

*Andrijana Nikolić*

MY MOM HAS MS

*And we are  
More than Strong*





Writer: Andrijana Nikolić  
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**Translation**

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**Publisher**

Multiple Sclerosis Association of Montenegro

**Graphic Desing**

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**Illustrations and Cover**

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**Printed**

200 pieces

**Printing**

Grafokarton Prijepolje

**Financed by**



Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd  
Representative Office Podgorica  
Svetlane Kane Radevic 3  
81000 Podgorica, Montenegro

Podgorica, 2016.

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији  
Национална библиотека Црне Горе, Цетиње

**Andrijana Nikolić** was born in Sibenik, Croatia. She is the president of NGO, a Multiple Sclerosis association of Montenegro, founded in 2007 in Podgorica. She is the editor of several anthologies on the subject of multiple sclerosis. Her mother also suffers from multiple sclerosis and Andrijana had different childhood from most of the kids. This picture book presents every kid's childhood whose mother suffers from this insidious disease. In addition, this picture book is a reminder to other families which have diseased member that multiple sclerosis is specific disease which advances in addiction to different parameters. However, every family must have parameters of love and support.



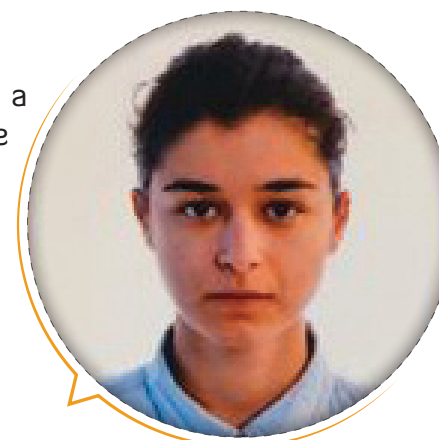
**Aleksa Stankovic** was born in Podgorica in 2002. In 2007, he enrolled Elementary school "Pavle Rovinski" and currently he is in the 9th grade. During his education, Aleksa spent one year in El Paso, Texas, USA where he finished 4th grade of elementary school "Helen Ball". After he finished 4th grade, Aleksa came back to Montenegro and continued to attend school "Pavle Rovinski". In 8th grade he took part in a project "ACES" within he presented his school and Montenegro across the region.

Like other kids of his age, Aleksa enjoys hanging around with his friends, playing soccer in local soccer club, playing video games, and skiing.



**Mara Jovanovic, 17**

Born in Podgorica, currently studies in UWC Adriatic in Italy. Has a passion for visual art, philosophy and engineering, enjoys fin de siècle paintings and calming music. She was 15 when she illustrated this picture book.



This picture book was printed in 2014. and again in 2016. in Montenegrin language. Thanks to our sponsors, this is the first edition in English language. The writer Andrijana Nikolic, the president of the Multiple Sclerosis Association of Montenegro, insisted that her first co-workers are kids, because this book is intended for children. Grown ups the best understand language of children.



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Podgorica  
2016.







I am Marko. I'm 10 years old and I'm a student of an Elementary school. I live with my mom, dad and my sister, in a third floor apartment.

-My dad Igor is 36 years old and he is a mechanical engineer. He works in a design office and is often away from home, because of his work in an office or on the field.

-Sara is my younger sister. She is 6 years old, and she is a first grade student in an Elementary school. Sara is still very young, so she needs help in everyday activities, including getting escorted to school, and back.

-My mom Anna is 33 years old. Until two years ago she worked in an office, and then she retired. She is suffering from Multiple Sclerosis – **MS** and she is too exhausted to do everyday chores.





**M**y carefree childhood was ended by my Mother's Illness. I was only 6 years old and I didn't know what was happening. My dad explained me that mom was in hospital so grandma will take me to school. However, I had to get back home by myself because granny had to take care of Sara who was only two at the time.





