

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.

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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

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Story by

ADRIA HUSETH RDN, LD, NASM-CPT

Diagnosed in 2020

Currently 41 years old

Lives in Urbandale, Iowa, United States

Instagram: @livingproof.nutrition

Email: livingproofnutritionllc@gmail.com

Fate whispers to the warrior, “You cannot withstand the storm.” And the warrior whispers back, “I am the storm.”

When I contemplate the first forty-one years of my life, the best analogy I can come up with is a house. Thinking about what I have been through thus far is like that of building a home. You must have a solid foundation. Once that foundation is cured, you can start framing out the walls. You enclose those walls and make that house your home. You decorate and make it homey. Over the years, your taste may change, and you “redecorate”. You feel safe within those walls. However, your walls aren’t immune to toxic environmental factors. A tornado could take out your roof, or a house fire could damage that frame. But when damage happens to your house, you don’t just turn and walk away. You grieve that damage; you thank God (or whatever higher being you prefer) that

you're still alive, and you rebuild those walls—maybe even better the next time around. You get back up and fight to reestablish your home.

The Foundation

I grew up on a farm in rural America (Iowa) as an extremely active and healthy child. I was exposed to a lot as a child, being the daughter of a veterinarian and chiropractor. I had the happiest childhood anyone could ask for, filled with adventures, a large organic garden, animals, two brothers, loving parents, extended family, and cousins nearby where our imaginations could run wild. I wasn't abnormally sick. I was breastfed as a baby, no chronic use of antibiotics, I had mono (EBV) in high school, and never broke any bones. (Trust me, I should have broken plenty with trampoline shenanigans and with as many trees as we climbed while exploring the open land.) I point this out because there was no childhood trauma. We were surrounded by nothing but love, positivity, encouragement to follow our dreams, and ample support. I think my passion for sports and a competitive nature evolved early on. With two brothers and many older cousins, I either kept up or got left behind. That drive led me to success in many competitive sports throughout my younger years. I competed in anything that involved "winning!" Throughout junior high and high school years, I found myself craving that competition. It wasn't uncommon for me to finish one sport and merge into another. In the fall, there was volleyball, leading to basketball in the winter, track in the spring, and softball in the summer. I managed to play varsity sports as an incoming freshman. I was an athlete and that defined me for half my life. Being competitive involves giving nothing less than 110% effort every day, being a leader, never giving up, and practicing until I succeeded—then practicing more! If something didn't go my way, I tried harder, never taking no for an answer. And if I didn't want to do something, then I wouldn't. What I didn't know at the time was that this training, mindset, and discipline I put myself through would not only one day save my life, but it would also set me up for success in more than one battle of a lifetime in 2020. I look back at the first twenty years of my life and am beyond grateful to those who influenced me so deeply: aunts, uncles, coaches, teachers, friends, classmates, siblings, parents, and God. If it wasn't for that solid foundation of what made me who I am, I'm not sure I'd be sitting here, sharing my success story with you.

"You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard ya hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done." - Rocky Balboa

In college, I took an active interest in health, specifically nutrition. I eventually made a career out of it and became a registered, licensed dietitian and certified personal trainer after earning a bachelor's degree in marketing. Together, these unique skill sets allowed my career to evolve through educating others on the impact of nutrition and health. I also delved into human nutrition research. Dietetics is an evidenced-based profession, and I found an interest in how food can profoundly impact disease and health. In 2018, I furthered my training and explored functional nutrition. Functional nutrition considers every aspect of health, diet, and overall lifestyle when giving nutrition recommendations. It aligns with the ideologies of functional medicine. Hindsight is 20/20, but I know God, once again, was guiding me down a path that would set me up for success for the second half of my life by using my education.

The First Build

In 2015, I married the perfect man for me. We had a lot of similar interests and hobbies. We were what you could call the perfect match. Marriage is hard under normal circumstances. Little did we know just how far we would be put to the test in the unforeseeable future. At the end of 2015, we welcomed our beautiful son Jack, and in late 2018, our precious daughter, Charlotte (Charlie). Both pregnancies were hard on my body, and the deliveries even more so. After twelve hours of labor, they determined Jack was breeched, and we had to have an emergency C-section. That experience was traumatizing. There were complications, but at the end of it all, we both came home and were doing well. The recovery from the C-section wasn't a picnic. It took me a lot longer than I would ever imagine getting back to "normal." Charlie wasn't breeched, but I wasn't dilating as fast as the doctors wanted. I ended up having another C-section, even though I was adamant about a VBAC. This time around, I didn't recover well. After twelve weeks, my incision split open, and my body began expelling the staples that should have been dissolved by my body. I was having tremendous pain during this time and headaches that would take me out. I saw a pain specialist and my OBGYN. It took the better part of a year before the pain and headaches subsided. I used over-the-counter pain medication to help alleviate the headaches and pain. If I had to pinpoint the start of my health demise, I would say it was the trauma to my body from my second child, the over-the-counter pain medication that, more than likely, was causing gut permeability, and low vitamin D3 status. For autoimmune (AI) diseases to occur, we must be born with the genes.

You can do genetic testing to determine what genes could make you susceptible to AI diseases, but there is no DNA test available specific for multiple sclerosis (MS). Changes in 200 genes are linked to the disease,

but not everyone with MS has them, and most people with these changes don't have MS. The changes are polymorphisms, not faulty genes. MS has a genetic component but isn't hereditary. This could definitely change in the future with the advancement of technology and testing. Source: <https://pathology.jhu.edu/autoimmune/development>

I've spoken with my pediatrician about potentially testing my children for AI disease susceptibility. I haven't done so yet but will consider it in the future. I plan to educate them on food choices when older and monitor their vit D3 levels to help prevent any disease activity as best I can. Having a balanced diet, exercise, not smoking and keeping their Vit D3 levels at optimal ranges is the best preventative measure I can take for them as of right now.

Source: <https://www.genosalut.com/en/genetic-testing-and-counselling/autoimmune-diseases/>

There's only about a 1.5% chance of a child developing MS when their mother or father has it (meaning around one in sixty-seven get it). Source: Adrienne Dellwo. "Is Multiple Sclerosis Genetic Testing Available?" <https://www.verywellhealth.com/multiple-sclerosis-genetic-testing-5201481> - 27 September 2021.

We can go our whole lives without the genes becoming activated. We can experience trauma or be exposed to lifestyle and environmental factors that, after so long, activate those AI genes.

The House Fire

September of 2019 was a poignant time in my career. Reorganization of my past employer had been occurring off and on for the last year. It was becoming clear the organization was taking a different path of business operations, and my role in that was not clear. I felt there was no transparency, a lack of communication from upper management, and gaslighting throughout the whole process. This took a toll on my mental and emotional health, and eventually, my physical health. The chronic stress began and continued over the course of the next year. I dedicated ten years of my life to building programs and a solid nutrition foundation for an organization. Feeling that my work was undervalued and unappreciated had a profound effect on me—in a negative way. I feel I held those that needed to be held liable accountable with the help of a kind, smart lawyer who believed in me. I did what I did because I felt I needed to stand up for those before me who couldn't or wouldn't. I pioneered as a leader to help those who will come after me, at the expense of my mental and physical health. I hope my small stance changes the future for my children.

