

TRANSCRIPT #: 1011

' Will the Pain Ever End? – Finding My Way Out '

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Ryan Murphy

DPT, Board Certified Geriatric Physical Therapist, Ryan Murphy Pain Coaching
Kennewick, Washington USA

[00:00:00] Hello. I'm glad to join you guys this evening and have this opportunity to visit with you guys. I'm a **physical therapist**. I've been practicing for about 11 years now. And my specialty area is **geriatrics**. And I currently practice in-home health and reside over in the Tri-Cities area of Washington.

[00:00:22] I'm a native of Oregon. I grew up in Eastern Oregon and went to Eastern Oregon University for undergrad. But when I moved up to Washington to go to PT school, Washington caught my heart. And so I've stayed up there ever since. But I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you **my story, recovering** from chronic pain.

[00:00:46] **Before I developed pain**, life was pretty good for me. I had a position I enjoyed. I had just moved to the Tri-Cities area and got into home health. And things started to look good for our financial future. We were making progress on our financial goals. I was starting to see our student loan debt start to shrink a little bit. We even purchased our first home, and I had just celebrated my 10th wedding anniversary. I was starting to take my son up to ski slopes to learn to ski with me.

[00:01:20] I experienced an **initial injury** in March of 2017. I was assigned to work with a gentleman who had a lot of weakness after being ill and hospitalized for a prolonged period. And after a session, he had grown quite particularly fatigued. And when it was time to assist him back into his wheelchair, his legs gave out, and he was quite a heavy lift for me to get him safely back in his wheelchair. And when that happened, I experienced pain in my back suddenly. And at first I thought, oh, this is a minor bout of back pain. It'll resolve, you know, everybody experiences back pain now, and then. But this pain grew worse, and it traveled down into my right leg. And by the next day, I was no longer able to continue my employment duties, and I knew something was wrong. I went on medical leave and got in to see a doctor and was diagnosed with a massive L5 herniated disc.

[00:02:28] They found that it was causing some **nerve impingement** due to inflammation that was causing the pain in my right leg, as well as some weakness to develop. The doctor suggested that we do conservative treatment, and with some anti-inflammatories, some rest and back protection, and physical therapy, he thought that I'd recover well.

[00:02:53] At the time of the injury, I was healthy, active and I was totally confident that I was going to get better and would be able to return to work. I followed my doctor's recommendations and worked hard in physical therapy and by midsummer, after the injury, oh, approximately four and a half months, I was able to **return back to work full time** again. And I felt pretty good when I went back. I had little to no pain, maybe a little stiffness fatigue by the end of the day. But really I was feeling pretty good and I felt good into the fall. And through the winter, I got back into my regular activities, took my son up skiing again, went hunting that fall. And then in the winter, I even commenced a home project that we had been planning to do since we purchased our home and install a second bathroom.

[00:03:55] And so. It's been say **about eight months since** I had gone back to work, about a year after I had initial injured my back. That's when life changed for me. So this was a spring of 2018, and I had been working a lot of long nights on my home renovation project. It started out. Thought it'd be a simple bathroom installation. No, no home project is simple. It morphed into an endless home renovation project, and it was requiring a lot of late nights after my regular employment, trying to get this project finished. And one night after a particularly long night of work, **suddenly I started to experience pain in my back**, and it felt just like the pain I had a year earlier when I was injured.

[00:04:52] Well, this was quite worrisome for me. And so I immediately took it easy, wanted to let things rest. And I was worried something might be wrong. Well over the next month or two, the pain only continued to get worse. And I started to get worried. I had stopped doing all my recreational activities and stopped the home project and was doing everything I could think of to control this pain and, and get it to go away. I was trying ice and heat topicals. I **did all my therapy exercises**, stretching. I wore a back brace, even bought an inversion table to try. And nothing was working. If anything, the **pain was getting worse**.

[00:05:40] So finally, I decided to go back and try physical therapy again. Even though I'm a physical therapist, it's good to have some other eyes on you. See if I can get some other ideas of things to try. And at first the **physical therapy, it started to work**. I started to feel a little bit better, but soon it stopped working. And soon the pain was just getting worse.

[00:06:04] And after about **six months** of struggling to manage this pain, finally, I just got to be so bad that I **couldn't even continue working as a physical therapist**. And up to that point, I had just barely been getting through the day, meeting just the minimal demands of my employment.

