

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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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.

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

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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17

Story by

MICHELLE

Diagnosed in 1996

Currently 56 years old

Lives in Florida, United States

Instagram: @mysaladbowloflife

In January of 1993, I was twenty-five years old and newly pregnant with our third daughter. My husband was traveling to China for three weeks, while I was preparing to fly across Canada with our two daughters (ages two and four) and the dog to stay with my parents. Two days before I was set to leave, I started noticing one of my eyes was not quite right. I couldn't see clearly. By the day of travel, it was as if a cotton ball was clouding my vision. When I arrived in my hometown, my mom took me to the University hospital where there happened to be a neuro-ophthalmologist in residency. After an examination and vision testing, he diagnosed me with optic neuritis (ON).

Because I was pregnant, there was nothing they could do for me. I was sent on my way, told that it should resolve itself. If anything else odd happened to me, I was told to see a doctor. Sure enough, my vision improved, correcting itself over the next couple of months. Our healthy

baby girl was born, and I dove into the chaos of being an overly tired mom of three little ones.

For the next two years, nothing out of the ordinary happened, aside from being exhausted. But then again, what new mom isn't? One day, as I was preparing the main course for a "moms' dinner club" night I was hosting, I snuck a mouthful of chocolate chips. I thought to myself, "Wow, this brand of chocolate chips is awful. They taste like wax!" I didn't give it much thought until later, while enjoying dessert and coffee with my friends. I realized I couldn't taste or feel temperature on half of my mouth. A few days later, after confirming the loss of sensation, I went to the doctor, who then recommended me to a neurologist. Because I was living in Canada, it took nearly four months before I was able to get into the specialist.

During my first visit to the neurologist, I shared my health history and received a neurological exam. For some reason, this doctor did not want to tell me about my condition because he didn't want me to live my life differently. The one thing he did say was that the myelin around my nerves was breaking down. I was perplexed, to say the least. I went home, and being the sleuth that I am, immediately grabbed my husband's college biology book to look up "myelin" in the index. When I turned to the assigned page, I found this shocking explanation: "When the myelin breaks down around the nerves, it is most often multiple sclerosis (MS)." Everything I'd heard about multiple sclerosis before this moment was scary and overwhelming. My neighbor had it, and she was struggling to walk.

Two days later, I reached out to the MS society, requesting any informational brochures they had. When they arrived, I read through them and was positive that I did, in fact, have multiple sclerosis. I began reading everything I could about MS. What I found were the worst-case scenarios, over and over. My brother-in-law's father was a neurologist in Canada. One of the first books suggested to me was *Multiple Sclerosis: A Guide for the Newly Diagnosed* by Jock Murray. The fifth edition of the book was published in 2017, so I must have read an earlier edition. It gave me very little hope, confirming my thoughts that I had no choice but to live the rest of my life with this.

My next definite MS attack was trigeminal neuralgia (TN)—an awful stabbing pain in the side of my face. Back to the original doctor I went, for a new referral to a neurologist who was actually interested in confirming a diagnosis. She also prescribed an anti-seizure medication to quiet the TN. It resulted in me being unable to function or take care of

our girls. So, I got off it. Again, I had to wait to see the neurologist, followed by another long wait to undergo magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). In Canada, you often wait up to a year to get an MRI. I remember getting a call that someone had cancelled, so I got in after only eight months. A month later, the neurologist confirmed that based on my clinical symptoms and a positive MRI, I indeed had MS. The time span from the presenting case of ON to official diagnosis was over three years.

I told my husband of my diagnosis after he arrived home from an overseas trip. We were both shaken, unsure of my future. This became even more overwhelming when we shared my diagnosis with a couple from our church. He'd been diagnosed years prior. They were both emotionally distraught at my news, causing my husband and I to be even more scared. We didn't have family living near us, so we had to share our news by phone with most of the family. It was a mixture of tears and great concern. I was blessed to have a group of close mom friends who were my support system. As I shared the news with them, they shared in my sadness, promising to be there for me if I needed anything. I was twenty-nine years old and incredibly unsure of what my future held. In Canada at that time, multiple sclerosis medications were not available. Over the next few years, I treated attacks with oral steroids, trying to live my life as normal as possible.

In November of 1997, we moved from Canada to the United States. For the first couple of years, my MS was fairly quiet. I was still dealing with bad fatigue but didn't experience any real attacks. One Florida day, I spent hours in the sun and heat, playing with our girls. The next day, I felt as if I'd been hit by a truck. The MS decided to show itself again with back-to-back attacks. I found a new neurologist and did my best to replay the tape of my MS history for him. Since I had been diagnosed, I dealt with severe vertigo, Lhermitte's Sign (a shock sensation when bending my neck), MS hug (a tight band-like sensation around the chest or torso), loss of feeling in my arm, a collapsing knee, along with other MS symptoms. And, of course, the presenting optic neuritis and trigeminal neuralgia. These attacks would appear then disappear within a month or two.

