

BEATING MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Empowering Stories of Self-Healing and Thriving

AGOTA NAWROTH
& PAIGE NEWSOME

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To my loved ones,

This book reveals the transformative path of my MS journey and daily dedication required for a healthy life. I'm taking care of myself, so you don't have to.

To the multiple sclerosis community,

May our stories empower and inspire, fostering understanding, compassion, and progress. Together, let's navigate the challenges of this journey, knowing that we are never alone.

With love and deepest admiration,
Agota Nawroth

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to everyone who has contributed to the creation and completion of this book.

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Lastly, I extend my gratitude to my followers, readers, and supporters. Your enthusiasm, feedback, and reviews inspire me to continue sharing my story and the knowledge I've acquired along the way with the world, raising awareness about diseases that can be prevented.

To all those mentioned above and the countless others who have contributed in various ways, your presence in my life has made this book a reality. Thank you for being a part of this remarkable journey.

With heartfelt appreciation,
Agota Nawroth

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Many individuals are searching for a diagnosis while struggling with various symptoms. For those of us already diagnosed, having answers can be a relief but also adds a lifelong burden. At times, this weight can feel overwhelming. I wish a book like this had been available when I was first diagnosed four years ago. It would have made a world of difference. Back then, I wouldn't have felt so alone and lost. I wouldn't have had to search through numerous books to connect the dots. My goal with this book is to provide you answers and give you practical guidance to regain control and steer your life back on track.

The stories in this book showcase the remarkable potential within us as human beings. We can heal our minds and bodies, making full recoveries from autoimmune diseases when we cultivate the right mindset and well-being practices. I haven't encountered anyone who thrives with a pessimistic outlook. Our minds are incredibly powerful. It's crucial to remember that the path to healing often begins there. While change can be a challenge, it's a necessary step for those seeking a healthier life.

So, who is this book for? It's not exclusively for people with MS. This book is filled with ideas to improve the lives of anyone, diagnosed or not, who is facing symptoms. Each chapter is a glimpse into someone's life, flourishing despite the diagnosis. My hope is that you'll discover a story or two that resonate with you. Please share this book, help us spread the message, and raise awareness about this complex condition. It doesn't have to lead to life in a wheelchair.

CONTENTS

Disclaimer

1	Agota N. - Diagnosed in 2019	1
2	Paige N. - Diagnosed in 2019	28
3	Katy - Diagnosed in 2020	44
4	Angie G. - Diagnosed in 2004	56
5	Elisa F. - Diagnosed in 2011	65
6	Kelly G. - Diagnosed in 2015	81
7	Bob C. - Diagnosed in 1999	89
8	Nassira - Diagnosed in 2018	100
9	Biljana - Diagnosed in 2013	107
10	Mohammed - Diagnosed in 2018	112
11	Kathryn - Diagnosed in 2018	117
12	Claudie - Diagnosed in 1996	120
13	Laila - Diagnosed in 2010	129
14	Adria H. - Diagnosed in 2020	133
15	Mara R. - Diagnosed in 2004	159
16	Kelly K. - Diagnosed in 2015	164
17	Michelle - Diagnosed in 1996	182
18	Joanne M. - Diagnosed in 2009	190
19	Helena K. - Diagnosed in 2000	205
20	Sam P. - Diagnosed in 2015	212

21	Alicia - Diagnosed in 2018	230
22	Dawnmarie D. - Diagnosed in 2012	240
23	Clare M. - Diagnosed in 2019	243
24	Sofia C. - Diagnosed in 2013	250
25	Andrea - Diagnosed in 2000	257
26	Meryl H. - Diagnosed in 1999	268
27	Conor K. - Diagnosed in 2003	274
28	Parmjit K. - Diagnosed in 2008	286
29	Kadesha R. - Diagnosed in 2012	298
30	Melody W. - Diagnosed in 2013	306
31	Lieza - Diagnosed in 2016	312
32	Jasmin D. - Diagnosed in 2008	321
33	Megan L. - Diagnosed in 2007	325
34	Gabriel - Diagnosed in 2018	339
35	Talia - Diagnosed in 2016	348
36	Alice S. - Diagnosed in 2007	357
37	Maria I. - Diagnosed in 2012	373

Final Note

“Wellness is the complete integration of body, mind, and spirit – the realization that everything we do, think, feel, and believe has an effect on our state of well-being.”

