

INNER

After two decidedly challenging years, **Sheryl Crow** is soaring with a renewed drive to make music, take care of herself, fight for causes close to her heart, and put first things first as she raises her son, Wyatt

HARMONY



Reviewed by Louise Chang, MD
WebMD MEDICAL EDITOR

By Lauren Paige Kennedy, WebMD Contributing Writer



Sheryl Crow is in a good place.

Yes, she's back on her farm just outside of Nashville, Tenn., close to family and friends again after keeping a demanding winter schedule that took her across the country and to Japan. The rock-country crooner, 47, promoted two albums (*Detours* and *Home for Christmas*), made the rounds of chat shows, and performed for the new First Family in HBO's "We Are One" concert at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. (No slacker, she played a few inaugural balls there, too.) She was also a presenter at the 2009 Grammy Awards in Los Angeles in February. Nine-time winner Crow's *Detours* was nominated for Best Pop Vocal Album.

But simple geography—the slower, familiar pace below the Mason-Dixon Line—is not the only thing making this Kennett, Mo., native smile. The good place Crow is enjoying right now is coming from within.

"I'm not nearly so hard on myself anymore," she tells WebMD. "I've learned to stop putting everybody before myself, and to say 'no' sometimes, which was a huge lesson for me. I think women get caught up in that, forgetting about their own needs." Even with

the international, bicoastal itinerary she's just wrapped, Crow claims she does "only what I want to do" these days, and that "for every 10 requests I get now, I might say 'yes' to one."

Crow's other, more publicized, "huge lessons"—game-changing events that forced her to reassess her relationships and well-being, leading to a newfound sense of serenity and self-acceptance—came in threes: A very public, broken engagement to world-famous cyclist and cancer survivor Lance Armstrong in February 2006. The shock of being diagnosed with stage 1 breast cancer a few weeks later. And finally, becoming a mother for the first time the following April. In just over a year's time, she went from canceling a wedding and getting a lumpectomy to changing the diapers of her newly adopted son, Wyatt, and singing him lullabies.

"In a way, it was a wonderful life-shifter," says Crow. The recent upheavals helped launch the singer on her own winding road toward parenthood, contentment, and good health.

Survivor Lessons

For Crow, the painful breakup with one of cancer's leading advocates is forever linked

to her own battle with the disease—and to Wyatt's adoption, which she began pursuing while undergoing radiation treatments.

"I've had maternal instincts since I was really young," she says now. "But I had to let go of what I envisioned a family was supposed to look like. I always saw myself with the traditional husband and the kids and the dog, but letting go of all that created opportunity. The best thing I could do was to open that door."

Before she could welcome baby Wyatt through that door, however, Crow had to heal, physically and emotionally. During the frenzied paparazzi aftermath of her split with Armstrong—"When you're most down, the tabloids are most interested," she says ruefully—she did her best to stay above the fray by lying low and following doctor's orders.

First, there was the routine mammogram that revealed "suspect" calcifications in both of her breasts. A radiologist suggested she return for another mammogram in six months' time to take a second look, but her ob/gyn urged immediate biopsies. "Thank goodness I listened to [my doctor]," Crow says, "because my cancer was caught

in the earliest stages. I am the poster child for early detection."

"Early detection saves lives," says Eric Winer, MD, chief of the Division of Women's Cancers at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. "Stage 1 breast cancer—like Sheryl had—is defined as a tumor less than or equal to 2 cm with negative [presence] in the lymph nodes, and it has a very, very good long-term prognosis because it's been caught so early. Ninety-five percent of women with stage 1 will be alive in five years, and a great many are cancer-free. In fact, most are cured of their cancers."

"I was told I had dense breasts," Crow tells WebMD, a factor that has been linked to an increased risk of developing breast cancer, according to Winer, who is also the chief scientific adviser for Susan G. Komen for the Cure and a leading expert on the disease. "We're not exactly sure why there is a correlation, but there seems to be one. Breast density also makes it that much more difficult to find cancer on mammograms," he says.

Crow's treatment consisted of minimally invasive surgery—a lumpectomy, where a

surgeon excises only the tumor and a clear margin around it, leaving the breast intact—followed by a seven-week course of radiation. A post-treatment mammogram showed she was in remission and cancer-free. She remains so to this day.

The experience "woke me up," she says. "I was no longer dulled out. ... I think I was conscious before, but having cancer really opened my eyes." After staring down her own mortality, Crow knew it was time to build the family she'd always wanted, and on her own terms.

In the wake of a broken heart and a recovering body, Crow "didn't go out much. ... I took care of myself, and I learned the only way to get through grief is to grieve, to experience those emotions. I would tell people when I needed space, if I needed them to run an errand for me. And I allowed myself to sleep as much as I wanted to, and to do absolutely nothing ... and I let myself feel everything."