Looking back, so much of this was a blur. I had three young daughters, a husband who traveled one hundred fifty days a year, and multiple sclerosis. My husband was amazing! When he wasn't working, he took the girls on lots of fun adventures. It took a couple of years after our move to the U.S. to build up a support system of incredible friends.

The first and only neurologist I have seen in the U.S., Dr. Harris, confirmed that these attacks warranted the start of Copaxone (a multiple sclerosis agent). For the next two years, I took Copaxone daily. Despite my fear of needles, I gained some solace by being in control of the injections. My MS continued in an active state during this time. I'd had several attacks, requiring IV Solu-Medrol (a glucocorticoid). I started noticing divots at my injection sites. My gums were also receding. After examining these serious side effects, Dr. Harris determined that continuing with Copaxone would be detrimental to my health. It was time to try something new. Next up was Avonex (another multiple sclerosis agent). It's administered through weekly intramuscular injections, which I continued for a year and a half. During this time, my quality of life plummeted. I administered the injection on Fridays, so my husband would be home with the girls during the most intense post-injection side effects. For the following forty-eight hours afterward, I experienced severe flu-like symptoms. I dragged myself around as best I could the rest of the week, often sleeping sixteen broken hours out of a twenty-four hour day. I was in and out of bed throughout the day as my body would allow, and then back in bed before the girls went to sleep. I'm so grateful my girls were very responsible and able to put themselves to bed most nights. This was a dark time. I found myself slipping into a deep depression. I tried treating it with antidepressants, but they left me with nothing but suicidal thoughts. I gained a great deal of weight. Being active felt almost impossible. After one too many days of this, I decided I could no longer deal with the horrible feelings. I took myself off the Avonex.

In 2008, after six months off all meds, I returned to my neurologist, explaining what I had done. Dr. Harris immediately ordered an MRI with contrast. The results showed a new, large, active lesion. I was told I needed to start Tysabri, a once-a-month IV treatment. I had to stay in the office to fill out the paperwork and arrange a nurse for a home visit to qualify me for the treatment. Upon a bit of research, I found out three women had died during the trial! Not only that, but it also had a black box warning! There was no way I was starting a treatment that came with a possible chance of death. No, thank you!

The next day, I went to Barnes and Noble and found myself wandering over to the health section. I stumbled across a book called *The MS Recovery Diet Book* and bought it. I took it home to discuss with my husband, who agreed to support me in trying the diet. My sister, who was visiting at the time, also encouraged me to give it a try. That day was fifteen years ago, and it was the best decision I have ever made in my life (aside from marrying my husband and having my three amazing girls).

I read the book and immediately started the elimination diet. I removed seven foods: dairy, gluten, legumes, sugar, corn, eggs, and yeast. I found it easiest to precook and freeze individual servings of protein (chicken and salmon) while upping my veggie and fruit intake. The rest of my family continued with their regular diets. When I decide to do something, it is all or nothing. So, I followed the diet strictly. It wasn't easy removing the specified foods as I have always loved all foods. I was raised not to be a picky eater, so the adjustment was hard, especially when eating out or at someone's house. I never wanted to appear picky to others. I was able to set myself up for success by always having safe food available. I would cook for myself with the foods I could eat, and then add to it, making it more interesting (and palatable) for my husband and girls. Being addicted to sugar made it tough to eliminate. But, after two months of giving it up, I could successfully stand in front of a bakery case without craving one item!

I avoided all processed foods and stopped drinking alcohol. At the same time, I started swimming on a local Master's Swim Team. Within two weeks, my husband and our girls started noticing a difference in me. I was thinking more clearly, and my energy level was much higher. I still took my afternoon nap, but I wasn't in bed for most of the day anymore. I found eating at home proved to be the easiest because I could control what I ate. If we ate out, I opted for a piece of protein (no seasoning or sauce) and veggies. As the weeks went on, I was feeling better and better. In the first three years, I let myself slip a couple of times. Within hours, I was in bed, exhausted and not feeling well, often lasting several days. I was so incredibly thrilled when I felt well. It was all the encouragement I needed to stick to the elimination diet.

Three years after making my drastic life change, my husband thought it would be a good idea to get an MRI to make sure the multiple sclerosis wasn't doing anymore damage to my brain. I wasn't experiencing any attacks, but I agreed. When I walked into my neurologist's office, he exclaimed, "Michelle, you look amazing!" I smiled as I was feeling amazing. I explained to him that I chose not to go on Tysabri, but instead, made a huge lifestyle change. He could see I was doing much better than before, but he also wanted to order an MRI. Two weeks later, my husband and I sat across the desk from Dr. Harris. He asked what MS meds I was taking, and I replied that I hadn't taken any in over three years. I told him about my decision to use nutrition and exercise to manage my symptoms, instead. Then, he pulled out the MRI from three years ago, putting it side by side with the most recent. He looked back and forth between the two, as if he was having a hard time deciphering something. He asked me again what medication I was taking. My answer

was still none. He immediately rose from his chair and went to get another doctor, along with a resident, to review the MRIs. Confused as to what was happening, my husband and I were holding our breath. Finally turning to me, Dr. Harris said, “I am seeing no new lesions, and the existing ones are shrinking.” We were overjoyed! What I was doing was working. He followed it up with, “Whatever you are doing, keep doing it! If you have anything come up, come see me.” When I left his office that day, I knew I had to keep taking care of myself. It was my only option. I was healthier than I had been in many years.

