

**The**

# Spotlight\*

Sharmane Pearson



On a late summer morning at Hartman Park Regional Center, a room full of adults are keeping busy in various ways. The majority of participants in the Metro Parks disAbilities Program are sitting in a group around a woman who is patiently getting the group on track to begin practicing "The Star Spangled Banner" in American Sign Language.

A table in one corner displays four Special Olympics World Games medals and an identification lanyard, which is covered in Special Olympics pins.

"I'm glad y'all had lots of things to do over the summer," says the teacher, hoping to draw the attention of several of the classmates who haven't seen each other in weeks and who are excited to fill each other in on where they've been. Sharmane Pearson is in the middle of the group, not saying a word. She's not being shy. And although she's looking forward to swimming and walking the track while others sing karaoke later in the day, right now she's ready to get down

to business. She's looking at the teacher. She's focused. The medals on the table are hers.

She earned the medals at the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles this summer, with the same focus she's giving to the Songs Through Signs teacher.

"I was just really focused on the stage. I wasn't looking at people at all. I just wanted to do the job," says Sharmane, during a short break between programs at Hartman. "I could hear my dad. He was screaming at the top of his lungs. He was jumping up and down even though he was still recording!"

Sharmane has a silver for bench press, a bronze for dead lift, and a bronze for total weight lifted. When asked how many trophies and medals she has at home, she says, "I don't know. I've been doing things since I was eight."

Sharmane's father, Joe, and mother, Vivian, work hard to help Sharmane be one of the most active, visible, and present adults with Down syndrome in Middle Tennessee. Many people benefit from the perceptions that come from Sharmane's active life, but for Joe, the reason is simple: "The other option is to stay at home, and that's not a good option."



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Vivian is still mindful of how Sharmane interacts with the world. "I want people to like her, and I want people to get to know her. I want to make sure she's protected, and safe, and loved. It's important for her to express herself, but it's hard for me to let her if I'm with her," says Vivian. Even though she worries, she is always proud to

see Sharmane's sparkling personality come through and loves to see how others embrace her.

Alecia Talbott, Executive Director of DSAMT adds,

**"Sharmane is a favorite personality at our events because of her joy and humor. Sharmane, however, is her toughest critic."**

Sharmane and her parents visited Muscle Beach while in Los Angeles for World Games, and Sharmane took pictures with some body builders. "They loved it. They were blown away that she powerlifts to begin with, and then also how much she lifted," says Vivian.

One of Sharmane's favorite aspects of her trip was meeting people from everywhere. Her most memorable meeting was with an athlete from Kodiak, Alaska. Joe and Vivian spoke with athletes and trainers from Bahrain, Russia, Hungary, and Egypt. They say they were humbled to encounter people from countries which have so much less, but still manage to send athletes with disabilities to compete.

Back in Nashville, Sharmane is going to Hartman Park Regional Center's disAbilities program twice a week and continues to volunteer for DSAMT when time allows. Sharmane is easing back into powerlifting training after a nice break, and has also gotten into yoga. She has to relax sometime!



Sharmane will be showing off her exuberant personality on stage at the 2015 Nashville Buddy Walk, as DSAMT recognizes her for her tremendous accomplishments at World Games 2015.

  
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Down Syndrome Association  
of Middle Tennessee

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## DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE IN THE DSAMT SPOTLIGHT?

Sharmane is receiving \$100 and a special gift for being our Spotlight focus! Do you know someone who wants to be our Spotlight of the Month?

Email a photo and a short explanation why to [lisa@somethingextra.org](mailto:lisa@somethingextra.org).

Winning submissions will receive \$100 and a special gift!