



for a Cure



By Jeff Siegel

**W**hen Tim Borland, with his wife and two children, pulled into the parking lot at the elementary school in suburban Montreal, they weren't sure what they would find.

"I had never been to Canada," says Tim, who grew up in Southern California. "When we crossed the border, I didn't have any idea what to expect. But when we got there, it blew the roof off my expectations."

And why not? Hundreds of children were waiting for the Borlands, eager to welcome them to their city and their school. They knew why Tim was there, and they wanted to let him know how much they appreciated it. Tim was there, on the day before Halloween, to run 26.2 miles to raise money for one of their classmates who is suffering from ataxia telangiectasia (A-T). A-T is almost always fatal, and patients usually die in their teens or early 20s.

This stop in Montreal was the 58th consecutive day that Tim had run 26.2 miles, the distance of a marathon. He would run five more marathon distances over the next five days. All told, he ran 26.2 miles—sometimes in organized events, sometimes not—63 times in 63 days. Tim didn't do it to set a record or garner fame for himself; rather, he did it to bring attention to A-T, a disease that is as mysterious as it is deadly.

"That was always my mental focus," says Tim, who admits there were times over the two months when the thought crossed his mind that he could be doing something else other than yet another 26.2-mile run. "It goes back to my mission and my purpose. There is so much that needs to be done for A-T that your heart goes out to all those kids. And if I focused on that, then I was that much more on target."

### **63 in 63**

So how crazy does someone have to be to run 63 marathons in 63 days? Not much, but it does help, says Michelle Borland, who has been married to Tim for five years. They have two children, Kailey, 3, and Colton, 17 months, and they're expecting a third child in the spring.

"My first reaction, when Tim told me, was that he was crazy," Michelle says with a laugh. "But that's because I had no idea of the kind of reaction we would get from

the families when we did it. I had no idea how much they would get behind us."

Tim came to the project three years ago after meeting a 16-year-old girl named Cathryn Achilles, who suffered from A-T. Through her family, he met other families with children with the disease. Tim ran in several events to raise money for the cause. "My interest just continued to grow and flourish. And I started to get this idea about the marathons about a year ago, and it just kind of took off from there," he says.

The marathon-sized marathon across the country, called the A-T Cure Tour, began in Anaheim, Calif., when Tim ran the Disney Half-Marathon twice. The A-T Cure Tour took in 12,000 miles of travel through more than two dozen states, the District of Columbia and Canada. Tim finished at the New York City Marathon, one of five sanctioned events on the schedule. The rest of the time, Tim ran 26.2 miles on streets, parking lots and trails—wherever he could put together the distance. The A-T Children's Project, based in Deerfield Beach, Fla., arranged the schedule, working with A-T families in each city who wanted Tim to run there. His schedule was much the same every day: run in the afternoon, then get in the RV (a 29-foot El Monte, which Kailey enjoyed very much and Michelle, not quite so much) and drive to the next destination.

"People always ask me if I got to see much of the country," Tim says. "Not really—unless you count looking out the RV window at night."

### **Training for the Distance**

So how does a runner prepare to run that many miles in that few days? Tim wasn't too concerned. He worked with an exercise physiologist at Stanford University in the couple of months preceding the A-T Cure Tour to establish some guidelines and make sure he was capable of completing the effort. But Tim has been running for 11 years. He ran cross-country in junior college and worked his way up to triathlons (a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run), including the famous Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii. Then Tim competed in ultra-running events, at distances as long as 50 miles. This was pretty impressive for a man, says Tim, who started running in high school because he was overweight.

Given this background, running 26.2 miles a day is not ➤



as difficult as it seems. This is not to say it's just another daily training run, but the actual running was not the most challenging aspect of the A-T Cure Tour. Much of it was mental, to be able to handle the monotony—running, driving, sleeping and then running, driving and sleeping again. The key there, he says, was focusing on his goal, and it didn't hurt that his family was with him.

"Michelle has been incredibly supportive," Tim says. "She made a lot of sacrifices to do this, and I know I couldn't have done it on my own."

Some of the challenge was physical, but not from sore joints, painful knees or other running ailments. Tim, in fact, says that he has been remarkably lucky, and has not suffered anything like that during his running career. The bigger challenge was finding a way to keep weight

on, since all that running meant that he burned 3,000 calories more a day than normal. Tim started out with a scientific eating regimen, but by the end of the A-T Cure Tour, he was eating to survive. "I became a human garbage disposal. I wasn't eating because I liked it, but because I had to, and it almost wasn't fun to eat anymore," Tim says. All told, he was cramming down fatty foods, smearing mayonnaise on everything and consuming 7,000 calories a day—more than three times the average daily consumption.

### **Making a Difference**

And now that Tim has finished the A-T Cure Tour? "We're just tickled about how it went," says Jennifer Thornton, the executive director of the A-T Children's Project, which put the Cure Tour together in conjunction with presenting sponsor Octapharma USA. "It's just incredible how we can increase awareness with a grass-roots effort like this. We've never had to field this many calls from the national and local media," continues Thornton, who notes that Tim appeared on ABC's "Good Morning America" and National Public Radio. "When they told me that Good 'Morning America' was calling, I thought the people in the office were kidding me."

In the end, running 63 marathons in 63 days was about getting that sort of attention for A-T and the kids who suffer with it. It was about raising money to support research to work for a cure.

"These people needed national awareness," says Tim. "It's not that people don't want to help. It's that they don't know about it. I felt called to match my focus and my purpose with their passion and their purpose."

Which he did—63 times in 63 days. ■

## **About A-T**

Very little is known about ataxia telangiectasia, other than it is almost always deadly, killing children in their teens and early 20s. A-T is a rare, childhood neurological disorder that causes degeneration in the part of the brain that controls motor movements and speech. The first signs of the disease appear before the child is 10, and include delayed development of motor skills, poor balance, slurred speech and telangiectasia—tiny, red spider veins that sometimes appear in the corners of the eyes or on the surface of the ears and cheeks.

A-T can result in cancer, including leukemia. Many children with A-T develop weakened immune systems. If that's the case, IVIG is

often administered, and it does seem to help with that symptom of the disease.

About one in 40,000 babies is born with A-T. But some researchers think that number is low, because children with A-T may die before they are diagnosed.

### **For more information:**

A-T Children's Project: [www.atcp.org](http://www.atcp.org)

NINDS A-T Information Page: [www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/a\\_t/a-t.htm](http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/a_t/a-t.htm)