“She was powerful, not because she wasn’t scared, but because she went on so strongly despite her fear.” - Author unknown.

In the height of my stress at work in the fall of 2019, I was beginning to experience anxiety, panic attacks, and sad moods. I wasn’t sleeping well—two small children and a stressful job will do that. I was so hyper focused on work and trying to survive that I couldn’t focus on anything else. The damage stress can cause to our bodies is often overlooked. It’s no secret that stress can wreck your emotional well-being, but chronic stress works quietly behind the scenes to wreak havoc on your physical health, too. They call it the silent killer for a reason. I specifically remember my first and only MS attack. It was just before Halloween in 2019. I was getting ready for bed and walked out of my bathroom. I reached to turn the light off. As I stepped out of the room, it felt as if the light switch went off in my body. A bolt of electricity went down my left side. There was a numbing, buzzing sensation from head to toe on the left side of my body, and it did not stop. Initially, I thought it was a pinched nerve. In true fashion, I ignored it for several days. It went on for a week or so but lessened over time. When it wasn’t improving, I decided to see a doctor at a walk-in clinic. They sent me to the emergency room (ER), which eventually led me to neurology. I remember being in the hospital and getting nervous, thinking to myself, why aren’t they being direct with me? Not to mention we were missing trick-or-treating with my kids (who were one and four at the time). I remember looking at my husband with tears in my eyes, asking, “What if it’s multiple sclerosis?” He dismissed that idea because I was so healthy—not even possible. The buzzing eventually stopped, and I returned to what I deemed normal after a week. I still saw the neurologist at the request of my mother. In my mind, the buzzing stopped, so why go? Had I not gone, I could have progressed more. This first visit essentially “caught it early”. In December of 2019, they diagnosed me with transverse myelitis. I had a lesion on my cervical spine. I had never heard of this diagnosis. The neurologist kept talking to me about MS. I remember being so angry at him. Why did he keep bringing up MS? Why would he allude to the fact that transverse myelitis could lead to MS? Since I had recently completed my functional nutrition training, I had the knowledge to request specific blood values be tested since deficiencies can mimic that of autoimmune diseases, like MS. I requested my vitamin D3 be checked, along with my B12 and inflammation markers, including CRP and homocysteine. I wouldn’t be notified until months later of the results. According to functional medicine ranges, my D3 was deficient, and my inflammatory markers were high (this told me my body was in a chronic state of inflammation). According to western medicine, they were within “normal” limits.

In true Adria fashion, I began researching all things transverse myelitis and did not like what I was learning. I agreed to do a follow-up MRI in six months to monitor my progress. January 2020, I was progressively having more anxiety, panic attacks on the way to work, in my office, and at home, accompanied by sleepless nights. I was still experiencing extreme fatigue, plus joint pain like nothing I had experienced before. Every joint hurt. I couldn't run because my ankles and knees hurt so bad. I couldn't lift my arms above my head because my shoulder joints were so painful. I couldn't sit for extended periods of time because my hips ached. I experienced what I call heavy legs—it was as if I had sandbags strapped to my legs, and I had to concentrate on moving my legs to walk. I had a baby the year prior, and I couldn't lose my baby weight. I was barely eating and working out harder than ever to combat the stress, but I was only getting worse. I was deteriorating. I was experiencing Lhermitte's (when you look down, an electrical sensation runs down the back and into the toes). It sounded like tissue paper in my neck every time I moved it from side to side. I was riddled with anxiety attacks, depression, and hopelessness. When you're so far in, you don't realize how dark your world has become. You have adapted and lost pieces of yourself. You stop laughing, smiling—trying to survive one day at a time. You chalk it up to a new baby, breastfeeding, lack of sleep, a toddler, everything that comes with working full time, running a home, and producing meals. Relationships become strained. One day you look in the mirror and don't recognize the person looking back. Who and what have I become? What's wrong with me?

No one on the planet could predict what the whole world would endure over the course of the next two years. COVID. I was traveling abroad for work and was in Budapest when COVID broke. Initially, like the rest of the world, I shrugged it off as just another virus. As the months progressed and things were locked down, my health deteriorated. In February of 2020, I lost my job. Less than three weeks later, the world was in lockdown. To say my stress was heightened was an understatement. I had a one-year-old and a four-year-old, loss of significant income, and now my health—my whole family's health—was at risk. The world shut down, and it was the perfect storm of my world falling apart. Never in the history of humankind had we experienced anything like this. Like the rest of the world, we adapted. We stayed home, we took walks on the trails, we made rainbow hearts on our windows, we cooked, we drank, we binge watched all the shows, we faceted, and we kept our family safe.

In June of 2020, I went for my follow-up MRI. I was given the diagnosis of multiple sclerosis on July 9, 2020. It was the worst day of my life. I

remember the doctor delivering the news as nonchalantly as a weather report. What I remember is him showing me the MRI image with the lesion on the right side of my brain and saying, “You’ll take a pill the rest of your life and most likely won’t end up in a wheelchair. We don’t really see that anymore.” I remember sort of blacking out. I will NEVER forget the look on my mother’s face. I know that look. As a mother, you never want to have your child diagnosed with an incurable, debilitating disease. She instantly went into “mom” mode, and I am grateful to her for asking the questions I couldn’t, having the strength to stay strong and levelheaded. Not once breaking—not one damn time. I admire her strength and courage because right then and there, I was shattered into a million pieces. Who would pick up my pieces? I remember my mother and the doctor speaking, but I couldn’t tell you what they said. My whole world stopped. I couldn’t see or hear anything around me. My life flashed before my eyes.

I remember thinking my life is over. I’ll be in a wheelchair by the time my daughter is in kindergarten. I’ll be dead before they are married. This isn’t the life my husband signed up for. It’s bizarre how the most irrational thoughts instantly enter your psyche after receiving devastating news, and it’s even scarier how quickly this disease will make that mental space dark.

I remember leaving the doctor’s office in a daze, and my mother saying, “We need to make a plan—we’ll beat this,” as matter of fact as she could. I think a small part of me wanted to believe her. I had to break the news to my husband, my dad, brothers, aunt, and my four closest friends since grade school. I remember most of them teared up and were speechless. No one expected this. I just floated through the next couple of days. At one point, I remember lying in bed one night, convincing myself I was a complete burden to my family. My husband didn’t sign up for this. He shouldn’t have to take care of a disabled wife.

