

Miles to go



Cyclists discover hidden strengths in Bike MS rides.

by Robert Lerosé

Brandi Denton Gatewood got lost but found resilience. Brooke Simon met llamas. C.B. Dushane climbed higher. As cyclists who participate in I Ride with MS know, it's not the destination. It's the journey.

Since 2014, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society's I Ride with MS program has celebrated and recognized riders who live with MS. Anyone who participates in Bike MS may sign up. In 2017, nearly 70,000 cyclists hit the road in 72 rides, raising \$68 million for MS research and services and spreading awareness of the disease from coast to coast.



Participating in Bike MS helped Brandi Denton Gatewood (left) come to terms with her diagnosis. Photo courtesy of Brandi Denton Gatewood

Cyclists can choose routes between 15 to 150 miles and ride individually or as part of a team. A well-coordinated volunteer staff, including support and gear vehicles, and well-stocked rest stops every 10 to 12 miles keep riders safe on the open road courses.

“This is not a race; it’s a ride. People aren’t racing to the finish line,” says Kris Rauh, associate vice president of Bike MS experience. “Each ride has its own flavor.”

Advocating for herself

As a partner in a Mississippi law firm, Gatewood fights for the underdog, but she never imagined that her biggest fight would be for herself. That changed when she was diagnosed with MS in June 2017 at age 35. “I was angry about it and thought that it’s not doing me any good to sulk, so I turned to the National MS Society to find ways to get involved,” Gatewood says.

In April 2018, she signed up for Bike MS: Tour De Beach, held annually each September. Inspired by Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and using her own initials, Gatewood cycled under Team Notorious BDG and wore a multi-colored jersey, with each stripe signifying a different health issue.

On the first day, she logged 14 miles along the beautiful Gulf Coast and Mobile Bay without a problem. Expecting to do an easy 11 miles on the second day, Gatewood took a wrong turn and got lost, adding another five miles to her ride, but raising around \$7,000.

Discerning litigant that she is, she uncovered an important truth. “The ride was a lesson in self-endurance and pushing myself. It showed me I could do more than I thought after hearing I have MS.”



Brooke Simon stayed active as a new mom by training for Bike MS.

Photo courtesy of Brooke Simon

No hill too high

After her second child was born, 33-year-old Simon of Denham Springs, Louisiana, began feeling numb on her left side and had trouble holding her newborn. She thought it had something to do with her C-section, but in May 2017 a neurologist confirmed that she had MS.

Simon temporarily lost the ability to walk and used a wheelchair for almost a month. To stay active, she started riding with a local group that was training for Bike MS: Dat’s How We Roll and readily accepted the challenge to join. “I had 150 miles as a goal to prove to myself that I can keep going and to do it for my sons. I can’t let them see their mommy just sit,” she says.

Starting at Hammond, Louisiana, and heading to McComb, Mississippi, in October 2018, Simon promised herself that she would ride every hill without getting off the bike and walking. Even though she had to stop and ice down her legs when they went numb, she refused to get in a vehicle and ride to the end. Simon crossed the finish line last, but under her own steam, raising over \$3,000—and unexpectedly stumbling across a llama farm during her ride.

“I went toward what I needed to do to make the change for me to be happy. Now, I’m cycling my foot off and loving it,” she says.

Pushing himself further and farther

Fifty-one-year-old Dushane had worked out often, racing bikes and lifting weights, so he ignored the tingling in his legs. Walking down to his kitchen one morning, he lost sensation in his feet and tumbled down the stairs. At his wife’s urging, he saw his doctor. He was surprised to learn in December 2017 that he had MS.



C.B. Dushane raised \$17,000 and has completed several rides for MS. Photo courtesy of C.B. Dushane

After his diagnosis, he got in touch with a friend who worked for Primal Wear, the clothing sponsor for Bike MS, and said he’d like to ride with the team. Dushane used his skills as a salesman for a cybersecurity company to tell his story and seek donations, raising more than \$17,000.

In June 2018, he joined cyclists in Westminster, Colorado, for a two-day ride that would go through Fort Collins before returning the following day. As he got close to his one-day goal of 82 miles, Dushane felt energized and continued along the 102-mile path.

“The three hardest climbs were in that section—not super long, but very steep. You’re grinding up these hills and then you head back out towards the plains after you come out of the mountains and foothills of Colorado. I felt I owed it to the people who gave on my behalf and showed them that I’m willing and able to push myself hard,” he says.

No sooner had he gotten off the bike, he was tapped to do a Facebook Live interview for the Society, laughing when he remembers that he didn’t even have time to get cleaned up first. That Sunday, Dushane bumped into a fellow rider he had met earlier and cheerfully finished the last leg with him, completing 176 miles over the weekend.

“Whether you have MS or not, it’s a fantastic way to push yourself physically, but it’s also for such a great cause. I’d love to know we’ve found a cure for MS,” he says.

Robert Lerosé is a Long Island, New York-based writer.

Learn more about [I Ride with MS](#).

Register to ride or volunteer for [Bike MS](#).