

The amazing racer

Tim Hague's fitness level has helped him fend off the effects of Parkinson's and triumph in a high-profile competition

Tim Hague didn't start cycling because he craved a lean and muscular physique. He wasn't driven by the cardiovascular benefits or the improved aerobic capacity. His motivation was much simpler: he was broke and needed a way to get to nursing school.

What started as a practical solution to a transportation problem turned into a fitness habit that had him running half-marathons. As it turns out, the habit has also been a buffer against the effects of early-onset Parkinson's disease for Hague, who is 48.

to apply for the show, and Hague admits he thought his chances of being chosen from among the thousands of applicants were "nil and none." But the very day the applications closed, the show's producers contacted him for an interview. "I was flabbergasted. Absolutely flabbergasted. And the rest is history."

During the four weeks of filming, Hague and his son travelled 23,000 kilometres across most of the country and took on mental and physical challenges that both strengthened the bond between

"My neurologist told me the only reason I'm doing as well as I am is that for the last 20 years I've been exercising"

"The literature is beginning to show that, at the very least, exercise slows the progression of Parkinson's," says Hague. "Somehow, it allows the brain either to heal itself or not to break down as quickly. My neurologist told me the only reason I'm doing as well as I am is that for the last 20 years I've been exercising."

Hague became familiar to many Canadians last year when he and his son Tim Jr. won first place on *The Amazing Race Canada*. It was his wife's idea for the dad-and-son team

them and sorely tested Hague's physical abilities. An event that required him to unwrap bars of chocolate proved impossible, while many of the other events left him exhausted. One particularly grueling race in Iqaluit included a 500-metre run straight uphill. "I would not have made it without my son. He literally pulled me up the hill."

In the final episode, "the Tims" scored a come-from-behind victory after Hague beat out the other teams in completing a memory task, which



**Perseverance paid off for
Tim Hague and his son Tim Jr.
on *The Amazing Race Canada*.**

involved identifying the flags and flowers of each province and territory they visited. “We were students of the game and knew that anything we saw along the way might be a clue,” explains Hague. “So we took notes.”

Hague is now back on the job at Winnipeg’s St. Boniface Hospital as manager of patient flow and transition. It’s the most recent phase in a 20-year career that began at the age of 27 when, married and with a young child, he realized he needed stable and well-paying work. He decided to enrol in the two-year diploma program at the Grace Hospital school of nursing.

After a few tough years trying to break into the full-time labour market, Hague got a job at St. Boniface as a general float, working shifts on different units. That breadth of experience served him well when he left after eight years to accept a position as the first medevac nurse with Fast Air, tending to patients being flown by small plane out of isolated northern communities. “It’s a highly specialized field, requiring knowledge of how vibration, temperature and air-pressure changes in the airplane affect the respiratory, cardiovascular and other systems in the patient’s body.”



Hague, grand marshal for the 2013 Winnipeg Santa Claus Parade, acknowledges the crowd.

10 QUESTIONS with Tim Hague

What is one word you would use to describe yourself?

Persistent

If you could change anything about yourself, what would it be?

I'm pretty content with who I am

What is one thing about you that people would be surprised to learn?

For most people, it's that I'm a nurse

"If I had more free time, I would..."

Travel more

Name one place in the world you'd most like to visit.

Paris

What is your biggest regret?

No regrets. All of life moulds us into the person we become

What was the last good book you read?

The Brain that Changes Itself by Norman Doidge

What is the best thing about your current job?

Working full-time days

What do you like most about being a nurse?

We get to do the things most other humans will not do for one another

Name one change you would like to make to the health system.

Have more home care. We keep far too many people in hospital for far too long

Hague also took on an executive role in the company, setting policy, managing staff and helping to grow the business. The experience was an asset when he later returned to St. Boniface in a new position.

The first sign of Parkinson's appeared three years ago. "I was literally sitting in the kitchen, reading the paper on a Saturday morning, and noticed my big toe was twitching," he recalls. He knew it wasn't a good sign. Three weeks later, the twitching had spread to his entire foot. "All of a sudden you're hit with this degenerative disease that in some people goes very, very quickly," he reflects. "In my support group, there are a number of people in their mid-40s who can't work anymore. That can be devastating, both personally and financially."

Cramping in his left foot has recently forced Hague to give up running, but he continues cycling to keep in shape. "Being in such good condition definitely helped get me to the *Amazing Race* finish line." He's now using the national profile he gained on the show to benefit others like him. He's taken on advocacy work with Parkinson Society Manitoba and is helping to set up a Parkinson's wellness program at the Reh-Fit Centre, a certified medical fitness facility.

"What an incredible opportunity, just to get selected for this competition," says Hague. "And then to come away winning — it's just huge. My son and I had lots of fun along the way, and hopefully I'll be able to do some good with it. I welcome the chance to encourage others to push back against Parkinson's." ■

KATE JAIMET IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN OTTAWA.