How would this affect my children? Would I embarrass them? Would they get sick of having to answer that question of, “What’s wrong with your mom?” In my darkest moment, I decided they would be better off without me. The kids were young enough that they wouldn’t remember me, so there’d be no emotional pain to deal with. Let’s face it, my kids are adorable—who wouldn’t want to take them on? My husband was young and vibrant. He would easily find someone to love again without the burden of an incurable disease dampening his “happily ever after”. That night, I made the decision for them. When I got bad enough, I would end it (thinking this would be sooner than later at the rate I was feeling).

I slept well that night. Early the next morning, I woke up to Jack, my son, telling me I needed to get up and make him breakfast. He was hungry. I looked at the baby monitor, and Charlotte (Charlie) was bopping up and down in her crib, and the dog was barking to go outside. I got out of bed and started the process of “mothering”. I got the dog out, the kids set up for breakfast, and started making a cup of coffee. An overwhelming feeling came over me. I didn’t want the kids to see me crying, so I turned away from them. I wiped away my tears and swallowed the lump in my throat. When I turned back around, they were all at my feet, staring up at me silently. Jack asked me if momma was crying. Daisy, the dog, was dancing on her hind legs as if asking to be picked up, and Charlie was just smiling at me like she was seeing me for the first time. If this were a movie, *Eye of the Tiger* would start playing, and Mickey would shout at me, “Get up, you son of a b*tch cause Mickey loves ya!” (Rocky V 1990). If you can’t tell, I’m a diehard Rocky Balboa fan.

But this is real life. At that moment, I knew I was the ONLY person for them. I would fight like hell to stay here and be healthy FOR THEM. If that meant some days, I was only operating at 10%, then my 10% would be better than zero. But let’s be real, I trained my whole life thus far for this moment, and I would give nothing less than 110% to being the best damn mother on earth. That meant starting then and there with finding a cure. And for me, I eventually found it. My babies can’t read right now, and they will never fully understand the profound impact they had on me at the darkest time in my life, but they truly saved me that day. They are my heartbeat, a literal extension of my aorta, and my reason WHY I fight so hard every day to be here. I hope one day, they know just how much they saved me. I love them more than words can describe, so I won’t try.

I have never shared these details with anyone. I hesitated to even write it down. What would people think? In the end, I decided to include this overwhelming moment because it shines a light on how dark, lonely, and dire this disease can take a once profoundly positive, outgoing, life of the party kind of person. It changes everything about you—physically and mentally.

Growing up, and even into adulthood, I never experienced anxiety, depression, or dark thoughts. People used to tease me that glitter ran through my veins because I was extremely happy and outgoing. The darkness was all new for me, and I was not equipped to handle it. Healing my mental health would prove to be my biggest challenge as it was the hardest hurdle for me to clear. I attribute my best friend for bringing to my attention how depressed she thought I was and

encouraging me to seek professional help. She made me look inward when I didn't even want to leave the house. She designed a journal personally for me when I didn't even know what to say, so I wrote. I am deeply thankful for her support in my mental health journey.

Taking care of your mental health is such an important part of healing this silent disease. I share my experience because I know I am not alone on this journey. There are others out there. If reading my story can help save another MS warrior or make them feel less alone, then that is my duty to fulfill.

I cried nonstop for weeks, months even. I still choke up thinking about those first few weeks and what my inner circle and I went through; how impersonal and cold that doctor was. After a couple of days, it sank in. I was terrified to even speak the words multiple sclerosis. It felt like a dirty secret to me. I was feeling shame and guilt around it. I was a health professional! How could I let myself get to this point? Why did I take pain medication knowing the damage it could potentially have? Why didn't I push back more when having my second child and insist on a VBAC? Why did I fight for a job where they didn't want me? Why did I keep pushing myself to the edge of exhaustion?

I decided to not accept this diagnosis, and the first neurologist had gotten it wrong. I said no to the drug reps who were stalking me every day, calling me multiple times a day to start their MS drug. There is money to be made, and I'm a walking dollar sign to them. The problem was, I just didn't feel it in my gut that meds were the answer. Something was telling me there had to be another way. The side effects of the drugs sounded worse than the disease, and with my luck, I'd be the one who ended up with the rare brain cancer they can cause. I asked the pharma rep to please stop calling, and I would reach out when I felt the time was right to start.

As I was overanalyzing what to do with my unknown future and health, I started to research natural approaches to treat the disease. I came across Dr. Embry and his son Mathew's work on treating MS naturally. Unintentionally, I ran across Mathew's documentary, Living Proof, and for the first time in a month, I had a glimmer of hope. I thought that maybe things would be okay. I won't sugar coat it; it was hard to watch. It's triggering to see MS warriors and their declining health. It's hard not to ask yourself, is that how it will be for me? Mathew's documentary led me to his site MSHope.com. Mathew's story and his father's research and development of the Best Bet Diet is truly inspiring. I continue to follow Mathew and his father's work. I am grateful for their trailblazing

path while sharing evidence-based research, and their commitment to disseminating the information for anyone who will listen.

Within the Living Proof documentary, Dr. Terry Wahls is featured. Dr. Wahls was dependent on a tilt-recline wheelchair for four years (because of progressive MS), until she reclaimed her health using a diet and lifestyle program that she designed specifically to restore her cellular health. She now pedals her bike to work each day. Dr. Wahls is a clinical professor of medicine at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine in Iowa City, Iowa, U.S.A., where she teaches internal medicine residents in their primary care clinics. She also does clinical research and has published over sixty peer-reviewed scientific abstracts, posters, and papers. I live seventy miles from the University of Iowa (my alma mater). It is as if fate was stepping in again. I inquired to see if she was taking on patients and set up a discovery call to see if we'd be a good fit to work together. Until then, I researched and purchased her book, *The Wahls Protocol*, and dove in.

In the meantime, I managed to get into the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. I got a second opinion from the head of neurology in mid-July of 2020. For weeks I had full panels of blood work drawn, more MRIs, and met with various doctors that weren't convinced it was MS initially. The lesion in my cervical spine had healed, and there was only one lesion on my right parietal lobe that seemed to be getting smaller. Eventually, they encouraged me to get a spinal tap. Initially, I was completely against it. After the trouble I had with my C-sections, I didn't want anything in my spine ever again. I did eventually agree after many tests came back normal. The spinal tap would be a determinant of what course of treatment to take. Just my luck, I had a spinal fluid leak after the procedure and was bedridden for almost a week with severe pain and headaches until my body could heal itself. The results of the spinal tap showed that what they were seeing in the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) was consistent with what they would see in a typical MS patient. I was disheartened, but nothing like the first time the news was delivered. At this point, I had a plan.

The Rebuild

I decided then, with the support of my neurologist at Mayo, I would attempt to treat this naturally, monitoring the disease with MRIs every six months. I have done so since July of 2020. When I asked her about diet and lifestyle changes, she stated that diet had no impact on the course of the disease, but it didn't hurt to eat healthfully and not smoke. She stated her biggest concerns were her patient's mental health. Depression is one of the most prevalent psychiatric conditions in MS

patients. Today, lifetime prevalence of major depression in MS patients is estimated to be around approximately 25–50%, a number two-to-five times greater than in the general population.

