



# Strong *at* Sixty

Lynda Jager hopes to inspire others with her physical fitness

BY LYNN HADDRALL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALISHA TOWNSEND

Lynda Jager could play the role of an Amazon warrior. Watching “Wonder Woman” on film, she was drawn to the characters of the mother and aunt, older women showing mental and physical strength.

“They were powerful and muscular, and both were women that I could relate to,” says the competitive bodybuilder and personal trainer.

Jager turns 60 on Aug. 12 and eagerly looks forward to the years ahead. She does not intend to slow down as she transitions to new career opportunities such as modelling and television work.

“Celebrating? Absolutely, because we know if we’re not getting older, the alternate is worse, right? I’ve reached the age now where I know that my fitness and my physique is unique. I’m different,” says Jager.

The woman with the well-sculpted body

is accustomed to some people finding her physical strength odd. It used to make her self-conscious. Now she embraces it.

“I’m 60 years old. Why am I not giving this message to other people? I’m hoping I’m an inspiration for people rather than someone that they look at as an oddity. I would rather be someone who inspires people.”

Jager didn’t always have the same confidence. She started out as a “closet exerciser” who became interested in fitness at 20. It took years before she had the confidence to compete on stage.

“I was bodybuilding even before it was thought normal for women. Almost 40 years ago, it was thought very odd or weird that women would want to build muscle. I used to get comments like ‘Why do you want to look like a man?’ At that time, being young and self-conscious, I would hide everything, hide my muscles.”

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Taking time to relax in her Cambridge home, Lynda Jager is proud of the level of fitness she has worked hard to achieve. She no longer feels the need to hide her muscles like she did when she was younger and self-conscious.



**TOP:** Lynda Jager enjoys working out with her husband, Mark Subject. PHOTO BY RUDY ROBINSON

**ABOVE:** Lynda Jager overcame her initial stage fright to compete and win titles in the figure category of bodybuilding competitions. PHOTO BY SIMON LAU

Early on, Jager was inspired by fitness trailblazers such as Cory Everson, Charlene Prickett, and women on the “20 Minute Workout” television show. She watched them or read their fitness routines in magazines. She worked out in her parents’ Cambridge basement.

Eventually she ventured into a gym where it was mostly men lifting weights. As her muscles and confidence grew, she felt strong and energized. And she finally worked up the nerve to compete for the first time.

“For years I had people saying, ‘Why don’t you get on stage? Get out there and show them what you’ve got.’ I was always very reluctant to do that. I think part of that was because I had a major phobia of stage fright. I just couldn’t stand up in front of a group of people like that. I was very afraid of that type of thing.”

Jager figured if she could conquer that fear, she could do anything. She was 51 when she competed for the first time in a competition in Stratford. It was scary and she froze momentarily.

“I was just stuck, I was a statue. But I did it and after I did it, it skyrocketed and I kept going. I think I won the competition too, in my category.”

Being on stage means putting yourself in the spotlight. Judges are looking for specific standards. The scrutiny is intense.

“It’s scary and it’s a little bit demeaning sometimes. You do feel a little bit like that, but after a while you get so that you want to improve, try a little bit harder and go out the next time trying to be a little bit rounder in the shoulders or just trying to make those improvements in your body, which is motivating in the gym as well.”

Jager’s competition resumé includes five wins at the provincial level. At one point, she was ranked fifth in Canada and 12th in North America in her age category – grand master, for athletes older than 45. She competes in the figure division, requiring less muscle than the physique division. She’s proud that she has attained her physical results with hard work, good nutrition, and lots of sweat.

“I’ve never taken a steroid in my life; never will,” she says. “I don’t believe it would do my body any good, especially at this age. I’ve never taken anything like that, but when I was competing, you definitely would stand on stage beside someone who definitely had been taking something. You could tell (by the) different characteristics they have.”

**J**ager is transitioning into modelling and television work. You might recognize her from the fashion pages of the March-April edition of *Grand* magazine, or from her work on The Shopping Channel as a fitness model.

“I’m not sure if I’ll go back on stage (to compete) again or not. It’s hard to say. I think it depends a lot on where life takes me next. Maybe if I’m not really doing anything and I get that urge to get back on stage, then maybe I will.”

Jager, who works full time as a medical office assistant in Guelph, became a certified personal trainer in 1999, working with clients in their homes or in her own home gym. About five years ago, she con-

sidered getting into modelling but wasn’t sure how someone like her could fit in.

