

Jim Cowan



Lord Simon Stevens of Birmingham
Chair
Cancer Research UK
2 Redman Place
London E20 1JQ

18th October 2023.

Dear Lord Stevens,

Re: The Race for Life.

May I congratulate you on your appointment as the new Chair of the Board of Trustees for Cancer Research UK.

I am writing in the hope that you will help to correct a wrong of nearly thirty years; the misrepresentation of the origins of the Race for Life and, with it, me, the person who created the Race for Life, never being recognised for coming up with the original idea for and launching Cancer Research UK's most popular fundraising event.

Over the years, it has been a source of frustration to me, to many of my friends, and to those who are aware of the facts that I have been never recognised for coming up with the idea for and creating the event; frustration I am sure any right and fair minded person would sympathise with. Indeed it is fair to say that when creating the event I also created a new fund raising genre, one much copied since.

Reputable sources such as Runner's World magazine and Wikipedia are among those who do recognise me as the Race for Life's creator. Yet, Cancer Research UK does not.

As this may be the first time you have heard this, allow me to briefly explain where the Race for Life idea came from and how it then became a reality.

In 1993, my father was diagnosed with prostate cancer and, as someone with several years' experience of organising fundraising events, I decided to create an event to support a cancer charity. After conducting some research, it became apparent that the biggest opportunity for a successful fundraising event lay not in general fundraising but in a targeted, women only fun run over a shorter distance than typically available at that time.

In October 1993, I spoke to a friend who was temping at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund (Cancer Research UK's former name) about the idea and she found a contact name for me (for reference, my friend is available to confirm this if required). On 5th October 1993, I wrote to that person (Jill MacRae, nee Baker) outlining my proposal for an event to be called the Race for Life. I then followed the letter with a phone call during which a meeting was arranged and, on 27th October, MacRae replied in writing expressing her excitement at my idea, and confirming the meeting for 15th November at the charity's (then) Lincoln's Inn Fields offices.

Sadly, my father passed away on 3rd November 1993 and so never saw the idea come to fruition but, the meeting on 15th November went ahead and was a success. I then set about organising the first Race for Life at Battersea Park on 29th June 1994 as a fundraiser for the

Imperial Cancer Research Fund. Following that event, the plan was to expand to six events around the country in 1995, to twelve in 1996, and more in future years, eventually to a minimum of one in every county and every city. However, not long after the first event I received a phone call from MacRae thanking me for the idea and advising me that the charity would now be progressing on its own without me.

I am sure you will understand my frustration at never being given recognition for what has become the hugely successful event I knew it would. It is doubly frustrating that the event that could (and should) have been my father's legacy completely ignores the role he played in motivating its creation.

In the intervening years I viewed the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and, subsequently, Cancer Research UK as an organisation with less integrity than one would hope to find in the charity sector, believing a 'corporate' decision had been taken to exclude me and any reference to me from the event, effectively rewriting history. Given the number of Cancer Research UK staff given recognition for achievements, not to also recognise my achievement smacked of hypocrisy.

Then, in 2013, I discovered that Cancer Research UK may have been actively misled as to the origins of the event by MacRae and other former staff, thus explaining my not receiving due recognition and thanks.

I discovered this when I was contacted via email by MacRae claiming the Race for Life as her idea and asking me to remove claims on websites and on social media that the idea had been mine.

Initially, I ignored the email. However, she followed it up, this time stating she had discussed the matter with former colleagues who she copied in on the email. Her email was followed by one of her former colleagues suggesting her email was "brilliant" and asking to be kept posted.

I felt I now had to reply and so sent a strongly worded email and letter, copied in to her former colleagues, stating the facts, reminding her that I had correspondence between myself and her from 1993 and 1994 confirming the origins of the event, and insisting she desist from making further claim to being the event's originator. Interestingly, she never contacted me again and removed her false (possibly fraudulent) claims from her own social media.

It is clear to me that MacRae made a conscious decision in 1993 or 1994 to claim the idea for the Race for Life as her own, whether by misleading her then colleagues or with their collusion is less clear. Apart from potentially progressing her own career via a fabricated, possibly fraudulent CV, she also effectively stole any good will due to me for the idea. It is fortunate I still have copies of early correspondence regarding the idea and can prove from where and why the event originated.

After MacRae left the charity, Imperial Cancer Research Fund and, later, Cancer Research UK were clearly unsure about the true origins of the Race for Life and a number of different, incorrect, sources were cited.

Having uncovered MacRae's deceit, I contacted Cancer Research UK to request that Cancer Research UK and the Race for Life correct the wrong-doings of the last quarter century and give due recognition to me as the originator of the event, offering to meet to share evidence and to provide further detail.

Unfortunately, both the previous and current CEOs and the outgoing Chair ignored my offer. Instead, they moved away from the varied stories of the Race for Life's origins to a policy of silence and of crediting no one. My offer to meet to discuss the matter was never taken up.

Later, it was claimed that an inquiry into the origins of the Race for Life had established that those origins could not be established. However, that inquiry did not seek evidence from me, did not speak to me, nor did it speak to the witnesses I could provide. That inquiry has also never made any of the 'evidence' it did consider public.

Wikipedia once gave credence to MacRae's false claim but now, having seen evidence, correctly cite me as the creator of the event.

Runner's World magazine recently celebrated its thirtieth year in the UK by recognising thirty running game-changers in that time. I was listed at number two as the man who created the Race for Life. And Runner's World would know as it was me who originally spoke to them about the idea before it even became a reality, and it was me who brought them on board as the Race for Life's very first formal partner.

The evidence is overwhelming. By ignoring it Cancer Research UK run the risk of appearing to lack the integrity or the morals the public should expect of a charity.

Despite nearly thirty years of being ignored by the charity you now Chair, I remain happy to meet and to share evidence with you. I am also more than happy to examine any contradictory evidence (in the unlikely event any exists) and comment on it. Witnesses, including the person who made the initial introduction, are still available too.

I trust that as the new Chair of the charity you will be seeking to be at the head of an organisation that does, and is seen to do, the right thing. I therefore hope I can look forward to hearing from you soon and to beginning the process of righting the wrongs of almost thirty years and to finally putting the record straight.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Cowan.
Creator of the Race for Life.