Source: Feinstein A, Magalhães S, Richard JF, Audet B, Moore C. The link between multiple sclerosis and depression. *Nat Rev Neurol*. 2014;10:507–517.

On the way home from Mayo that day, I was mentally exhausted and unsure of the future. The little research I had done on treating MS naturally didn't seem too idealistic. If we don't have hope, then what do we have? As we exited off the interstate, I closed my eyes and asked God to show me a deer if I was making the right choice. I took a deep breath and opened my eyes. In the ditch, a large buck seemed to jump out of nowhere, looked at me, and bounded off. Other than the birth of my children, it was probably one of the most miraculous experiences I've had. I don't know why at that moment I asked God to show me a deer. It just popped into my head, and He answered. It wouldn't be the last time God winked at me. Nearly one year later, as I was preparing for another MRI, I was feeling anxious that week. A sense of doubt was creeping in, and I asked God for another sign as I was driving home. I kid you not, in the exact same spot as last time, He showed me another deer. I had to look twice to make sure I wasn't imagining things.

Last spring, the kids and I were planting flowers, and I found myself wondering, would I always be able to do this? Would I always be mobile and active? Just then, three butterflies landed on the flowers I was planting. They rested for a minute, fluttered their wings, and eventually flew off. The significance of the butterfly refers to the normal appearance of the choroid plexuses on the axial imaging of the brain in an MRI. Butterflies are symbols to me and MS patients worldwide. I felt a sense of calm, and I still carry those winks with me each time I spiral with negative thoughts. I know He's got me. Whatever your belief, look for the signs; find comfort in those moments to help ease the uncertainty that comes with this disease.

I connected with Dr. Wahls at the University of Iowa in fall of 2020. I was going to work with her individually as a patient; however, she was recruiting for a clinical trial for those with Relapsing-Remitting MS (RRMS) and had not started on any disease modifying treatments to treat MS. I instead opted to be a subject in her RRMS research study for the next year. Throughout fall of 2020 and all of 2021, I followed a very strict, modified paleo diet, targeted supplements, mental health and breath work, and exercise to complete the study as a compliant subject.

Surveys and phone interviews were conducted. Journaling and support calls were encouraged with other subjects in the trial.

That first year connecting with Dr. Wahls, her team, and the other subjects in the study was truly a gift from God. I can say with 100% certainty I would not be doing as well as I am today if it was not for that experience and the specific education provided. It saved my quality of life, my health, and provided me support through those who were “walking in my shoes”. My family and friends provide me with the support and love needed to keep going each day, but the small group, whom I still stay in contact with today, lifts me up and can relate to life with MS. They, too, are working towards good health daily. Our group motto is, “If Dr. Wahls can get out of a wheelchair, then we can keep ourselves from getting into one.” And we live by that. If there is an opportunity to be a part of Dr. Wahls’s team and her clinical trials, I highly encourage it. She is my hero and an angel on earth who wants to change the way healthcare treats incurable diseases like MS, and give us hope that we can thrive in life after diagnosis. I will never be able to repay her for giving me my quality of life back, but I will honor her legacy each day by staying true to the cause and paying it forward to those who are diagnosed after me.

One of the hardest parts for me was not personally knowing anyone who was diagnosed with MS and thriving. My only experience with the disease was a family friend who had passed away from complications, along with others who were quite limited in mobility. I was terrified. I thought that was how life would be. Throughout my journey, I have met so many wonderful souls who are thriving after diagnosis, and we all treat the disease differently. It is important to find support in your community for those living with MS. In Iowa, I was lucky to connect with a non-profit, MS Moments, just this past winter. Their mission is to provide financial assistance in the form of grants to Iowan’s and their immediate families. It is so much more than that. It is unique in the way it brings MS warriors and their families together in positive, fun ways to keep the community engaged, active, and supportive of a cause that affects more than just those living with the disease. Another group I have ran across is First Descents. First Descents provides life-changing outdoor adventures for young adults impacted by cancer and other serious health conditions like MS. I encourage you to seek out their information. Research similar organizations in your state or country to find support throughout your healing journey.

MS affects everyone differently. I think that is why it is so difficult to diagnose and treat. We are all individuals, and we must choose the

healing path we feel is right for us and what we can stay consistent with as life evolves. There is no right or wrong way to treat this disease. For me, I am one giant walking experiment. Over the course of the last three years, I have tried many holistic approaches and feel confident I have found what works best for me.

To treat MS the way I do takes discipline, and you must want it enough to be consistent and dedicated each day. It is not for everyone. If medication is your chosen route to treat the disease, I still believe a paleo diet and supplements should be implemented. The disease modifying drugs (DMDs) are not treating the root cause of your disease. It is essential to work with a functional doctor, or a doctor who supports your treatment course. Look inward at your lifestyle to help you determine what the root cause is. Most people with an autoimmune disease like MS are vitamin D3 deficient, according to functional medicine ranges. There more than likely was some chronic stress, trauma, or exposure to environmental factors that occurred before diagnosis. Consuming a Standard American Diet (SAD) can cause chronic inflammation, as well as stress with work and family responsibilities. Pinpointing the where and why of the disease can prevent you from repeating the habits that are contributing to the progression of the disease. Treating the root cause and stopping the inflammation is key in managing this disease. DMDs address inflammation, but they also suppress your immune system. I was diagnosed during COVID, and the thought of tampering with my immune system during the pandemic didn't feel like the answer. There is a reason the drugs stop working overtime, and you may have to try multiple drugs over the course of your life. DMD's might be needed in certain cases, and many choose this route. This is completely acceptable. I am not against medication. I do feel strongly, however, that finding the root cause of your disease is just as important as treating it.

The way I treat my disease is through a very strict, modified paleo diet. Initially after diagnosis and throughout the clinical trial I was involved in, I eliminated all gluten, dairy, soy, corn, nightshades, legumes, alcohol, grains, eggs, sugar, processed foods, and oils. If you do nothing else, give up dairy and gluten. Scientific data shows the proteins in gluten contribute to increased gut permeability and food proteins can leak through the intestines, firing up the immune system. With MS, the body attacks the myelin sheath. Avoiding gluten can help keep those gut junctures tight. Science shows that dairy proteins closely resemble the proteins in myelin. When the immune system encounters dairy through consumption, it gets sensitized to the myelin and attacks the myelin sheath. This is what we are trying to avoid with MS.

