

By her mid-30s, Kate Milliken was living the epitome of a New York-minute lifestyle, prioritizing a mix of working out, dating, even managing her own video production company. Life was so busy she skipped savasana at the end of each yoga class to bank a few minutes.

In 2006, odd physical symptoms forced a pause. It started with tingling in the hands and feet, leading to a strange sensation that felt like her “body was out of whack,” and she couldn’t make her left leg do what she wanted it to do without a delay.

Milliken resigned herself to a doctor’s appointment, and one MRI later she was diagnosed with relapsing MS.

She found it challenging not to get lost in googling about multiple sclerosis, fearing what the future would bring. Her life up until this point was controlled and meticulously managed in minutes and appointments, a successful setup of over achievements and raising of bars. Now, like the way MS can interfere with receptors in the brain that control the movement of the body’s extremities, she was forced to give in to something larger than herself.

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society defines MS as a chronic, often disabling disease that attacks the central nervous system, made up of the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. Symptoms may be mild, such as numbness in the limbs, or severe, such as paralysis or loss of vision. The progress, severity, and specific symptoms are unpredictable and vary by person.

Milliken said she did what she could to get in front of it, and started to make sense of all of the information she could gather. She knew the onslaught of a chronic illness wouldn’t just affect her; there was her thriving business, her family and friends. She wanted to figure out how to communicate her experiences and ease her loved ones’ worries and fears.

She decided to blog her journey on [Kate's Counterpane](#), based on a favorite children’s book, *The Counterpane Fairy*, where she shared her emotions, tribulations and hope throughout her first year with MS. Like any good producer, she brought video cameras during one of her first doctor’s visits where she learned that a lesion, or plaque build up, was on her C4 vertebrae in her cervical spine. She interviewed family and friends and journaled via video, photos and text. She said capturing the experience helped her to stay present and to experience the pain and fear head on.

Milliken adopted a mix of Eastern and Western medicine, committed to blogging and a daily mantra, “Reverse it.” She was adamant that her diagnosis was not a death sentence but rather an opportunity for hope. At the end of that first year, the lesion was nearly gone.

Knowing the battle was far from over, and having learned so much in those 12 months, Milliken wanted to share in her progress with as many people as she could. Kate's Counterpane quickly birthed [MyCounterpane](#), an online community for people with MS, their loved ones, chronic illness advocates and caregivers. The site walks users through an easy process to share posts, either private or public, that describe one’s emotions with a tool called the Moodifier. The tool

graphs a timeline of one's moods allowing them to see trends with the disease's ups and downs, as well as other life events.

Milliken said that the Moodifier empowers an individual to save their own life at a time when they feel the least in control. Further saying that it is a call to action for those who feel alone in their struggles, "if you have the courage to put [your personal story] out there in a modern day format... It's amazing what you get."

She finished that first year with the realization that her courage, vulnerability and slower pace—even learning to appreciate the meditative benefits of savasana—gave her opportunities to help others. She welcomes any chance to make a connection with anyone sharing her diagnosis, telling them, "You're not going to die tomorrow. Take a deep breath." She breathes with them, slowly inhaling and exhaling with intention, knowing all they can do is take one breath at a time.

Kate Milliken lives in Scottsdale, Ariz., with her husband and two children. She owns and operates the company, Milligrace Productions, producing testimonial films that share personal and inspiring stories. She hopes MyCounterpane will continue to expand and lead to a research study to further uncover how tools, like the Moodifier, provide physical and mental health benefits.