



Dr. David Hanscom

## **A New Film Inspired by a Personal Struggle to Overcome Chronic Pain**

An interview with Kent Bassett & Marion Cunningham  
on Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom

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**Kent Bassett & Marion Cunningham - A New Film Inspired by a Personal Struggle to Overcome Chronic Pain**

Tom: Hello everybody and welcome to Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom. David, I understand we have a special guest with us in the studio today.

David: We do. A friend of mine, Kent Bassett, who I met probably five or six years ago is here. He has a remarkable story that I'm anxious to have him tell to the audience tonight. His compatriot, Marion, is with him. He is a film producer and has created a documentary on chronic pain, which began with his own story of healing many years ago. Welcome to the show Kent and Marion, appreciate you being here.

Kent: Hi, thanks for having us.

Marion: Thank you so much for having us.

David: Kent, if you could start first, and introduce yourself briefly, with your story of chronic pain and how you solved it which led you to start the project that you will tell us about.

Kent: Sure. Back when I was 22 years old, I was in college, and I was going really hard at the gym, lifting really heavy weights that were probably a little too much for me. And in the aftermath I developed a very severe arm pain. I saw a doctor and was diagnosed with tendinitis and did physical therapy. It wasn't working.

I saw another doctor and was prescribed Vicodin that didn't help. And I started to become very worried. The arm pain was growing steadily worse, and I couldn't turn a doorknob or write my papers, and so I had to drop out of college.

David: How long after it started did you have to drop out of college? I mean, that's a pretty big deal.

Kent: Yeah, it was about four months later. I started in September and then in December I realized like, this isn't getting any better. I've seen several doctors. My doctors warned me, "Maybe don't type on computers too much, you might have a repetitive stress injury, you may never be able to type on computers again." That kind of stuff. It had me very worried.

David: And this is your senior year in college?

Kent: Yep.

David: And just for curiosity's sake, this audience knows my lines pretty well. Was it a time of high stress in your life at the time?

Kent: At the time I didn't think so. I was pretty happy in college... And no. To be frank, no, it didn't seem any more stressful than any other part of my life. And only in retrospect did I make some connections about stress.

David: Right. And then was it your whole arm that hurt?

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Kent: Yeah. It started on my right forearm, the top part. And then it spread to my bottom part of that arm and then it went to my left arm a few days later. And then it was in the bottom part of my left arm. And over a few weeks it slowly kind of grew into my fingertips as these recommendations and treatments didn't work. It seemed to kind of spread a little bit, but basically never went beyond my fingertips to my forearm.

David: And just ballpark, how many doctors did you see during that period of time?

Kent: Probably about 12, but it culminated in seeing a leading arm surgeon who was inventing new kinds of arm surgery in New York City, who I thought would really give me the final diagnosis I was searching for. And he told me, "I see people like you all the time. People from the Julliard School of Music who play violin too much", and he's like, "There's no diagnostic box for you. We don't know for sure you have tendonitis, you might have some other thing we haven't figured out yet."

He's invented new surgeries for the hand and for tennis elbow, which he thought of as a very specific tendon that you can work on. He was like, "Your pain is too diffuse to be put in a box." He's like, "Good luck. It often goes away in a couple of years."

David: In couple of years?

Kent: "We'll see." At that moment I decided Western medicine, as I knew it, didn't have the answer. And I started saying like, "I guess I have to consider alternative medicine," which I had been very skeptical of. And then I read Andrew Weil's book where he mentions John Sarno. Andrew Weil has a book called Spontaneous Healing. And he mentioned a friend of his who was cured by John Sarno who had leg pain. And I was like, leg pain, arm pain, maybe they're related. And that's what led me to John Sarno.

David: And so you read his book, and what happened?

Kent: So, I read John Sarno's book. I was sitting in Barnes and Noble and I just started laughing. He had such a confident tone in the way he was saying our bodies have evolved for millions of years to be resilient and to heal from injuries. And the idea that these minor abnormalities that are often the product of aging and MRIs or that you would have an injury that would just ruin your body for the rest of your life is not the case. I don't know what the word is... It seems preposterous, which it did seem to me.

