



SEX, DRUGS & *(mostly)* YOGA

*Field Notes
from a
Kundalini
Awakening*

KARA-LEAH GRANT

Advance Praise

“Kara-Leah Grant’s new book, *Sex, Drugs & (mostly) Yoga: Field Notes from a Kundalini Awakening*, takes you on a roller-coaster ride through Grant’s very real and very tumultuous journey through the transformative processes of yoga.

Her growing fearlessness, strength and integrity, which develop through her yoga practices and her willingness to confront her own flaws as well as the shadow sides of others and society as a whole, will impress you. Her unflinching candour and the ferocity of her pursuit of true and full awakening will definitely inspire you!

She doesn’t present herself as an expert, an accomplished or model yogini, nor does she hide behind any other facade. She presents the raw reality of her experiences of using yoga in the heroic pursuit of the freedom to come home to her truth, her Self, and find rest in a kind of steady wisdom within herself.

She has taken that wisdom and brought it into her teaching. She’s unafraid of walking with people into their shadows to support them bringing the light of Consciousness, the light of yoga, into their heart, mind and body.

Kara-Leah dispels the myth that the transformative power of yoga unfolds with ever expanding peace and love. That transformative power is Kundalini, revered as the great Goddess Shakti, and She is ferocious and unflinching in Her dedication to freeing people from all the causes of suffering. In Her, Grant has found the inner ally she needed to transform her mind, body and relationships.”

Lawrence Edwards, PhD, BCN Senior Fellow, LMHC is the President of the Kundalini Research Network, a medical school faculty member and a meditation retreat leader. He is the author of *The Soul’s Journey: Guidance From The Divine Within*, *Awakening Kundalini: The Path to Radical Freedom*, and *Kali’s Bazaar* penned by Kalidas.

Testimonials

“Few personal memoirs make for stay-up-all-night reading, but Kara-Leah’s latest book defies convention in this and oh-so-many other ways. Her poignantly (and brutally) honest narrative shines the light of truth onto our preconceived notions of psychosis, relationships, and power. It beautifully demonstrates the practice of mindful self-enquiry, not on a yoga mat or meditation cushion, not at the feet of a teacher or guru, but in the gritty, messy, moment-by-moment onslaught of real life.”

– **SARAH HON**,
Conscious Brand Strategist and Yoga Teacher

“What a story!!! Is it Real or not? Kara-Leah masterfully explores the connection between psychosis and spiritual awakening, combining her personal experience with deep insight, feeling and analysis... if you have ever questioned the reality of your experience, wondered what is Real, then *Sex, Drugs & (Mostly) Yoga* is a valuable and much needed perspective.”

– **RAMA WHARERIMU**,
ex-monk, support worker and owner of Soul Jiggle Meditation.

“What we consider crazy and who we label insane is usually determined by someone outside the experience. Here, in Kara-Leah’s memoir, we have an opportunity to witness her witnessing herself and providing a much-needed view to how remarkably close awaken-ment can be to so-called insanity. Let’s hope with more in-depth inquiries like hers we can learn to discern sooner and support better, and thus grow a culture of more alive, awake humans.”

– **MELISSA BILLINGTON**,
creatix of MYOGA Freedom & The Amazon Academy.

“Kara-Leah writes with remarkable honesty, immediacy and intimacy. She offers us a glimpse into the very real challenges of spiritual life, and the blessings and unexpected transformation that can come through adversity, losing the familiar, and facing our human vulnerability with clarity and compassion. Her writing, flowing in a stream of consciousness style, takes us straight into our own direct, embodied experience. The humour and candour of her stories and inner unfolding remind us that spiritual life and the search for true meaning have little to do with having everything figured out, being perfect, or controlling conditions. In this day and age, such reminders are precious.”

– **Peter Fernando,**
author of *Finding Freedom in Illness*

Sex, Drugs & (mostly) Yoga

Field Notes from a Kundalini Awakening

Kara-Leah Grant



Dedicated to
Jase Boogie Stardust
and all the other shaman, healers, sages
and seers that walk amongst us

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And So We Begin

Prologue

On August 21, 2004, I was admitted to Lion’s Gate Hospital’s Acute Psych Ward by Dr. Alex Ritchie who stated, “This woman is psychotic. She has very disorganized thoughts and poor insight and poor judgment. She is a risk to herself.”

