

Understanding through images



Illustrating life with MS

by Jessie Ace



Jessie Ace draws illustrations to convey what it's like to live with MS. Some of them, like this one and the others below, have been

published on [MSConnection.org](https://www.msconnection.org).

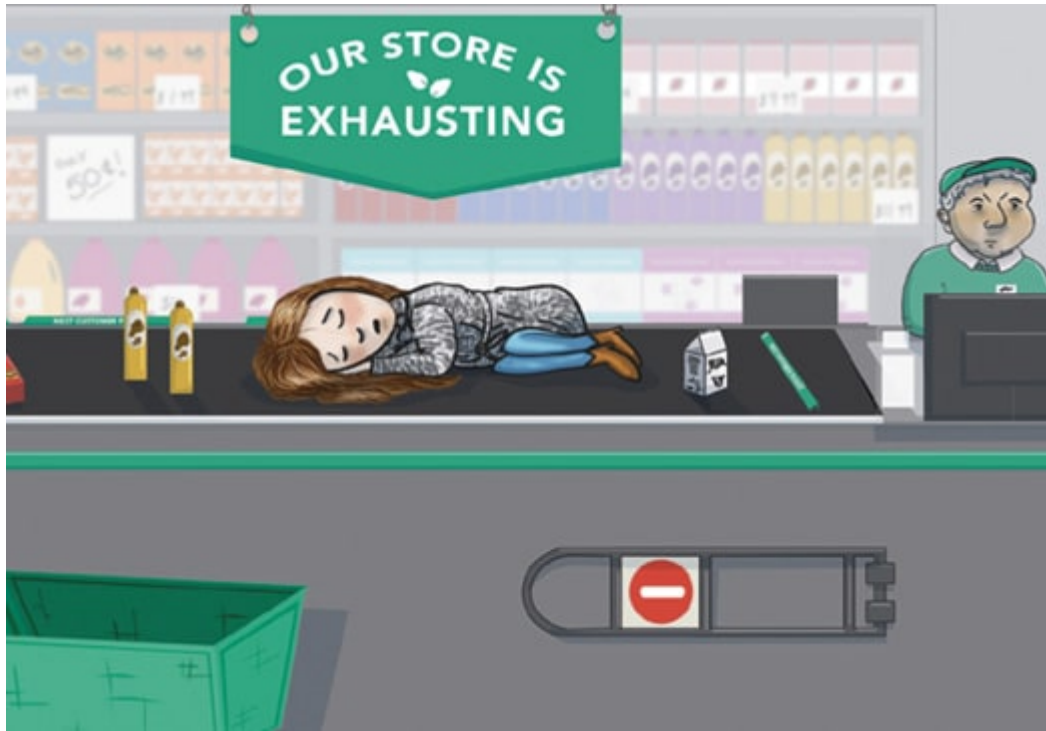
The last day of university was a blur for 22-year-old me. I'd been spending every minute finishing my degree and setting up a business as an illustrator. Unfortunately, the final day of university didn't exactly go as planned.

I spent that day trying to convince myself that I'd slept funny and that's why I'd lost feeling in the left half of my body. After a week, it was still there so I decided to see a doctor, who thought I'd had a stroke and immediately sent me to the emergency department. After three days of constant tests in 2013, I found out that I had multiple sclerosis. I freaked out, associating it with wheelchairs and worried I wouldn't be able to walk down the aisle at my wedding. I was forced to leave my job as a graphic designer in fashion due to the long hours and commute. I couldn't stay awake through the work day and the "cog fog" made it impossible to fulfill tasks.

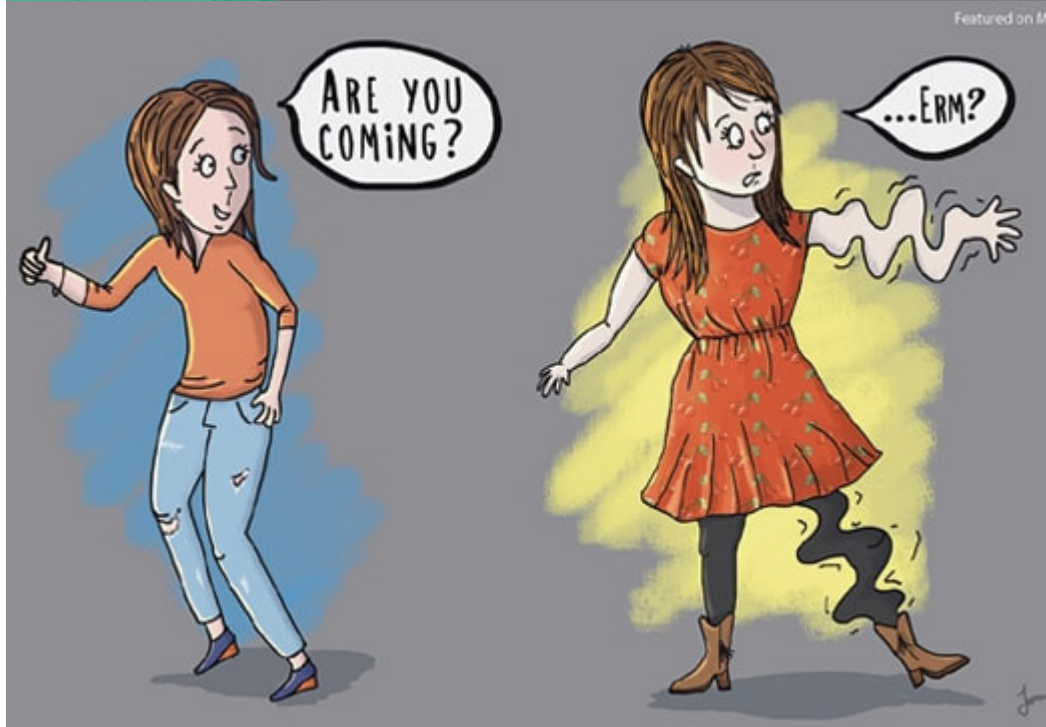
I started working on designing wedding invitations and set up a group on Facebook of more than 3,700 brides to provide them with wedding advice and doing confidence coaching through Facebook Live videos. I also sold bridesmaids dresses that helped take the stress away from the bride. I spoke to a lot of brides with disabilities who were worried about how to disguise their oxygen tank on their big day or decorate their wheelchair, providing confidence from all angles.

Around the start of 2018, I had accepted my diagnosis more because I'd gotten so used to discussing it on Facebook Live with the brides—especially the brides-to-be with disabilities. We chatted and compared our symptoms and it made me feel so much more at ease. I decided I wanted to help other young people who had been diagnosed. I became a blogger for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in May 2018, and I was encouraged to include an illustration with each blog. It was the first time I had illustrated since I lost most of the use of my hand to MS six years before, and I was understandably anxious. It was like my hand had turned into a claw, not quite a fist, but close. I couldn't straighten my fingers because I had no strength in my hand whatsoever. It was frightening.

The support of the blog readers and the staff at the Society were so encouraging. And now that the use of my hand is back, I want to pursue illustration full time and help to convey MS in images so that more people can understand the illness. It still frightens me a little that it could go again at any time, but while it's here, I'm going to appreciate it and enjoy it! I'm 28 now and I believe that what you're given or have experienced doesn't define you. It's how you react to your situation and what you do with it that defines you as a person. I want to turn MS into something good that can help other people feel accepted and understood.



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Jessie Ace lives in Swadlincote, Derbyshire, in the middle of England, with her husband and fur baby shadow, Lucy.

Read Jessie's blog posts on [MS Connection](#).