I was 22 years old. No one had ever warned me that going hard at the gym could ruin my arms for the rest of my life. So it seemed implausible. And suddenly I was like, okay, this is it. It's stress or my brain or my mind causing this symptom. And I was just deliriously happy, because I knew I had the answer. I didn't know when my pain would go away, but I knew this was the reason for it. And it turned out that my pain went away the very next day.

David: Wow. And it's been gone. Never came back.

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Kent: It's been gone. It moved to different parts of my body over the course of the next several weeks. So it moved to my shoulder, my left shoulder. I was like, "I know this is just my mind doing this". Then it moved to my other shoulder. It was a really fascinating education on the power of the mind-body connection, that there was some mechanism within me that needed to produce pain somewhere.

And I also had heartburn. I got ringing in the ears. It was just bouncing around my system and each place we would go to, I could use these, you know, insights from John Sarno's book to make the pain go away. But it definitely left me with a sense of, "Okay, there's more work to be done. Like why is my body or my brain doing this?" And so that, you know, took, I would say many years and sort of keep looking for a root cause of this though my symptoms were gone, you know, after a few weeks of the symptoms bouncing around, I didn't have a problem with chronic pains and stuff.

David: Cool. So Marion, let me ask you a question. I have lots of things to comment on as far as the overall situation. I know you've not had chronic pain, but obviously your background is a film producer. Is that correct?

Marion: Yes. Filmmaker.

David: And then how long have you been working with Kent?

Marion: Well, Kent and I actually went to film school together, though we didn't really know each other at the time. And then I moved to New York right after film school, Kent went to LA. And a few years later he decided to try and see what the jobs' scene was like in New York. And he had already started shooting the film and he ran into a mutual friend of ours from our film school, Chapman, and started telling that person about the project. And it was a friend of mine who knew that I was looking for a documentary project to sort of do in my off time, sort of as a passion project. So he introduced us in early 2013 and we've been working together ever since.

David: Wow.

Kent: Yeah. And the way I think about it is, I may have started the film, but without Marion the film definitely would never have been a finished. So she became a super integral part of the whole process since 2013 till now of figuring out who the characters were going to be, how we are going to edit this thing and what the film would be.

David: And so Marion, what about the project? Just to be clear here, the effort that these two have made has been just unbelievable. I mean nobody does a film like this as a part-time job. This is a full fledge documentary called This Might Hurt and it's the topic for tonight's podcast.

And that's the reason we're having this conversation—to help raise money to finish the film. It's a very compelling story and the quality of production and the commitment to the project are unbelievable. They obviously feel like they have a message to give to the world. So I'm curious, Marion, from your perspective, what drew you into the project?

Marion: Well, Kent. The crux of our film is following three patients through Dr. Howard Schubiner's treatment, four week mind-body treatment, to take care of their chronic pain. And Kent had shot the three characters going through the treatment the year before. But it's really difficult to edit your own film, your own footage that you shot with all of your money and time and heart and soul into.

So I started digging through the footage, getting to know the characters and figuring out how we were going to tell the story. And you know, just seeing not only, you know, the characters struggling in the moments before they started the treatment, but then working through their pain in the class was really inspiring to me. It was a beautiful thing. I had never heard of Dr. Sarno before this, but I was immediately hooked.

David: So let me jump back into the conversation a little bit. I just want to introduce Dr. Schubiner from my perspective. I had been in chronic pain myself for about 15 years. I accidentally came out of it in 2003, but I didn't know what had happened. I didn't know how I got into pain. I didn't know how I came out of it. And I asked Dr. Schubiner to be my keynote speaker at a course we put on in Seattle called A Course of Compassion: Empathy in the Face of Chronic Pain, and he started explaining the relationship between the body in a chronically stressed state and how many physical symptoms it could cause. He put up a list of 33 physical symptoms, and I started counting this list, and my wife reminded me, she asked a question to Dr. Schubiner. She goes, "I have a friend by the way, who has 17 of these symptoms."