– *Greg Anderson*

DISCLAIMER

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29

Story by

KADESHA ROSS

Diagnosed in 2012

Currently 24 years old

Lives in Winnipeg Manitoba, Canada

Instagram: @kadesha_ross

Most nine-year-olds start getting into sports and social life at school. I, however, was entering a world of blindness and paralysis. Oh, and don't forget the tingling sensation throughout my extremities. Although it was so long ago, I'll never forget my first multiple sclerosis (MS) episode. It was 2009, and I'd started experiencing vision problems in my left eye. I instantly thought it was from a laser tag incident. Why else would a healthy and active young girl's eye start to lose vision?

Allow me to rewind a bit. My name is Kadesha Ross, and I was born as a healthy baby on March 5, 1999, in Canada, Winnipeg Manitoba with zero pregnancy or birth complications. My father is from Jamaica, and my mother is from Canada. There is no known history of multiple sclerosis within my family. I was a happy, healthy child who loved gymnastics and anything artistic. I was quite the social butterfly with tons of energy, until one summer evening.

Everything that I once was began changing. My energy levels started diminishing, my athletic and social life became harder to maintain, and my artistic creativity took so much effort. I was no longer the Kadesha everybody knew. The change started after a friend's birthday party where we played laser tag. At one point in the game, one of the lasers from a friend's gun caught my eye. I felt fine, but it wasn't too long after that I noticed the vision in my left eye was weakening. I didn't think much of it. Assuming the vision problem came from the laser, I kept it to myself. The next day, it progressed so badly to the point where I had zero vision in my left eye. That really freaked me out. At first, I was hesitant to tell anyone because I was so scared of what would happen next. I truly didn't know how to share this news. Also, who would ever believe me when I told them I couldn't see out of my left eye? After a day or two, focusing during school became difficult. My right eye started hurting, as well, along with my head. With zero sign of improvement, I knew it wasn't going to get better on its own. I had to let my family know.

Initially, my brother thought I was pretending, and my mom thought I just wanted a pair of glasses since a lot of my classmates and friends had them. This made me refrain from expressing how bad it truly bothered me. After two more nights of zero complaints to my family, I felt the need to express that I still couldn't see out of my left eye. My mom finally took me to see an optometrist, where they said everything looked fine, throwing a pair of glasses on my face. Obviously, I still couldn't see. However, at the age of nine, I wasn't sure how to express this to my family, let alone, an optometrist. Time passed by, and my vision slowly started returning. Honestly, everyone, including me, sort of forgot about it.

For roughly a year and a half, everything seemed fine. I was healthy and thriving in my sports and hobbies again. Until one day in fourth grade, I started feeling a tingly sensation on my left side. It was predominantly in my left hand. I knew something was off when someone accidentally shut my locker door on my hand, and I didn't feel a thing. I still went about my day until last recess, the tingling and numbness started traveling all over my body. I knew I had to let someone know because it did not feel comfortable or normal whatsoever. I called home for my mom to come pick me up from school, and I'll never forget the look she had when she walked through the front door. She could see in my droopy face that something wasn't right. She calmly packed me in the car and headed straight to the children's emergency room. They ran a bunch of tests, beginning with bloodwork and computed tomography (CT) scans, becoming progressively more intrusive with the magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs), spinal tap, and so many others. After all these tests and hours of waiting, the doctors admitted me into the hospital, trying to find

additional answers. At this time, they hadn't mentioned MS. They wanted to test for a variety of disorders of the central nervous system first.

A day or two went by, and we received news from the doctors that I may have had a stroke. A child having a stroke was unheard of and highly uncommon, so they wanted to do a few more tests. After a few days of prednisone, the doctors came back and announced that they thought I had something called acute disseminated encephalomyelitis (ADEM). This was a best-case scenario, as ADEM could be treated. With some treatments such as prednisone and tons of physiotherapy, I started to feel a bit better and was so happy to see positive results. I was finally able to brush my own teeth, feed myself, and walk, along with more daily mundane things. However, I knew I still didn't feel like myself. I was sent home after almost a month in the hospital with a misdiagnosis (one that I was unaware of until later). I slowly started regaining feeling and control back on my left side, but I knew I had many limitations that were not there before.

