

Partners in crime



Shemar Moore and his mom take on the world, and MS, together.

by **Andrea Sachs**

Shemar Moore needs to stay fit for his starring role as Derek Morgan on the hit TV drama series “Criminal Minds.” But a love of exercise is in his DNA; his mother, Marilyn Wilson-Moore, was athletic, and ran half-marathons while he was growing up. And before becoming an actor, Shemar set out to be a professional baseball player. He was scouted by the Boston Red Sox and Baltimore Orioles, until tendinitis sidelined him for good.

Web exclusive

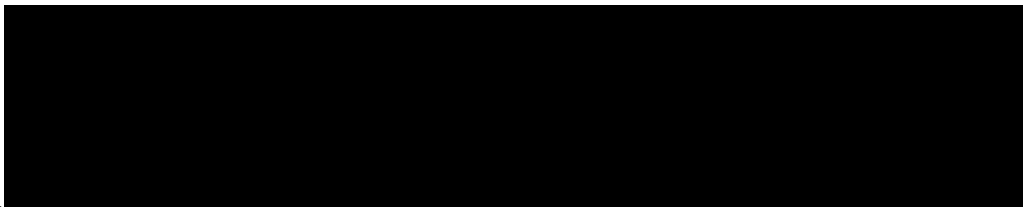
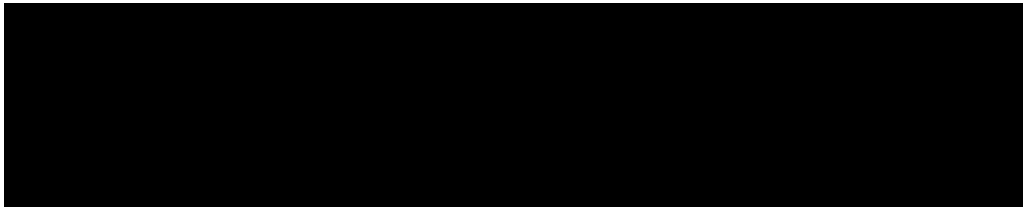
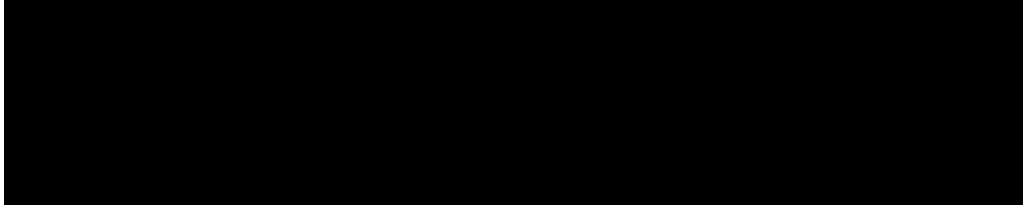
[Watch Shemar Moore](#) ride in Bike MS—and hear him talk about why he does it.

As Shemar’s career went in a different direction—first as a model in New York City after graduating from college, then as an Emmy-winning actor on the soap opera “The Young and the Restless,” and finally on to his nine-season reign on “Criminal Minds”—he always found time to play sports. Football, track and field, soccer, basketball—he loved them all.

But eight years ago, Shemar says, he learned something that would completely change the meaning of exercise to him. “When I got into cycling, the crew members I worked with at “Criminal Minds” told me about bicycling events that raise money for multiple sclerosis,” Shemar, 43, recalls. “It hit me like a thunderbolt,” he says, because his mother had been

diagnosed with MS in 1999, at age 56.

Shemar looked into it, and discovered that Bike MS, which has raised nearly \$1.2 billion since its inception in 1980 to fund MS research and programs, is the largest organized cycling series in the country. “I told my mother, ‘Hey, I’m going to ride a bike a long way, and we are going to raise awareness and money for this disease,’ and that just lit her up. I thought, ‘Wow! I can do something fun for me, but also uplift her.’ ” He’s participated every year



since.