After the food elimination phase, I slowly reintroduced certain nightshades and grains to see if I had any reactions to them. This is a strategic process, and if interested, I encourage you to work with a functional medicine or nutrition expert to help educate and guide you on how particular foods can affect you. Since the research trial has ended, I still maintain the paleo diet for the most part. I have reintroduced organic, pasture-raised eggs with no issues but only eat them one to two times a month. I do eat more nightshades than I have in the past. I know which ones I do well on and in certain amounts. I have incorporated rice into my diet at a minimal amount—this girl loves sushi! I may have rice a couple of times a month, and I'm satisfied with that. I also love popcorn, so I pop my own at home a couple of times a month (organic non-GMO), drizzled with olive oil, salt, and nutritional yeast.

In addition to a varied plant-based diet with quality protein, fiber, and healthy fats, fermented foods are another important aspect for a healthy gut. Most fermented foods contribute bacteria that have a potential probiotic effect. This means that these bacteria may help restore the balance of bacteria in your gut, support digestive health, and alleviate any digestive issues. A healthy gut makes for a strong gut-brain axis and is essential in managing MS. The gut-brain axis is a bidirectional communication network that links the enteric and central nervous systems. This network is not only anatomical, but it extends to include endocrine, humoral, metabolic, and immune routes of communication, as well.

Throughout this process, I have become so in-tune with my body that I now know what foods I need to incorporate each day to feel my best. If I slack on that routine, I feel it. I try to buy in season produce and organic when available, as well as grass-fed beef, organic meats and wild seafood. Green smoothies are almost a daily staple. I call it a salad in a cup. This is one way for me to knock out six cups of leafy greens, with a serving of brightly colored frozen fruit (i.e., dark cherries, wild blueberries, aronia berries, or raspberries, etc.), a chunk of organic fresh ginger, cold flax oil, a tbsp of nut butter, a scoop or two of Paleovalley dried bone broth protein, matcha powder or cacao powder, camu and acerola cherry powder, all incorporated into one large smoothie. Not only does this provide a nutrient dense meal, but it is anti-inflammatory, as well.

Investing in a commercial grade blender will provide a huge advantage. I use my Vitamix blender daily, and it pulverizes the smoothies. I make sure to have a quality protein at every meal, in addition to a sulfur-rich food (arugula, brussel sprouts, asparagus, bok choy, cruciferous veggies

like broccoli or cauliflower, cabbage, onions, garlic, etc.) or brightly colored fruits or veggies. There is a science to eating this strategically and why it is important to incorporate particular foods and food groups daily to maintain health. This education is already widely available and would take another thirty chapters for me to go through. I encourage you to seek out Dr. Wahls's Protocol or the Best Bet Diet for more information.

I won't pretend eating this strictly was easy initially. I am a dietitian and still had to drastically change the way I looked at food and how I fed my body to heal. I cried in the grocery store on more than one occasion and was completely overwhelmed. Reading food labels and ingredient lists will be key. Your once go-to comfort meals and family staples will need an overhaul. You'll grow sick of cooking some days and just want to eat whatever you can get your hands on. For a couple weeks when I initially overhauled my diet, I felt unwell, like I had the flu and wanted to give up (my body was detoxing). I assumed it wasn't working for me. But one morning after sticking to it for a couple weeks, I woke up and felt better than I had in years—and I never looked back. I think I felt sick because I quit all foods cold turkey. Had I eased into it, I would have had an easier time.

The biggest tips I can provide are to find your food staples and stick to them. Reading food labels is helpful as they must call out common allergens at the end of the ingredients list. For me, especially when I travel, meat sticks like Chomps or Nicks are my go-to. Paleo valley superfood bars (my favorite flavors are chocolate and apple) have been a lifesaver as far as convenience and travel items. Many paleo brands like Siete, Simple Mills, Hu, Jovial grain-free pastas, and Primal Food products offer compliant substitutes for your pantry. There is a plethora of paleo food products out there. Some are great to help calm that craving or a great substitute for products you miss.

Food prep will become so important. I always have a compliant soup, a meat prepared like organic rotisserie chicken or ground beef, and chopped veggies to assemble meals quickly. Not being prepared is setting yourself up for failure. Find ways that work for your schedule to always have compliant foods ready to go after a long day. Because of COVID, we did not eat out for close to one and half years. As awful as COVID was for so many, it did force me to deal with my mental health and familiarize myself with cooking dishes at home that didn't leave me feeling deprived.

Don't limit your meals to what society deems meal appropriate. Breakfast foods were the hardest for me. Now it is not uncommon for me to eat leftovers for breakfast, make a green smoothie, have a sausage scramble with some kind of veggie, or have soup using bone broth for added nutrition and protein. Sipping on bone broth after some water first thing in the morning can be very nutrient dense and healing to the gut. One cup offers nine grams of quality protein and contains the amino acid L-glutamine that is extremely healing to the gut if you're dealing with "leaky gut" or gut permeability.

In addition, I do a natural fast since we typically eat an early dinner with kids around 5:30 pm, and I tend to not eat before 8 am the following morning. Fasting is tricky. If it works for you and you feel great doing it, then continue to do so. If you feel you struggle with it or feel unwell, shorten your hours of fasting. Fasting can be hard on women, specifically when trying to balance and manage hormones. I also encourage you to not drink coffee on an empty stomach. Fasting, plus caffeine on an empty stomach, is setting yourself up for an imbalance of hormones and cortisol spikes, which can lead to insulin resistance.

Over the course of the years, I have found staple dishes I never grow tired of. They leave me full and satisfied. Examples of my go-to dishes are tacos or taco salads with organic grass-fed beef, spaghetti squash lasagna bowls, dairy-free clam chowder, salmon patties, pork lettuce cups, and cauliflower rice. My family loves shrimp fried cauliflower rice or buffalo chicken bowls with cilantro lime cauli rice. We also enjoy smoked trout and roasted potatoes and veggies, various soups and stews, as well as stir-fries and scrambles.

I try new things—sometimes they work, and sometimes they flop. Look for paleo recipes online, knowing you'll have to modify ingredients to be compliant for what works for you. Over the years, I have found online food bloggers like paleorunningmomma.com, cookprimalgourmet.com, 40aprons.com, againstallgrain.com, and Dr Wahls have plentiful recipe options for inspiration.

Lean on family to help, try new dishes, get the kids involved, and/or get your family to eat like you! It will only set them up for success in the future. As my kids have grown older and understand mommy can't have gluten or dairy and I must eat healthy for my brain, it makes them interested in how food provides nutrients to their little bodies. We have not discussed the words multiple sclerosis with them. I feel they are too young to understand at this point, but we do spend a lot of time

discussing health and how what we do today affects our bodies as we age.

I allow my family to still eat gluten, dairy, and have treats in moderation. I know my children are more at risk of developing an AI disease. When they are old enough to understand, I will educate them on the importance of limiting some of their food intake. But most importantly, making sure their vitamin D3 levels are in optimal ranges is the most preventative measure I can take for them right now.

