

It was 25 years ago today...

By Wilma Blokhuis
OAKVILLE LIVING EDITOR

Twenty-five years ago, today, Terry Fox visited Oakville as part of his Marathon of Hope cross-country fundraiser for the Canadian Cancer Society.

While Fox is rightfully regarded as a Canadian icon today, on July 13, 1980 his cross-country trek was just gaining momentum.

It's hard to believe, but if it hadn't been for a handful of dedicated Oakville Cancer society volunteers, his stop in Oakville would have gone almost unheralded.

One of those volunteers, probably the most instrumental, was Joan Gibb.

She remembers his visit like it was yesterday.

"Terry was a day late," said Gibb, who was forced to deal with the logistics of the last minute scheduling change. "He was to arrive here on July 12 - it was the only day he didn't run."

Making the change and informing the public was a major challenge.

"That was back in the days when there were no cell phones, no e-mail and no Starbucks or any other coffee shops downtown where people gather."

Fox was originally scheduled to stop in front of the Oakville Central Library on July 12.

But his stop in Toronto on July 11 was too much for the young runner.

"He was overwhelmed with having met Daryl Sittler of the Toronto Maple Leafs and seeing a crowd 10,000 people in Toronto," remembered Gibb like it was yesterday. "He needed a day off. It was the only day he didn't run."

"He ran 3,524 kilometres before taking a day off," she said, fondly remembering his look of determination across



BARRIE ERSKINE/ OAKVILLE BEAVER

FOND REMEMBRANCES: Long-time Oakville Cancer society volunteer Joan Gibb leafs through her Terry Fox scrapbook, which she recently loaned to the Terry Fox Foundation.

a rugged face beneath a tussle of curly hair. Fox had been on the road since he dipped his artificial leg into the Atlantic Ocean in St. John's, NFLD, on April 12, 1980.

"So, here we were, on a Sunday in downtown Oakville in 1980...and no people to cheer for Terry."

Gibb was not about to let Fox run through Oakville unnoticed.

Getting the word out was difficult. When the adrenaline kicked in, however, she decided to re-route him to Sheridan College, the final stop in the former Oakville Journal Record's annual Antique Car Rally.

"I knew I would find some people there."

She had received the go-ahead from that paper's publisher, Hub Foley, to add a visit from Fox to its rally celebrations.

Gibb made the decision at 7 o'clock that morning. The runner arrived at Sheridan College at 6 p.m.

Volunteers were few in number as most of them were away for the summer, and the Canadian Cancer Society's Oakville unit office was closed for the weekend.

Making arrangements to find a crowd to greet Fox and to raise some money was "sporadic. It went by gosh and by golly."

"The volunteers had just finished (wrapping up) the April campaign and said they were tired."

Nevertheless, a handful of very dedicated volunteers remained in town to help Gibb, namely Frances Rustom and her son Michael, "who stood in front of the Oakville Central Library that Sunday and redirected people to Sheridan College. Though she was with me every step of the way, she unfortunately, didn't see Terry."

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