

Living Waters

Spotlight on Akoras who are changing the World around them...



Akora Nana Yaa Agyeman: Standing Tall for a Worthy Cause

One evening, just before she was due to start a new job with Atlantis Radio, Nani came home from swimming and began throwing up. She did not stop throwing up for a whole month. The doctor she was taken to didn't know what was going on with her and she had to go to several others before ending up at Korle-Bu hospital. By this time, one side of her body felt numb and she had a tight feeling around her chest, which she later learned is called 'banding.' That nightmare which began in April 1996 was only the beginning of a twelve-year journey that has led her into what she is doing with her life and her resources today.



Akora Nana Yaa Agyeman
Class of 1977, Kingsley House

At Korle-Bu, I was given a myelogram – a diagnostic test in which dye is injected into the spine; the next day I couldn't get out of bed.

For the next two years, I was on steroid therapy, doing well sometimes and very badly

at other times. At one stage, I needed to be placed on a ventilator because the paralysis had reached my lungs.

The diagnosis at this stage was "acute demyelination of the spinal cord" but Multiple Sclerosis (MS) was ruled out because I had one longitudinal lesion in my spinal cord, as opposed to several in the spine and brain, which characterizes MS. I was also treated for Bilharzia, but the doctors ruled out any connection between that and the neurological condition after doing a biopsy of the lesion.

After several months on steroids and other drugs, I made a recovery of sorts and started working first at a hotel front desk and then with my husband's newspaper, The Accra Daily Mail.

Fast forward to 2001. A shadow started creeping across my eyes and the ophthalmologist prescribed more steroids for it. By this time, I had had enough of the side effects of steroids, so after disobeying him, he told me off and prescribed a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID).

It was now April of '03 and I had been faithfully taking this NSAID when one day, while editing at the computer, I had a seizure... I was told later how I was rushed in the office manager's car to the hospital, because my husband fell into such a panic that he was unable to drive; how two policemen appeared, seemingly out of nowhere in an armored vehicle at

the Gold House Junction, stopped all traffic and took me through to the emergency room. I don't know who they were and we have never had a chance to thank them for this.

In October 2003 my cousin got me transferred to his hospital in Tema because I was still totally dependent and the public hospital did not have the staff to give me the 24/7 care that I required. He took care of me for the next three months and hired a physiotherapist to teach me to slowly regain my independence.

Meanwhile the neurologist, newly returned to Ghana from specializing abroad, came to see me and said he thought I had Multiple Sclerosis. He prescribed a new treatment that included steroids, which I was comfortable with. I slowly regained my strength and I am now able to walk independently indoors and with a walking aid (what I call my BMW) when I go out. The diagnosis was later confirmed as neuromyelitis optica (NMO) or Devic's Disease, a variant of Multiple Sclerosis.

Right now, I'm coordinating a support group and association of people with autoimmune conditions (**Sharecare Ghana**), which I founded in 2006 and registered as a non-profit organization in November last year. **Sharecare** aims among other things, to create awareness about autoimmune diseases and advocate research into them with the ultimate aim of finding a cure.

My husband – I am married to Alhaji A.R. Harruna Attah, managing editor of the Accra Daily Mail – and two daughters, Ayesha and Rahma, have been my source of strength through all these years.

After Achimota School, I did my 6th Form at OLA Secondary School in Ho, which I 'bombed' (flunked), did the 'second world

war' (remedial classes) at the Accra Workers' College and went on to undertake a diploma course at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. I then worked with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, then with Anokyema Ventures and later with The Statesman.



I never thought I would ever be in a leadership position, but I realize now that Achimota School made me the confident person I am today. My ability to talk about what I have gone through and encourage others to do the same took a lot of courage. School activities like sports, clubs, and even morning trotting prepared us for team work – I say this in hindsight, because we hated most of these activities we were forced to undertake, and I was totally "apathe."

One thing many Ghanaians lament today is the fallen standard of education in our country. My work with newspapers brought this fact into sharp focus when I had to edit scripts from young people who couldn't differentiate between **border** and **bother**. I found that those who had come from Achimota School, even if they went to so-called mushroom journalism schools, were still

equipped with the basics of English and were generally more inquisitive, a trait that is essential to a career in journalism. The difference was clear even in this small group. It is essential that we continue to support our alma Mata, so that she can once more attain her first class status.