It wasn't long after that when I decided to slowly begin adding eliminated foods back into my diet, watching for any odd symptoms. The MS recovery book I spoke of earlier did have a good section on reintroduction. I tried adding back only one food per week. I first added soy sauce to rice. That was a big “no” for me. Within fifteen minutes of consuming, a patch of burning skin would appear, often lasting twenty-four hours. Next, I tried frying an egg. It resulted in intense brain fog. If I eat an item with egg as an ingredient, I don't seem to get as intense of a reaction, i.e., gluten-free pancakes. I tried eating a piece of bread and felt tired afterward. Gluten is the one food I wish I would have fully taken out of my diet from the beginning. I know you can't have just a little gluten because it stays in your system for a long time. Its biggest side effects were a skin rash and fatigue. It wasn't until years later that I connected gluten to the appearance of rheumatoid arthritis attacks. I can't remember what I did to reintroduce dairy, but it was probably ice cream. It caused me to get all stuffed-up. You could guarantee there would be snoring that night. This is another food I know should not be in my diet, but I save it for special dessert opportunities. This had happened to me before starting the elimination diet. Back then, I attributed it to being overtired or stressed. My body told me if I ate something it didn't like—I just had to listen! Occasionally, when I slip up and don't take care of myself, the MS gives me a reminder.

I am so grateful for my good health and how it has changed my life in so many ways. I continue to swim a few times a week, travel, and live an incredible life. I stick to a paleo diet and try to source the best quality food possible. I have spent the last 15 years researching nutrition and modalities to keep myself the healthiest I can be. I've found that massage and stretching is a good addition to my regime. About ten years ago, I had all my amalgam fillings removed. I went to my regular dentist and asked her to read an amalgam removal protocol, so she could remove them for me. Back then, holistic or biological dentistry wasn't a well-known thing (at least to me).

About three years ago, I started experiencing muscular pain with no known cause other than possibly MS, thyroid issues, or menopause. I was working with an integrative doctor at the time. I asked if she would prescribe me Low Dose Naltrexone (LDN) 4.5 mg. It's an off-label drug, typically used in treating alcoholism or drug addiction when taken in 50 mg doses. In the eighties, a doctor discovered that it helped his multiple sclerosis patients. I read *The LDN Book* by Linda Elsegood, along with *The Power of Honest Medicine* by Julia Schopick and Don Schwartz, and decided to give it a try. I joined an LDN support group on Facebook where I've met many other members with autoimmune diseases. The medication has made the muscular pain much more bearable until I'm able to complete more functional testing to find the root cause.

I've volunteered at the Multiple Sclerosis Society and spoken to others with MS. I decided it wasn't for me when I was told more than once, "You can't have MS. You look too good." I've offered to share my story and successes with others. Often, I get in return, "Oh, that would be so difficult. I could never do that." It pains me to hear people selling themselves short.

In 2021, I completed my certificate to become an Integrative Nutrition coach after a one-year online course. I received my Integrative Nutrition Health Coach certificate from The Institute for Integrative Nutrition. I may practice when I complete my other certificate. Time will tell. Last month, I started a one-year program to become a Functional Medicine Coach. This is very important to me as I believe in a functional medical view, which is to look for the root cause of a disease or disorder. Ultimately, with the two certificates, I will be able to help others, as well as friends and family.

For me, turning to nutrition and exercise was an absolute game changer in my life. Today, I am thriving as a wife, mother, and nana to five amazing grandchildren.

Back when I was diagnosed, I thought I was destined to be wheelchair bound. Instead, I am living my life actively and plan to keep on doing just that.

My book list is extensive!
These are since 2008:

I have read all of Terry Wahls books

Managing Multiple Sclerosis Naturally by Judy Graham

Thrive: The Vegan Nutrition Guide by Brendan Brazier

The Gold Coast Cure by Andrew Larson

Staying Healthy with Nutrition by Dr. Buck Levin

Eat to Live by Dr. Joel Fuhrman

MS - Living Symptom Free Daryl Bryant

Kitchen Cures by Peggy Kotsopoulos

The Immune System Recovery Plan by Susan Blum

The Body doesn't lie by Vicky Vlachonis

Healing Multiple Sclerosis: Diet, Detox and Nutritional Makeover for

Total Recovery by Ann Boroch

The Food Babe Way by Vani Hari

The New Health Rules by Frank Lipman

The Autoimmune Wellness handbook by Mickey Trescott

Eat Fat, Get thin by Mark Hyman

Paleo Principles by Sarah Ballantyne

Food Rules by Michael Pollan

Eat Dirt by Josh Axe

The Paleo Cure by Chris Kesser

The Paleo Approach by Sarah Ballantyne

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.