Having food around that I cannot consume doesn't bother me anymore. When someone offers me something, I politely say no, thank you. When we go out to eat, I tell the server I have a gluten and dairy allergy, and I've never been met with any disputes. Early on, I would bring my own salad dressing in a small container or cassava chips for a side. I review the menu before going to a restaurant. If attending a social gathering, I bring a dish I know is compliant.

I often get asked if I cheat, and the answer is no. There really isn't anything I truly miss that I haven't found a substitute for. The only thing I do still think about is a good slice of pizza, and that's because of the ooey gooey cheese. I desperately miss cheese. There is no dairy-free substitute that truly embodies a good, aged cheese. I was the queen of dairy prior to my diagnosis. I had it at every meal. But no food is worth being in a wheelchair. Dramatic, I know, but that is how I think of it.

In addition to a strict diet, I incorporated acupuncture, chiropractic care, psychotherapy, and massage therapy monthly. These have made a huge impact on me regaining my mental and physical health. I'm lucky to have a mother and brother who are chiropractors and a father and brother who are veterinarians. We come from science-backed training. My family has been instrumental in not only supporting me, but also talking through the physiology of the disease. There were many days or nights I'd call any one of them sobbing about one of my symptoms, and they would listen, discuss the mechanisms with me, and calm me with the reassurance that I was not progressing or that my lesion wasn't active. Early on, that is where my thoughts immediately jumped with any twinge, tingle, or twitch. Now I know that sometimes things pop up, and it is not always MS related. It can be due to aging, injury, sickness, or just life in general. Over the years, I have learned what affects my body negatively. For example, alcohol doesn't work well with my gut health. Consecutive nights of poor sleep negatively affect me. Oats make me tingle.

Stress brings on fatigue or tinnitus. We will never escape stress, but having resources to manage stress is imperative to controlling disease activity. Viruses like COVID or the flu linger on for me longer than “normal” people and can cause symptoms related to MS to flare-up. I had COVID at the end of 2021 and was in rough shape for about a month. I had to receive fluids daily at the walk-in clinic, and the nausea kept me from being able to eat or drink much for weeks. I lost about fifteen pounds in one month and was so fatigued and weak, I could barely function. I lost 60% of my hair, had gut inflammation for eight months afterward, and continuously lost weight. I could barely eat anything without GI distress and had to heal my gut all over again.

In December of 2022, I had the flu virus like I had never experienced before. I quickly recovered in general, but the lingering effects of fatigue, low blood pressure, and dizziness remained. Had this happened a couple years ago, I would have been riddled with anxiety and panic attacks thinking something was wrong, but I now know this is just life with an autoimmune disease, and I am armed with education and resources on what to do to alleviate the occurrences. It took years to get to this point. When I start to feel off, I ask myself, what did I eat the day before or even days ago? Did I get my rest? Did I do my breathwork? Do I need to slow down? Was I recently sick? Asking yourself these questions is a way to check yourself on where you might be slacking and where things might need to be tightened up. In the beginning, keep a journal to track your habits and symptoms. Life is going to throw us curve balls—be prepared to swing.

I have discussed the importance of mental health work throughout my journey. Psychotherapy was influential for me when I realized I couldn't fix what I was going through on my own. I had no experience with poor mental health. It is important to find the right therapist for your needs. I am not one that likes to “talk” about my issues. I prefer to just forge on. I wanted to be armed with tools and resources to revert to when issues arose. Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), accelerated resolution therapy (ART), acceptance and commitment therapy, brain spotting, manifesting, and guided self-hypnosis were influential tactics used to help me work through my problems. I started a gratitude journal and still do this each morning. Even if it is five minutes of writing down what I'm grateful for—even if it hasn't happened yet. I visualize stable and clear MRI's. I envision a Pacman in my brain chomping down on all my lesions to produce a clear and healthy brain. This is particularly helpful when lying in the dreadful MRI machines.

Another imperative aspect of my mental health is meditating, prayer, and breathwork. Any of these you can find on YouTube or phone apps. I particularly use the *Headspace* app for guided meditations each morning or when feeling particularly anxious or stressed. Breathwork can be as simple as breathing in to the count of four, holding your breath to the count of seven, and releasing the breath to the count of eight (4-7-8 technique). There is also the box method, along with countless types of breathwork methods, and other ways to stimulate the vagus nerve to calm the nervous system.

Exercise is also imperative in managing any disease and stress. If you rest, you rust. For me, learning how to exercise and not overdo it was a challenge at first. As an athlete and someone who relished challenges (i.e., mud runs, marathons, triathlons, intensive hikes, waters sports, snowboarding, etc.), it wasn't a workout unless I was left dripping in sweat or spent two hours at the gym. There is such a thing as working out too much. It stresses the body and can contribute to inflammation. Slowing down and working out less intensely has helped me improve over the years. What does this look like? I do something every day. It could be a walk, run, weight training, yoga, biking, stretching, swimming, or chasing my kids at the park. The key is it doesn't have to be a high intensity workout every day. Just moving your body, getting steps in, and raising the heart rate for a short period of time will be beneficial. Doing more weight resistance training and building solid muscle mass as I age will be a key factor in managing my disease for years to come. I don't go to any fancy gyms or classes anymore. I have a treadmill and free weights in my basement. I tune into apps, Youtube or Netflix for yoga or short HIIT sessions, and I modify according to my needs. You don't have to push yourself to the point of exhaustion—you just need to move your body daily and consistently.

Over the years, I have watched or listened to what feels like every podcast, movie, or book written on autoimmune disease and functional medicine. I devour anything related to Dr. Wahls's work. Her movie *Defying All Odds* was a beautiful inspiration. I receive her e-newsletters and follow her on social platforms. I read her research publications and keep a finger on the pulse of any upcoming work she has in the pipeline.

Other podcasts I have tuned into are: *The Doctor's Farmacy* with Dr. Mark Hyman, *The Genius Life* with Matt Lugavere, *Wholistic Matters*, and countless others. MSHope and Dr. Embry and Mat Embry's work, including their question-and-answer segment Tuesdays on Facebook live, is educational. There are numerous functional medicine doctors I follow on Instagram and many MS books that allude to different ways not only

to look at the disease but how to manage it spiritually and physically. As I said, I am my own science experiment. I keep learning and incorporating new health techniques to see if I feel any benefit. I am an ever-evolving human living with MS.

I have a Durasage sauna I sit in three-to-four times a week, and immediately take a cold plunge or shower after. I do cryotherapy every couple of months, and I exercise daily. We have installed a reverse osmosis water filtering system in our home for our drinking water. Most city waters aren't as clean as I would like. The reverse osmosis system is wonderful at removing all the contaminants you would not want in your drinking water; however, it also removes the trace minerals you do want in your drinking water. This means you'll have to add back trace minerals to your drinking water. This is important so your body is not depleted of the trace minerals needed for proper biological functioning.

