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By [CAROLINE HOWE FOR DAILYMAL.COM](#)

EXCLUSIVE: 'I felt like there was an army of Pac Men inside me, chewing away.' Ann Romney reveals she wanted to die when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in touching new memoir

- **Ann Romney, 66, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1998 after experiencing numbness up in her torso and complete exhaustion**
- **'My life as I had been living it was over,' the wife of Mitt Romney reveals**
- **When they asked her doctor about sex, he said one couple found great satisfaction simply by hooking their pinkies**
- **'Mitt looked at him as if he were crazy,' she writes**
- **Ann was sixteen when she met Mitt in 1965 and they fell in love**
- **He'd take her home, she'd kiss her parents goodnight and then crawled out of her first floor bedroom window to meet her sweetheart**
- **Ann was also diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in situ, an early stage breast cancer, in 2008**

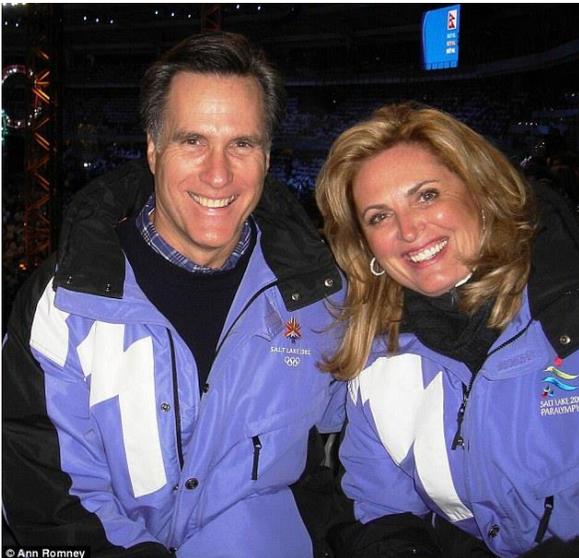
Life seemed pretty good to Ann Romney in the early 1990s – ‘married to a wonderful and successful man; five smart, active, healthy boys; and living comfortably in Boston’ – but towards the end of the decade, the former First Lady of Massachusetts and wife of politician Mitt Romney, wanted to die.

She suddenly had no feeling on the inside of one leg and the numbness extended up into her torso.

She'd lose her balance or trip going up the staircase.

But the complete exhaustion and fatigue was the most crippling symptom.

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All smiles: Mitt and Ann Romney get cozy for the camera at the 2006 Winter Olympics



Ann and Mitt have a Christmas morning wake up call from four of their 22 grandchildren in 2013
Extensive testing revealed she had multiple sclerosis, MS – a very serious progressive disease that can become fatal.

A disease, the cause unknown, allows the immune system to attack the protective sheath covering the nerve fibers resulting in attacks of worsening neurological function.

The brain can no longer tell the muscles what to do.

'My life as I had been living it was over. I was devastated, totally devastated.

'Looking into the future, 'the only thing I saw was more pain and heartache.

'My mind went to a lonely, dark, very scary place.

'I began wishing that I had a terminal disease that would end my life quickly, because I didn't want to be taken inch by inch.

'I wanted it to be over', Ann Romney, now 66, writes in her touching new memoir, *In This Together: My Story*, published by Thomas Dunne Books.



The entire Romney family poses for their annual Christmas card photo at Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire
Having spent her life worrying about her family, raising their five sons, she now had to focus on herself.
It all subtly began in 1997 with the loss of sensation in parts of her leg and then the fatigue set in
overwhelming, unending exhaustion.

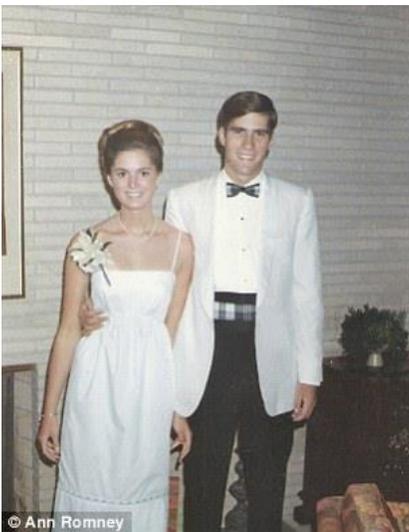
She suddenly didn't want to get out of bed in the morning and didn't know how to get dressed or drive
after a very active lifestyle being a jogger, skier, tennis player who never got tired.

Her life had suddenly taken a 180 with frightening symptoms of loss of balance, weakness, numbness in
one leg and complete exhaustion.

The neurologist confirmed the worst – ‘You have multiple sclerosis’, he told her, showing her the results of her MRI.

She scarcely heard anything he was saying.

When the doctor left the room, Ann and Mitt both cried.



Love of a lifetime: Ann attends Mitt's senior prom (left) in June 1965, where first proposed to her. Mitt sports a similar look while taking Ann to her junior prom (right)

They both realized their life together would never be the same.

‘As long as this isn’t terminal we can deal with it’, Mitt told her through tears. ‘We’re going to deal with it together.’

