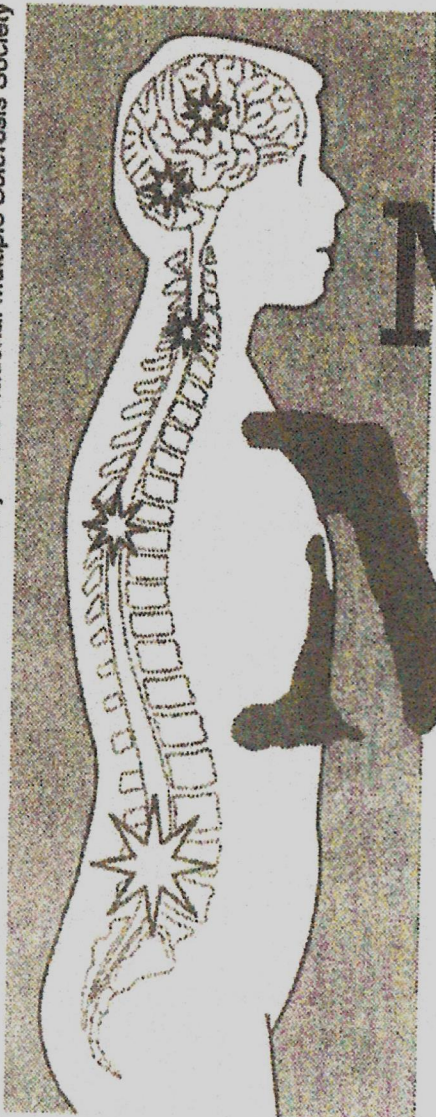


etc.★

Health/Science

Illustration courtesy of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society



■ BARBARA ANN ROSENBERG
Special to the Jewish Exponent

My Bout With MS

Writer
prevails over
on again-off
again disease

Yes, I have to say it. I'm lucky — even after almost 30 years of living with demyelination, more commonly known as multiple sclerosis.

Actually, I feel as though I have been lucky on several counts. When I first felt the onset of the many unpleasant sensations that led me to seek medical advice, my family doctor, William Lander, then chair of family medicine at Bryn Mawr Hospital, listened to the symptoms I described on the phone and said firmly, "Stay home; I'll be there shortly!"

Lucky? You bet! How many docs were (are?) that devoted to their profession? Not only was he devoted, but he was a superb diagnostician.

The following week, I was referred to neurologist Dr. Frank Elliott at Pennsylvania Hospital, who, after ordering some preliminary tests and a hideous diagnostic procedure known as a pneumoencephalogram — the best and only tool that was available at the time — concluded that I had MS, rather than an inoperable brain tumor.

Lucky. Well, fairly lucky. I was still terrified that I would be incapacitated, a burden to my family. And I was still weepy from time to time at that prospect.

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But my good husband assured me repeatedly that he would always be there for me. Now the only thing I had to worry about was being a burden — which was bad enough.

Then, miraculously, all the symptoms disappeared. No exhaustion, no weakness, no messed-up eyesight — meaning that I could look into the distance without seeing things through a veil, as a blur. Swell. All gone.

And I remained symptom-free for months, perhaps even a year.

This was the kind of phenomenon that, unless people were under the care of a sophisticated, savvy neurologist, they — mainly women — were often simply diagnosed as being neurotic, or just imagining things. That anomaly was compounded by the fact that it was often weeks or longer for people with MS symptoms to get an appointment to be evaluated, by which time the symptoms may have changed, receded or disappeared.

Then, much to my dismay, my exhaustion came roaring back, followed by the rest of the miseries, only to have the symptoms hang around for a while. And then to disappear again. By then, strange as it seems, I was feeling elated. Comparatively, that is.

It seemed I had the relapse-and-remit form of MS. Better, by far, I thought than the progressive type — which meant that my symptoms would just keep getting worse.

Lucky again. My wheelchair-bound/bedridden fears were put aside once more.

It seems that because I was older at the onset of the MS, there was less chance of exacerbation of the condition. It was one of the few advantages of getting older.

And so it has continued over the years. Diagnostic tools kept getting better with the improvements in electronic gadgets — first the CT scanner and later the magnetic resonance imager, each of which produced an infinitely finer picture and gave Dr. Elliott a chance to, as he expressed it, “peer inside that head of yours.”

So, it was finally confirmed without a doubt: I had MS.

So I continued with my life, rest-

became more and more...
tinue at my normal, go-go-go pace. I stayed home and I rested — a lot.

The write stuff

And between bouts, I traveled, I wrote — because that is what I do. I mostly write about food and travel, but sometimes, like now, about health matters.

We moved into Center City after 25 years in Radnor. Jefferson is a block-plus from our front door; Pennsylvania Hospital a few steps from the back. It just meant I had to get used to a new slew of medicos.

A dear friend, Dr. Herbert E. Cohen, an internist and cardiologist at Jeff, took over where Lander left off. He's also a great diagnostician and caring human being.

Again, I found myself lucky with his being in charge. And when the MS came roaring back, Cohen put me in the hands of an intensely human and knowledgeable expert on the subject of MS, Dr. Fred Lublin, first at Jeff and now at Allegheny/MCP.

But, after seeing me stagger a bit on one of the days when my balance was a bit shaky, Lublin prescribed a cane.

Now that was going too far, I thought. I still, after all these years, look forward to entering a lambada contest and, if my luck holds out, winning!

Well, since that isn't going to happen anytime soon, I guess I'll just have to settle for the next best thing and haunt the antique shops until I find a collectible cane with a flask in it.

That would make me immensely happy. And if I find one, I'll figure I'm back on my lucky streak. ■

For information about MS and its treatment, call the National Multiple Sclerosis Society at 215-271-1500.

Correction

In a photo accompanying last week's story about “Saving Private Memories,” the name of the officer serving as a rabbi at services in the former home of Joseph Goebbels was misspelled. His name is Emanuel Poliakoff.