“Sometimes it is difficult to find where I fit in the modelling world because my body’s appearance is not about to change any time soon. Fitness is part of my life, just like brushing my teeth or eating dinner. It is part of my routine and therefore it’s normal to me, just like my physique and muscles are.”

She approached Toronto modelling agencies but was turned away for being too fit.

“It was a complete turnoff. I thought if I’m too fit I obviously can’t be a model. I really don’t want to change who I am to fit into somebody else’s ideal of what I should look like. I don’t want to lose weight, get skinny, just because that’s the way they want me to look.”

Donna Schmidt-Kirk saw potential for Jager when they met after a local fashion show in Cambridge. Schmidt-Kirk owns Expressions Model and Talent Agency. It specializes in “lifestyle” work, matching models with clients looking for people of all ages and all sizes. She knew there was a niche for someone like Jager. It was just a matter of finding the right spot.

Schmidt-Kirk rhymes off a list of companies that Jager has worked with, from Germany, the United States and South Korea. She’s also working as a fitness model for The Shopping Channel. Jager says it is fun seeing how things unfold there behind the scenes. She loves that her physique is celebrated when she demonstrates products such as home gym equipment.

Schmidt-Kirk sees even more opportunities for Jager in television.

“I think being a health model with The Shopping Channel is amazing, because she’s got that smile that people love to look at and they just adore that. She’s got that warmth about her. She’s a good speaker. I would really love to see her getting into some film.”

Jager’s main fitness focus today is to live healthy and stay strong as she ages.

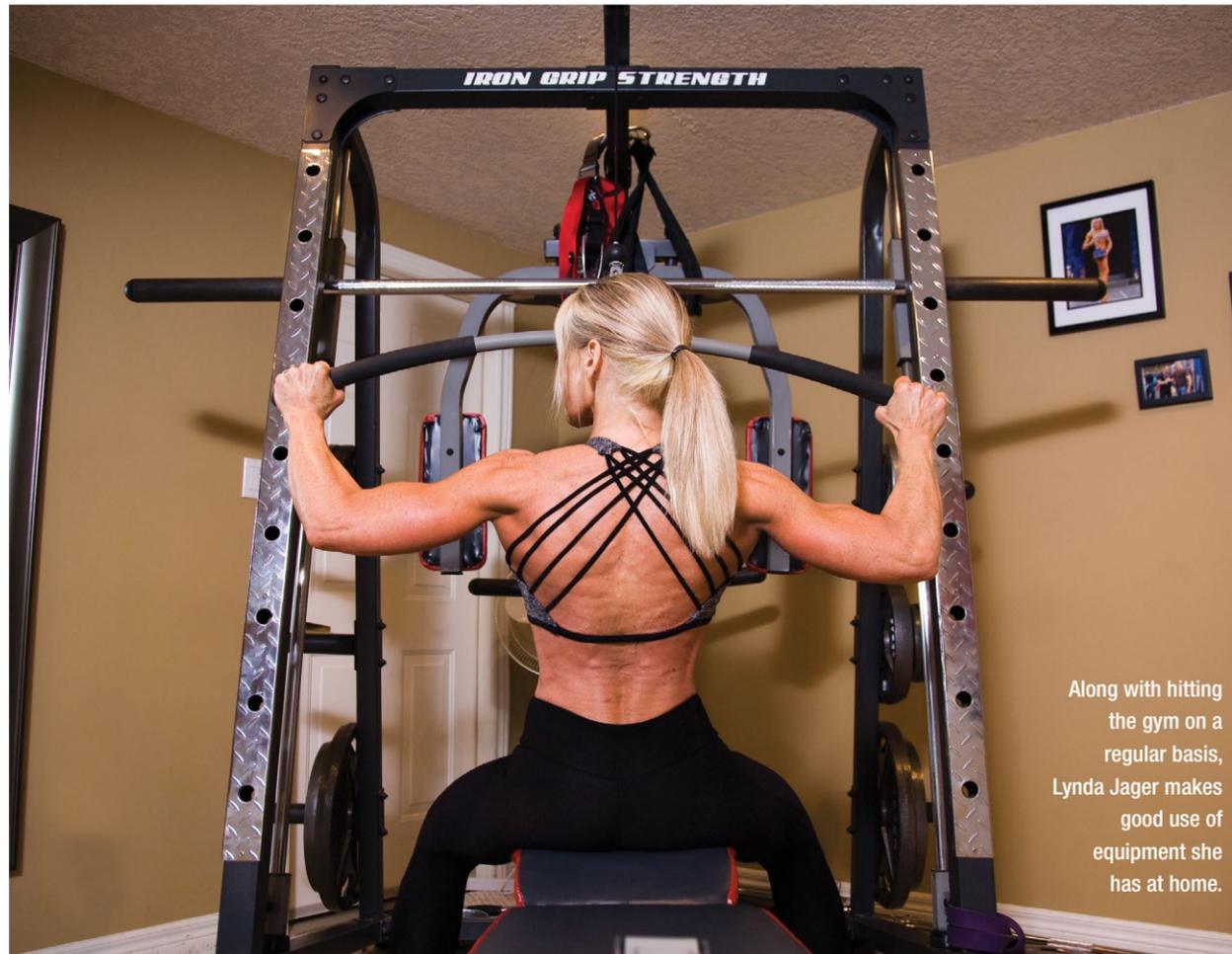
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Along with hitting the gym on a regular basis, Lynda Jager makes good use of equipment she has at home.

