

• Winnipeg Free Press

Local News

Friends' battles spur Tori on

By: Will Tremain

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You could say that Tori Yetman runs just because she can. But Tori runs for people who cannot; those who have suffered on a long and difficult road called cancer.

Five years ago, Tori's best friend, Roderick (Rocket) Spence, succumbed to leukemia. He was four.

Then last year, Tori's friend, Matthew Berard Stevens, died of bone marrow cancer. He was 14.

Yetman, an athletic 13-year-old who hails from Nelson House in the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, 800 kilometres north of Winnipeg, told herself she had to do something to fight the scourge of cancer.

"After I lost my friends it was heartbreaking," Tori said. "And a lot of people have the disease. I just want to help as much as I can to get rid of it."

To that end, Tori is cycling and running close to 1,000 km over the next 10 days, from her home in Nelson House to Winnipeg.

She'll use two bikes in the long journey, with the first 200 km on gravel roads.

She will run as she passes through each community, raising funds for childhood cancer research with all donations going to the Canadian Cancer Society.

She plans to arrive at her school, Arthur A. Leach in Winnipeg, on June 28.

Tori's fundraising target is high, at \$250,000, but she shows quiet confidence rare for a teen. "If I do raise a quarter of a million dollars I'd probably make a really big difference," Tori said.

Tori's role models include Terry Fox. "He had the ambition to do it on one leg, rather than do it on two," she said. "And he didn't train at all. So it made it that much more amazing."

Tori will have a support entourage riding along in an RV: her dad, her mom, her aunt and others.

They'll have everything they need to assist Tori after each day's gruelling ride.

Tori said she's ready for the trip. She's been training for the last eight months up to six times per week at McDole Performance Systems, a Winnipeg gym, under the tutelage of head strength coach Dave Beakley.

When the two met, Tori was already playing volleyball, hockey, and flag football, Beakley said, on top of being in school every day.

Beakley describes Tori's fitness level now as "fantastic." His advice to her is to be mentally tough and to think positive to get through the journey.

"Physically, I know she's capable of doing it," Beakley said. "Tell yourself you can do it and the likelihood of doing it becomes a lot greater."

On Tuesday, it was time for Tori's last training session before she flew home to Nelson House to start her journey.

Tori was on her final set of strength exercises, with Beakley supervising closely.

"Pick it up, pick it up, pick it up," Beakley said swiftly over the sound of a resistance treadmill. "Way to go, way to go, way to go!"

Tori's feet churned, making the treadmill whine at high speed, but she hardly broke a sweat.

Tori leaves Nelson House on Thursday after a memorial ceremony for her two friends.

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Tori Yetman prepares for her 1,000-kilometre fundraising journey from Nelson House to Winnipeg to benefit children with cancer. Her trek begins today.

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