

Rick Hansen: No Walls Too Big to Climb

# Rick Hansen: No Walls Too Big to Climb



*Written by Mary Beth Leatherdale*

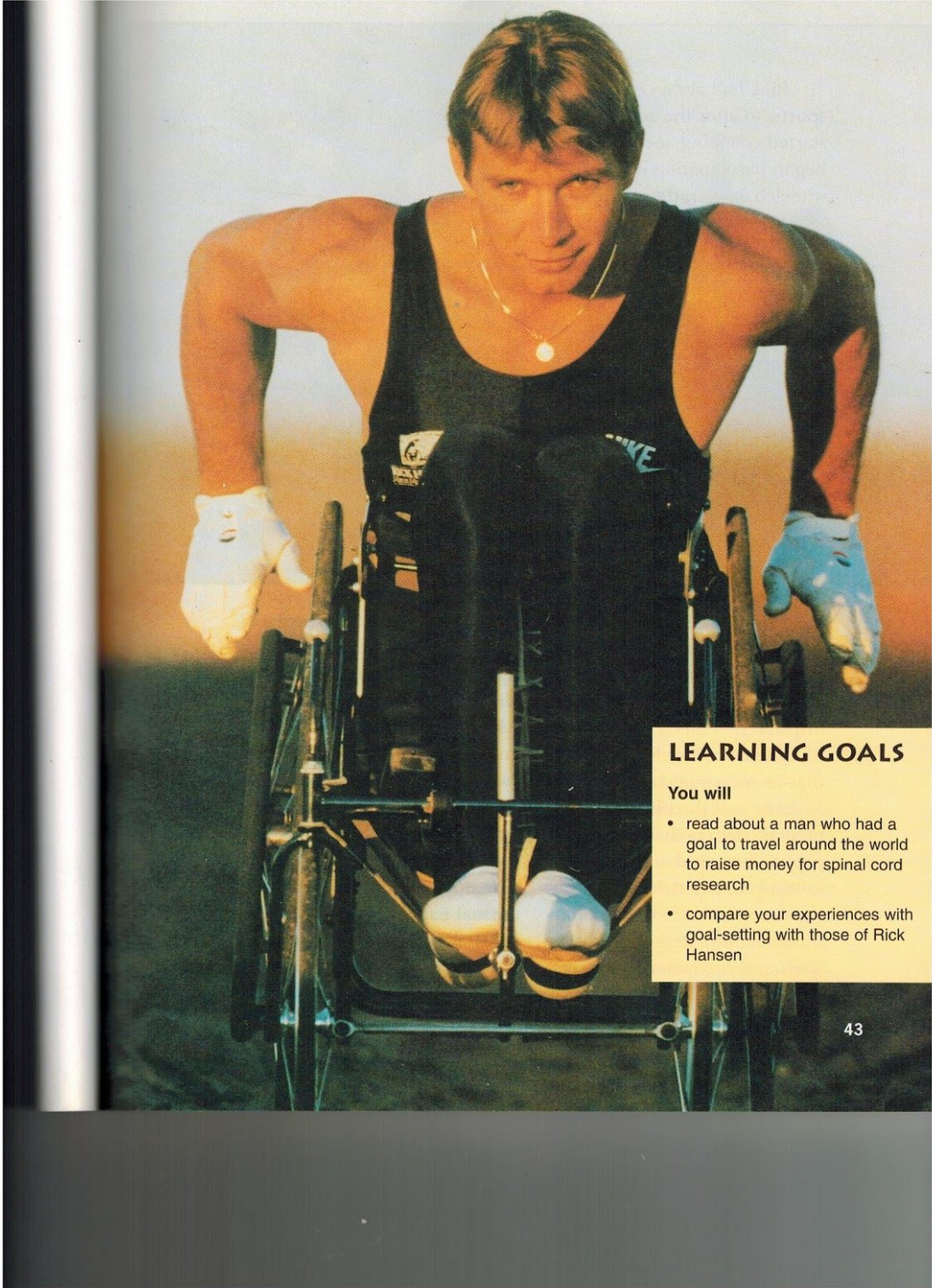
## READING TIP

### Think about your experiences

Think of a time when you set a personal goal. What happened? As you read, record what Rick Hansen did to achieve his personal goal to tour the world and raise awareness of the barriers that disabled people face.