*“The goal that I am striving for at this point in my life is not stepping on stage or to walk the runway, but to be able to walk, run, ride my bike, carry my own groceries, and feel good in my clothes.”*

“The goal that I am striving for at this point in my life is not stepping on stage or to walk the runway, but to be able to walk, run, ride my bike, carry my own groceries, and feel good in my clothes. Being able to do some modelling on top of all this is a bonus, like icing on the cake. I find it fun and challenging and I’m constantly being put in new and different situations which I also believe is good for the brain.”

To maintain her fitness and lifestyle, Jager has a strict schedule. She rises early, usually at 4:30 a.m. A typical day includes her full-time job and at least one visit to the gym for cardio and weight training. She

likes plyometric and high-intensity interval training. She finds ways to fit in modelling and television jobs as well.

Jager realizes her fitness schedule might sound excessive, but she enjoys it and rarely misses a day. She believes it’s better to “wear out rather than rust out.”

She’s always looking for a new way to challenge her muscles.

“I personally want to be able to hike Machu Picchu or tour New Zealand. I fully believe that keeping my body as fit as possible will help me achieve it,” she says. “Just keep doing different things. I’ve done rock climbing. I would love to try other

challenges. Generally, we like to stay pretty active. We have our road bikes too.”

Jager, who has two children, married longtime partner Mark Subject in June. It’s a second marriage for both of them. Subject has three children and the couple has five grandchildren, with a sixth expected in September. “I am so excited,” says Jager.

On her wedding day, Jager wore a sleeveless form-fitting wedding dress with “just enough sparkle” to proudly showcase her muscles.

“I’m more for showing off my physique,” she says, flashing that big smile. “If people don’t like it, don’t look, right?”

The couple planned to honeymoon in the Mediterranean on a 12-day cruise, another opportunity to have fun while staying active.

Her next big event is turning 60 in August. Likely the celebration will be a quiet dinner with her husband. Jager doesn’t expect to skip her workout. She might treat herself just a little, with dessert and a glass of wine.

Then it’s back to her healthy diet, daily exercise and a regular routine of trying new things. 🍷

### LYNDA JAGER'S FITNESS TIPS

- **Establish clear fitness goals.** Write them down and include your reasons. “You have to come up with a plan and know what it is that you want to get out of it before you even start.”
- **Get out of your comfort zone.** “Don’t come home and eat your supper and sit on the couch and watch ‘This Is Us.’ Do something different and accept that you are going to have to make changes to change yourself. You’re going to stay the same if you don’t make those changes and get out of that comfort zone.”
- **Eat healthy.** “A lot of people may consider my food boring because I do eat a lot of the same stuff, but it’s tried and true. Mostly a lot of chicken, fish. I don’t eat any red meat. A lot of green vegetables. Egg whites. I don’t feel deprived. I like what I eat.”
- **Exercise with a friend.** Jager spends lots of time in the gym with her husband. “Having a buddy makes it easier. It’s nice to have the two of you there, to figure out something new.”
- **Do not watch others in the gym to learn how to do an exercise properly.** “Many of them are doing it wrong. Learn by getting an experienced trainer or watching exercise videos led by experienced, competent instructors.”

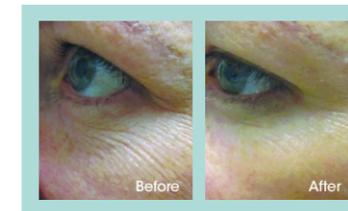
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