She also began meditating, the art of sitting with oneself in silence, during this time. "As Westerners, we try to stay busy. We say: 'Just don't think about it, get on with things.'

But for me, meditating is tantamount to quieting the brain." Crow says it helped her through those few rough months and that she continues the practice now, every day.

The Road to Wyatt

After her diagnosis, Crow retreated to Nashville to be closer to her parents, who still reside in her hometown of Kennett just a few hours away. "I needed my family around me [during treatment]," she says. "What resonated with me was trying to live a normal life, as normal as I could."

She also needed to provide a home far from intrusive eyes for her new son, who was delivered into Crow's arms when he was just a day old, after a series of heart-tugging disappointments. "I met with a few different moms, and [adoption arrangements] all fell apart for one reason or another ... but then Wyatt came through!" Even now, two years later, there is real glee in her voice when she says these words.

Asked about the adoption process, and if she has any advice for other parents now going down that road, she answers, "It was sort of like a recipe: Follow the directions

NO IT ALL

How to stop saying yes to everything

Singer Sheryl Crow didn't discover how to do it until a health scare forced her to put her own needs first—a new experience for her. "The problem is that women were never taught how to say no," says Rebecca Adams, PhD, associate professor of family studies in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind. And this translates into their saying "yes"—to their spouses, children, bosses, and volunteer groups—when they ought to be saying: "I'm sorry, I just can't take that on right now."

Adams offers these tips for mothers who want to learn how to say "no" now:

MAKE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT. "So often, once baby comes, both men and women slip back into traditional gender roles," she says. "Women need to say, 'Yes, I'm staying home, but my expectation is that we are both involved, from changing diapers to child care.'" Even if these familial roles have come to feel cemented, Adams believes that the first step is acknowledging things are out of balance and specifically setting out to make a change.

HAVE A FAMILY POWWOW. Start the conversation with your husband or partner, and then include the kids if they

are old enough, says Adams. Even if you've been married for 10 years, it's never too late to start talking. "Explain to your spouse why you need to say 'no' sometimes, why you need more time for yourself or simply can't take on a specific chore or responsibility ... and tell your kids that mom cannot be on call 24/7."

REMINDE THEM. After the big talk, there's bound to be regression—family dynamics are years in the making, after all. "Simply say, 'Kids, we talked about this,' or 'Honey, my new expectation is this.'"

BANISH THE GUILT. Working mothers and stay-at-home moms have one thing in common: guilt. "Traditional mothers may feel like, since they're home, they have to be supermoms," says Adams. "So they try to be perfect, overcompensating and taking on everyone's needs while ignoring their own. And some of these moms inadvertently encourage dependence over independence, because satisfying their child's every need makes them feel needed. Conversely, working moms sometimes rush home and, feeling guilty for missing out on so much, don't set limits with their kids, setting themselves up to be used. Neither approach is healthy for anyone."—LPK

PREVIOUS SPREAD: BRIAN BOWEN SMITH/AUGUST; LEFT: JONATHAN SNOWCORRIS OUTLINE

carefully and you'll get the right outcome." But the right outcome took time. "They don't put you at the front of the line just because you're a rock star," Crow was quoted as saying in 2007. "I went through the proper channels and did it just like everybody else. I went through an agency. I filled out a lot of paperwork. ... This was a closed adoption, but I have a physical description and the medical history of the parents, which is really great because you know what your child is in for regarding medical issues."

Seeking medical information was a wise thing to do, says Deborah Borchers, MD, a founding member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Adoption and Foster Care, "especially since many diseases do not present until the 20s or 30s, and may become issues [later] with the child's [biological] grandparents." Borchers adds that children available for adoption may have special needs, including medical, developmental, and mental health challenges arising from the effects of drug or alcohol use by the mother, poverty, abuse, and separation from biological parents.

My ambition "started to wane four or five years ago. But I had a resurgence with Wyatt, the desire to make music. He created a new sense of urgency to give voice to my concerns."

Biology aside, the connection Crow felt with her new son was immediate and lasting. "Wyatt is the first thing I think about in the morning and the last thing at night," the singer says of motherhood. "I never knew my heart could be so expansive, could feel such love and joy. Becoming a mother changed how I look at the world."

Did the threat of her cancer's returning ever give her pause as she was dealing with the paperwork and readying Wyatt's nursery? "Never," says Crow, a longtime health advocate who had performed for breast cancer events, such as Revlon's Run/Walk, for years before becoming involved with Armstrong and facing the condition herself. "My cancer was caught so early, I was lucky ... and I couldn't live my life in fear. It made me more self-examining, sure, but becoming a mother was something I needed to do."

Maternal Instincts

Wyatt, who turned 2 on April 29, is now "testing his boundaries and throwing mock tantrums. I find it so difficult not to laugh when he does this," Crow tells WebMD. "I

do everything I can to show him I'm taking it seriously because he is so dramatic. ... And he is just a good-natured little boy." Crow also reports that her son is "very social and confident," loves "hanging out with my [band's] guitar player," and is "super-close to my dad." She depends on her parents more these days, she admits, and is happy to have always had a close relationship with both of them.

