

Impact Statement

Benjamin Gu, Grade 7

Marathon of Hope, 2025

Watercolor on paper, 15 x 21 inches

Kerrisdale Elementary School, Vancouver, BC Canada

Unsung Hero: Terry Fox

Although Terry Fox may not be well known around the world, he is a national hero in Canada—a Canadian athlete, humanitarian, and cancer research activist. The annual Terry Fox Run, first held in 1981, has grown to involve millions of participants in over 60 countries. It is now the world's largest one-day fundraiser for cancer research, raising over C\$900 million through the Terry Fox Research Institute as of September 2024. I have participated in the Terry Fox Run with my schoolmates every year, and I hope to share his story with even more people through my paintings.

Terry Fox loved sports. Unfortunately, he lost his right leg to cancer. Yet he faced the challenge with incredible bravery, never afraid, never giving in to despair. He overcame his difficulties and continued to walk using a prosthetic leg. What's even more amazing is that he planned to run a marathon himself. His experiences in the hospital made him frustrated by how little funding was dedicated to cancer research. Motivated to make a difference, he set out to run across Canada to raise awareness and support for cancer research.

One of his most powerful statements was: "We need your help. The people in cancer clinics all over the world need people who believe in miracles. I am not a dreamer, and I am not saying that this will initiate any kind of definitive answer or cure to cancer. I believe in miracles. I have to." In 1980, Terry Fox began the Marathon of Hope to raise money for cancer research. He hoped to collect one dollar from each of Canada's 24 million people at the time. With little fanfare, he began his journey in St. John's, Newfoundland, and Labrador, in April of that year, running the equivalent of a full marathon every day. By the time he reached Ontario, Terry Fox had become a national star. He made numerous public appearances alongside business leaders, athletes, and politicians in his efforts to raise funds.

Terry Fox was not only a warrior who confronted his own personal challenges, but also a social activist dedicated to promoting cancer research and helping others receive treatment. Although cancer eventually took his young life, his spirit has inspired countless people and continues to give us strength. His heroic status is rooted in his image as an ordinary person attempting an extraordinary and inspiring feat. His greatness lies in his bold vision, his unwavering determination, and his ability to overcome obstacles. His determination united the nation, with people from all walks of

life supporting his run. His memory continues to inspire pride across every region of the country. He embodies some of the most cherished Canadian values: compassion, commitment, and perseverance.

Terry Fox was the youngest person ever named a Companion of the Order of Canada and was awarded the 1980 Lou Marsh Award as the nation's top sportsman. Widely regarded as a national hero, he has been honoured across the country with numerous buildings, statues, roads, and parks named after him. I chose a close-up portrait of Terry Fox as the central subject of the piece. His youthful face radiates vitality, and his curly hair seems to shimmer with the light of youth. His eyes are bright and focused—his firm gaze reflecting his inner strength and willpower. The slight smile at the corner of his mouth conveys his positive and optimistic spirit.

To the right of the portrait, I included an image of Fox running during the Marathon of Hope. His strides are heavy, his body clearly in pain, yet his perseverance is deeply moving and inspiring. On the left side of the picture, I depicted his prosthetic leg—a crucial support for his body, a tool that helped him pursue his dream, and a powerful symbol of courage and perseverance. In the background, a road stretches vertically, representing the path Fox ran—a road that stands for determination, struggle, and hope. A red line runs horizontally across the image from left to right, tracing the route of his marathon through the eastern provinces of Canada. The line appears winding and uneven, symbolizing a journey full of obstacles and aspirations. This is not just a physical path—it represents the road of growth and life that each of us must travel, filled with trials, resilience, and hope.

I used watercolor to capture the facial details of the portrait, aiming to realistically portray the true appearance of a hero. The red shirt contrasts vividly with the green background. The large expanse of green represents the landscapes along the Marathon of Hope. Green is also a color symbolizing vitality and hope, which reflects both the journey and the spirit of Terry Fox.

At the bottom of the piece, I included a meaningful slogan—“To try and help others.” This, I believe, is the essence of what made Fox a hero. His legacy reminds us that, in a way, everyone is running their own marathon. Along the way, we encounter beautiful scenery, the support of family and friends, and the inevitable challenges and setbacks. But with courage, we overcome these obstacles and move forward—step by step. By doing our best to help others, we not only grow ourselves but also pass on strength and confidence to those around us.