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Compassionate Minds

Shemar Moore, star of *Criminal Minds*, hopes to raise awareness and funding for the many Americans with multiple sclerosis, including his mother.

BY LINDA CHILDERS

On the CBS television drama *Criminal Minds*, Shemar Moore plays the role of FBI special agent Derek Morgan, part of an elite team of profilers who analyze the country's most twisted criminal minds and anticipate their next moves before they strike again.

In real life, Moore is committed to eradicating a different kind of villain: multiple sclerosis (MS), a chronic and potentially debilitating neurological disease that affects over 400,000 Americans, including his mother, Marilyn Wilson-Moore.

Nine years ago, Wilson-Moore began experiencing a variety of troubling symptoms. She found herself dragging one leg when she walked, suffering from urinary urgency, and falling frequently. And then there was the mysterious itch of her thumb and forearm. After undergoing numerous tests, she was diagnosed with MS.

At the time of his mother's diagnosis, Moore was starring as Malcolm Winters, a bad boy turned photographer, on the soap opera *The Young and the Restless*, a role he calls "the big break" in his career. His stint on the soap opera led to Moore winning a daytime Emmy award eight years ago. After accepting the Emmy, the first thing Moore did was call his mother to share the good news.

"I wouldn't be the actor that I am today if it wasn't for my mom," Moore says. "She taught me to always follow my dreams and not let anything stand in my way. She's my hero."

EVEN SUPERWOMEN GET THE BLUES

Moore admits that he had noticed slight changes in his mother's health but thought they were part of the aging process. He was in denial when he initially heard his mother's diagnosis.

"I've always thought of my mom as being Superwoman," he says. "I'm an only child and she raised me as a single parent. She has always been incredibly active and I believed she was invincible."

As a result of her MS, Wilson-Moore's mobility began to suffer. Her gait became slower and walking even short distances became difficult. She feared losing her independence and worried she might soon be bedridden.

"I was at the point where I was literally crawling to get up the stairs in my home," Wilson-Moore says. "I consulted with another doctor who believed that something was going on in addition to the MS. He found I had suffered bone loss in my hip and was literally walking bone on bone."

Her doctor subsequently scheduled hip replacement surgery.

"I often wonder if the steroids I had been taking for MS might have caused the bones in my hip to deteriorate," she says. "Only recently have doctors been making the connection between fractures and steroid use. I encourage anyone who has MS and suffers from debilitating pain to have it checked out rather than just chalking it up to the progression of the disease."

CELEBRATING LIFE

Since her surgery, Wilson-Moore has been given a new lease on life. "To be able to walk again is a mir-



MOORE, ENCORE!
From left to right: Shemar Moore as Malcolm Winters on *The Young and the Restless*; as FBI agent Derek Morgan on *Criminal Minds*; with his mother Marilyn Wilson-Moore and *Criminal Minds* co-star Paget Brewster at the 2007 Southern California Start to Finish MS Bike Tour.

acle," she says. And she now takes interferon once a week for her MS symptoms.

She also enjoys swimming and yoga. "I think these two activities have been critical in slowing down the progression of the disease," Wilson-Moore says. "I can see where they have both made an incredible difference in my health."

In addition, Wilson-Moore attends physical therapy three times a week for 45 minutes each session. She says it has helped her recover from hip replacement surgery and increased her mobility, which was diminished as a result of the MS. She admits to having both good and bad days. On good days she tries to stay as active as possible and even volunteers with the local chapter of

the National MS Society.

"The hardest part for me is the days where I'm cognitively off," Wilson-Moore says. "I'm typically pretty quick, so it's hard when I sense that I'm not processing information correctly."

Both Moore and his mom try not to think about the future, but rather live in the moment and celebrate goals such as Wilson-Moore's ability to walk again.

"It's been wonderful to see my mom regain her independence after undergoing hip-replacement surgery," Moore says. "She's such a proud woman that it's hard for her to ask for help, but I want to be there for her. She's my partner in crime."

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE SON

Like his mother, Shemar Moore has never been one to sit still. Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, Moore "played every sport under the sun." He made every all-star team, and eventually got a full scholarship to Santa Clara University.

"Basketball, baseball, football, you name it and I played it," he says with a laugh.

Moore also enjoyed biking, but it wasn't until he joined the cast of *Criminal Minds* that he was introduced to competitive cycling.

"A lot of the crew members on the show are involved in semi-pro cycling, and they invited me to come along for a ride," Moore says. "Of course, a ride for them means riding several hundred miles at 50-55 miles an hour. These are cyclists with high-end bicycles that cost almost as much as a small car."

What started as weekend-warrior activity for Moore soon became a passion, and he decided it would be great if he could use his love for cycling to raise awareness and funding for MS.

"Cycling is a great way to unwind after working 14-16 hours a day on the show," Moore says.

In 2006, he put together his first *Criminal Minds* team for the "Start to Finish MS Bike Tour," one of over 100 rides nationwide that raises awareness and funding for MS research. Moore and his team of 60 cyclists raced in the Southern California event the last two years and plan to bike again in the 2008 event scheduled for September.

"Last year's race raised more than \$700,000 for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society," Moore says. "After all these years of working out, it's nice to be able to use a sport to give back." **NN**

What Is Multiple Sclerosis?

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic and often disabling neurological disease that attacks the central nervous system, made up of the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 200 people are diagnosed with MS every week. Worldwide, the condition is thought to affect more than 2.5 million people. While it is not contagious or directly inherited, epidemiologists have identified factors that may eventually help determine what causes the disease, including gender, genetics, age, geography, and ethnic background.

People with MS typically report symptoms including (but not limited to) fatigue, numbness in their arms or legs, problems walking, vision problems, dizziness, changes in their cognitive function, bladder dysfunction, and depression.

The National MS Society says that in order to make a diagnosis of MS, the physician must:

- ☑ Find evidence of damage in at least two separate areas of the central nervous system, which includes the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves AND
- ☑ Find evidence that the two instances of damage occurred at least one month apart AND
- ☑ Rule out all other possible diagnoses

Although there is no cure for MS, a number of drugs can help control symptoms and may slow disease progression.

Linda Childers is a health writer whose work has appeared in such magazines as Redbook, More, and ePregnancy.