

# Nancy Gajdosik

Who wasn't inspired by Terry Fox? But in the case of Nancy Gajdosik, it was the Marathon of Hope that inspired her to enter the world of running, at the somewhat ripe age of 38. She saw Terry and went out the door with her dog and got moving. She loved it from her first outing. Living in St. Vital near St. Amant Centre, it was a reasonable jaunt to run through St. Vital Park and exercising and being outdoors got her hooked. She started entering the MRA road races.

Running brought Nancy into the acquaintance of Marilyn Fraser and there was no turning back. Now she was not only running races but volunteering when she wasn't running. She got involved with the Manitoba Marathon and played a prominent role for the past 41 years. She also got her 5 children to work as volunteers as well, giving them valuable life lessons as well as intrinsic enjoyment. Nancy also served on the board of the Manitoba Marathon and continues to serve on the Marathon's Tech Committee.

As a runner, after running many 5 kms and 10 kms, Nancy set a goal of breaking 2 hours in the half marathon. With the support of a fellow runner named Edward, whom she met climbing the "heartbreak hill" on Bishop Grandin Bridge, she achieved her goal, crossing the finish line in 1:58:33. She had arranged in advance to have Shep Shell as her hugger and told him that she would be around the 2 hour mark. Edward (as an unofficial pace bunny) let Nancy cross first, and there was Shep to deliver the promised hug, in the form of lifting her off the ground. She said, "Running the half-marathon is a little like having a baby. I'll do it again some day, but not tomorrow." Reporter Scott Taylor was nearby and overheard and asked if he could use that quote. It became both the quote of the day and the quote of the year! It was particularly fitting because Nancy is not only dedicated to running and to her children, but she was an obstetric nurse who led Lamaze classes for decades, including for many of the members of the running community.

Nancy's proudest achievement in road running has been getting so many kids and volunteers in general involved in helping with the Marathon. Prominent among those volunteers were Jerry's Kids, a group organized by Jerry and Gerry Ilchyna of Dakota Collegiate who did yeoman service in many Marathons starting in 1983. This was before students performed community services for school credit.

Another cherished memory is being at the Marathon finish line when the last runners crossed the finish line, accompanied by the bike sweepers. The media was long gone and signage and equipment was already being taken down but these final foot soldiers would proudly cross the line in pursuit and achievement of their very personal goals. Somehow the satisfaction felt by these slowest performers was even more moving than that of the champions at the front.

Nancy fondly remembers Jim Hamill, the first chair of the technical committee of the Marathon who suffered a debilitating stroke in 2010 and had an extremely difficult rehabilitation program but nevertheless insisted on attending the Expo and handing out medals at the finish line from his wheelchair, a truly touching scene. Unfortunately, Jim died in 2021, the 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the Manitoba Marathon.

It will surprise no one that Nancy's favourite race is the Manitoba Marathon, both for what it has done for the running community and for what it has done for Manitobans living with intellectual disabilities.

Her favourite road running memory from her running career was running those beautiful loops of Assiniboine Park on race Sunday mornings, with her family sleeping when she left home and still sleeping when she got back! Her worst experience was her last half marathon when her time of 2:33 convinced her that she would not be running any more PR's! Runners in Manitoba owe a huge debt of gratitude to Nancy for all she has done for them over the past 4+ decades.