

Walker urges people to cherish life's challenges



By Brock Weir

Lionel Strang scoffs at the idea he might have any trepidation about walking from Downtown Toronto to Barrie.

Like the men and women who joke that they climbed the mountain because it was there, Strang laced up and made the trip simply because he could.

Well, it's not quite as simple as he lets on.

The 63-year-old Barrie man has been battling stage four melanoma since 2014.

First diagnosed at Royal Victoria Hospital, he was referred to Princess Margaret Hospital where he volunteered for experimental therapy. It is now 2017, nearly three years after his initial diagnosis that he wouldn't make 12 months.

When he first beat that one year marker, he and his friend Barb decided to celebrate with a fundraiser barbeque to benefit Princess Margaret's Psychosocial Oncology Centre. They continued the event to mark the second year on his cancer journey but this year he decided to up the ante.

"I have seen so many people at the hospital who are suffering so much more than me," Strang told The Auroran shortly before his walk took him through the heart of Aurora on Sunday afternoon. "I have been very fortunate with my cancer experience so far, and I just realised that so many people are so much worse off than me. In this day and age of people complaining, I just wanted to do something.

"It seems kind of weird to say I am fortunate, but I just wanted to do something and I got the idea from the guys in World War Two, including my dad, who would walk miles and miles, and then there was Terry Fox who ran 28 miles a day, and I thought I could walk from Princess Margaret to the barbecue. So many people are working hard and I am just standing around, so why not walk? There wasn't a whole lot of thought to it other than doing something because I can."

After his initial diagnosis, Strang said his wife and son essentially had to carry him out of the hospital, but after going to Princess Margaret and learning about Dr. Anthony Joshua's clinical trial, he decided to give it a go.

"I figured I didn't have anything to lose at that point, and if I could help humanity move forward that would be a good thing," he recalled. "I started to go and I kept going. The wonderful thing about Princess Margaret Hospital is they are quite willing to admit they don't have all the answers to all the questions and they are just as thrilled as I am, which is also a wonderful thing."

With each day that goes by, Strang feels more "blessed" than the day before.

"I met a lot of people [at the hospital] who are cancer patients; we've lost some heroes, gained some warriors, and it is hard to explain what it is like to be in this ball of wax," he said. "You have two choices: you either curl up and stop, or you keep going. I didn't get sick, so I kept going. Here I am, three years later, thinking: 'I've got to do something to help this hospital as much as I can and this is what I came up with to make people aware."

"Having problems are a good thing. If you have problems, that means you're alive. That is what each and every human being on the

planet wants. If you're standing in the wrong line at Costco, that's a good thing. If someone cuts you off when you're driving, that's a good thing. If you're struggling financially, that's a good thing because it means you're alive. I am doing this walk because I can, and I am not supposed to be here. Half the fun will be being too tired, being too hot, or being too cold if it rains.?