

And now for something completely different:

HEEBONICS

ATHLETE WITH MS TO CLIMB FOR THE CURE

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Staff Reporter

Yonan Mintz would like to be one of Toronto's most eligible bachelors.

"My mom would kill me if I didn't put this. I'm happily single... Maybe that's a good intro," he said, explaining that his brother, a *Toronto Star* columnist, was listed as one of Toronto's 30 most eligible bachelors in the *National Post*.

Mintz, 37, is eligible enough. He eats well, stays healthy and loves sports. He plays baseball, hockey and squash. He mountain bikes, runs, goes to the gym three times a week and, this fall, plans to climb a mountain in Peru.

He also has multiple sclerosis. But that hasn't stopped him yet.

Mintz was diagnosed with MS, a disease of the central nervous system, last year. And in a few months, he'll spend four days climbing Machu Picchu, a mountain in Peru, to raise money for MS research.

MS is a disease that attacks myelin, the protective covering wrapped around nerves in the central nervous system, making it difficult for the brain and spinal cord to communicate. The effects of MS vary from person to person, but can include loss of vision, hearing, memory, balance and mobility.

While Mintz was diagnosed recently, he experienced his first symptoms in 1996, when he went blind in his right eye for six weeks.

"I had an MRI at that time, which was inconclusive," Mintz said. His neurologist gave him two options - to take experimental drugs as a possible preventative measure or to take care of himself and hope for the best.

"I chose plan B, but I did experience other symptoms over the years," Mintz said. "The most major thing was the chronic fatigue, where I'd be physically and mentally debilitated by an exhaustion that had a sense of vertigo to it. I've experienced that on and off."

About a year and a half ago, Mintz started feeling a numbness in his feet. He went back to the neurologist and was officially diagnosed.

"I wasn't surprised. I knew all along that I had it. I had a hunch. I think it was, at the time, it wasn't really earth shattering for me. It was more upsetting for some of my family," he said, adding that the hardest person to tell was his daughter, who will be 14 next month.

One of the most difficult parts of the disease, for Mintz, is the fatigue.

"Imagine being absolutely



Yonan Mintz with his daughter, Mattison Preston Mintz.

physically and mentally exhausted, light-headed, dizzy. It just makes all the simple things in life... like getting out of bed and putting your shoes on, pretty challenging. It could last a day to a week," he said.

While Mintz has always seen himself as having a healthy lifestyle, everything changed after the diagnoses.

"The big thing was adjusting my diet. I wanted to take a holistic approach," he said, adding that he decided against taking injections, which is something that most patients with MS are offered.

"I wasn't very enthusiastic about the prospect of having to take daily injections. It's not that I wouldn't do it if I needed to, if I felt I couldn't

manage it in a holistic way," he said.

His holistic approach included switching to a vegan diet, though he does eat some poultry and fish.

"I don't eat any processed foods, I don't eat any dairy. It's been cleaner for my system and I felt a difference," he said.

Mintz also takes a variety of vitamins and has taken up yoga and meditation to deal with stress, which can make his symptoms worse.

About a year ago, he heard about the MS Climb, which was started by Ralph Cochrane as a way to raise money and awareness about the disease. Participants can climb various mountains, including Mount Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania.

"I heard about it over the summer, and I knew this was my calling. It was clear. I knew this is what I had to do," Mintz said about the climb, which will start in October.

With the help of his mother, Ellen Litvak, and other family members, Mintz raised about \$10,000 for the climb.

"I'm just very happy to support my son in whatever he does," said Litvak, the manager of Mintz's fundraising campaign. "If you talk to anybody, they'll tell you he's extraordinarily exuberant. He loves to take on challenges."

At first, Litvak was nervous about the four-day climb.

"I'm always proud of him, but I was a little bit nervous until I talked to people who had climbed Machu Picchu," she said. "I know that he really works hard at keeping himself in good shape. I think he's going to be very much OK with the climb."

Litvak's biggest concern is the altitude, which can be dangerous while climbing.

"Interesting enough [the effects of high altitude] actually mimics some of the MS symptoms, in particular fatigue and vertigo," she said.

Mintz isn't worried. Not about the climb or the disease.

"You can live a happy, productive life [with MS]. It doesn't mean you can cease doing the things you love to do... I believe I'm going to be healthy. I get up every day expecting to be healthy," he said.

"I don't resent it. I'm actually grateful for it because it's put me in a position where I can be an... example to others."

For more information about Mintz and the climb, visit www.msclimb.ca.



Yonan Mintz and his mother, Ellen Litvak, helped to raise about \$10,000 for MS research.



Yonan Mintz, who was recently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, will participate in the MS Climb to raise money for research.

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