**R**ick Hansen dreamed of doing the impossible. He dreamed of wheeling around the world—a distance of 40 000 kilometres—in his wheelchair. And through blinding snowstorms, over tall mountain ranges, and against other countless obstacles, Vancouver-born Rick Hansen travelled across 34 countries and made his dream a reality.

Rick's idea of wheeling around the world grew slowly. At first, Rick was just interested in challenging himself physically. When he was 15 years old, he was hitching a ride in the back of a truck when it went out of control. The resulting injury to Rick's spinal cord left him paralyzed from the waist down, meaning he would never walk again.



**LEARNING GOALS**

**You will**

- read about a man who had a goal to travel around the world to raise money for spinal cord research
- compare your experiences with goal-setting with those of Rick Hansen



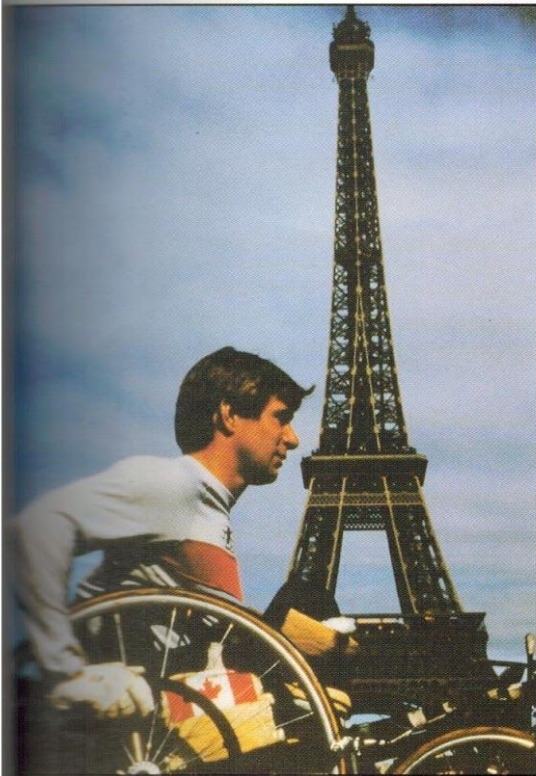
Rick had always enjoyed sports, so after the accident he started coaching and eventually began participating in wheelchair marathons. He won 19 wheelchair marathons in a row and became world champion three times. His success in marathoning made him realize that he might be physically and emotionally strong enough to take on the challenge of wheeling around the world—if he wanted to.

Rick had trained with and become friends with another disabled athlete named Terry Fox. Terry had lost his leg to cancer. In 1980, Terry set off to run across Canada; Terry's Marathon of Hope was intended to focus attention on cancer and raise funds for cancer research. Rick was inspired by Terry's courage and what he achieved. Rick realized that he too could raise awareness of the physical and mental barriers that disabled people face. And a world tour would give him the opportunity to raise money for research, rehabilitation, and wheelchair sport and recreation programs



for people with spinal cord injuries.

So Rick decided to make his dream a reality. Planning for his Man in Motion tour was a huge undertaking. What route would he take? Where would he sleep? What would he eat? What kind of safety, medical, and training gear would he need? Who would help him during the tour? How would he make sure he was safe on the road? And where would he get the money to start the tour?