And Howard quickly figured out that she was talking about me and I was giddy I'd gotten better, but I didn't know why. And all my 17 symptoms were gone, but also I didn't realize that when you change the body's chemistry and it is sustained, it has an effect on every organ system in the body. Each organ is different, then you have different set of symptoms. And so you mentioned tinnitus, ringing to the ears. I had tinnitus for 25 years. It's an incredibly annoying symptom. It's gone. My feet were burning, that's gone. At that moment within 10 minutes, entire tenures of work came into a very sharp focus, and I was so excited and, like you, a huge light bulb went off. Howard and I still work together very closely—Howard Schubiner is a pain specialist in Detroit, Michigan.

He's out working with one of my former fellows, Dr. Marc Moise at the Detroit Receiving Hospital working on doing optimum rehab. And so, Howard is very academic. He does lots of research on it and he continues to move the frontier forward, but the bottom line is pain is an output. It's not an input. In other words, there's nothing inherent about this table. I'm touching and it's cool, because it's cool only because my brain says it's slightly cold. Something's painful only because your brain has interpreted impulse that says this is painful. Anyway, bottom line, when you're in pain, you're trapped, which creates more stress, chemicals, you get more frustrated and you keep spiraling out of control. So Howard Schubiner, I consider my mentor, we have ongoing work together and Kent had filmed people before and after Howard's treatment.

And I'd like to actually now have you jump ahead in the story. I know you produced the film. There are some remarkable success stories. And again, both of you maybe give me a little perspective about what you're trying to convey with the film, and what watching these people change feels like to both of you.

Marion: Yes, you can go first.

Kent: When I went to Detroit, I really didn't know what I was in for. You know, I had had this experience of reading a book and getting better, and I was kind of like, why do people need a four week class? Like, you know, can't they, you know, they must get really a lot better. You know, they must get better plus and then some. And one of the first things I learned is, "Oh my God, you know, chronic pain can be a lot worse than what I went through." Even though I was disabled and had to drop out of college. Other people have multiple symptoms, you know, they have fibromyalgia, and migraines, and restless leg syndrome, and three other things. And one person that I had met had been in bed rest for eight years because of severe fibromyalgia and abdominal spasms.

She's one of the central characters in the film. And, so it started to come into focus what a massively difficult issue chronic pain can be and how hard it is to dig yourself out of it. Even when you have the aid of somebody who I think is really wise and useful. And came to think that while I was filming Dr. Schubiner. I'm not sure if I'm answering your question, but that was one of the things that was a first realization. And I guess you were asking what was it like to see them, you know, start to improve?

David: Well, I mean, here's one of the things, and I guess I'll address this to you Kent, is that it's almost a universal truth—that patients in chronic pain don't feel believed by anybody. And the problem is that physicians are trying to take a neurological or neurochemical issue and turn it into a structural problem. So your story's pretty classic. Okay. Your arms hurt. It must be a tendonitis. Well, your arm does not have to be in pain for your brain to create pain. It just doesn't have to do that. Unfortunately, the medical industry now has sold the idea there's got to be something wrong so the medical industry can fix it. Right. Well, like you said before, the body can heal itself. And I think the essence of healing and simply connecting to your own healing capacity allows you to alter your body's chemistry to live your life.

So it's a self-directed process. You have to understand the tools and strategies to get there. And when you're angry and frustrated and trapped, you disconnect from everything, including your own sense of emotions. So connecting to your own healing capacity, whatever way that works, is really the essence of healing.

And guess what? You went from four months of pain to pain-free in a day. We do see that happen a lot. You met Dr. Schubiner who chose three patients that had difficult problems. They weren't getting better in a day. There are research studies showing that the impact of chronic pain is equivalent in the effect on a person's quality of life as a having terminal cancer. It's a big deal. So at this point you've seen the film of people beforehand and afterwards, and Marion I'll ask the question to you. What do you want to tell the world about chronic pain, but also how do you want to convey it in this film?

Marion: Great question. Well, first of all, I just want to acknowledge how brave and how appreciative we are of Dr. Schubiner for inviting us to film this treatment. It was an incredibly life changing experience and we obviously wouldn't have a film without him. But of course chronic pain affects a hundred million Americans yet Kent and I struggle to get any recognition from this film, from the medical industry, from film festivals.