For my whole life, gymnastics had been a huge part of my identity. But around this time, gymnastics class seemed to be very hard. Even beyond physical and motor skills, I felt drained, mentally and cognitively. I had to put a lot of effort forward just to keep a conversation going. I'm not going to lie, even walking was something I would have to focus on deeply for it to work. My hand-eye coordination was terrible. The tingling sensation progressed, with pins and needles lingering on and off.

The cherry on top was a bad case of H1N1. Yep, I was one of the unlucky patients to be affected by the influenza A virus during the flu season in 2009, making me even more sick. Around this time in my life, I also started experiencing blood difficulties. My platelet counts would drop to an alarming level. It appeared that every other week I would be covered in bruises, along with something called petechiae. I was also suffering from internal bleeding. I remember one day, the internal bleeding in my stomach and digestive track was so bad that it produced tons of blood in my vomit, raising alarm in myself and others. Once again, I was sent to the children's emergency room where they treated me with transfusions and more prednisone.

Almost a year goes by of me trying to get my life back. After several tests and treatments at the Hematology Laboratory located at CancerCare Manitoba, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder called immune thrombocytopenia (ITP). ITP is a blood platelet disorder that causes abnormal bleeding and bruising due to low platelet count levels. Platelets are small blood cells that stick together where blood vessels are

damaged. When you don't have enough platelets, blood cannot properly clot to stop bleeding. ITP is an autoimmune disease caused by dysfunction in the immune system which attacks blood platelets with antibodies. If that wasn't enough for my now twelve-year-old self, I also had an MRI appointment with the neurologist. The results showed that I indeed have multiple sclerosis. Finally, I was properly diagnosed with Relapsing-Remitting Multiple Sclerosis (RRMS) in early March of 2012.

At the age of twelve, I didn't know what that meant, but I could see tears filling up my grandma and mother's eyes. That couldn't mean anything good. I just remember feeling so scared that my life was over before it had even begun. I was a 12-year-old kid, trying to figure out what two autoimmune disorders looked like. For me, it meant daily injections, lots of hospital visits, and extreme fatigue, as well as brain fog almost constantly. It also meant missing out on activities with friends and having many limitations. Pins and needles would sometimes be a pest but eventually felt like the norm. I felt trapped, stuck, and hopeless.

After a year or so of living with multiple sclerosis and feeling alone, I'd heard of something called a multiple sclerosis camp. A place where kids and teens like me, who were all diagnosed with MS, could get together for one week at a camp named Easter Seals, located in Ontario. MS camp was a place where the outcasts didn't feel like outcasts anymore. The daily problems we all suffered from (feeling fatigued, brain fog, or tingling) weren't a surprise to the people surrounding you, making us feel not so alone. I could talk to my peers about MS problems that my friends back home wouldn't understand. The average ages in the camp were twelve to twenty years old, as well as some peer support workers who were twenty-one years old and up. There was no disparity between boys and girls. Each day was filled with new information and insight regarding MS, giving me more of an understanding that MS looks very different for each person. When I watched videos about MS, it was always older people who were very immobile. Also, going to my appointments made me feel like the youngest person in the world to be diagnosed. At my appointment, I would have to fill out a questionnaire. However, the questions were for people much older than twelve. For instance, when it asked about how my MS was affecting my driving or work life, I never really knew how to answer. But at MS camp, I quickly learned that people of all ages were diagnosed. This is where I finally felt understood and didn't feel so alone. Multiple sclerosis camp is where I found my hope again.

The camp offered many activities, such as kayaking, arts and crafts, yoga, and much more. I found a passion for yoga. My MS symptoms were undetectable after each session, leaving me feeling tremendously

relaxed. That wasn't the only spark that ignited through MS camp. I also felt a drive within me to share my MS story through a positive lens, inspiring hope in others who were diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Although camp was filled with so many positive aspects, when it was time for the injections, I got very overwhelmed and just wanted my mom to be there to calm me down. I had never been this far away from my family, especially for this long. When my home sickness kicked in, I remember phoning home and crying for my mom to send an airplane to rescue me. Obviously, this couldn't happen. She encouraged me to try and enjoy the rest of what camp had to offer.