I soon realized that I'll be doing many things alone. I learned how to make a sandwich, before I go to school. I also learned how to fry an egg, when I come home from school. I'd wash my plate, and my cutlery, and then I would them back neatly. I'd write my homework by myself and patiently wait for my granny, who would carry my lunch in one hand, and carefully leading my sister Sara in the other. I would help my granny prepare lunch for my dad, and I would also look after my naughty sister Sara. We were spending evenings together. While my dad was driving granny home, I was putting Sara to bed. Every morning my granny would bring Sara home with her, after the three of us would take a walk to my school.



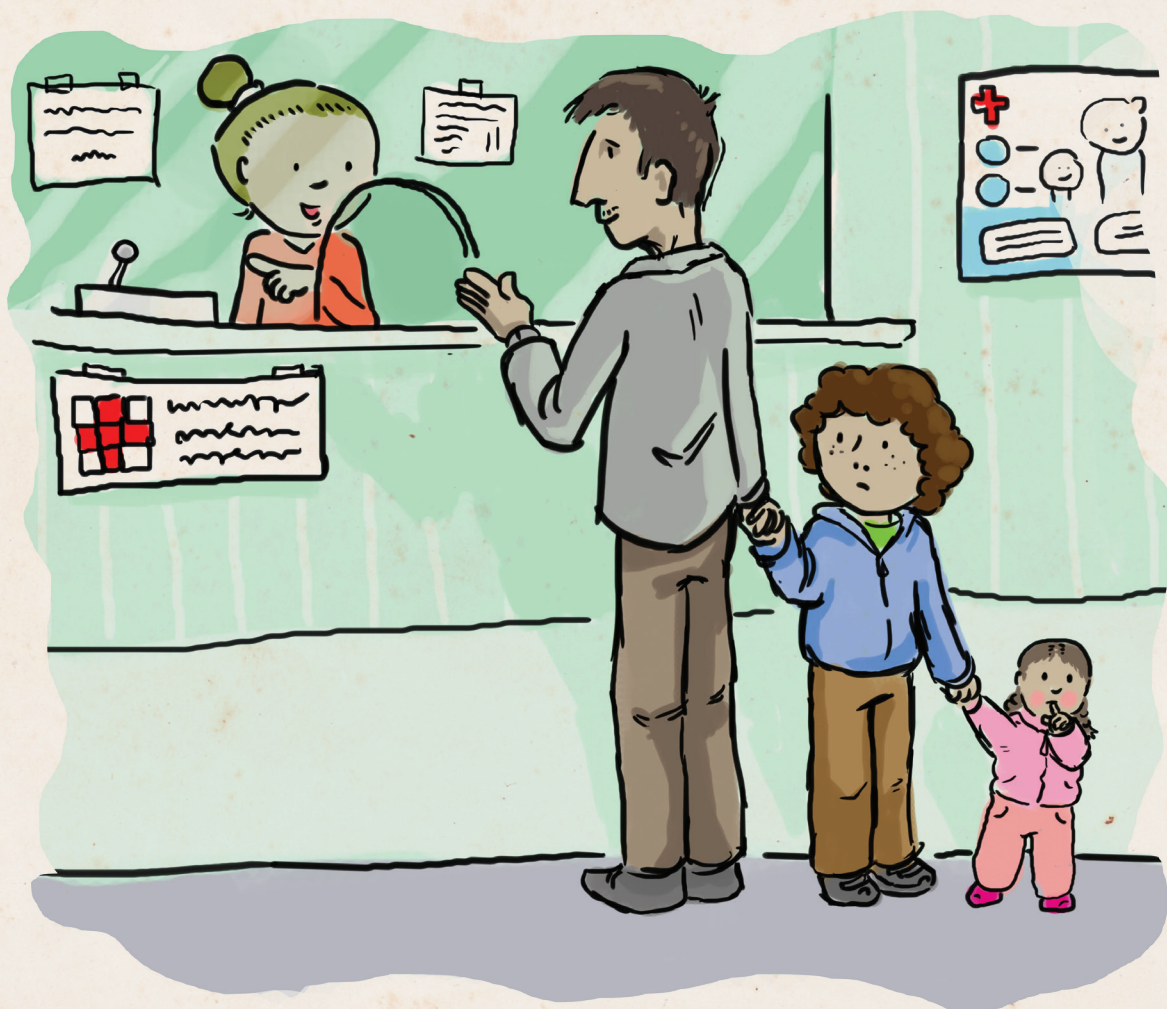


I've learned to watch out for cars, walk on the sidewalk, or right next to the road, to cross the street only on the crosswalks, and to obey the traffic lights. I taught a stray dog to follow me home from school. The stray dog got used to eating a bit of my school snack, and as a sign of friendship, he would wait for me every morning. All of these things I've learned very fast, but I just couldn't get used to the emptiness of my apartment, and that was tearing me apart. I missed my mom. My mom...



