

Dan Norman – Olympic Team Member 1992 in C1 Slalom carried THE TORCH on November 1st

My leg of the torch run was at 6 AM on the first of November in Nanaimo.

When I found out when, where and how far I would carry the torch, I was pretty excited to be part of the relay, but also couldn't help wondering what it was all about. I figured that if they needed someone to run the torch in the middle of nowhere for a long way under difficult conditions, then I was their guy - I had kind of visualized myself carrying the torch along a trail in the mountains in the pouring rain for ten or fifteen kilometres - but they had me running 300 metres on flat pavement in the middle of the city. It still seemed pretty cool though, and everyone who knew I was doing the relay sure seemed excited.

The day before my run, I was involved in a community event to welcome the torch in my home of Mill Bay - I stood in the parking area of the local plaza and ran a craft station where young kids made a small torch of their own using a stick, some red cellophane and aluminum foil. The children were all pretty stoked about it, and then the torch relay itself came through in the pouring rain, and hundreds of people stood there watching and cheering. The excitement level I witnessed around me was huge, and my anticipation built...but I was also a bit weirded out by the huge trucks with sound systems and sponsor logos which preceded the runner carrying the torch - they seemed to take the focus away from what we were all there to see.

On the morning of my run, I woke very early, put on the track suit they provided and ran alone about 3 km in the dark to the rallying point. I was part of a group of 20 other torch bearers who were all on a bus which dropped us at our start point and then picked us up afterwards.

The energy levels on the bus were huge. This was the highlight for me - everyone on the bus told their story - how they got involved, who they were and how they were feeling. So I told my story in 30 seconds or less and heard 19 others, and this inspired me. With all the anti-Olympic sentiments that were bouncing around BC in the first few days of the relay, it was rejuvenating to be with a group of strangers who were all completely supportive of the Olympic movement. There were tears, cheers, and all kinds of displays of positive emotion.

One story really hit me more than the others. One of the other torch bearers, named Rusty, had just returned from serving in the Armed Forces in Afghanistan. He had just retired from the military, and his parents had made his application to be a torch bearer for him, believing it would be an effective step in his transition to civilian life. This view of the torch run as a pivotal part of his change in circumstance and shift in life direction really made me understand how powerful the Olympics are as a symbol. I was inspired by Rusty and of all my fellow torchbearers on that bus, he was the one I found afterwards to thank and shake hands with.

The bus stopped and let me off on a bridge near the water in the dark at 5:50 AM. I was the second torch bearer of the day, and so I waited - and then another runner approached, we held our torches together, and I was bearing the Olympic Flame. There was almost no one around, but I didn't care. When I started running, I went hard, and the security escort asked me to slow down - and even if I didn't want to listen, the escort truck with bright lights wouldn't speed up so unless I wanted to run around it, I had to. My wife Laura and daughter Quin had come out in the early darkness to see me run, and I slowed down as Quin ran alongside me - she really moved fast and kept up for the final 100 metres. As I passed the flame to the next torch bearer, I was able to stop, and let Quin help me hold the Olympic flame. (My son Jacob had woken up to come see this, but was so sick with the flu he could not get out of bed).

I am honoured to have been chosen to bear the torch, but more than that, I am humbled by the enthusiasm, excitement and sense of import which everyone I encounter displays. The Olympic Flame is an amazingly powerful symbol, and from the reactions that I have witnessed, it speaks very loudly to people everywhere.