We use an AirDoctor air purifier in our bedroom. We have had our home tested for mold. I have incorporated more plants throughout the home. I have a year-round herb garden in my kitchen on the wall, so I have access to fresh herbs even in the winter, and we plant a garden every spring. I swapped all food storage containers to glass. We no longer use plastic in our home when storing food or water bottles. We incorporated new cookware like cast iron or ceramic. I no longer use any pans with PFAS, also known as the forever chemical. You typically see PFAS in nonstick coatings. I upgraded our mattress to one that is organic with no "off-gassing" and use organic, cotton bedding. I gradually switched all my skin and beauty products over to safer ingredients. This was a process. I changed what makeup I used, skin care, toothpaste, soap, lotion, deodorant, and hair care. Thankfully, there are so many cleaner options out there. Find what works best for you and your family. It took me some trial and error.

A great tool I use to look up clean products is the *EWG Healthy Living* app. Not all products are on there, but it is continuously being updated. You can look up products by category, and it shows the ingredients with their rating according to the Environmental Working Group. I have switched over to safer cleaning products, hand soap, and laundry detergent, using Branch Basics.

I stick to my sleep schedule, even on the weekends, and make sure I'm getting my eight-to-nine hours of sleep each night in a cool, dark room. If you struggle with sleep, as many MS warriors do, there are many sleep habits you can incorporate into your daily routine to improve your quality of sleep. Sleep is so important because it is your body's time for

cellular repair. Getting natural sunlight first thing in the morning can help regulate your circadian rhythms. Circadian rhythms are physical, mental, and behavioral changes that follow a twenty-four-hour cycle. These natural processes respond primarily to light and dark and affect most living things. Being out in nature and limiting light exposure at night can help regulate this natural process.

My supplement list feels extensive and ever evolving, but what I have found that works for me over the years is as follows. I take vitamin D3 + K2. Vitamin D3 is not only a vital fat-soluble vitamin, but it's also a hormone that is essential for initiating several important biological processes. Vitamin K2 is essential for their completion and expression. When diagnosed, I requested my vitamin D3 levels be checked. They were at 25 ng/mL. I was told that was normal. With my functional nutrition training, I knew better. Anything below 70 ng/ml will affect how I'm feeling. It is essential to have your vitamin D3 levels checked one-to-two times a year and know your numbers. Don't rely on western medicine ranges to make that decision for you. Listen to your body. My sweet spot is in the 80's. This winter I had my D3 checked, and it had dropped to the low 60's. That, coupled with the flu virus, had me feeling off. I upped my D3+K2 intake and have been feeling better. Now, this recommendation isn't for everyone. It is best to know your body, numbers, and what works for you. More is not always better either. You ideally want that D3 sweet spot of 70-100 ng/mL when dealing with autoimmunity. Talk with your doctor to see what works for you.

In addition to D3+K2 each morning, I take Nordic Naturals omega 3 fatty acids, magnesium threonate, NAC, phosphatidylcholine, and a methylated B12, B6, and folate. The methylated forms are important because they are already activated and more readily absorbed and bioavailable for the body to use. In the afternoon, I take an activated B-100 complex, organ meat supplements (because I just can't tolerate eating organ meats), curcumin, and every other day, chlorella. In the evening, I take magnesium glycinate, zinc, selenium, a spore-based probiotic, and mushroom adaptogens. It is important to have testing done to tailor the right supplement regimen for your body. The supplements I take have specific and targeted purposes. For example, there are seven different forms of magnesium. They can serve different purposes. Knowing the forms of the supplements you take, and their purpose, is imperative. It is a highly unregulated industry, so choosing reputable companies is crucial. Many of the supplements in my regiment are antioxidants with anti-inflammatory properties. Others are targeted for mitochondrial health. The classic role of mitochondria is oxidative phosphorylation, which generates ATP by utilizing the energy released

during the oxidation of the food we eat. ATP is used in turn as the primary energy source for most biochemical and physiological processes, such as growth, movement, and homeostasis. Dysfunction of the mitochondria and a resulting depleted energy supply is thought to contribute to the damage of nerves and subsequent disability. That is why minding your mitochondria is so important in managing MS and its symptoms, particularly fatigue.

I take CBD oil some nights or arnica for when I have menstrual cramps, or any pain that needs alleviating. I no longer take NSAIDS. I had a stool analysis done to check for parasitic infections. I have dabbled in parasite cleansing using specific herbs, but this is something I only recently began educating myself on. It is important to understand herbs can interact with specific medications and are dangerous at copious levels, so I would only advise this under a health professional's guidance.

I had a hair tissue mineral analysis done (HTMA), and it showed I was under A LOT of stress! YA THINK? And that my body was depleted of a lot of trace minerals. It also showed the heavy metals aluminum and mercury in my system at low levels. I have two mercury fillings (hello, I'm an 80's baby) that I am considering having removed.

Aluminum exposure is from aluminum filled deodorants, which I have stopped using, and food/beverage packaging. Because of this testing, I know I have a fast metabolism. I run through my minerals, for example, copper and magnesium, quickly—especially when stressed. Because of my fast metabolism, I need to use a B-100 complex. Not everyone will have the same results. You can order this testing from a functional or holistic practitioner, per your request. I know @nutritionbyrobyn on Instagram is a functional RD, and she runs HTMA testing bundles where she sends you the kit.

I also had a food sensitivity test done (ELISA). Now, food sensitivity testing is controversial. I think if done properly and with the right testing, it can be a helpful tool to help you navigate your healing journey. When I tested myself for food sensitivities, the company I used was US BioTek. It uses three main immunoglobulins in their testing: IgG (1,2,3), IgA, and IgG4. They test these antibodies separately to establish a clear picture of what food triggers may be the root cause of patients' symptoms. I used BioTek because as a practitioner, I could order my own testing. It is important to understand if your body is under chronic inflammation, this test might yield a different result than if your body is at a calmer state. When I took this test, I had not eaten dairy, gluten, soy, corn, sugar, eggs, etc. for a year. All those items showed up as "safe" foods because I had not been exposed to them. That doesn't mean I am not reactive to them.

It means my body had not been exposed to those foods, so there was no intolerance at that point in time. It did show intolerances to bananas, Brazil nuts (two Brazil nuts a day meets your daily selenium needs which is important for thyroid health), some cruciferous veggies, vanilla, and some other foods. I have never noticed any issues with bananas, nuts, or vanilla, but I'm conscious of my consumption of them. Because of my food elimination diet and reintroduction phase the year prior, I was aware of the effects some veggies had on me, particularly some of the high sulfur ones. I know I can't eat a lot of veggies raw, or indigestion, gas, and bloating occur. Same thing happens with some nightshade veggies. Food sensitivity testing is expensive and can lead to inaccurate results. The best way to truly understand your food sensitivities is through an elimination diet, followed by a reintroduction phase. A nutrition expert can help assist you with this.

