

Trans-Canada cyclist raises awareness for Huntington's Disease

Two Wheels and a Heartbeat tour stops by Cobourg

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COBOURG -- With more than 5,000 km behind him, cyclist Kevin Glenney is still loving the adventure of his Trans-Canada bicycle tour.

"Everyday is a brand new adventure," said the 36-year-old cyclist, who began his journey to raise awareness for Huntington's Disease in Vancouver on June 2.

"I just can't get over how much happens in a single day and how different each day is from the day before."

Mr. Glenney has been harbouring the idea to cycle across Canada since 1997, when he got his first view of the mountains on a skiing trip out west. But school debts and the real world called, and Mr. Glenney found a job as an aerospace engineer at a firm in Minneapolis, where he has worked for the last 10 years.

In January, his father shared with him a previously unrevealed family history of Huntington's. Mr. Glenney's grandfather and great-grandfather both fell victim to the disease, and an aunt and uncle he rarely saw are currently battling the degenerative brain disorder, which affects muscle co-ordination and leads to cognitive decline and dementia. The revelation spurred Mr. Glenney's desire to cycle across Canada, and added a cause to the journey.

"This disease has really affected my family, but I didn't know anything about it until January," he explained.

"It cleared up a lot of things because growing up there wasn't very good communication between my dad and his family, and he'd get upset very easily. But it turned out he was struggling with this all along so I'm very happy he was able to share it with us and I hope this ride will allow others to do the same."

Mr. Glenney set out with the goal of raising \$30,000 before the tour concludes on Sept. 10 in Cape Spear, Newfoundland, the eastern most point in North America. He has so far raised nearly \$15,000, but says money isn't the only goal of the journey.

"Awareness is a really big thing because many people don't know what Huntington Disease is. They think it's a type of cancer," he said.

"I want to help raise awareness and understanding, which in turn will increase funding for research and support for families to get counselling and other help."

Pat Wannamaker, a member of the Peterborough chapter of the Huntington's Society who accompanied Mr. Glenney to Cobourg, watched his father suffer with the disease.

"When I was growing up I didn't know anything. This disease was sort of like a skeleton in the closet," he explains.

"My father was viewed as a drunk because of his movements and because people didn't understand the disease. All I knew was that he was in the hospital in Kingston, which was sort of viewed as a nuthouse back then, and I had to grow up with that. Hiding the disease is the worst thing because it lets people's imaginations run wild, that's why what (Mr. Glenney) is doing is so important."

For more information on Two Wheels and a Heartbeat or to donate visit www.kevinglenney.com.