



Bennett Roman

"I'm pretty content with where I am at right now. Understanding and managing Chiari has affected me a lot, but staying positive has allowed me to start a new chapter in my life—giving back to others who need support, love, encouragement, and most of all hope."

August, 2014 - Although 10 years have passed since his initial diagnosis, Bennett Roman still continues to work hard and inspire many individuals in the Chiari community along with those in the medical field. He has learned throughout his journey that focusing on the positives is extremely important as well as finding the strength to lean on others for support. When Bennett started his junior year of high school, he had no idea that his life was about to push him into a situation which would inspire him to become a doctor.

"During high school, I had horrible migraines and I didn't think much of them until I was sixteen. Before joining my peers in wrestling, I needed to have a physical; during the exam, I told my doctor about the migraines and he ordered an MRI. I was then informed that I had a Chiari malformation with a pretty pronounced herniation and I needed to have decompression surgery ASAP," said Bennett.

Two weeks later, he had his first surgery in the summer of 2004 which consisted of a duraplasty and laminectomy. Although the decompression was successful, Bennett developed meningitis as well as a few other complications. After three weeks, he went back to his neurosurgeon to correct a CSF (cerebral spinal fluid) leak. He then spent the following two months in the hospital recovering.

Seven years passed since Bennett's first two surgeries and during this time, he was driven to make a difference in the world.

"I have to say that my biggest motivator was Chiari. After my experience with the first two surgeries, I knew I wanted to become a doctor and help others. It took a few years for me to get into medical school, but I was determined."

After working in a hospital for a little over a year to receive his master's degree, Bennett was involved in a horrible car accident. He broke his neck at the third cervical vertebrae and also developed a syrinx (a rare, fluid-filled cavity within the spinal cord) throughout the cervical spine. To everyone's surprise, he did not have any Chiari symptoms appear. However, his syrinx was responsive to the trauma and increased in size.

Bennett then underwent a third decompression surgery in February of 2012. This procedure also produced complications, but he fought through all of them and steadily improved. Six months later, he received his medical school acceptance letter; he was absolutely ecstatic and ever so grateful to his highly skilled physician.

"My neurosurgeon was absolutely incredible when it came to my surgeries. He handles many non-standard Chiari decompressions which are often too complicated for basic Chiari neurosurgeons. His expertise and experience is astonishing to say the least—he is an incredible man, doctor, and neurosurgeon. I have him to thank for helping me live an active and extraordinary life."

Although he still has pain, it is not limiting or severe; the surgeries overall were a big success and a lot of his symptoms haven't returned.

To Bennett, living with Chiari has been a positive character building experience; it gave him an opportunity to learn more about his condition and ultimately motivated him to pursue a career in medicine. One of his long-term goals is to use his experience as a Chiari patient to become a passionate and supportive health care provider.

"Focusing on the positives has been very important to me. Prior to now, I was overwhelmed by a lot on my Chiari journey, but my family always pulled me out of the darkness and supported me. James chapter 1 verses 2-4 was also a large source of inspiration: 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.' I'm a lot stronger because I had and still have an immense amount of support and love; and today, I have the opportunity to demonstrate that strength to help others in need."

In the spirit of lending strength, Conquer Chiari has also been blessed to have Bennett as the New Orleans Chiari Walk organizer in 2013. He stumbled on our website last year and instantly wanted to become involved because he wished to meet more individuals that had similar experiences related to Chiari. Furthermore, he hoped for comfort and support from Louisiana's Chiari community.

"Conquer Chiari has been a gigantic help in bringing tons of people together—not just Chiarians, but families and friends of Chiarians and the general public as well. Finding a helpful and beneficial resource for those with rare conditions are sometimes difficult to locate, but I know that I can count on Conquer Chiari for the latest research."

In the fall (2014), Bennett will begin his 3rd year of medical school at Louisiana State University's Health and

Science Center in New Orleans. In two years, he will be changing the world for the better with his personal and professional experiences. In the future, he also hopes that he will continue to be stable without symptoms.

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Jennifer Eubanks

Chiari Community Columnist

Ms. Eubanks is a professional writing and research scholar from Purdue University Northwest. After being diagnosed with a Chiari I Malformation in 2011, she quickly decided that being conquered was not an option—she was committed to fight and pursue a budding love of healthcare/medical writing. Spreading awareness and hope to others battling Chiari is her largest motivator alongside educating others who have not heard about the condition. Reporting for Ideas in Motion Media and tutoring at the Writing Center (Purdue University North Central) has been immensely beneficial to her success as well as all the remarkable individuals who helped her become the composer and analyst she is today.

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