

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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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I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the remarkable individuals who graciously shared their heartbreaking stories for this book. Your bravery in opening up about your journeys will undoubtedly resonate with others who find solace and strength in knowing they are not alone. I am honored to have had the opportunity to give voice to your stories and express my deepest appreciation for your invaluable contribution.

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.

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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

The stories shared in this book provide personal perspectives and experiences, reflecting individual accounts. These stories should not be construed as professional medical advice or recommendations.

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Story by

MERYL FAITH HUTT

Diagnosed in 1999

Currently 62 years old

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“Multiple sclerosis (MS)? THE wheelchair multiple sclerosis?” I asked the neurologist. Even amidst the shock and devastation, I’ll never forget that moment or his response.

“That depends on you.”

It wasn’t the answer I wanted. I was looking for reassurance and to be told everything would be okay, but it was exactly what I needed to hear. It started me on the path to where I am now—sixty-two years old and enjoying an active retirement.

So, how did I find myself—a thirty-eight-year-old mother of two—in the Neurology Department, receiving an MS diagnosis that day? It’s a story all too familiar for many others. It started years before with symptoms that I didn’t even realize were symptoms; symptoms we brush off as working mothers. We put things down to the strain of busy lives. I

experienced dizziness, tiredness, numbness, or heaviness in my limbs. At first, the symptoms were episodic, and as they wore off, I carried on with life. Some were hard to ignore though. One night, when I was thirty-three, I was kept awake with what felt like an electrical current running through my body; little electric shocks, pins and needles in my fingers, and a burning sensation across my knees. Even though it was hard to ignore, I managed. I got out of bed the next morning and continued with daily life.

The following year, I landed my dream job as a Teaching Assistant, working with children with Special Educational Needs. I found I needed reading glasses and noticed problems with my hearing, especially within the busy classroom. Following a hearing test, I was told the problems were due to blocked sinuses and rhinitis.

Then, something happened that I firmly believe sped up my MS symptoms. The school I was working at was offering the Hepatitis vaccine to staff, and as a family member had recently died of the disease, I decided to have it. After that vaccine, my lower back pain worsened, and I started to have monthly migraines which made me vomit and faint. Then, one afternoon, a child fell over on the playground. I ran to help, but my leg gave way underneath me. With these new and worsening symptoms, I was sent by my doctor for an X-ray, and I was diagnosed with osteoarthritis. I wasn't worried though. My elderly mother had osteoarthritis, and it just seemed inevitable that I would, too. Naively, I started taking cod liver oil and believed that would do the trick. Needless to say, it didn't!

At that time, I ate standard British food. I have always loved trying new recipes, but back then, I cooked with butter and lard. Plus, I didn't eat as many vegetables or fish as I do now. However, it wasn't until the following summer, when my husband and children started to notice my disability, that I became concerned. Anytime we were out walking our dog, they noticed my "floppy leg" and the sound it would make as it hit the floor. At this point, my leg seemed to have a life of its own. It felt hollow as if all the muscle had disappeared. It started to affect my mood, too. We were an active family, but as my husband and children (eight and eleven at that time) climbed Mount Snowdon while on holiday, I was forced to wait in the car alone, unable to even start the ascent. My arm was also starting to bother me. Sometimes it would shake, and at other times, I'd suddenly drop things.

It was my mother who finally convinced me to return to the doctor as my symptoms were nothing like what she experienced with osteoarthritis. I

was thirty-eight years old when I was sent for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), which had to be rescheduled due to a broken machine (while I was in it), and then another two months before I was called in to receive my results.

That brings us back to being sat in the neurologist's office, asking whether my diagnosis would lead to a wheelchair. At that moment, it felt like my life was over. I immediately thought of my husband and children. Would I live to see my children grow up? Would my husband be forced to become my carer? What would our life look like moving forward? I had a lot of thinking time those next few days, as I immediately began three days of intravenous steroids. I had never taken more than one paracetamol, so I was reluctant. I told him that I didn't want it, but he said this is what I had to do, so I went along. Who was I to question a neurologist with years of experience? While they did seem to help initially, it was just days before the effects wore off, and at that moment, I decided to change my lifestyle. As a result, I never took another medication for my multiple sclerosis again.

The following year at my annual appointment, he wanted me to have steroids, but I refused as I couldn't see any difference. Every year when I attended my annual review, he would ask if I'd had any more relapses, and if I would like steroids or a trial of any new medication they had. I always refused, especially after my health had improved over the previous nine months, and I gained strength in my leg and arm. After ten years, my neurologist retired. I then had a much younger neurologist who was more interested in my diet and exercise, and he spoke about needing to research it further. About nine years ago, he told me I didn't need to come anymore as I hadn't had any relapses. My MS had remained benign/mild.

After I was diagnosed, the first step I took upon the advice of my husband was reducing my hours at work. Working in the mornings allowed me to rest in the afternoons. He also took on much more of the housework, and by now, my children were older, and they helped, too.

Next, I decided to start researching multiple sclerosis, so I might better understand my disability and be more informed in order to advocate for myself. The only problem was this was 1999. The internet was not what it is now, or at least it wasn't for me. I couldn't just pick up my phone and have a wealth of information at my fingertips. There was no social media to find others like me. The only book I could find about MS was depressing. A subscription to *MS Matters Magazine* didn't improve my spirits either. All the stories were of severely disabled MS sufferers.

