

## Who Am I To Stop It: Kris's Story

KRIS: 2008, I was in the hospital for a week, and I was suicidal and you know, out for two weeks. One of my most beloved cats died. He was named after Jackson Pollock. You ever heard of him?

FRIEND: No.

KRIS: He just kinda like blew the whole art world away.

FRIEND: Really?

KRIS: Yeah, with his paintings, back in the 40s and 50s. My cat that was named after him, he was very special because this cat used to bring me flowers in his mouth into the studio.

FRIEND: Oh my gosh! Are you serious?

KRIS: I'm dead serious. And we're talking like for two and a half years until the day he passed away. So I commemorated his passing. And then a year later, I had 10,202 pieces!

[buzzing fluorescent light]

NURSE: I'm gonna check your heart rate.

KRIS: OK.

DR: Your pulse is really high. Are you getting out and going for walks at all?

KRIS: I've only started recently doing that and a little bit of yoga and more meditation. Trying really hard to get consistency.

DR: Oh, awesome. OK. Do you get nauseous when you get overwhelmed and you get a headache?

KRIS: Yeah, it, see, like I can tell either like um...shoot, sorry. Like with the migraine, it will be either the nausea or the head pain that kind of all the sudden in just a few moments kind of bump up a little bit. And it's like, oh shit. And that's kinda like a warning.

DR: You were mentioning about a noise cancellation device.

KRIS: How the [crying]— Sorry.

DR: Yeah.

KRIS: You know like the sound cancelling device cuz that like when I'm out... cuz I wanna, I wanna get out more, you know? And so I mean that's a huge thing. I mean this helps a lot visually, but the sound, you know? It's just, I think it's harder to block out.

[cars roar]

DR: Yeah. Is it difficult for you to ride the bus and to make transfers?

KRIS: I mean, if it's busy, yeah, it's wear and tear on my brain.

[bus, cacophonous talking]

You know, whoosh, tons of people, tons of things going by, multitudes of sounds.

[overwhelming traffic, siren blares]

[cat purrs]

I'm home. I'm safe. "Let your heart speak to others' hearts." "True understanding is found through compassion."

[low-key music]

I know that people don't see me as having a brain injury disability. I think that they'd rather see me as an eccentric artist... who only wants to paint! You know, la la.

[knife scrapes paper]

[tapping on paper]

It's First Thursday, and it's kind of a big deal in the Portland art scene or just actually too, even Portland. I mean, it's an event. It's almost like, in a way, a coming out party, coming out day, or whatever it is. Because I have been wanting to get out more and just not see the world so much from my computer.

[patrons chatting]

To me, you know, if I was in a gallery like one of these down here, that would mean I made it. I'm starting to get teary-eyed. I guess it's just, you know, a big dream. [crying] And I want it to happen.

Even though my symptoms right now, but I can still see something like that...and forget about... for a second. It's like, that's fucking cool. All of a sudden, I just felt sorry for all the people that have brain injuries that aren't artists because I at least have that to look towards. I mean, this is what I miss. Like, when you see their work, it's like it inspires you.

[upbeat music]

You know, I've just been so isolated.

AMY: Hi!

KRIS: Hi, I'm Kris.

AMY: Hi, I'm Amy Archer.

KRIS: Nice to meet you.

AMY: Thank you for coming and looking at my work.

KRIS: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you for having it here.

KRIS: Jennifer? Hi, I'm Kris. Nice to meet you.

JENNIFER: Hi, nice to meet you.

KRIS: Actually it's the art that saved my life, pretty much. A little story about, though, when I first had Major Depression Disorder, I was hospitalized with it. I'd been painting even before the brain injury, but 2008, I came out, and they had the election going on. So there's a whole huge amount of euphoria, wonderful, people hyped. Then my cat, named after Jackson Pollock, he passed away on November 8th, 2008. This cat used to bring me flowers in his mouth.

AMY: He what? Oh.

JENNIFER: Wow.

KRIS: Yeah! So I commemorated passing on that day. I did 4 paintings that were totally different than anything I'd done.

AMY: Because of your cat.

KRIS: To commemorate.

AMY: Yeah, yeah.

KRIS: Yeah, just like—

AMY: An homage, yeah.

KRIS: And then, I liked it so much when I went back down the next day, and then the next day, and then the next day. And then flash forward to November 7th, 2009, and a year later, I had finished piece 10,202.

AMY: Oh my gawd!

KRIS: Yeah. I totally became the artist that I wanted to be. OK, you know how— OK, this is something of course you can answer. You know how judgmental we can be?

AMY: Oh! Oh gawd!

KRIS: That shouldn't be that way. That's something that I learned. There was this one quote. I keep forgetting who said it to who, but from Cecil B. DeMille to Martha Graham, or the other way around. But what I got it from was who are you to stop it?

AMY: Good, yes. Right.

KRIS: Who am I to stop it? To remove the ego, it would be really cool to see what else you can do.

AMY: It's really hard, yeah. It's great you came out. It's really great that you came out.

KRIS: It helped me to be non-judgmental about my work, whatever I produced.

JENNIFER: Chris, my fiancé and I, are both bipolar. We met in a support group, and we started talking about the concept for a painting gallery featuring artists with mental illness. I've been told

that I've created kind of a safe haven for some artists that might not have the confidence or ability to approach other galleries.

KRIS: Yeah. I know. Yeah, actually, that's very good point because I actually do feel more comfortable talking with you than I would, than I have in the past before, with other gallerists.

So yeah, can I just ask you?

Would you ever mind coming up— My studio's five minutes away.

JENNIFER: Yeah, I would love to.

KRIS: Are you sure?