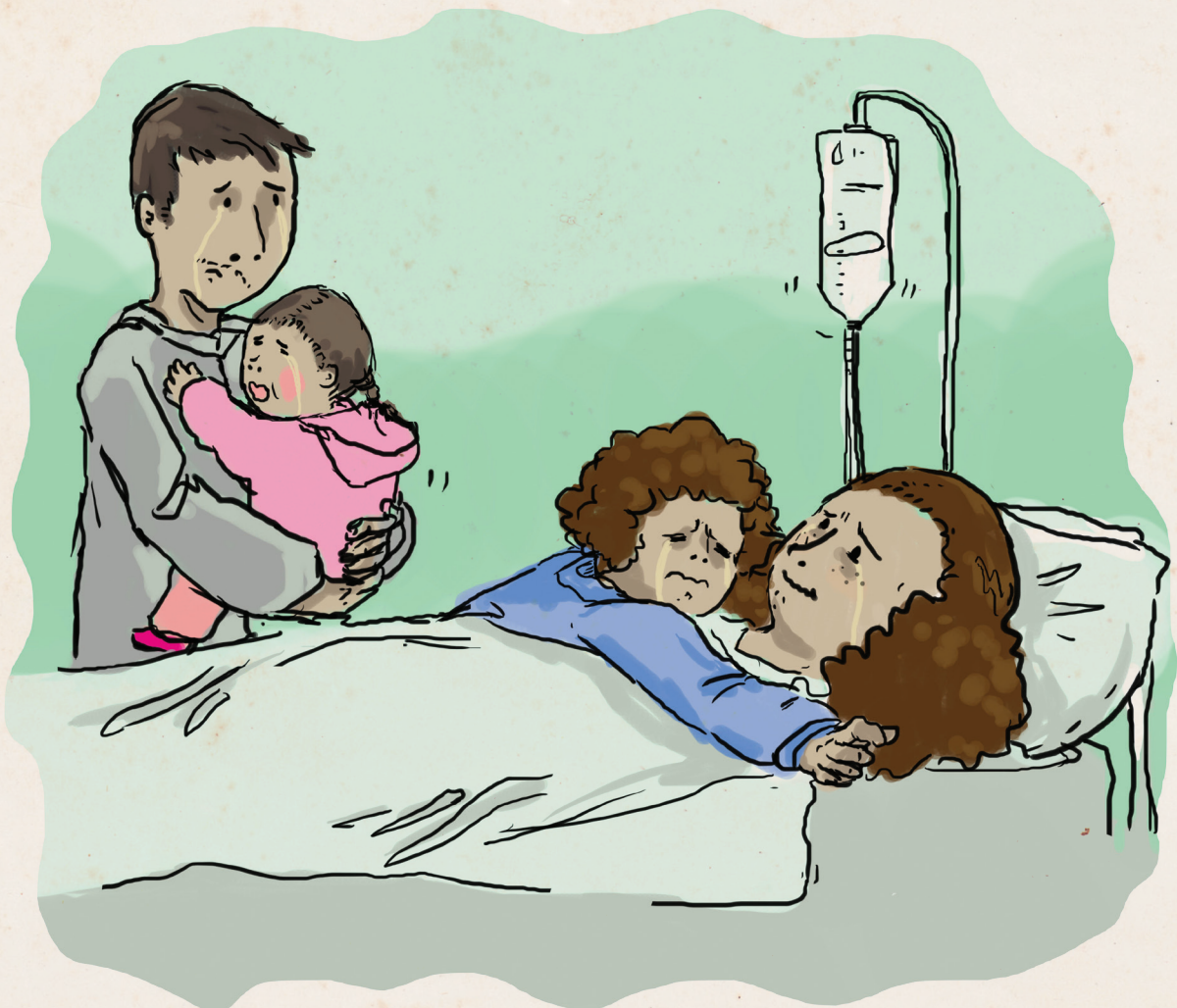


One Sunday my dad took my and Sara to visit my mom. Although the hospital seemed very scary and grey, my desire to see mom overcame fear of unknown. I couldn't wait for the moment to finally see her.



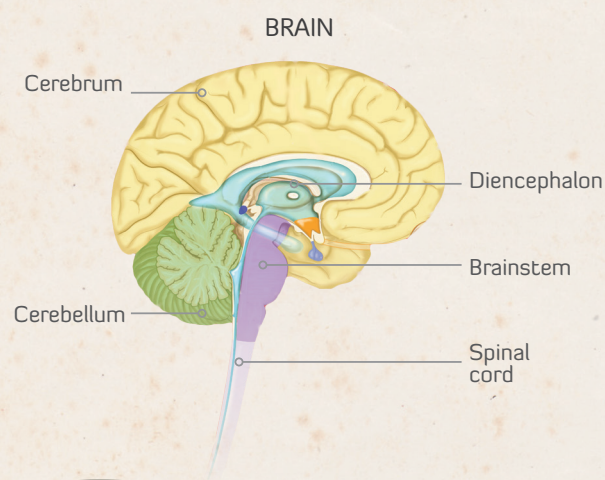
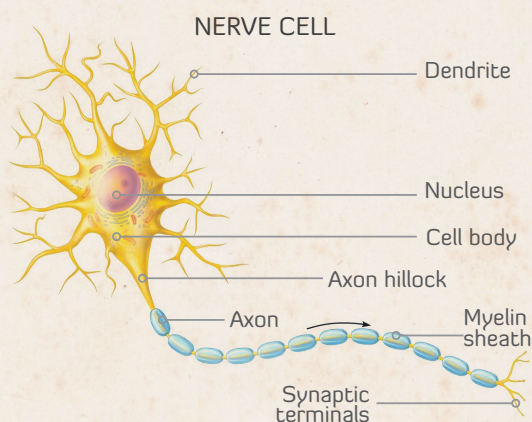


**M**y mom was lying in bed, pale. From one hand you could see the small tubes through which the infusion fluids were dripping. I hugged her, and although there was this hospital smell, the only thing I could smell was my mom, which I missed very much. First Sara started crying, and then I started crying as well, the next thing I knew, we were all crying: Sara, cause she was scared and didn't understand what's happening; Me, cause I missed my mom so much; Dad, cause he was worried about everything, but my mom cried the most. It was the hardest for her .





Suddenly, a doctor came in the room and asked us to be brave so we could help mom to get better. He explained that mom's medical condition depended on our love and care. Then he drew two drawings to inform us more about my mother's illness. The doctor explained that Multiple Sclerosis attacks long nerve's extensions, called axons. The axons connect different parts of nervous system and transmit the information between brain and targeted organs (eyes, legs, arms)...



**Multiple sclerosis (sclerosis multiplex)** is an illness characterized by degeneration of myelin sheaths which wrap central nervous system cells. Nerve cells conduct stimulations from receptors to central nervous system (CNS) and from CNS to appropriate cells and organs. **Nerve cells** also have a role to transmit and stock information in nervous system.

From a layperson point of view, axons in nervous system can be compared to electrical wires which transfer electrical power from socket to electric device. The axons, as well as electrical wires, need a coating. Without this insulation, electricity leaks from the wires and electrical devices cannot be supplied with sufficient amount of energy. When myelin sheaths (coating) are damaged, impulse communication is distorted and intermittent. Messages in brain arrive with delay; they are incorrect or missing.

Scars which are formed in places where myelin is missing are called **SCLEROSIS** or **lesion**.

