

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Cameras and Catwalks: Conversations with "America's Next Top Model" Winner, CariDee English

Kristee: How did your life change after winning Cycle 7 of "America's Next Top Model"?

CariDee: Every aspect of my life completely changed—I moved to New York, I signed to a huge agency (Elite) and I was just living it. I got so much love from the viewers and was embraced for who I was, especially living with psoriasis. Up until that point, I was constantly rejected, dropped from agencies, or told I'll never model when they saw my psoriasis, so winning "America's Next Top Model" made me feel vindication, validation, appreciation, and gratitude. I made it happen and it was a big "F*ck you!" to the haters and a big "F*ck yeah!" to me and the ones who loved and supported me.

Kristee: What was your favorite and least favorite challenge on the series?

CariDee: My favorite challenge was the Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt challenge because it really stretched my acting abilities. I've been in theater since I was 4-years-old and was acting and performing music before modeling. In fact, performing is *why* I love modeling. It's never about looking pretty, getting attention, or wearing fashionable clothes, it's all about getting to perform which, for a lack of better words, is what gets me off. My least favorite challenge was the wobbly runway—it was so stupid and far-fetched. The wobbly runway was completely for television and even injured contestants like Eugena! And also, obviously, the cold pool shoot. That challenge was so unnecessary and was only used to create drama for the show. I got hypothermia and got yelled at for not quitting, when in reality I would've gotten yelled at if I had quit, too. That was rough, but it was what it was at the time and I'm not a victim, I'm a victor.

Kristee: Do you have any regrets from your time on "America's Next Top Model"?

CariDee: F*ck no, I think it worked out pretty well for me! I have no regrets in life. Ever. I'll try to be a better person and take accountability and apologize where I need to, but I don't live with regrets. That's what women are supposed to do—regret everything that we do that's emotional or masculine. F*ck that! So ladies, live your life. If you hurt someone, be accountable. Learn from it, try not to do it again, but don't live with regrets.

Kristee: What is your favorite modeling gig that you've booked during your career and why?

CariDee: I've been professionally modeling for about 16 years now, so that's tough! I'd say the most impactful one was definitely when I got to be a global ambassador for psoriasis and participate on panels and do speaking engagements with companies around the world. I got to meet people with psoriasis who didn't even know I was from "Top Model" and the more I spoke with them, the more I realized that I don't get to be silent about my condition. I have a responsibility to use my platform to educate others. It feels good because I know if something happened to me tomorrow, I left the world a better place, not because I won "ANTM", but because I took psoriasis and put it on the map. A lot of people weren't speaking out about it at

the time, so I really loved being able to own it. Modeling is one thing to achieve, but being a role model is way better than any level of supermodel.

Kristee: What are the biggest challenges you face in the world of modeling?

CariDee: Age. 100% age. Women are told to “age gracefully” and do this and that to alter your look so you stay fresh and young. Meanwhile, men can just grow old, fat, whatever and it doesn’t affect how they can survive in the world. It’s f*cked up. I *do* love how there’s more diversity and campaigns around body, race, and things like that, but for me personally, the challenge has always been age because someone younger always gets the job. Even when you’re 24-years-old! My whole life, I would age as a natural person does, but instead of celebrating that I was getting older, I would sometimes think I was expiring in a way. The belief system that the patriarch put in us was affecting me and I thought the older I got, the less valuable I became. But I’ve started to move past this and realize that women can age any way we want to and get paid at any age we want to. Right, ladies? Let’s f*cking get this!

Kristee: What advice would you give a young woman aspiring to be a model?

CariDee: Don’t compare yourself to other models. Honestly? When I was on the show, I never watched any other girls shoot ever. Not that I didn’t want to cheer them on or because I didn’t think they would do good, but because I didn’t need to. I would crawl under the table where it was dark and take a nap during the other models’ shoots because I was not going to compare myself to other women. Comparison is a thief of joy and I don’t need to get in my head. So if I had to give one piece of advice to women, not just aspiring models, it’s to stop comparing yourself to other women. That’s not what life is about. Love is real, don’t compare.

Kristee: Do you have any professional photographic training or are you completely self-taught?

CariDee: I’m completely self-taught. I was blessed with the artist’s gift, so I’d pick up things in that area very quickly. I also have a photographic memory, so if I see something done, I can learn how to do it myself. If you try to teach me something in a class, I’ll just go somewhere else, because that’s just not how my brain works. Logic was never my strong point and that’s just who I am. But yes, I was self-taught and would go online to figure out how to work my new camera or learn ISOs or other photography techniques and tips.

Kristee: How would you describe your photographic style and what photographers or experiences have influenced it the most?