Even before they know it's Sarno based in TMS, I think, you know, Americans aren't really willing to admit that we have this problem with chronic pain and that it is so pervasive. And in part, I think that so many folks, as you said, are not believed. Or if they are, many doctors will just say it's all in their head, but they aren't willing to offer patients anything beyond that. If it is all in their head, what they can do about that. So for us it's just really important to shine a light on this subject, as well as this treatment, because it really is being ignored. And we felt that firsthand.

David: And what's your impression of the people who have healed? I mean, I know I've watched a hundred patients go to pain free. And for me, the data shows that only 20% of physicians feel comfortable managing chronic pain. Less than 1% enjoy it. And I have to tell you my personal experience. You take somebody who has no hope, they're stuck in a black hole. Not only do they come out of the hole, they thrive at a level that they've never thrived at before. So, because it affects your body chemistry so profoundly that you probably know my lines, I think anxiety is the pain. The mental pain is actually a bigger problem than the physical pain. So not only does their pain drop down, they aren't fighting anxiety all the time. But to go from that deep of a hole of chronic pain to thriving is just remarkable experience. Truly can't even put into words. How would you describe the people that you've seen that have now gone to pain free?

Marion: Well, first of all, no spoilers.

Kent: Yeah, I'll try not to spoil the film. There are four classes in the film. In class one, people show up, they're very tense, they're anxious, you know, nobody's smiling. Nobody's having a good time. In class four, just the sense of community alone that comes from being recognized by other people who have chronic pain gathering together to not deny the problem, but to acknowledge it's real that they, you know, all these people who start the class also acknowledge that they think are willing to consider that their brain and their mind is the dominant cause of their symptoms, which is a big leap of faith. And by class four, there's a lot of smiles. There's hugs. You know, some people have had dramatic improvements in their pain and it was extremely joyful and moving for me to be there and watch that.

Going back to your earlier question about what was it like to go there and just sort of see this process? When I first met Kim, it was before she had ever met Dr. Schubiner. So I got to hear her talk and interview for three hours about all her different symptoms over many years and was really grateful that she was willing to trust me with this story, which is very personal.

You know I had read Sarno's book and got cured of my arm pain, but I was like, I don't know if Kim is an actual candidate for this. Like I thought I was like pretty smart about Sarno. I'd read a few of his books by that point, but I was like, I don't know how to untangle this person's symptoms and life story. And then I filmed her have a three hour interview with Dr. Schubiner, and I was really blown away by all the different questions he would ask to try to connect when symptoms arose and what was happening in her life.

And she often didn't have an idea when you first would ask, but then he would gently ask another couple questions and another and then ask it from another angle and then they would often chance on, "Oh my God, that was the time where, you know, I, my TMJ started right after this major stressful event in my life. I had never thought about that before. No one had ever asked me about that." She'd seen over 50 doctors. Nobody had ever made a connection between these very stressful life events, which she'd had a number of them, and symptoms that started right afterwards.

And so that was really an eye opening education for me and pretty astonishing. And we tried to create that experience in the film for people. We had to tease out some specifics because they were, I mean, like we said, three hour interview with Kim originally, and then Howard had a three hour interview when the movie's only 80 minutes. So you get a taste of it. But it was really extraordinary to watch that.

David: Marion, what were some of your thoughts—some of your impressions? Because, generally, we expose the chronic pain well before and you got to see some people firsthand because you spent obviously quite a bit of time talking to these people, right?

Marion: Yeah. My first impressions, I mean, I think when I first watched a trailer, a very early trailer, Kent made in 2013, I didn't totally believe it. I was sort of skeptical. I didn't know Kent very well. so I didn't really know his story yet. I was just sort of like, "What's going on here?" But as I dug through the footage and got to know the characters and watch their journeys, I mean it was an eye-opening experience that affected my life and encouraged me to examine my emotions in ways that I had never before. And it's ultimately been a really beneficial experience for me in my life. So, thanks Kent.