But Ann was terrified. ‘I’m not even fifty years old, not even fifty years old, and I am never going to have another normal day’.

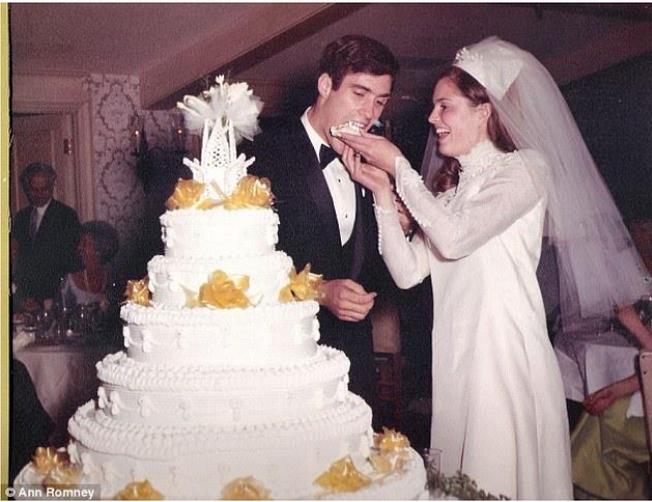
Her mind was racing – what was going to happen to her? How much time did she have before the predicted full effects of the dreaded disease?

But she snapped back realizing she had to fight this. What was the treatment, she asked the neurologist?

The doctor’s pronouncement - ‘There is no treatment’.

The treatment using steroids began when the symptoms get worse.

‘If this is considered not too bad, that means my life is going to get a whole lot more difficult. And I’m supposed to just go home and wait until my symptoms get worse’?



Wedded bliss: Ann feeds Mitt on their wedding day in her hometown of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. The two married on March 21, 1969



A mother's love: Ann Romney looks over her three youngest sons Josh, Ben and newborn Craig in 1981



Making a splash: Mitt and Ann jump into the waters of the Grand Canyon in July 2014 with some of their grandchildren during a family trip

Mitt asked the doctor about intimacy. How would that work if there's a loss of control and feeling?

The doctor's response was that couples find their own method of gratification and one couple he knew 'found great satisfaction simply by hooking their pinkies'.

'Mitt looked at him as if he were crazy'.

Ann recognized she was facing a monster and 'I had not the slightest idea where to begin'.



in this together
ANN ROMNEY
MY STORY
© Thomas Dunne Books

She imagined the disease to be 'like an army of Pac Men inside me, chewing away with the inevitable outcome of me sitting in a wheelchair incapacitated, dying young'.

Mitt looked as frightened as Ann was, despite assuring her that they'd be okay. 'If you have to be in a wheelchair, I'll be right there to push it'.

'But I'll be the one in the wheelchair!' she thought.

Nutritional supplements, elixirs and suggested miracle cures had no effect.

While scientists have searched for a vaccine to prevent MS, steroids and some chemotherapy drugs have had a temporary positive effect – but there was no way to know what would work for each patient. It was a temporary crap shoot.

The Romneys searched out leaders in the research and treatment of the disease and found Dr. Howard Weiner at the MS Center at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston who told them treatment was an inexact science but waiting was not an option. Basically what the neurologist had told her was 'crazy'. 'I can't tell you we can cure it, but we can treat it. We're going to attack it and we're going to start right now.'

'Nothing will come of nothing', he said quoting King Lear.

So he blasted her body with cortisone, a steroid typically used to fight MS and the numbness began to recede but the side effects were devastating.

Ann fell asleep at night hoping she'd wake up and find this had all been a bad dream. But the bad dream didn't end until a call from a friend of a friend came, further along in the disease, with the suggestion of alternative therapies.

One of the treatments, was craniosacral therapy, a gentle manipulation that balances the fluids in the brain.



Courageous battle: Ann credits a powerful horse named Bentley for helping her make significant progress with the effects of MS



Mitt and Ann stop for a photo after apple picking with their boys in Massachusetts in 1985 (left). Mitt shows his softer side with this loving message sent to his sweetie during his missionary in France

Another treatment was reflexology, the application of pressure to the hands and feet.

Her mind was suddenly open to the suggestion of holistic treatments when told they would positively make her feel better. This woman stressed that Ann wasn't alone. Others have faced the overwhelming challenges of the insidious disease and overcome them.

'She was the welcome wagon to the rest of my life'.

All of Ann's life she had been a caregiver and advised by her father on his death bed to not be afraid of anything.

She felt like a burden, a person who could not get out of bed, but Mitt told her, 'Your worth is not what you do; it's who you are'.

To fight this, she needed help from her husband, family and friends. Reluctantly she was now facing a new, unexpected life – and she knew she had to pursue it vigorously.

'There was no room for any more fear in my life'.

Ann wanted to take up horseback riding again, a passion she had growing up. She found a stable, a trainer and a horse when she and Mitt settled in Salt Lake City and she began learning dressage, a competitive equestrian sport.

She pursued craniosacral therapy where a practitioner gently touches the skull, face, spine and pelvis to balance the spinal fluid.

