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LIFETIME

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Crazy Sexy Survivor

A frightening cancer diagnosis changed Kris Carr's life forever — in many ways, for the better.

BY LAINE BERGESON

On Valentine's Day 2003, Kris Carr went to see her doctor about abdominal cramps and shortness of breath. The pain wasn't entirely new — she'd experienced similar symptoms (which doctors had chalked up to constipation) off and on for a few years. This time was a bit worse than usual, but Carr, then a 31-year-old actress and party-circuit regular living in New York City, just figured she'd partied a little too hard that week.

She was wrong. An ultrasound of her liver and both lungs found cancer. Lots of it. It was advanced — stage 4 — and inoperable. "My first thought was, 'I'm too young for this. How could this be happening to me? I'm barely getting started,'" says Carr, now 39. "I didn't know how long I had to live, so there was a lot of sadness there, too."

Carr's shock soon gave way to determination. She was going to learn everything she could about healthy living and make lifestyle changes the biggest weapon in her arsenal against cancer. She also decided to listen more attentively to her own body than she had ever done before.

"In New York, I ate a lot of fat-free food and followed diet fads," she says. "I drank a lot of martinis, too." She also had an unquenchable passion for fast food and fueled her busy days with a steady stream of coffee. "I was a mess."

She felt like a mess, too, suffering frequent colds, chest infections, allergies, depression, acne and eczema. "In my 20s, I didn't have the energy that I thought I should have. I remember feeling like I was headed for burnout," she says.

Her cancer diagnosis changed everything, including her willingness to rely entirely on conventional treatment approaches. "My first oncologist told me that I needed a triple organ trans-

plant," says Carr. "I thought, 'Well, I don't know much, but that sounds stupid.'" So she sought a second, third and fourth opinion, finally finding an oncologist at Harvard whose treatment plan matched her own intuitive sense of what a holistic approach to recovery could look like.

"The doctor I ultimately hired was the one who said, 'Let's look at this thing. It's very rare. We don't know enough about it. Why don't we get to know it a little bit more before we make any radical statements and decisions?' He suggested I go out and live my life."

Carr did just that. Turning to her acting talents, she wrote and directed a movie about her disease called *Crazy Sexy Cancer*. The inspirational documentary, which aired on TLC in 2007, follows her after her diagnosis as she dives headlong into the world of healthy foods and integrative medicine. She also wrote two manuals on living with cancer that advocate a holistic lifestyle, *Crazy Sexy Cancer Survivor* and *Crazy Sexy Cancer Tips*, and launched a collection of blogs, videos and other supportive resources through her Web site, CrazySexyLife.com.

The "Crazy Sexy" titles came, she says, from the subject line of the update emails she used to send to friends and family. At first, she wanted to prove that she hadn't lost her sense of humor. Over time, the phrase became a term of empowerment.

One of Carr's first post-diagnosis stops was Whole Foods Market. "I didn't know where else to go," she says. "I just knew they had a lot of good food there, and I'd always heard people say, 'Eat your vegetables!' So I just bought a lot of vegetables that I didn't know what to do with."

With time, practice and experimentation, Carr learned the fine print of healthy eating. She's now compiled her knowledge and experience in a third book, *Crazy Sexy Diet* (Skirt! 2011). An instant

bestseller, the book offers advice for *anyone* interested in eating and living healthier, including a plant-based approach to eating that focuses on balancing the body's acid-alkaline levels. (See the online version of this article for Carr's Green Drink recipe and find more recipes from Carr at www.crazysexylife.com.)

Carr transformed the rest of her life, too. She left New York City for a quieter, more pastoral existence in Woodstock, N.Y., where she lives today with her husband, Brian, and their dog, a Catahoula Leopard mix, Lola. (Kris and Brian met during the filming of *Crazy Sexy Cancer*; he was the film editor on the project.) Carr taught herself how to get better sleep and how to meditate, and she started exercising. Most significantly, she didn't approach these changes as a "cure for cancer," but rather as keys to enjoying a great, vitality-filled life.

"My goal was to feel better — get fewer colds, have less constipation, better skin, better sleep, more energy," she explains. It's worked; she says she has never looked or felt better in her life, and she's never felt happier. And her tumors remain dormant.

With her movie, books and Web site, CrazySexyLife.com, Carr hopes to help others take stock of their health, regardless of whether they are facing a scary diagnosis. "You have to be brutally honest," she says. "You have to be willing to take an internal inventory and say, 'Am I a sugar burner? Am I stress drinking? Am I eating too much because I'm not getting love in my life? Am I addicted to obsessively checking my email because I don't want to look at the fact that I've got stuff to clean up with my dad? You've got to come clean and have those hard talks, because that's where your power is. The power is in facing the brutal truth, because then you can change it.'" ❖

Laine Bergeson is an Experience Life senior editor.

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VIDEO EXTRA!

Go behind the scenes with Kris Carr. Watch our cover-shoot video at experiencelife.com.