David: I would also think, all of us would agree that to watch somebody who has no hope, to not only have hope, but start to thrive is just a remarkable experience. You really can't put it into words, and that's why I'm excited about the film, because you can't describe in words what these people have gone through, both being trapped and also being free. And the film just tells a story. You get to experience these emotions yourself, or get to watch these emotions occur, and it's just a remarkable story experience. The other thing that's interesting is that the medical profession has for a long time, I think, been making things way too complicated, whereas the solutions are actually disturbingly simple because they're so available.

In the book I'm writing right now titled *Do You Really Need Spine Surgery*, I discuss how we're taking back pain, which is either a neurological problem, a muscle problem, or a combination of both, and we're doing a major structural procedure for a neurological problem—and it can't work. The success rate of a back fusion for back pain, for example, is about 23%—that's it. There is not one research paper in 40 years that documents that a back fusion for back pain works—none.

And with your situation, Kent, you had surgeons talking to you with all sorts of explanations for it. But, the bottom line is we're medicalizing a neurological problem and we've just missed it. And your story is not that unusual. We actually call it the Sarno Effect, from which evolved Dr. Schubiner's approach, which has Sarno's format. I have my approach, similar format but different angles to it. Dr. Clark in Oregon, Dr.



[Schechter 00:23:41], Dr. [Abass 00:23:43] . All of us have different methods, but the basic approach is the same. Just calm down the system, relaxing, connecting your mind back to your body, and moving forward.

It is not very hard—we take the risk of a \$100,000 operation, which works only 23% of the time, versus over two-to-six months to calm down your nervous system. There's no comparison. And so again, your film is a huge contribution of in saying, "Look, it's not only possible, it's probable." And by the way, the results are spectacular. I mean, I think your story is compelling. I know it's only four months of pain. But, think if you'd not read Dr. Sarno's book. It might've been two or three years of pain out of college. I mean life would have been different, right? And so just think, just that paradigm shift alone, we've also found out, makes a huge difference.

So I do encourage you with this podcast, we'll be linked to Marion and Kent's website called This Might Hurt. You're needing to raise some final funds to get the film onto the market. Many of you have gotten a lot better from Dr. Schubiner's work, from my work, from different other people's work. And I would urge you to give back because giving back is actually the final solution to chronic pain. Because in chronic pain you're focused on yourself, unfortunately with your attention on yourself, you're actually reinforcing the problem. To me the ultimate solution to chronic pain is what I call a spiritual journey, which will be good food, good wine, good friends, but just getting your perspective back. But a step beyond that is actually giving back. So I'd urge you, honestly, to look at this film as your part of giving back and we would all really appreciate your help.

Any final words, Marion, about the project?

Marion: No, I mean thank you so much for saying that. That means so much to us and we really appreciate all your listeners support. We're so excited to share the film with everyone. We think it could really help a lot of people and that's why we're doing it. That's why we've been working at it for six years on the weekends, and evenings, and taking time off between gigs, and using all of our savings to make it happen. So we really appreciate any support.

David: Yeah, absolutely.

Kent: Yeah, I was just going to say on this Indiegogo campaign, which I hope people watch, you, can see some of the footage that we shot in a trailer of the film. And available for a reward for people who contribute is a digital download of the film that you'll receive before it goes out to the public. So you can get an advanced copy as well as special features with an extended interview with Dr. Schubiner, and some more deleted scenes that would give you a broader picture of the kind of work that he does. So anyway, and we think there's some other cool stuff on the campaign, so I hope people will check it out. The link is:

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/this-might-hurt-film--2#/>

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Marion: Including some coaching with you.

David: Right.

Kent: Yes, that's right. Yeah.

David: Best of luck.

Tom: Well thank you Kent and Marion for a really great interview. It was great to hear your story and the progress you're making on your film and wish you all the best of luck. And I want to remind our listeners to come back next week for another episode of Back in Control Radio with Dr. David.

Link to Indiegogo for film on chronic pain This Might Hurt:

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/this-might-hurt-film--2#/>

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**Note:** The original transcript of this episode of Back in Control Radio with Dr. David Hanscom has been edited for readability