My MS peers consoled me, letting me express how much I disliked my injections. They told me that there were other medication options out there, ones that had never been mentioned to me by my neurologist. I was currently on Copaxone. These daily injections made me develop a phobia of needles. It was a daily battle for me and my mother during injection time. The needle itself hurt, but the aftermath left me with a burning sensation at the injection site. I could not live with the constant anxiety and fear surrounding my daily Copaxone dose, so I mentioned to my doctor another treatment named Tysabri that was shared with me by my peers from MS camp. This treatment could be given intravenously which put my mind at ease. However, I did not qualify due to the risk of getting progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy (PML), a rare viral infection of the brain. After many complaints to my doctor, she allowed me to switch to weekly Avonex injections that I took for roughly six months. By then, my injection phobia and anxiety had returned. I also developed mild depression as a side effect. Luckily (and unluckily), I had two autoimmune disorders, which meant there were more options for medication. Why not kill two birds with one stone?

I started a medication called Rituximab (Rituxan and MabThera). It works by turning off a part of the immune system that doesn't work properly in autoimmune diseases. Although it wasn't guaranteed to help MS, my neurologist agreed it was worth a shot. If I remember correctly, I was taking Rituximab once a week for about five months. Then, I stopped responding to the treatment. I had to go in for a splenectomy in hopes it would help my blood disorder. After my splenectomy, I was placed on prednisone for about two years, which my neurologist had reason to believe would also help treat my MS. After the prednisone, I tried the Rituximab, once again, and it worked. So, I decided to stick with it. At this point, I was sick and tired of treatments.

In the midst of despair, I decided to attend MS camp once more as it was the final year that the program would be run through the Easter Seals

camp. This time around, I was seventeen and able to enjoy the experience on a whole new level, allowing me to really connect with those around me and learn more about my disease. Although we shared the same autoimmune disorder, everyone around me was so individually unique, as well as their multiple sclerosis stories and experiences. One individual stood out to me the most. Jessica was diagnosed in April of 2007. Jessica was a bit older than me and seemed to be thriving. This gave me hope when it came to chasing my dreams and experimenting with different ways of life to help MS.

Jessica was very athletic. She experienced MS episodes that would limit her; however, she would always find a way to embrace her athletic abilities. I remember one day she invited me for a morning jog. Due to my ignorance, I thought it would just be a slow and short adventure. My whole life I was taught that individuals with multiple sclerosis are always limited when it comes to athleticism and energy. Jessica proved me wrong. Halfway through, I had to turn around. Walking alone on my way back, I realized that even with MS, you can almost always find a way if you stick to what works for you and listen to your body. At the time, Jessica was on a medication called Lemtrada and was living a vegan/plant-based lifestyle. A yearning for a more natural lifestyle was ignited within me. Using what the earth has to offer by experimenting with different diets and activities that cater to you individually as a source to stay healthy can truly make a huge difference in your life.

When I returned home from camp, my old mindset on medication and life changed as a whole. I dove into research to see if I could live a healthy life with multiple sclerosis without medication. I continued to explore my love for yoga and started taking classes. I also practiced at home whenever I could. Apart from yoga, I love to walk. I found that these two activities alone made a difference in my mood and energy levels. Even if some days I had to turn it down a notch due to my MS, I always came out of it feeling better than before I started. Finding some sort of physical activity, in my perspective, is truly beneficial in sustaining physical health with or without MS. Apart from physical activity, I knew my diet had to change. I still ate desserts or indulged in the occasional burger and fries. But I tried to be mindful and pick whole foods and plant-based products whenever possible. I spoke with individuals already living this lifestyle and gained insight from them. I like to mix and match when it comes to my diet. I enjoy finding creative dishes on the app TikTok.

Being aware of what I'm putting into my body and reading up on certain diets for inflammation has helped me a lot. After getting my physical

health and diet in check, I still felt like I was missing something. One of the biggest aids in my multiple sclerosis journey overall has been mindfulness practices and discovering spirituality.

Simply practicing mindfulness is amazing and beneficial for anyone, but it especially helped me with the everyday stresses of living with an autoimmune disorder. My whole view on life began shifting when I really started getting into spiritual practices. These practices consisted of meditation, manifestation, yoga, and working with the energy pools in my body. During my meditations, I would picture the lesions located on my spinal cord and brain being healed by a bright gold light. I was twenty years old when I started this specific practice. For manifesting, I would envision health and healing. During yoga, I could feel the healing taking place in my body. As for working with the energies in my body, I followed a guide to healing the seven chakras.

