

Comment

He's running still

A quarter-century after his death, Terry Fox remains as inspirational for Canadians as he was all those years ago



CHRISTIE BLATCHFORD

The modern long-distance runner — by that I mean those, like me, who come to the game relatively late in life, are distinguished by a singular lack of ability, and who have not acquired the underfed-chicken look that once was the norm among marathoners — is a bit of a whiner.

In my little group, for instance, though several of our number have been felled by actual devastating injuries (two ripped Achilles tendons, one broken foot bone), and most of the rest of us now gimp along like aging German shepherds with bad hips, we tend, in the main, to be comically obsessed about every twinge or worse, every anticipated-but-as-yet-unrealized one.

Indeed, our collective mantra is, “Well, you’ve got to listen to your body,” though speaking purely for myself, I would happily ignore what my own says (it is largely a call to stay in the sack and eat bonbons) if I could be assured that someone other than me would have a look at it now and then.

Anyway, all this is quite amusing given that the greatest danger most of us face is that we are prone to unwarranted, spontaneous and inexplicable face plants.

Once, having smashed up my nose and glasses doing just this, my friend, Tracy, who is a member of our group but also not a member in that she is actually fast and thus properly mortified by the rest of us, inquired what happened.

“I just fell,” I told her blithely, adding with the exaggerated patience one uses with the feeble-minded, “Tracy, everyone who runs falls now and then.”

“Blatchford,” she sneered, “you’re a big, fat liar.”

Others in our group are overly interested in self-care, and employ small armadas of therapists that any impoverished Canadian Olympian would envy — foot doctors, physios, masseuses, personal trainers, nutritionists. If we’re heading out for a run of any distance, we wear these enormous water-bottle belts that Tracy scornfully calls The Travelling Buffet, adorned with gels, energy bars and drinks, various



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salves and pills.

In our number, I swear, there are folks who eat so much they gain weight during the marathon.

Most curiously, one of us appears to have been taken over by the spirit of my late mother.

My mum never lived further than four miles from me in the same city, but as our weekly Sunday breakfasts approached, would always reply, when I attempted to confirm the usual arrangements, “weather permitting,” as though I were in Florida and she in Yellowknife and we were smack in the midst of some 24/7 storm season.

Ditto the woman whose head she now inhabits.

She, like my mom, is glued to the Weather Channel and is prone to announcing, with a worried brow, that rain clouds have been spotted somewhere within a 1,000-kilometre radius of the city and thus, she may not be joining us the next morning.

I’ve been thinking of all this of late, as our next big race approaches. Some of us are doing our third marathon, the Toronto Waterfront, a week tomorrow, with the wounded doing the half.

I’m feeling particularly dubious this

time around.

For one thing, with two others under my belt, I have seen the enemy.

I know too well how hard it is to run 26.2 miles. I know that I will go out too fast, due to excitement and that tragic, early-in-the-race delusion that I really am an athlete. I know that my already sore right foot (I refuse to have it looked at out of Fear of orthotics, those costly old-lady inserts that everyone I know wears now and which appear to be prescribed for everything) will give me trouble. I know that a recent week of no runs, bad food, little water and not much sleep in New Orleans

may not have affected my physical fitness but has wreaked havoc with my confidence. I know that around the last few miles, there will be well-meaning spectators chirping, “You’re almost there!” and that I will want to smash their teeth in, this due to the fact that each of the last few miles feels like 300 and that I am nowhere near there, there being the finishing line.

And so, from this mewling vale of tears, I remind myself of Terry Fox.

He lost a leg to bone cancer. He ran, in his inimitable hippity-hop manner, more than halfway across our country. As my colleague, Roy MacGregor, wrote this week, in a column about Terry’s best friend and companion-on-the-road Doug Alward, Terry did a marathon every single day for 143 days.

The last week or so of his Marathon of Hope, he was running with fear in his heart — he was feeling unsettling pain in his chest, which, on some level, he knew was bad news. It was about that time, in a little Northern Ontario town called Terrace Bay, that I met Terry. Only about a week later, when it became unbearable, even for him, did he ‘fess up and call it quits.

I was working then for The Toronto Star and, at the news that Terry’s cancer had come back, this time to his lungs, flew back up north to see him. The change was shocking: Where such a short time before he was so gorgeous and fit I thought he’d surely live forever, now he looked small. As he formally announced the end of his run, a lazy Northern Ontario fly made its way across his lovely face, and Terry was too weary to swipe at it.

Unusually, for our country, the memory of this wonderful young man has been kept fresh, and almost a quarter-century after his death, he remains as inspirational as he was all those years ago. Yesterday, school-aged children across Canada ran to raise money for the Terry Fox Foundation; tomorrow, there’s the annual general run in his name.

Indeed, raising charitable dollars by running is itself a Terry Fox invention, I think.

