

My body is just, it's fighting itself to stay alive and to heal, even though it never will heal itself. It can't be separated from the rest of my life.

I have lived with chronic pain since I was -- since before I was a teenager. And I was constantly active. I didn't realize I was living in pain. I thought my knees were going through growing pains. And my friends didn't seem to be crying themselves to sleep at night from their growing pains; so, I never even told anybody.

I went from being a college athlete. I played soccer in college. I was captain of the team. I ran marathons. You know, I went from that level of athleticism, to now, I'm fully disabled.

I did nothing to cause my spondyloarthritis. It was actually a condition that my dad lived with, which is a very painful disease. It involves inflammation throughout the body. So, essentially, my whole joints are all inflamed all the time and at risk of fusing permanently.

So, I live in pain 24/7. I don't know what it's like to be without pain.

I did not cause this condition. It -- it happened to me. It was a gift from my dad. It's actually the reason that my dad died. He had spinal surgery, two of them; and the second spinal surgery he never healed from.

Actually, I learned I had the disease from my dad. So, as soon as I found out, I was talking about what I was going through on Facebook and realized how it resonated with other people. So, I accidentally cried out for help and ended up helping millions of other people over the next eight to ten years.

I'm non-binary. It took a long time for me to decide to come out publicly, and especially to my doctors about this identity that I was, you know, leaning into and realizing. Because I didn't want to be somehow seen differently. Because I'm already a chronic pain patient, I don't want to give the doctor another reason to give me different levels of care.

I think a lot of people think that, oh, it's just pain. It's straightforward. You go to the doctor. But it's not as simple as that.

It puts a whole lot of stress on just living.

Pain is invisible because you can't see it. But it is also often invisible because people choose not to.

I'm Charis Hill. I'm a disability activist, and this is my real pain story.