There was not a hint of positivity or optimism to be found. The only seemingly happy people in the magazine were those raising money for charity by running marathons, and they did not have MS. I decided not to continue reading; all they did was add to my fears.

Six weeks after my diagnosis, we were booked to go on an all-inclusive holiday to a five-star resort in Crete. At the time, I was unsure about going as I felt self-confidence and my physical abilities slipping away. I decided, for my children's sake, I had to push myself to go. It was the best thing I could have done. The whole family was able to truly relax and unwind in the sunshine.

On returning home, I decided to focus on losing weight. Over the previous couple of years, I began piling on the pounds as I was not active. I started a low-fat diet, incorporating some of the Mediterranean recipes I'd enjoyed on holiday, and I cut back on sugar. I read about the benefits of the Mediterranean diet, so I started using olive oil, more vegetables/fruit in every meal, and ate more fish, nuts, and yogurt. Plus, I was cooking more from scratch. In a short span of time, my digestion improved, and I lost twenty-eight pounds. I felt much better! Gym visits left me feeling depressed, so when my niece mentioned a yoga class at the local Adult Education Centre, I decided to give that a try instead. It turned out to be the best decision I could have made. My yoga instructor, Ed, had experience working with clients with MS and knew exactly how to support me. I loved the classes. At last, I had found an exercise I could do that was beneficial. I attended classes for ten years until the class time conflicted with my work schedule. Yoga is still very much part of my life as I attend classes when I can and practice regularly at home. I firmly believe the combination of yoga, healthy diet, weight loss, and reducing my busy schedule allowed me to gain strength back in my body. My leg even stopped flopping! I started walking further, dancing all night at parties, and most of all, my fatigue improved. I also feel that my brain/nervous system improved. When my strength improved, my limbs didn't feel hollow anymore. It felt like the transmitters had been cleaned out. Ten years ago, I joined a bowls team, and I enjoy playing four times a week. I play competitively in different leagues against men and women. One year, I was captain of the Warwick and Worcester team, and I managed eleven men!

As my strength returned, so did my confidence. I finally felt able to enjoy life without fear. I decided to travel more, visiting New York, Florida, the Deep South, and cruising the Mediterranean and beyond.

One thing I hadn't done up until about eight years ago was disclose my multiple sclerosis to anyone beyond family and close friends. I didn't want their sympathy or comments on what I could or couldn't do. One day a friend said to me, "People need to see that MS doesn't have to be life in a wheelchair." I thought back to that first appointment when I received my diagnosis and decided she was right. Many friends and colleagues were shocked as I had no noticeable symptoms.

Sharing my diagnosis with others not only opened their eyes to MS but also opened doors to new opportunities for me. A little over a year ago, a month or so into my retirement, a friend I'd met at work contacted me to let me know that our local MS Society was offering "Keep Fit", yoga classes, reflexology, and massage sessions. I now attend weekly, and I love it. I not only benefit from the exercise and relaxing massages but also the sense of community.

When I was working, I kept fit from bowling, walking the dog, and attending a yoga class once a week. After retiring last year, I started stretching every morning and doing some yoga poses, such as cat-cow, warrior, tree, sphinx, bridge, triangle, and to finish, child's pose. Alternatively, I will do a routine from YouTube. Currently, I attend yoga or an exercise class at an MS session at St. Giles in Sutton Coldfield. Afterwards, we have a chat or lunch together. The MS society in Sutton Coldfield offers reflexology/massage, plus exercise and yoga sessions. Hinna, my massage therapist (@relaxwellbeing), has been amazing this year for relieving tense muscles and giving me total relaxation.

Changing my diet has been vital in the improvement of my health. For breakfast, I'll have either a green smoothie (kale, avocado, spinach, oat milk, blueberries, banana, and a teaspoon of peanut butter) or yogurt with berries, almonds, and walnuts. I would love to eat more fruit, but my body won't allow it, so I only eat up to three fruits a day. During the winter months, I eat porridge with cinnamon and fruit. For lunch, I'll have a salad (typically Greek), homemade soup, hummus, or falafel. My favorite lunch is feta cheese with a drizzle of extra virgin oil and rosemary with red onions, cucumber, and tomatoes. If I'm hungry, I might have some granary bread, too. For my evening meal, I may have salmon or sea bass with spices and different vegetables. I love gnocchi with roasted vegetables, topped with crumbled feta, or cooked legumes with vegetable dishes. I love prawn linguine, crab, or pesto pasta. When it's cold out, I love cooking rustic vegetable stew, Mediterranean vegetable and chickpea stew, or butter beans stew. Alternatively, I enjoy chili and trying out new recipes. If I go to a restaurant, I enjoy eating

meze with friends or fish. Very occasionally, I will have a filet steak. Now and again, I have some chocolate or a slice of cake!

When I was first diagnosed, every book or magazine spoke of getting used to a sedentary lifestyle—to take up knitting or jigsaws puzzles! This depressed me as I was so young and had small children. I suppose that spurred me on. Now, when I put my feet up, I love reading or doing crosswords, and my favorite codebreakers!

The reason I wanted to share my story is because I want others to know that life doesn't end with an MS diagnosis. I am sixty-two years old. I'm fairly fit. I enjoy walking and dancing with my husband, playing with my young grandson, weekly exercise classes, crown green bowls matches, and holidays with friends and family. Don't put life on hold because you have MS. My advice is to start with lifestyle changes. I have always been a positive person, but now that I'm retired and healthy, I enjoy every day.

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.