"Incorrect messages" coming from brain result in disturbed field of view (duplicate images), decreased visual acuity, difficulty speaking, difficulty walking, impaired physical abilities, inability to concentrate and memorize, cause pain without specific reason, lack of strength in one or both hands or legs, balance disorder and dizziness, subjective stimulation nuisance, spasm, trembling of limbs or some parts of the body, difficult urination and swallowing...



**A**t the end of his presentation the doctor wrote:

*Love + Care* are stronger than MS

*Love + Support* helps mom fight MS

This message will stay deep in my memory. I will never forget it. This is the message of hope for our **Mom** and a message of **Strength** for us.

This is the message which we use to fight **MS**.





Finally, mom came back home. Dad was holding her because she couldn't walk. He said that mom can't see very well; that she is seeing double. Dad also said that she gets tired very easily so she needs to rest. I was happy and sad at the same time. I was happy because mom came home and indescribably sad because I wasn't used seeing her that helpless. I started crying again in her room, because I saw crutches. I wanted to ask her many things, but she was very tired. She asked me if I wanted to lie next to her, so I snuggled under the blanket, hugged her, and fell asleep.





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slept through the whole night in my mom's arms. When I woke up, I saw my mom hugging me. She told me that she will recover, and that I will help her a lot. She expected my support. And then I remembered the doctor and his message. I knew exactly what she expected from me.

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After a while I've become so independent that I was going to school by myself, because my granny was coming to take care of mom and Sara in the mornings. After school I was going home accompanied by my faithful friend, that I named Rex. The apartment wasn't empty anymore and the silence disappeared with mom's arrival. Very soon I was able to help her get up, pass her the crutches, and to walk her to the Living room. I'd sit her on the sofa, cover her with a blanket, and set up her pillow. I would cut up fruits for her, cause she had problems swallowing, bring her juice, and after that she would gently hug me. Those were our moments. Sara didn't know much but she liked mom being home. She became a lot calmer since mom came back from the hospital. She'd often put on mom's slippers, like she was expressing her joy and her care at the same time.





From day to day, we were showing our love and care for our mom. Dad would often bring her flowers, and Sara would cheerfully clap with her small arms. Granny still helped around the house, and mom's condition was slowly stabilizing. From unstable walking, she started walking slowly, but safely, holding the railings set up around the house. She would often sit on the sunny side of the balcony, holding Sara in her arms. She wasn't dropping glasses anymore and now she would pick the appropriate spoon and fork. Even her voice got better, so one day she joyfully shouted: "Rex" from the balcony, who has already marked his territory in the yard beneath our building. Every day I started believing more and more in the doctor's message and I realized its importance for our mom's recovery.





Once mom told me that many people who suffer from MS look like they are not sick, but there are some who are in a really bad condition. She added that MS is a process and because of that it can be noticed more or less, and sometimes you can't recognize it at all. That's why mom takes checkups regularly and takes vitamins, because now she doesn't have therapy prescribed. Every day at the same time mom does exercises, intended for those who suffer from MS. In that half an hour Sara and I lay and attempt to do the same exercises, to show our support for her. In our family there are no smokers, and following our doctor's advice we make sure that all our rooms are filled with oxygen, and we kindly ask the guests to not smoke in our apartment.





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It has been four years since my mom got diagnosed with MS. With smaller and bigger difficulties, mom has successfully recovered. Because she has retired, she now has time to dedicate to herself and to us, and of course her disease. Although mom considers MS as a subtenant in her body and she will never let it take control over her body and mind. Mom says that we, her loving family, and our love and support are responsible for successfully defeating the first attack of MS. Although rough and unpredictable, MS has brought us new experiences and lessons. With MS we learned just how strong we can be. With MS we also measured other people's personalities, who either supported us or ignored us. MS has brought us Rex and after his vaccination he now shares the same apartment that we live in. MS has showed us that love is the cure for her MS residues and that's why we showed her our love. We can't change the world, but we can change other people's mindsets, We can do everything if we love.

*To my mom, with love.....*

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