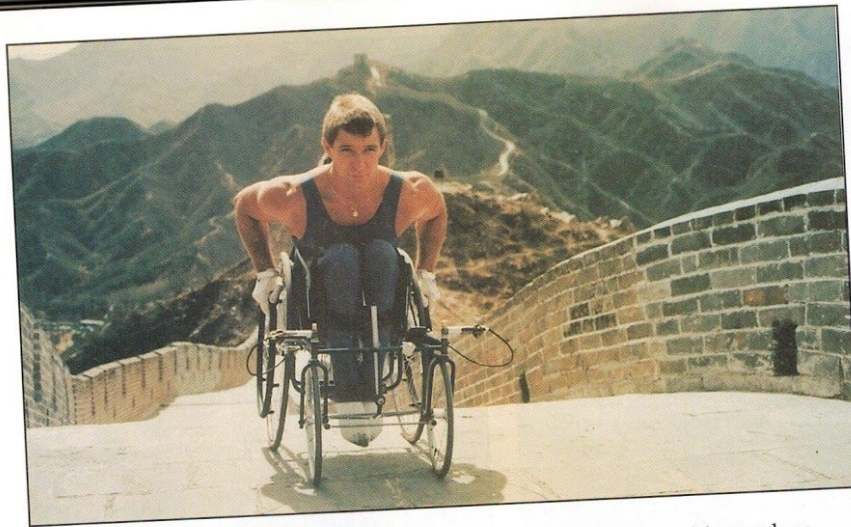


Despite working to overcome these obstacles for over a year, Rick never considered giving up. As he told a sports writer: "We're committed to this thing! If it turns out that [crew members] Tim and Don and I have to leave in a Volkswagen Beetle with three sleeping bags and the wheelchair in the back, then that's the way it will be. I'm going to wheel that chair around the world and that's all there is to it."



Finally on March 21, 1985, Rick set off from Vancouver, British Columbia, to wheel around the world. But his problems were not over. From early in the tour, Rick faced difficult weather conditions—wheeling against strong winds and rain, day after day. Then Rick started to have pain in his hands. Rick thought the pain was caused by mechanical problems with his wheelchair so he had his crew try adjusting the seat of his





wheelchair by tiny amounts, dropping it one quarter of a centimetre or moving it forward by a half a centimetre. While these adjustments would help the pain in one spot it would put strain on the other hand or wrist, causing more problems. Rick knew if he didn't take care of the injuries and continued wheeling he might have to take a break from—or even cancel—the tour until his injuries were healed. But through careful management and help from his physiotherapist and girlfriend Amanda Reid, Rick was able to continue.

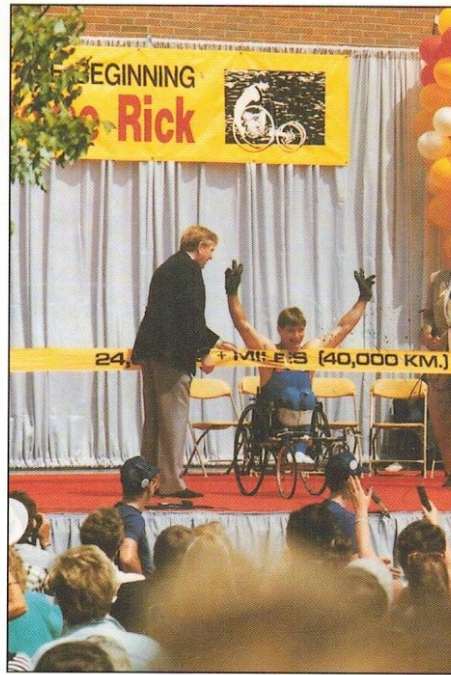
Rick's world tour was not a fun-filled adventure. While he

visited famous cities such as London, Paris, and Moscow, the many scheduled appearances and the physical demands of wheeling gave him very little time or energy to sightsee or get to know these places.

But his visit to China was a dream come true. The night before Rick began the world tour a friend asked him, "What do you want to get out of this tour?" Rick responded, "When I come back and it's all over, I want to be able to wake up in the morning, look at the bedroom wall, and see a picture of me in the wheelchair, sitting on the Great Wall of China."

“That’s it?” his friend asked.  
“That’s it. I want to be able to lie there for a minute, and stare at it, and remember what it took to get there, and remind myself that there are no walls too big to climb.” Rick did climb the Great Wall of China, an incredible achievement. It was extremely difficult because of the very steep angle of the Great Wall.

When Rick returned to Vancouver on May 22, 1987—more than two years after he set out on the Man in Motion tour—a crowd of 50 000 people greeted him. He had become a celebrity recognized around the globe and had raised more than \$20 million for spinal cord research, rehabilitation, and recreation programs. By proving to himself that there



are no walls too big to climb, he had also demonstrated this belief to countless others and inspired them.

## AFTER YOU READ

### Make connections

Review the information you recorded from the story. Make a chart to show connections between a time when you achieved a personal goal and Rick Hansen’s process of achieving his goal.