

THE CANCER POSSE

An Interview with Kris Carr

In 2003, 31-year-old actress and photographer Kris Carr was diagnosed with a rare and incurable stage four cancer. When the doctors told her that there was no medical treatment options, Kris began filming her story. Her healing path included Yoga, meditation, detox regimens and healthy lifestyle changes. Taking a seemingly tragic situation and turning it into a creative expression (her film, Crazy Sexy Cancer aired on TLC and Discovery Health and now is on DVD), Kris shares her inspirational story of survival with courage, strength, a positive attitude and lots of humor.

Integral Yoga Magazine: How did you come up with this wild name for your film?

Kris Carr: I didn't want this to be my "sad story." I wanted to challenge the stigma and bring humanity and humor to it. What's sexy about cancer? The women who have it! It's not "my battle with cancer." I'm a lover not a fighter. Instead, I call it my *adventure*. That puts me in an empowered position. I think the battle terminology further feeds into the stigma. I live with cancer so I can't allow my life to become my perception of the struggle, because then I totally miss out. Cancer feeds the monkey mind and it will devour you if you let it. Viewing cancer as my guru created many opportunities for growth. But let me be clear: Cancer is not a hunky dory gift, but it was the start of a personal revolution for me. It was that big wakeup call that forced me to take responsibility for my health and my life. Cancer has been my invitation to live—not die.

IYM: Were you practicing Yoga prior to your diagnosis?

KC: I first went to Jivamukti Yoga Center in 1992 and my heart and mind were blown open. The last time I saw Sharon and David [Jivamukti founders], I thanked them for preparing me for this journey. When I went to their Yoga classes, I was introduced to crucial concepts that at the time were so foreign to me. So when cancer came, it made sense to me that maybe there was something I could do to help myself heal. I began to increase my Yoga practice and adopted a vegan diet. I started to connect the dots and look to nature for advice—all the things they taught me. Instead of a weekend yogi, I became an all-day, every day yogi [*laughs*]! But this means way more than just asana and I take it more seriously as I can't afford not to!

IYM: You've referred to yourself as a "full-time healing junkie." Was that just in the beginning or are you still and what's your "regime?"

KC: I'm still a full-time healing junkie. I look at cancer like a Rubik's cube—like it is something I can figure out. Perhaps, if I'm curious enough and educate myself then I can help my immune system and either continue to live with and manage cancer or thank it for the teachings and

send it on its way. It's my "take back the night" approach! And, I am feeling better. I learned that if I had a better diet, if I reduced my stress level by committing to my Yoga and meditation practice, if I stayed away from toxins I shouldn't consume, then my body feels and functions better. I learned to consciously choose what I put in my mouth. My pharmacy is the supermarket. There's an inner global warming happening in my body, just like outside. For me, I needed to begin by greening my inner home first. Now that's disaster prevention for us and for our planet! The choices we make are really important.

As far as my daily schedule, well, I'm a big juicer. A couple of times a day I juice. I drink 16-32 ounces of green drink a day. I eat a lot of raw foods, I do rebounding, dry brushing. However, my life is also really busy and active, so I don't spend all my time doing cleansings and practices. But, I think I'm learning something neat. I have always tended to be an all or nothing person. Either I go to class at Jivamukti or I don't do any Yoga at all. So, I started thinking, "Can I just do fifteen minutes? Isn't that better than nothing?" I think that's a good place to get to. Sometimes my oncologist thinks I push myself. Yes, I was on a whirlwind book tour for two months; I travel for many speaking engagements, I was on Oprah and I'm finishing my second book—I work fifteen hours a day! But, I love what I do. When you love when you do, I think it increases your immunity. People are surprised I can handle it and they ask me how I do it. I think Yoga is a great vehicle for mental management. I know the physical benefits and believe them, but for me, the mental benefits outweigh them.

IYM: In what way?