I’m doing it myself next weekend in the Waterfront, for the Osteoporosis Society of Canada (it was the disease that left my mum bent like a comma); my Globe and Mail colleague, André Picard, is running the same race to raise money for a group building a hospice in Toronto for children with HIV-AIDS. Anyone wanting to pledge money can do so at www.icanpledge.com. And if you can’t find someone to sponsor who is running tomorrow, for Terry, you’re not trying.

Running is fundamentally selfish, at least the way most of us do it. For all the carping we do, nothing makes us feel more comfortable in our own skin. It was different with Terry, but then Terry was different. He was better.

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UN’s No. 1 problem? A growing deficit in global democracy



KEN WIWA

So the UN is 60 years old this week. In many countries, especially in the global North, that would be retirement age or at least time to contemplate it, while in many parts of the global South, especially in these times when life expectancy is declining, the UN would probably be dead.

Whether it is dying or not, the UN can still throw the most exclusive and unique party in town, judging by the gathering of just about every world leader in New York this week. I’d love to know the cost of that little outing — like how many of the Millennium Development Goals could have been ticked off by reallocating the funds for the party? Still, with so many of the

world’s leaders at an office party, it seems pertinent to ask: Who runs the world, anyway? In an age of economic integration (and disintegration), mass migrations, the Internet and everything else global-icious, the UN should really be coming of age. By my pop political theory, the UN should be running the show now that we are all being sold as global citizens linked by fewer and fewer degrees of separation.

The reality, of course, is very different. Instead of leaning on the wisdom of its age, some people are wondering whether the UN is out of touch with reality. Social-justice cynics would argue that instead of inviting the world’s leaders to New York, invitations should have gone out to the heads of the 100 largest corporations, who preside over bigger budgets than most of the 200 or so world leaders who, in theory, run the planet, but who, in practice, are just caretakers and supervisors for the corporate citizens among us.

For all its universal aspirations in the aftermath of the Second World War — that elegant opening line to the preamble of the UN charter, “We the people of the

United Nations . . .” now sounds a little presumptuous and overly optimistic, especially when it is set against the stern realities of a world where nation states, corporations and other transnational actors make decisions that bypass and mock the UN’s governing aspirations.

In hindsight, the UN was always globally challenged, what with the looming shadow of the Cold War that turned the UN into a stage for geopolitical theatrics.

I guess the UN has never seen itself as a global government, anyway — more an institution designed to manage and prevent the kind of conflict that gave rise to its founding. But on that score, of preventing conflict, it has probably succeeded and failed in just about equal measure; you could argue that it has always been let down by the opportunism of nation states that tend to hide behind the UN when it suits, and dismiss the institution when it does not serve their self-interest.

If disunited nations has been a part of its problem (with the Oil-for-Food scandal illustrating the criticisms that it is a bloated bureaucracy), then the challenge

for the UN is that it is now paradoxically cast as offering the basis of a global government that will bridge the jurisdictional gap through which transnational corporations operate, as well as serving as a counterpoint to the U.S. administration’s unilateralist agenda. In short, can a reformed UN be the answer to the collective prayers of global civil society?

The short answer is: not likely, if only because global governance is hard to calibrate, quantify and execute. Just as hard, if you like, as trying to figure out what global civil society is or what constitutes global citizenship.

Last week, I spent the weekend in Vancouver in the company of a select group of thinkers and journalists (not always one and the same thing) pulled together by the Trudeau Foundation to try to dissect and decipher the matter.

Reading between the lines of the papers presented and the discussions that followed only confirmed my view that we have a serious problem, a growing global-democracy deficit. “How can you talk about global citizenship if there is no in-

stitution to enforce and uphold the rights of the global citizen?” asked one participant, while an international jurist reminded us that there is “no concept in law of global citizenship,” confirming that there is indeed a vacuum at the heart of our international order.

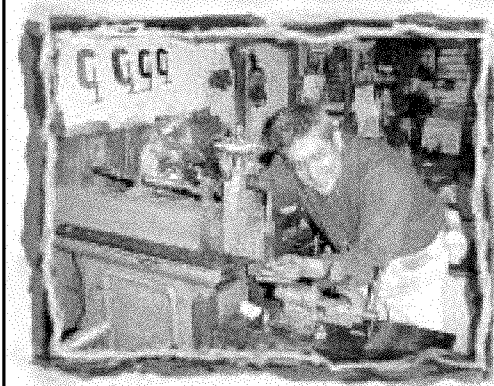
And because nature abhors a vacuum, we find ourselves in yet another new world disorder, where competing institutions and organizations, as well as political, religious, economic and social entities (and much more that probably adds up to global civil society) exist side by side, often in opposition, but without an agreed set of rules and a referee to preside over the contest.

This seems to me to be the most pressing issue that the world faces in the 21st century. Yes, it’s true that climate change, poverty and the arms race have all been touted as the number-one priority for mankind, but the common denominator in all those issues is finding consensus and effective power to manage change.

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