

U.S. Pain Foundation Ambassador of The Month: Calvin Eaton

Pain Warrior since 2009

As an author, food blogger and Chef, Tennessee Pain Ambassador Calvin has shifted his goals over the course of a few short years to accommodate his chronic pain. For this Texas native who grew up in upstate New York, pain was just a word heard in passing, during a conversation or in the news. It wasn't until nearly five years ago when Calvin was faced with the reality that he would embark on his own pain journey.

Home of the Blue Devils, Calvin attended Brockport High School where the district prided itself on the successes of its students through a team effort on the part of not just staff, but parents, teachers, counselors, community members and the administration. From there, he enrolled at Rochester Institute of Technology where he received his B.S. and M.S. in Hospitality and Service Management.

"In late 2009 I lost my job at the University of Rochester," Calvin explains. "I was working on my Master's Degree at the time. I had enough savings, had just bought my first townhouse and had no reason to worry about not finding another job. That was just around the time that the economy fell and to my dismay, finding a job was more difficult than I expected."

Calvin's Pain Journey

While dealing with the recent loss of his job, Calvin began to notice physical changes out of the ordinary.

"As the months progressed, I noticed my sleeping pattern worsened," Calvin recalls. "I felt more tired, lethargic and just...blah. I noticed that no matter how much I slept, I never felt rested. My muscles ached all over and the fatigue was like nothing I had ever felt before."



For Calvin, simple, everyday tasks became a challenge. A shower was now an extended process for the pain warrior; Calvin's muscles continued to ache more constantly and wide spread that getting dressed after the shower came at the price of time and energy.

"These conditions worsened into the new year. Throughout early 2010 I became more sick and weak, to the point where I was bedridden for one month at a time," Calvin shares with U.S. Pain. "It was then that I knew something was very wrong. The incessant doctor's visits started and the rest...I guess is history."

Living with Pain

In the fall of 2010, the unanswered questions circling through Calvin's mind as to what could be causing these new and extreme symptoms were answered.

"I was formally diagnosed with the debilitating illnesses of Fibromyalgia and Degenerative Bone Disease," Calvin notes.

For many suffering from an illness, disease, injury, condition or syndrome, the pain is invisible to others. Much was the same for Calvin, who took the news and immediately thought to have a proactive approach towards his health.

U.S. Pain Foundation Ambassador of the Month (continued)

“Initially, I looked at it (the diagnosis) as something that I could conquer or get over,” says Calvin. “I was the one who brought the issue to my doctors and so I increased my research, looking into every type of self-treatment I could find.”

This quest for answers and a pain treatment plan led the Tennessee Ambassador to purchase books, vitamins and similar resources. In the process, Calvin began to lose weight, as he had taken yoga classes along with pilates. Calvin sought after complementary therapy options such as acupuncture to determine what would eliminate or lessen his symptoms. In his mind, Calvin would overcome the illness, having no reason to think that his invisible pain would ‘completely consume his life’.

But having such a diagnosis comes with difficult decisions for many, and Calvin was challenged again to look at his options, his career, and his life, altering them all accordingly.

“I made plans to relocate to Nashville. I figured the warmer climate would do me well,” Calvin recalls. “In June of 2011 I moved to Nashville to embark in Nashville Teaching Fellows. When I moved, I had lost a total of 130lbs, coming down from 330lbs to 200lbs or so.”

At the start of the 2012 school year, Calvin sustained an accident, nearly crippling his body and causing a flare-up which would last over nine months.

“I was never able to return to teaching and ultimately had to return to my hometown in May of 2013,” Calvin states. “My family was there to support me and I moved back with my parents. It was a devastating blow. Still I have risen above that and have been able to get stronger and somewhat back to where I was before the accident, but I’ve accepted that I will not be the person I used to be and that’s okay.”

For support, Calvin commends his family for their love and devotion, as well as their willingness to learn how the illness has affected him, and helping when need be.

Recalling his darker moments when his teaching career was short-lived and he had to make adjustments, Calvin admits, “I couldn’t get through the days without them.”

Working with U.S. Pain Foundation

During his move, Calvin stumbled across the organization on Facebook. Intrigued, he signed up for the Pain Ambassador Program and has been providing his time, whenever possible. He also alerted fellow Ambassadors of his writing endeavors, allowing the foundation’s members the opportunity to purchase his e-Book once it hit the virtual book shelves.

Aside from volunteering, Calvin has turned to cooking and writing as an outlet to serve others who may be going through the same experiences.

“This journey is the primary subject of my poetry. I live a vegan and gluten free, and enjoy baking, running, swimming and pilates,” Calvin reflects.

The creator of The Gluten Free Chef, a blogging site with creative recipes ranging from pumpkin spice pancakes to Swiss chard pesto pizza with a cauliflower crust, Calvin uses proceeds from his books and products to provide his gluten-free baked goodies for local shops, markets and cafes in the Rochester area. His e-Book “Cooking with Fibromyalgia” was written with the pain community in mind to aid those who wish to create vegetarian, gluten and dairy-free meals.

From the Director of Ambassadors

“Where do you begin to explain the strengths and achievements of such an individual? For me, I start at the root of Calvin’s determination to showcase how one person can take his life into his own hands and advocate for his health. Many in Calvin’s situation may have stayed bedridden, may not have sought out alternative pain therapy options and would not think to provide tips and recipes for others in the pain community. But then again, Calvin is an exceptional person. He has taken his situation and is sharing his writing capabilities, pairing it with his passion for cooking and is now a prime example of what it means to be a leader in the pain community. Thank you Calvin for sharing all that you have with fellow pain warriors and the U.S. Pain Foundation.”

—Shaina Smith

Cooking with Fibromyalgia

A Young Man's Guide to Simple & Delicious Vegetarian, Gluten & Dairy Free Meals