KC: On the physical level, Yoga will soothe your adrenals, stimulate and boost the immune system, flush the lymph and pump oxygen in your system—and disease hates oxygen. All those things are good, but, on the emotional level, Yoga helps connect me to something bigger than myself. When you have an illness, it's all about "me." Yoga is a real vacation to get away from all the "me, me, me." On a spiritual level, it reminds me that I am part of Source. No matter how long my life is, this is just a physical body. This is the pre-show. There are so many other groovy parties ahead. So if you take these three

things—the physical, the emotional and the spiritual—and roll them into a vegan taco, it's gorgeous!

IYM: Why did you decide to make the film?

KC: I felt that cancer needed a makeover! I knew how I felt when I was diagnosed. I was devastated. I went to the library to find cancer documentaries and everything was so depressing. It was all “boo hoo” tragedy. There was nothing out there for people my age. Cancer happens to young people too. And what about the people who live with illness? I never knew that was possible. We're happening people and we need to be represented. If you have to go the distance, do you want to be labeled with a dark, spooky stigma? I like to call myself a “cancer babe.” It's about attitude and not letting cancer define me. So, I wanted to express another viewpoint. I'm still very vibrant and won't be shelved. I consider my tumors [now stabilized] as beauty marks that are a part of me. We work together, go out together—we live together [*laughs*].

IYM: Had you ever made a film before?

KC: No, I didn't even know how to work a camera. The film was a channel to take me away from the fear and put in the creative. I thought, “This will be cool—I'll make the film I need to see.” I would sometimes be spending hours in hospitals where doctors would say some pretty heinous stuff about the type of cancer I had, the prognosis and so on. As the director of this film, I could step outside of myself and say to the cameraperson: “Did you get that?”

My books and my workshops are about how to tap into our creativity—jumpstart our artistic healing mojo! I include 77 tips and stories from other young women. In the workshops we do everything from Yoga to nutrition classes, creative writing, transformative healing circles and even trapeze. Flying really smashes the fear! The workshops are a place where you can meet other cancer babes and make a cool cancer posse! It's a weekend full of information and inspiration.

IYM: What were you hoping the film would achieve?

KC: I didn't have any idea that it would be on national television! I've gotten a lot of attention for the film. We've also shown it at medical schools, hospitals and wellness centers all over the country. Now Gaiam is distributing it on DVD, and there are many helpful “how-to” bonus features including a Yoga sequence designed by my other wonderful teachers Rodney Yee and Colleen Saidman. I'm working on several more books including my most recent, *Crazy Sexy Cancer Survivor: More Rebellion and Fire for Your Healing Journey* (available in stores this September).



Kris Carr

My goal for the film and for the books is to bring the worlds of allopathic and alternative medicine together and show people that they can be empowered participants in their health. I want to be accepted at a doctor's office *and* on a Reiki master's table. I want both sides to talk, share secrets and make a game plan. I have a cancer that is not curable by western, allopathic means. That's why I looked to alternative medicine. When I uncovered what I know now, holy crow! I'm completely devoted to this path. If there were safe treatment in western medicine, I might try them—but I'm not going to eat hospital food. I'm going to juice, do colonics, do Yoga and meditation and stack the odds in my favor. My approach is: You (western medicine) do your part and I'll do mine.

IYM: Any further advice to those facing life-threatening illnesses?

KC: Life is threatening. Terminal is a sure thing. I think, when people get saddled with those words, they stop living. My advice is: Just because you've been stamped with an expiration date, you don't have to obey. It's time to get rebellious and be your own revolutionary. If you can't do it now, when can you do it? The worst that can happen already has, so plan for the future and have fun living.

Kris Carr is an award-winning actress, author and filmmaker. The film, Crazy Sexy Cancer, which she wrote and directed, chronicles her very personal four-year journey, healthfully living with stage-four cancer. For more information about the film (now available on DVD), her book Crazy Sexy Cancer Tips (foreword by Sheryl Crow) and her workshops, please visit: www.crazysexycancer.com