[00:06:26] When the time came for me that I had to tell my employer and my wife that I just couldn't get continue working, I was filled with guilt. I was guilty that I had overworked myself to reinjuring my back. I had a lot of fear that I'd become disabled, and I'd never get better. And I **worried** my inability to provide for our family, what effect that would have on my marriage and our financial future. My **pain had become unbearable and unrelenting**.

[00:07:07] Each day that I didn't go to work, I just laid on the floor in the only position that gave me a little bit of relief, but it was only minimal. As months started progressing without any improvement. The

pain just seemed to occupy my mind like a vast crater. I had no space to think or concentrate. And I began to question, **would my pain ever get better?**

[00:07:39] Every day was just a struggle and I couldn't even do simple tasks. And when I'd muster up enough energy to get something on the to do list that couldn't wait, it'd take days to recover. **It became a struggle** for me just to envision a life free of pain. And I could hardly remember what it was like to live without pain.

[00:08:03] The only thing that kept me going and not sinking into despair was the thought that when I'd be able to get to see a doctor, I'd get some help for my back and my pain. I had reapplied to open my L&I claims so I could get help. And about six months after I had to stop working. I finally got some good news that **L&I had approved to open my claim**, and I'd be able to go in and see a doctor. And this was quite exciting and brought quite a bit more hope after this long dark period.

[00:08:43] The physician ordered a **MRI** to take a look at my back again, and I was eager to get in and see the doctor and discuss the results and come up with a plan to get better and get rid of my pain. I was scheduled to go in and see the physician's assistant. And as I went in and sat down to hear the results of my MRI, she sat down and she began explaining things. And, I couldn't believe what she told me. She told me that **my back was fully healed** and that I should go back to work. **Dumbfounded**, I just could not comprehend what she was telling me. I was in more disabling pain than I had ever been in. The pain was so severe. Wasn't that evidence that something was terribly wrong with my back? Still not understanding, what she was telling me, I inquired, but what about my pain? Can't you do something for my pain? In reply, she just restated that my back was healed and that it was the **doctor's recommendation that I should go back to work**, and she proceeded to dismiss me.

[00:10:08] I left the doctor's office in a **daze of disbelief**. I just could not believe that my back could be healed and yet I had such severe pain. And I didn't understand why the doctors couldn't help me or provide any more information or answers. And worse more, I couldn't even fathom returning to work in this horrible state of pain I was in. It was all I had done for the last six months or for the previous six months when I was still working to get through a day of work and keep working. I had done all I could. And for all of that, it had just left me in a state of **utter disability** with horrible pain.

[00:11:01] As I sat in the parking lot with all these thoughts and questions swirling in my confused mind, I was attempting to come to grips with the realization, weighing down on me that all might be lost for help in my pain and my situation. But as I was going through this, a thought came to my mind. I recalled something **my physical therapist** had recommended eight months ago. He **had special advanced training in pain science** and had recommended I viewed some continuing education courses from the pain specialist, Adriaan Louw. At the time, I never did it, because I didn't really understand what's this pain science have to do with my situation?

[00:11:56] I had re-injured my back and once I got medical help for my back, and it's healed up, the pain will go away. So I had never bothered to watch these courses in the last six to eight months since recommendation, even though I was struggling in pain. Now with **no help left**, I decided that I'd watch these continuing education courses and **learn something about the science of pain**.

[00:12:29] I cannot even begin to describe the **hope and excitement** that filled me. When I started to view these courses and learn about pain science. I learned that there was a scientific explanation for my pain. I learned that I was not alone in this experience, but other people have developed chronic pain

after an injury. And best of all, I learned that other people were using pain science and the practices to get better and master their pain. I learned about these practices that they were simple and effective, evidence-based ways that would help me begin to think differently about my pain and begin to engage in activity and reclaim my life.

[00:13:26] I began **implementing these practices** in my life. And immediately I began to experience some reduction in pain. And, I began to improve in my movement and was able to engage in activities again. I was able to start envisioning my life again, free of pain. And, even better, I had a solution of how to get there.

[00:13:52] The practices were simple, easy to understand, and rooted in an basic understanding of how pain works. Those who teach about pain science used simple stories, illustrations, and examples that anyone can understand the science. And a lot of the practices were simply learning and understanding **how to think differently about pain**, as well as learning how to care for myself and listen to my body differently.