Emoha from *Emoha.com* says, “The seven chakras of the body are understood to be spinning discs of energy that should be open, aligned, and balanced for they have the vital task of absorbing our vital energy (prana) and redistributing it. For a balanced individual, these seven chakras deliver an adequate amount of energy to the mind, body, and soul.”

Through my spiritual practices, I became grateful for the life I have. I no longer asked, “why me?” When I looked back at all my medical issues, I viewed them as lessons that have taught me to be a grateful, empathetic, compassionate, caring, strong, and wise human being. I finally accepted all the things that happened to me and looked at them with a different set of eyes.

I was able to help others just like me shift their perspectives to be more positive towards multiple sclerosis through the MS Society Peer Support Program. During this time, I also went to school to receive my Community Support Worker diploma and became a yoga instructor. Everything MS-wise seemed okay. I finally felt like I had control of my own life. I wasn’t only living, I was thriving. I was doing things that many people warned me my complications would make impossible. I even had a baby in 2022! Many people told me my MS would get worse after giving birth, but it didn’t. Apart from morning sickness the first trimester and hormonal changes, I experienced no symptoms at all during pregnancy.

Before having a child and falling pregnant, my daily routine typically started with me getting up early and going for a sunrise walk or jog. If I didn’t have the energy for that, I would do a bit of yoga, followed by

some meditating and journaling, or maybe read a book with some tea or coffee. Once I finished working for the day, I would return home for quality time with my family, then rest as I did tarot cards, energy cleansing, or painting. Now that I have a baby, the daily routine simply consists of taking care of the baby. Other than that, I like to make sure I have time throughout the week to do yoga or some sort of physical activity. The baby and I go on lots of walks together. The advice I would give to someone with MS wanting to start a family would be the exact same advice I would give to someone without MS. Yes, there may be limitations, but every family has some form of limitation. Creating something beautiful takes a village. Be sure to have a good support system, and if not, find resources that provide them.

I'm not quite sure if it's symptoms of being a new mom or MS, but sometimes I do get fatigued throughout the day. It's nothing a quick nap or coffee won't fix. Every so often, I tend to get vision abnormalities in my left eye, followed by a severe migraine. Tylenol, a dark room, and plenty of rest help when this happens. It's rare that these episodes occur. I see my neurologist and receive an MRI once a year. If there are any concerns, I can call my neurologist to make an appointment, but there hasn't been any need for that. I'm currently off all medications. The last medication used to specifically treat my MS was Avonex. Now, I take only vitamin D supplements.

I'm living proof that through a healthy lifestyle, you can treat your multiple sclerosis. However, that's only my perspective. In some cases, medication is needed. But I also believe that along with medication, a healthy lifestyle will make a huge difference.

The amount of physical activity or movement you do helps you to stay mobile and pain-free. Being mindful of what you put into your body helps a lot with energy and mood. It also helps with inflammation and cognitive levels. Lastly, and the most important for me, are my mindfulness/spirituality practices. Having my mood, attitude, and stress levels in check have helped me breathe and worry less about things out of my control.

If you focus on the negatives, your life will manifest what you constantly think about. So, why not focus on the positives? Train your mind to think positively about life, your experiences, and your future. I hope my story can inspire others or be relatable to those that read it. The divine light in me honors the divine light in you. Namaste.

Emoha, *The 7 Chakras Demystified - Align Mind, Body & Spirit*, Emoha.com, 2022, <https://emoha.com/blogs/busy/7-chakras-meaning-in-human-body>

FINAL NOTE

"Before you heal someone, ask him if he is willing to give up the things that made him sick." -Hippocrates

As we reach the end of this book, I hope these stories have not only inspired you but also encouraged you to take a moment to reflect on your own life. The purpose of this book has been to shine a light on aspects that deserve recognition and change. It's not just about MS or autoimmune diseases; it's a call to awareness, an invitation to slow down and reevaluate our lives.

Our ancestors had wisdom we can learn from, and with today's technology and knowledge, we can create a healthier, more harmonious world, instead of heading down a destructive path. It's as simple as pausing to take a deep breath, enjoying the smell of flowers, and appreciating the beauty that surrounds us.

We hope you've found this book to be a valuable guide. In closing, remember that while healing isn't guaranteed, it's always within reach. The life you choose to lead is firmly in your hands. Join us on **www.BeatingMultipleSclerosis.com** to explore all the limitless possibilities together.