

RUNNER'S WORLD

Runner Begins Fundraising Run Across Country

Garth Watson hopes to raise \$10,000 for Stand Up To Cancer.

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Garth Watson is running across the country to raise funds for Stand Up 2 Cancer.

When Garth Watson landed in Los Angeles, he saw the Pacific Ocean for the first time since he was in the sixth grade.

Then he turned around and started to run home to Pennsylvania.

Watson, 24, is running across the country, backed up by his father in an RV, to raise \$10,000 for Stand Up to Cancer. His run started Sunday in Oceanside, California.

His excellent adventure calls for him to run from L.A. to New York in 150 days or less, averaging about 30 miles a day that he's been breaking into six- to 10-mile increments.

"It's something I'd wanted to do for a while—use my abilities to do something good for other people, instead of just keeping running races," said Watson, who says he grew up idolizing superheroes. "I love racing, but I wanted to give back."

Although none of his close relatives have had cancer, he said, he chose cancer research as a cause because he knew other people who have.

He also hasn't started a career since graduating from Edinboro University in western Pennsylvania with a degree in broadcast journalism. So, other than a part-time job at a bagel shop in New Jersey, Watson said, "I didn't have anything holding me back."

Watson has experience with this sort of thing. He ran 426 miles across Pennsylvania in 24 days in 2007, averaging 18 miles a day, to raise money for a track for the high school in his hometown of Canton.

After college, however, he stopped running.

"I thought the running part of my life was over," he said. "And it's very easy to not do things. So once I stopped running, I just stopped. I was just kind of living but didn't really have a certain direction I was going in. This is kind of a second chance for me to get back into it and prove to myself that I still have it."

Starting again was tough. "When I built up the mileage, I'd get pain in my knees. It was definitely a challenge." But setting the goal of running coast to coast, Watson said, made it easier to train and get back into shape.

There were other problems. One was weather. To train, Watson ran 100 to 110 miles a week through a winter of snow and sleet and record cold temperatures, only to get on the road in California under a blistering sun and oppressive heat. By Day 2, the backs of his legs were sunburned.

Friends who had promised to drive the RV in support backed out at the last minute, too. So Watson's father, Frank, who owns a diesel-repair shop and pilots corporate jets, agreed to fill in.

The two have been close since Frank Watson bought a tandem bicycle and they went on days-long rides together when his son was just a boy.

"We fight and dicker as much as any other father and son, but we really get along," said Watson Sr., who is also a runner, and tries to join his son for a few miles of every day's route.

He describes his job helming the 128-square-foot motor home while handling the provisioning, cooking, and logistics, "as like being the commander of an Apollo space mission. You've got to be a world-class driver, a therapist, a masseuse, a mechanic."

But he added, "When Garth says he's going to do something, he's serious. He committed to this, and it was something he was going to do."

That takes not just extra sunscreen, but a lot of focus, Frank Watson said.

"There's no rushing through it," he said. "If you stop and look at a map and start thinking about it, you'll just quit. It's just too big. The only way you can make this make sense so you just don't jump off a cliff is to just take it in and enjoy it."

His son agrees. Thinking of the miles still to come "takes a mental toll," he said. "I'm trying to enjoy the runs, enjoy the scenery, and take it one run at a time. I've never even driven across the country, so I'm seeing all these things for the first time, and it's really beautiful. That helps, just to be able to enjoy that."

The Watsons expect friends to begin coming out and cheering them on when they get to Ohio and Pennsylvania. A Canton running store donated the 10 pairs of shoes the run is expected to consume.

And Garth Watson blogs every day about his runs so people can follow along.

"I may never be a superhero, but that feeling of helplessness has dissipated as I've realized how I can use something I love to do something good in the world," he wrote in one.

"I've realized that the way for me to help may have been something I've been doing for a long, long time: running with purpose."

You can donate to Garth Watson's run [here](#).