CariDee: My style is definitely human interest—women specifically. I’ve shot a few men to make a good paycheck, but to be honest, they don’t inspire me at all when they’re in front of my lens. Not trying to “man bash”, but women are f*cking gorgeous and every woman has a supermodel quality. Every woman I’ve shot—from a nurse, to a wife, to an actual model—has at least one quality of her. Some have more, obviously, but that’s super freak nature. Sometimes it’s the legs or hair or eyebrows or eye color, you know? There’s something so uniquely beautiful about

every woman that shines like a diamond. I hate to be quoting a Rihanna song, but she clearly got it from somewhere and didn't just come up with that. It's true. As for photographers, there's too many to list. Annie Leibovitz is a pioneer and does portraits so well, so let's stick with her right now.

Kristee: What advice would you give to an aspiring photographer?

CariDee: I would tell aspiring photographers to learn your sh*t. Learn your camera, learn your gear, and don't worry about being the best. Just learn your gear so you can be proud of your images and shoot whatever makes you happy.

Kristee: If you weren't working as a model or photographer, what would your dream job be?

CariDee: That *was* my dream job, there's no other dream job. Although I am a rock star, as well. Before I was a model, when I was 19-years-old, I was a drummer, singer, and guitar player in a band, which was awesome, but paid literally nothing. People in your band are not always the most reliable, level-headed people, so it was hard to make it as a band. That's why I went and focused on modeling instead. We're women though, we don't do just one thing. We're a wife, or domestic, or mother, or cat/dog mom, or photographer, or writer, like, there's just not one dream job. Some people like to laser focus on a few things, but for me, I love to focus on a lot of things because everything is inconsistent. Everything isn't going to make you money or inspire you consistently. Like, right now, I'm pretty burnt out on photography because I did it for three years straight during the pandemic. And, now that we have auditions again, that's what's inspiring me more. Of course, with the writer's strike, I started writing more music again because I had more time, but don't worry about just being really good at one thing. Be happy doing whatever amount of things you want to do. Even if you've knit for a day, you tried something new! Good for you! Life is not about mastering, it's about experiencing.

Kristee: What is one tip you would give to young women struggling with a low self-esteem or lack of confidence?

CariDee: Again, I'm just going to circle back to my previous answer, "Don't compare yourself to other women." Comparison is the thief of joy. And don't listen to any archaic rules that tell us we *have* to compare ourselves to other women and be this size or this look or this race in order to be seen as beautiful. F*ck that. Go to your sisterhood and make your own rules. Also, don't look for attention from me, because that's fleeting.

I also want to touch on the importance of therapy and taking care of your mental health. Find an affordable professional, you can do it online, I don't care, but try to go to therapy at least once a week if you're really struggling with low self-esteem. I struggled from a lot of mental health issues during the pandemic and went through a really big, life-threatening situation with alcohol and medication. I was struggling with depression and anxiety and was self-medicating with alcohol and benzos to help alleviate the pain. What I truly needed during that time was a stronger support system and therapy. It was hard, because in the pandemic, every day was the

same for so long and it felt like “Groundhog’s Day” and “Nightmare on Elm Street”. I completely lost who I was because even though the alcohol helped alleviate the depression, it would also come back ten times harder. So I know what it’s like to live with low self-esteem, even being an America’s Next Top Model winner. That sh*t was just a bandaid on a bullet wound. Sometimes titles and accomplishments can really only hold a bandaid on a bullet wound if you don’t address your bullet wound—mine was learning how to live in my own skin comfortably. Exercise is also important, not to lose weight, but to get the endorphins and dopamine running naturally. Even if you don’t feel like working out, you’ll never regret it when you’re done. Honestly? It just takes work.

Kristee: What recommendations do you have for students who have accepted an internship in Los Angeles?

CariDee: Be proud of yourself! Also, take Fountain Avenue and Olympic Boulevard. Traffic is so bad in Los Angeles and these are the quickest roads. Trust me, that’s way stronger than any other advice I could give.

To add to that, Los Angeles has a lot of things to offer different kinds of people. I mean, a *lot*. The most important thing to do in Los Angeles is to find like-minded friends. Enjoy LA as much as you can and get ready to f*cking work your ass off. This city is not for the lazy.

Kristee: What advice would you give to young women who are about to graduate college and enter the real world?

CariDee: Isn’t college the real world though? Isn’t all the world real in all its awesomeness and terribleness? As a young woman, it just depends on what you want on the inside. I knew I was going to perform. I knew that way before I ever got the, “Oh, I want to fall in love, get married, have kids,” bug. I never got that bug. But if you’re going into the “real world”, just know what you want and go for it. Don’t lie to yourself. Trust your instincts as far as where you want to go. Even if you got a big degree and you fall in love and really just want to have kids for the next seven years, do it. F*cking have your babies, baby. All you have to do is live true to yourself.

Also, don’t drink to excess or get addicted to vices. As a woman, you have to keep your head on in this world. Every time we go outside, we have to be equipped for predators, so try to do as much as you can to keep yourself safe.

Finally, have a strong strategy for your mental health. You’re going to want to do new things, have new experiences, and meet new people in your life. The real world, or the professional world, or Los Angeles, or having kids, or whatever you decide to do—it’s going to change you. And change is hard for the brain. So the brain is going to need help and help can be found within therapy and friendship. Real connection.