I'm happy to report that since 2020, my MRI's have always been stable, no new or active lesions (I've had four MRIs since 2020), no inflammation, and no disease activity. The lesion margins appear to be shrinking. This has shocked my doctors at Mayo. They tell me to keep doing what I'm doing, and they'll see me next year, unless any issues arise.

As you may know, regardless of how one chooses to treat this unpredictable disease, it comes at an extreme cost. Not only financially, but mentally to the individual and family. I did not incorporate all these changes overnight. It takes time and money. These are all things I have managed to slowly incorporate over the last three years. I think it is important to note that early on, you will be consumed with learning, devouring anything you can get your hands on related to the disease. It's natural to want to educate yourself and compare other people's stories; however, I think it is beneficial to not let it consume your every thought. It is important to take a step back and still enjoy life, finding happiness in the interests and hobbies that make you "you".

You define your life. Don't let this disease, or one doctor's opinion, write your life's script. I will continue to explore and dedicate my time and energy to health and happiness, not only for myself, but for my family. As of today, I am living proof that nutrition and lifestyle can be one possibility used to control and manage this incurable and unpredictable disease.

I can say that I'm 100% healthier now than I ever have been. It is not just ONE thing that has changed my health. It is the synergistic effect of ALL THE THINGS. I can't eat healthy and not exercise or address stress. That

is like bringing a spray bottle to a house fire. It doesn't help! You must get the body back in balance while staying positive and consistent, knowing when to pivot when something is out of whack and having the tools and resources to know how to accomplish such an undertaking.

My family teases me that I'll outlive them all. I have almost gotten back to my "old self", but I am forever changed. I think with this disease, it is important to grieve your old life and find passion in almost a rebirth of yourself. Cry over that food you miss, cry over the inconvenience this disease can have on our daily lives, be angry, scream, shout, get it out of your body! It is important to release those feelings. There is no timeline for healing. It is what feels right for you.

It took me a year before I could speak the words "multiple sclerosis" out loud. It was even longer before I could talk about it and not cry. Early on, the support of my husband and his unwavering positivity and compassion of allowing me to choose the path that was right for me was essential. I went against what all the medical professionals were telling me, and he never questioned my choices. He is the most selfless human and works so hard to provide for our family. I know the last three years have not been easy. There were moments where I wouldn't have blamed him if he wanted to walk away—but he never did. He was strong when I couldn't be. He was a positive light when I had been dark for so long. I have fallen in love with him all over again because in marriage, it's the hard times that truly test your strength, love, and compassion for one another. I'm grateful my husband stands with me.

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." – Martin Luther King, Jr.

The support from my parents from day one has been profound. Not only the emotional support through some excruciatingly painful moments, but the physical support, too. Both my parents also incorporated the dietary changes that I made into their own lives. They both have improved their overall health and have come off several medications. I know when they look at me, they hate that I go through all this. But they have faith in me because they raised me to be strong, stubborn, and determined to defy the odds of what most doctors have told me. As a chiropractor, my mother has been key in my treatment with her unique training in sacral occipital technique (SOT), activator methods, trigger point, myofascial release and unwinding, and bioenergy synchronization technique (BEST). I'm so grateful for the parents who raised me. They are the true definition of what parents should be.

Good parenting involves parents living their lives as role models. I've been blessed with the best, and this includes my father-in-law. Both of my brothers, their spouses, my extended family, my in-laws, and my best friends will never fully understand the impact they have had on me through my healing journey. Never once has anyone in my inner circle questioned or made me doubt my choice on how I'm treating my disease. I know this support is rare after speaking with others. I encourage you to surround yourself with those who support and lift you up. It is not the quantity of people around you, it's the quality of those you allow into your safe space. Choose the ones that will improve your happiness, lessen your misery by doubling your joy, and who will divide your grief. To this day, I haven't announced or told many people about my diagnosis.

Treating MS in any way is hard! What is going to motivate you to stick with it? You must find your reason "why". What motivates you to want to get better? For me, that "why" is my children. I can honestly say if it wasn't for them, I'm not sure I'd still be here. Looking in their little faces each day, knowing they need me keeps me going. They are the reason I get out of bed each day. They need me as much as I need them. I want to be there for them when I'm old! I want to chase after my grandbabies and be a part of their life as my parents are for my children. I'm in it for the long haul.

"The secret of change is to focus all your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." – Socrates.

Redecorate

Plan A for me was treating my disease naturally, and I have done so through trial and error for the last three years. I'll continue to do so, as long as it keeps working. I know what I'm doing now is something I can sustain for a lifetime, God willing. I will always be evolving and modifying to fit my life, but I have a benchmark of non-negotiables. I do monitor the disease through annual MRIs. I cannot say for certain this is something I will continue every year. The anxiety, stress, and anticipation of the results is far more stressful and dreadful than it's worth.

One of the most memorable pieces of advice I received during the Wahls clinical trial was from the physical therapist. She always reminded us that an MRI is just a snapshot in time—a picture. It does not define the overall representation of our journey. It is more important to focus on how we are feeling in general. If we are feeling stronger and symptoms are subsiding, that is more telling of our health than an MRI image. Don't put too much stock in that "snapshot".

If for some reason my health declines, my plan B is a hematopoietic stem cell transplantation (HSCT). HSCT is an intense chemotherapy treatment for MS. It aims to reset the immune system by wiping it out and then regrowing it, using your stem cells. It comes with huge risks, side effects, and financial costs. Having a plan gives me peace and comfort. I think the most jarring thing when I was newly diagnosed was not having a plan, hope, or answers. It took me years to find them, and looking back—it was a hard, dark journey. I don't wish those dark moments of hopelessness on anyone. Over the course of the years, I have found myself asking "why me?" Why do bad things happen to good people?

The answer I have found is looking at this disease as a gift. I had to find a silver lining in the darkness. I have concluded that God is showing me my purpose for the next chapter of my life. He had to break me to show me why he created me. There are some people who will be content just "being", but some of us have been chosen by God to be "broken". I had to suffer with this disease. But when the breaking was done, I was able to see the reason for which He created me—for me to live a healthier life for my family and educate others to do the same.

As a dietitian with a focus in functional nutrition, I have slowly started a private practice and want to have a more online social presence to educate others about additional ways to treat MS. Ideally, when my kids are in school full time, I'll be able to focus on helping other newly diagnosed MS patients find hope and light through the darkness of those first few months after a life changing diagnosis.

I wish I had someone when I was first diagnosed to guide me on my options. Thankfully, I had the support, education, and awareness to ask questions, do the research, and make my own plan on how to treat my disease. I know my treatment is rather unconventional and will not work for everyone, but I think people should have options, regardless of their decision on how to treat the disease. I want to be the person that holds the new MS warrior's hand and tells them it will be okay. We can live healthy, meaningful lives. We are here to support one another—to be the light at the end of a dark tunnel. Whatever you are going through, the sun will come out. Never. Lose. Hope.

"Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim." – Nora Ephron

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.