To those who know Shemar and his mom, Marilyn, his dedication to her well-being is no surprise. “She’s always been my partner in crime,” he says. “It’s always been me and her against the world.”

Dynamic duo

Shemar is an only child, whose parents split up when he was 2. His academically oriented mother then took him traveling internationally, while she worked as a computer programmer in Denmark, then as a math teacher in Bahrain, only coming back to the U.S. when Shemar was 6. “She made whatever sacrifices and took whatever job opportunities she could with the hopes that she could give me the best future I could have,” he says admiringly.

“It sounds very glamorous,” Marilyn says, but the daily realities—language barriers, job and

school changes—drove the pair to function as a unit. “I think I was what Shemar could depend on.”

The onset of his mother’s illness only strengthened that bond. “It didn’t take MS for us to get close,” he says. “We got closer.”

Like many people, Marilyn experienced symptoms long before she was diagnosed: Her arm itched, her feet became numb, she experienced chills in her hands, her coordination was off, and she was overheating frequently. “There was always an explanation for the symptoms until my foot started to drag,” Marilyn says. Shemar, too, says he was in denial at first. “I was like, ‘Oh, Mom, just get a massage or go to a chiropractor.’ ”

When doctors ran a series of tests on her, says Shemar, “the last thing we expected was for her to get diagnosed with MS, because she was very athletic.”

It took a few years for the realization to set in that “my mom couldn’t fix it and that I couldn’t fix it. ... Like most kids, I always felt my mom was invincible. But here was a chink in her armor. She had kind of met her kryptonite.”

Shemar remembers that as a bleak time, when his mom’s newly reduced mobility led to loneliness and low self-esteem. “She had dark days and woe-is-me moments at times, because she is human.”

The gift of giving back



Like her son, Marilyn Wilson-Moore is committed to fitness. She credits her ongoing strength to her water aerobics program.

Both mother and son learned more about the illness, and she began to take a disease-modifying medication. And Shemar was at her side. Those early dark days mercifully passed and the duo rebounded. Though she now uses a cane, and sometimes a wheelchair, she's back to enjoying Red Sox games (she's originally from Brighton, Mass.), water aerobics, movies and dinners out.

She admits that she relies more on others these days, particularly when fatigue sets in. Still, she'd like to do more. "I would like to find a way to volunteer. I was a math teacher, so maybe I can tutor veterans and their families."

The notion of giving back seems to be deeply ingrained in both mother and son. "She did so much for me," says Shemar, "it would be wrong for me not to give back and fight for her. It's almost like in this stage of life we have traded positions; I'm doing whatever I have to do for her, and to give her a chance to enjoy her life. This thing is real, but we are not going to let it beat us."

Shemar says that it was a very proud moment for him a few years ago, when he was able to buy his mother a waterfront condo at Redondo Beach. "Every day, she wakes up and gets to look at the ocean. She sees dolphins and whales."

Marilyn also goes swimming, which her son, the athlete, strongly recommends. "She's a big fish," he says proudly. "I'm a pretty good swimmer as well. We still to this day have contests of who can hold their breath under water the longest. Sometimes, I think she actually beats me."

Last October, Shemar took part in his eighth Bike MS ride in Southern California, along with 47 other riders on the Criminal Minds team. "It was a true challenge," he says, "but I was determined to finish all 100 miles. My legs had moments where I didn't know if I would hang on to finish, but I dug deep and paced and pushed myself." The team raised more than \$68,000 for the cause, including \$53,000 that Shemar raised from friends and fans.

"I was walking slow and funny for three days afterward, but it was all worth it to see all the happy, excited and grateful faces when we crossed the finish line. And my mom was there at the finish line, screaming the hardest."

Andrea Sachs is a senior reporter at "Time" magazine. She was diagnosed with MS in 2009. Additional reporting by Laurie Budgar.

To learn more about Bike MS, visit bikeMS.org.