fictional character, that the question as to whether to spend any but the most minimal money on himself or his friends or family never arose.