As for her own parenting philosophy, it can be summed up in five words: "Don't sweat the small stuff." Crow believes that "being an older mom works to my advantage, because I'm easier-going now. I'm less critical of myself, more serene ... so if Wyatt wants to play in the dirt, I'm all for it. I don't get worked up, say, about some mess he makes."

Unlike some mothers, who allow personal ambition to sit on the back burner while they focus fully on the kids, Crow



says Wyatt reignited her drive and creativity. "[My ambition] started to wane four or five years ago. I just didn't have it in me to tour, to work constantly. But I had a resurgence with Wyatt, the desire to make music. So much is going on in the world, and he created a new sense of urgency in me to give voice to my concerns."

Still, Crow claims she's "always been into politics and been outspoken all the way back to the early days, such as with The Walden Woods Project," an environmental group created in 1990 by singer Don Henley to save Thoreau's Walden Pond from development. Pressing environmental issues, from a melting polar ice cap to overflowing landfills, alarm Crow; she inspired headlines with her 2007 "Stop Global Warming College Tour" on a bio-diesel bus with environmentalist and *An Inconvenient Truth* producer Laurie David and has long supported the Natural Resources

Defense Council's environmental advocacy. Crow also sounds the warning cry about everyday toxins, especially now that she has Wyatt's development and future to worry about. "We have to educate ourselves," she says. "Find out what affects us in our daily lives, from the foods we eat to cleaning products around the home. ... I only feed Wyatt organic food. I use earth-friendly cleaning products and drink water that's filtered. No bottles—it's such a waste, all that plastic. ... We as consumers must become conscious of our daily decisions; it's consumerism that endangers the environment."

One website she uses frequently is Healthy Child Healthy World (www.healthychild.org, an editorial partner with WebMD). "It's a great place to get ideas for daily living," Crow says, "to live a greener life." She even contributed a page to the organization's

READY TO ADOPT?

Sheryl Crow's adoption of her son, Wyatt, was a long process that took about a year, which is not necessarily typical but can happen. If you want to adopt, what can you expect? It depends on how you do it, says Deborah Borchers, MD, founding member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Adoption and Foster Care, because "adoption is not a one-size-fits-all proposition." Ask yourself these questions:

What kind of adoption do you want?

Private adoptions are generally domestic (that is, of U.S.-born infants), frequently involve newborns, and are arranged through agencies, private attorneys, or acquaintances. **Foster care** focuses on children who need out-of-home care due to neglect, abuse, or a family crisis. Child welfare agencies strive to place these children within their extended families or with foster/adoptive parents. **Intercountry adoption** occurs when a family seeks a child from another country. These are usually closed agency adoptions governed through international laws to ensure the transaction is ethical.

Do you want an open or closed adoption?

Open adoption means there is limited contact between the adoptive and biological family; closed means there is none at all. Many adoption specialists prefer open adoptions because even some contact between adopted children and biological parents seems to lessen issues of grief and rejection.

Are you financially ready?

Raising kids is already an expensive proposition. Many children available for adoption have special medical, developmental, and mental health needs—which only add to the cost.

For more adoption information, Borchers recommends the North American Council on Adoptable Children (www.nacac.org) and the Joint Council on International Children's Services (www.jcics.org).—LPK

2008 book, *Healthy Child Healthy World: Creating a Cleaner, Greener, Safer Home*, writing about the hope and resilience children bring to such problems as global warming. "Kids are so acutely aware and smart; they will be the ones to motivate us, their parents, to change," says Crow.

Body of Work

As for her famously fit body, Crow monitors everything that goes into it. "I eat chicken, fish, occasional red meat, loads of vegetables, plus lots of omega-3s and antioxidants." She also gives thanks to her own DNA. "I'm genetically blessed. My mom has wonderful skin. And I take care of myself. I get up and meditate. ... I'll work out on the elliptical machine and do core [abdominal] work. I used to run, but now it's just too hard on my knees. So I'll do Pilates or yoga instead."

For a woman who looks not merely years but even decades younger than most women pushing 50, does aging scare her? "Not particularly," she answers. "Certain things have changed with getting older, like not being able to run like I used to. But when I look in the mirror, I try to embrace those things and find the value in what I can do now. It has so much to do with attitude."

Crow also believes in finding balance, now that she's juggling a megawatt career with playdates and preschool applications. "I take care of my health," she says. "Sleeping is major for me. Meditating creates space in my life. I know how to say 'no' now, and move on. I listen to my body ... and I don't work as hard as I used to."

"There are certain choices I make," Crow adds. "And I choose quality of life. Every time." ■

Thinking about adoption? Learn more and get tips from other parents at www.WebMD.com.