[00:14:23] I want to share with you my experience as I implemented pain science to think differently and master my pain as I prepared to return to work. One of the things that I had to be able to do before my doctor would clear me for work was to be able to **lift 75 pounds**. I was strong at the time, but I had a new understanding that I needed to start out lighter and slower and allow my body to successfully experience lifting lighter weights initially and then work up to 75 pounds.

[00:15:05] I went to the gym and I decided I'd **start with 40 pounds**. I set up a barbell on the floor with 40 pounds, and using good body mechanics, I bent down and lifted it from the floor. And all of a sudden I experienced severe, knifelike, stabbing pain in my low back and **lightning bolt of pain** down my right leg. My back injury all over again.

[00:15:36] Or was it? I reminded myself that my back was healed and I was okay. My body was in an **overprotect mode**, and my pain was no longer an accurate indicator of harm. Once I reminded myself of that, my pain started to subside. And, even better, I didn't have an overwhelming fear and dread that I had caused horrible, irreversible bodily harm when I felt that pain, I returned to the gym every other day and continued to lift the same 40 pounds until I could do so with minimal pain and gradually built up to 75 pounds until I was ready to return to work. I initially returned to work part-time and gradually worked up to full time.

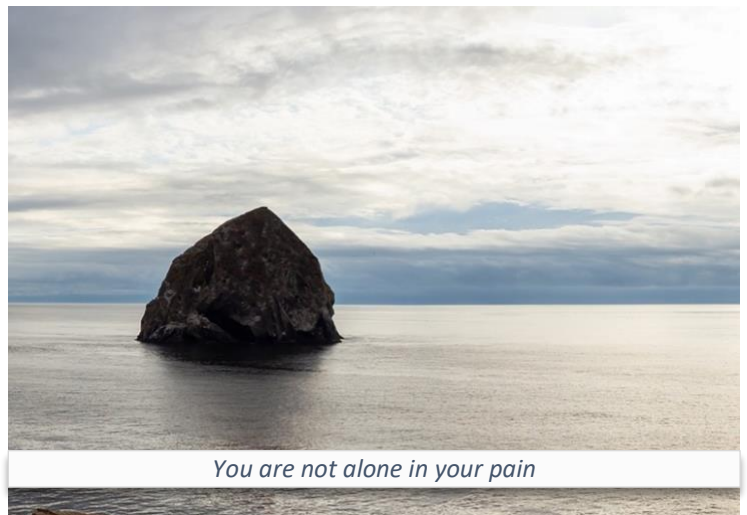
[00:16:40] And now, using pain science, I have **returned to work** for the last two and a half years uninterrupted full time. I've been able to resume my recreational activities, including taking my son **skiing** the last two winters and enjoyed a successful buck hunt last fall. And, I finished my home project, and we are now enjoying the luxury of a two bath home.

[00:17:10] I can't even put into words the awful reality of what my life would've been like had I not found **pain science** when I did. I am eternally grateful that I found it when I did, because it **saved my life**. Now in my practice, I teach anybody who's going through an injury or has experienced pain about pain science, and about the practices and how to think differently about pain. And I look for opportunities to share this information with others, and I am grateful for this opportunity to share my story with you guys.

About Pain Science Life Stories

Formed in 2018, the Oregon Pain Science Alliance (the Alliance) is an all-volunteer nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation. Our members come from the health care community, their patients, and others who follow pain science research.

We seek to share current information on how pain experiences are formed in the brain and influenced by biological, psychological, and/or social factors. Through community education events, health care workers describe how pain-science-based practices have changed their interaction with and care for patients, and patients tell stories about their experience with learned pain science tools used to help master chronic pain. We can now share these collected and curated stories, and other unique features, through the Alliance “story website” launched in early fall of 2022.



How to get involved?

Do new Pain Science insights and practices resonate with you?

We welcome anyone interested in collaborating to find or produce good stories and insights, then curating them to display on our website. Sharing in our discoveries and making them broadly available is both personally positive, and mutually satisfying.

The phone number or email address below will get you more information about us; then use the website link to the Member page for the steps to become an Alliance member, if that makes sense to you.

If you have a story using pain science tools and practices, and would like to share it with the larger community through our website, please send us an email. We would love to hear from you.

Phone: **541-224.8378**

Email: opsa@painsciencelifestories.com