She sought out a reflexologist, Fritz Blietschau, who applied intense pressure on her feet with his thumbs to stimulate the nerves and increase blood flow to the area that was the source of her pain.

'His thumbs were as strong as iron, and pain instantly rocketed through my body. It felt like a vise squeezing my foot'.



The Romney's bundle up for a trip to the beach in 1972 with oldest sons Tagg and Matt



'Perils of big brother babysitters': Ann and Mitt's youngest son Craig is covered in Fluff



Story time: Ann Romney lays back with her grandkids Nick, Mia, Grace and Parker to read them a book

And it felt better. He discovered that her adrenal glands weren't working, her liver not functioning correctly and her kidneys were weak. Without being told, he diagnosed her as having MS.

Treatments increased to two hours three times a week. The pain began subsiding and she felt stronger. She weaned herself off the steroids and continued with Fritz, who she called 'my oompa, my German grandfather'.

He added yoga and breathing exercises to her treatment.

Mitt even went to see Fritz for a terrible sciatica attack that had him doubled over in pain. He walked out standing tall.

Heartbroken, Ann lost her oompa when Fritz suffered a heart attack and died.

FACTS ABOUT MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

There are 200,000 to 3 million cases each year in the US

It cannot be cured, but treatment can help speed recovery from an attack

MS is when the immune system attacks the protective sheath that covers a person's nerves

It is a chronic illness that can last for years or even a lifetime

Some people with severe MS may lose the ability to walk

She found a Chinese acupuncturist in Park City, Utah before moving back to Boston and finding another reflexologist.

But she always remembered what Fritz had told her:

'Negative thinking is a pattern you can fall into, especially when something dramatic happens. If you're focusing on something bad that happened, your thinking can spiral out of control'.

He gave her the strength to face her recovery.

Ann was sixteen when she met Mitt in 1965 and within months, was deeply in love.

They'd go out at night and he'd dutifully get her back home at a reasonable hour. She kissed her parents goodnight and then crawled out of her first floor bedroom window to meet her sweetheart waiting around the block.

They'd spend several more hours in each other's arms before she crawled back through the window into her bedroom.

Madly in love they professed eternal love, agreed to marry before being separated for two and a half years while Mitt served a mission of aid in France for the Mormon church.

He returned home in December 1968 and it seemed like not a day had passed in their love affair. They were still profoundly in love and quickly married.



© Ann Romney
A young Ann (far right) with her brother Rod, her mother and father in Royal Oak, Michigan



© Ann Romney
A family portrait: Ann (second from left) is all smiles with her parents and brothers, Rod and Jim, during her senior year of high school

Several years later, her mother burst into tears and made a startling confession to her daughter. When her older brother was only a few months old, Lois Romney told her that she and Ann's father had decided to abort the pregnancy.

'We made arrangements to have it done abroad because it was illegal here. I had my tickets, my luggage was packed, and I was ready to go.

'But I got so sick that I couldn't go, and after that I knew I couldn't do it. And...and I can't believe what joy you've brought into our lives. When I think how close I came...'

Ann writes that her own Mormon faith that has played a central role in the couple's lives, and has gotten her through successive tragedies.

MS has made her part of a community of people who had to face a life that was suddenly changed forever.

She has become a caretaker for friends with terminal illnesses.

Ann confesses that when Mitt lost the 2008 presidential primary campaign to John McCain in 2008, it was his most difficult political loss.

When Mitt lost, Ann cried. 'I knew what had been possible for this country, so I knew what was lost'.

Results of a mammogram in 2008 revealed that Ann had ductal carcinoma in situ, something between pre-cancer and early-stage cancer that can quickly become fatal.

She was at stage 0, the best possible stage, and opted for a lumpectomy. She balked at having the radiation which could have a disastrous impact on her immune system – but she went ahead with it.

The resultant fatigue lasted for six months.

'There is so much we don't know about protecting our health that it makes great sense to open yourself to nontraditional options.

'There was a time I easily dismissed holistic medicine and the alternative therapies that, since I was first diagnosed, have become part of my recovery and part of my life.

'Nobody really knows what therapy will work for an individual or ...why it works.

'For me, reflexology, yoga, acupuncture, meditation, horses and faith, as well as a healthy diet consisting of organic foods and little meat – with a healthy dose of vitamin D from sunlight – have made all the difference.'



Ann and Mitt attend opening night of the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases in Boston in October last year

Wanting to do something that would make a real difference in people's lives, Ann started the Ann Romney Center for Neurologic Diseases at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

Here neurologic patients can get diagnoses, advice and treatment. If there is no treatment, they can participate in ongoing research, studies and experiments.

Board members include Marc Mezvinsky, Chelsea Clinton's husband who has a close relative with MS; Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy III; Meredith Viera, whose husband, journalist Richard Cohen was diagnosed with MS; Mitt; Spencer Zwick and Montel Williams. Ann writes she has now arrived at a place where others can lean on her.

In this Together: My Story by Ann Romney, published by Thomas Dunne is available on [Amazon](#).