JENNIFER: Yeah!

KRIS: You can say no. It's OK.

JENNIFER: No. [giggles] I really would. I would love to see your art.

KRIS: OK.

I love this! Look at that. For like-minded artists.

[fluorescent lights buzz]

I wanna get my internet back on. Hopefully crazy man won't be in there. He's still here. He was supposed to have been evicted.

[man's voice in hallway]

KRIS: That's crazy man. I'm just getting really tired of the light and the ventilation and having to deal with some of the crazy. You know, if I didn't have the art— If I had a brain injury, but I didn't have the art, I probably would've been practically suicidal, even more so. [chuckles] Cuz I have to do something. You know, I just can't sit there, waiting for Social Security. I'm not going to.

I didn't win benefits because they didn't think I was disabled enough as in my head wasn't cracked open, bleeding, my guts spilling out. And this is the most frustrating thing is like yeah, I look normal. But you hang with me one day.

How many more sites can I put my work on? There's so many more sites I could be posting on. And that's what I wrote, you know, having an intern helping me with that. And oh, this is my business proposal for my father to hopefully help me out financially, of course, cuz I need rent money, and I need to get my Etsy shop back up. But also, I need to get canvases, I need—  
[sighs]

"Because of my inability to spend no more than 20 hours a week on the computer due to lighting on the computer as well as short-term memory is involved, along with multi-tasking, my sales in my shop dropped to about ¼ of what I was making in previous months." And then I write, "What I need is the following." So, and then "What I'm offering you," that's what I wrote, "is a return on this investment of the following." Then I just write, that's the simplest thing, "Year 1, 15% of all my art sales to be distributed quarterly."

[pensive, driving music]

There was this guy that I had trouble with that was right below me for like a year and a half or so. Total like heroin addict, and he just he had no sense that there were other people in the building besides him. So music would be loud, video games would be loud, he would be talking. He talked so loud one time like he was yelling at someone, I was shaking in my apartment. So that was a whole drama that was with him. But he was evicted, and he actually had to get escorted out. Yeah, I just felt sorry. I ended up feeling sorry for him cuz I just saw what it was doing to him, but it's like he's doing that to himself in a way. And he's been given opportunities to improve, people trying to help him. Just frustrating when I see stuff like that, you know?

Hi, sweetie. [purrs]

[pensive music]

VOICEMAIL: Message market "urgent" sent on Thursday, July 10<sup>th</sup> at 9:49 am.

KRIS [voice message]: Hi, Cheryl. It's Kris. I'm at the Multnomah County courthouse. I was just told that if I don't have June's rent by 5:00 tomorrow, they're going to evict me. I'm a little bit desperate.

KRIS: It's like, where do I start? I actually first went to my brother, and then my second brother, and then my father. Then I ended up at my sister. I'm kinda surprised that she has not gotten back to me at all. It's like she's purposely avoiding contact.

[chuckles] I realized like five years ago, my father is not the caring kind. I don't think my father believed that I had this. My father sold insurance. So he kinda had that mentality of they're all faking it. You think I'd go to these lengths to make this up?! You know, when I could easily be working two jobs if I was normal? Or sorry, uninjured! And my mom's sitting there going like don't lend it to her.

[voice message] Hi, Cheryl. It's Kris. It's almost 12:45 on Friday afternoon, and I found out that apparently, I have a court date next Thursday. Anyway, so, I'm OK for right now.

[distorted lyrical music]

I went to court this morning and came to an agreement of a two-week extension to come up with the \$1500, yeah, an additional extension. And then I found out about the You Care, We Care something site for the fundraising.

It's cuz I was figuring out how many more blocks to go to my first written-down destination, just a month ago. And I was there, and I just looked over here. It's like, that must be new. That looks really cool there. I like this place. I wanna go there. So yeah. I know, and a month later.

JENNIFER: So you're still in your apartment?

KRIS: Yeah. Actually, I don't know what happened. I was expecting a notice Tuesday morning that the sheriff was gonna be coming. I haven't gotten one yet. So I have no idea. I was just in such an emotional state on Monday.

JENNIFER: Yeah, well, of course. Understandably. Anybody would be.

KRIS: It wasn't till afternoon that I peeked my head out, and there was no notice.

JENNIFER: That's good.

KRIS: I know, I know.

JENNIFER: Fingers crossed, right?

KRIS: I know.

CHRIS: How do you like the way your pieces look?

KRIS: Oh my gawd. They look great. Are you kidding?

CHRIS: They look great.

KRIS: Yeah. I know. It's like finally I'm in the right place, to look good!

JENNIFER: So this is Kris, one of our artists.

KRIS: Hi. Hi, nice to meet you.

PATRON: Nice to meet you.

JENNIFER: This is Kyle's wife. This is Jan and Jim.

JAN: Hi, nice to meet you.

KRIS: Hi, hi.

If I didn't have the brain injury, I would've still had the house. I wouldn't have been worried about being evicted. I have no idea if I would've gone down the same path. I'm actually grateful for that. I am incredibly grateful for this.

Oh, OK. You know what? I'm gonna...I'm gonna step outside for a second, OK?

PATRON: It was lovely meeting you.

KRIS: Lovely to meet you. Sorry! Gotta put my ear plug back in and...I'm gonna go outside.

KRIS [voicemail]: Hi Cheryl, it's Kris. I'm just trying to call as many people as I can to find out if anyone might be able to help me with moving stuff. I have to be out of here by Tuesday evening. Thanks.

VOICEMAIL: End of message.

TEXT ONSCREEN: After moving between a shelter, motel room, and a rented room, Kris got stable housing in a women-only group home setting. She continues to paint and create every day.