

Navigating a Musical Journey Through Chronic Pain

By Chris Lewis

Living with chronic pain is an intricate challenge that shapes every aspect of life. For me, this challenge has been particularly pronounced in my pursuit of a music career. As I release my latest song, *Fire Below*, on September 22nd, I reflect on my journey in crafting music while contending with unrelenting pain that has been my companion for decades.

The origin of *Fire Below* traces back to an agonizing experience at a walk-in clinic that left an indelible mark on my soul. Having endured chronic pain since adolescence, I've seen its insidious progression, its gradual erosion of comfort and mobility. In my younger years, optimism colored my expectations, thinking that a universal remedy existed. Yet, as the years rolled by, that hope faded, replaced by the unwelcome companionship of osteoarthritis, spondylosis, scoliosis, and sarcoidosis. Lots of different doctors, none of whom would commit the time to help me figure it out and it always ended with a referral for pain management, more imaging, and thousands of dollars out of pocket.

A significant shift in my perception occurred a few years ago, catalyzed by an intense experience at an ayahuasca retreat. This visceral encounter transformed my relationship with pain, leading me to accept it and stop trying to fix it. Ayahuasca's revelation was that pain was an integral part of my identity, an inextricable thread woven into my life's tapestry. Embracing this realization, I discovered the power of compartmentalization and mitigation over the futile pursuit of a cure. This mental shift marked a turning point, allowing me to be more proactive in confronting my pain while still maintaining my artistic journey.

I have witnessed a drastic change in the medical landscape. I have been taken off opioids, once wielded to me often, they were now viewed with suspicion and caution, both for legitimate reasons and as a reaction to the opioid epidemic's repercussions. The downside of this necessary course correction is that chronic pain sufferers found themselves cut off from essential tools to manage their pain.

In this void, I slowly added alternative strategies over time to help me cope – removing drama and negativity, a positive mindset is my most valuable tool, yoga, stretching, meditation, kava, hot showers, massage, cannabis, ayahuasca, San Pedro, a good hug, chocolate, playing guitar, candy, gratitude, and above all, singing.



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Singing, the very heart of my identity as a singer-songwriter, became my sanctuary. In the act of vocalization, pain receded, creating an oasis of relief. *Fire Below* crystallizes this profound liberation, its chorus echoing my emotionally intense experience: *The fire is burning my feet below, I can feel the flames get higher and higher, the pain is going to rage until my head explodes, is this how I go?*

Today, at 54, my life is a delicate dance with pain, a choreography of yoga stretches, alternative medicine, and soulful music. Pain, once a monolithic obstacle, has been demystified. It is no longer the antagonist but a part of my symphony. Through this transformation, I have channeled my pain into the creation of art and music and that is where my salvation lies. **My story stands as a reminder that pain does not define us; it refines us.** It tempers our spirit, forges our resilience, and nurtures our empathy. To all who bear the weight of chronic pain, I share this song with you, a reminder that amidst the flames of pain, we can still find solace, peace and understanding using the power of music.