My Canadian fiancé had driven me from our home in Whistler, Canada to the Vancouver hospital late on Friday night – it was 3am when we arrived at the emergency department.

That day, I had slipped into trance, speaking in a different voice and different language. There is no mention of that language in the hospital notes although my fiancé heard it clearly, telling me later it sounded like “ancient Egyptian.”

Dr. Philip Severy, who wrote the consultation report on that August visit to Lion’s Gate Hospital, saw me the next morning. He noted that I was a “29-year-old woman who has had a first break manic psychosis following heavy use of hallucinogenic drugs including marijuana, LSD, mushrooms and MDMA. She is unable to protect herself, behaving bizarrely, she has no insight and is in denial of reality, therefore cannot be admitted as a voluntary patient.”

Like much of the hospital’s records of that stay, and the second stay I had a month later after a second manic psychotic break, there are inaccuracies in this assessment.

The “heavy use” reported by the doctor referred to a half a tab of acid, one MDMA pill and a gram of mushrooms I’d had the previous weekend at a four-day music festival. I’d also smoked two joints that week. The “bizarre behaviour” included getting down on my hands and

knees in the doctor's office and doing prostrations to the Sun God Ra, in all four directions, while he and my fiancé looked on.

Yeah, bizarre, for sure, in that context. But in the context of being an Egyptian high priestess, pretty damn normal.

Only I wasn't an Egyptian High Priestess – at least, not in this lifetime. I was a freelance journalist, living in a small mountain town in British Columbia and engaged to be married to a Canadian bartender. I'd been there for nearly seven years, waitressing, go-go dancing, writing a screenplay and short stories, and working as a journalist. Oh, and taking shit loads of drugs, it's true, while practicing yoga and meditation.

But at the time of my admittance to Lion's Gate Hospital, I'd been taking less and less drugs, and doing more and more yoga. And I'd been under severe emotional stress in an increasingly strained relationship with my fiancé – a relationship I did not have the skills to navigate.

The verdict from the doctors on my admittance to the Acute Psych Ward was “drug-induced manic psychosis.” The reality was far broader than that – the psychological defense patterns I'd constructed during childhood were in overdrive attempting to protect me from the heartache of dealing with my failing relationship. And I was undergoing a major spiritual emergence as my ability to work with energy, know the future, and understand multi-dimensional reality came online. I didn't know it then, but I was clairaudient, clairsentient and claircognizant.

My medical notes allude to this a few times, “Patient admits to having had auditory hallucinosis but is vague about the content.” This was my clairaudient ability ramping up. In my discharge notes, it also says, “...was behaving in bizarre ways using her hands to direct energy fields around various people. In the context of all this, it was evident she was losing grip over reality...”

That's true. I did lose grip over reality – even as I was becoming aware of my ability to use my hands to direct energy around people. Something I now do as part of my work, facilitating deep psychological healing and release.

I was discharged from Lion's Gate two days later, on August 23, 2004. My diagnosis at discharge was, “Bipolar Type II with a manic psychosis induced by hallucinogenic drugs”.

Dr. Philip Severy prescribed me Olanzapine – to be discontinued after two weeks – and Epival to be taken for several months.

I recall seeing a nurse for a follow-up about two weeks later and telling her I felt great and asking if I needed to continue taking the drugs. She said no, and so I stopped. A week or so later, my fiancé broke up with me and moved out of our house. It was a Tuesday night, and I remember being aware that the next day was my father's birthday in New Zealand.

That's what makes reading my medical notes so fascinating – I have an intimate recall of so many details from that particular time in my life. Yet what is written in the medical notes seems so often wrong, and almost completely devoid of all content of the two experiences of psychosis that I had. Small things; these facts. And yet, they leap out at me when I read the medical notes, “This is wrong, and this is wrong, and that is wrong. And oh wow, look at how my fiancé framed THAT. Oops, ex-fiancé!”

Waking up in the psych ward the second time around was terrifying. Not just because I was committed and unable to leave, but also because the emotional reality of my life finally began to hit me. Except, I was in a locked ward and felt unable to be vulnerable with anyone around me. I couldn't tell anyone what was really going on inside of me – and there was no one there to back me up. I was alone, adrift, and profoundly lost.

This memoir is the story of how I found my way back from that place and reclaimed my experiences through a lens and context that made sense to me.

But this memoir is not “what happened” either. It is just my perspective, at this point in time.

I've written it for myself, and for all the other people like myself, who experience multi-dimensional reality in a world that tells them time is linear and the universe is mechanistic.

It's not.

The universe is a play of consciousness, the One masquerading as the Many.

In Tantra Yoga, the path I follow, one simply dissolves into consciousness. All sense of the individual Self falls away. Yet to have

this experience too soon or too fast is fraught with danger, as our psychological constructs need to be dismantled with care and love. Too much knowing, in too short a time, with too little context and grounding can lead to all kinds of apparent mental illness including psychotic experiences. My consciousness was evolving and my psyche was breaking open as part of the healing and growth process.

I know this.

I know it because I have lived this evolution of consciousness all the way into integration and wholeness.

And this is what I want to share with you now.

My story, my 14-year journey, my healing, and my emergence into a being that can navigate the true nature of reality while staying firmly centered and grounded in an apparently-separate sense of Self.

Because while the doctors in the Psych Ward diagnosed me Bipolar II and said I'd had two episodes of manic psychosis, I always suspected something different had happened...

Sobbing, again

Laingholm, New Zealand, 2017

Sobbing, again.

No idea why, again.

Another bedroom, another house, another town.

But still, there I am. Same as I always was: fucked up.

And yet not, because there is another aspect of me that is not disturbed by the sobbing. The real me, if you like. The me that holds onto the fucked up one as she soaks her yoga mat with oceans of tears, for unknown reasons, again and again and again.

Am I not yet through this, over this, beyond this? Have I not yet cried enough tears, excavated enough trauma, relived and released enough of my past?

It would appear not. Because however much I wish I were somewhere else, someone else, somehow else... here I am.

Sobbing on my yoga mat.

Again.

* * *

There is a difference though, between the me sobbing now, and the me that was sobbing a year ago, five, ten, years ago, fifteen years ago. And that makes everything somehow okay. Thin sliver okay, but okay enough. That okayness makes it possible for me to hold on while letting go and just allowing myself to rain tears on my mat, again.

Is this even my heart that sobs? Or is it the heart of humanity? Am I crying for all the suffering in the world? All the disconnection and pain which only seems to have amplified and exploded since I was

a passionate 11-year-old, angry at the world for hating gay people, for burning the rainforest, for blasting holes in the ozone layer, and just plain angry at how little everyone else seemed to care. Now I'm 42 and nothing has changed out there except that it's worse. Even here in New Zealand, often lauded as 'God's Own Country' – or God's Own for short – we're still decimating the waterways and the fisheries and the forests. We still have over 200,000 children living in poverty. We have families sleeping in cars one step away from joining the homeless people populating our streets while online commenters decry the choices that all these “fucked up poor people” make...

How can one heart hold all this pain? Because it is not just my heart and my pain, it is the heart and the pain of the world. I feel all the world's pain and I haven't learned how to hold it all yet...

* * *

That might not be true.

But it feels true right now as snot drips into my mouth and mingles with the salt of the tears. The back of my neck hurts from the rhythm of my sobbing head, my shoulders are hunched over and there is no one here to hold my 42-year-old self. Sam, eight years old now, is mercifully asleep in the bedroom next to mine, not witnessing this crying episode, although he has witnessed many in the seven years we've been flying solo.

Often, I've known why I've been crying. The pain of leaving his Dad, the terror of being on my own with a child, the heartache of being alone for so many years, the rejection when another man doesn't step up, the overwhelm when juggling single parenthood and a business simply became too much.

And then there's all the personal work I've done. The old pains and heartaches I've dredged up from childhood and beyond, feeling and releasing that which was too painful to feel and release back then. Not just from my lifetime, but from past lifetimes, and from ancestors.

* * *

This sobbing is different though.

This is... I don't know.

There seems to be no rhyme or reason. Oh... I can guess at reasons. The way I felt on the phone this morning when my Dad emotionally blocked my attempts to become part of a family gathering. The ache of a partner who lives 12,000 kms away, moored in the Northern Hemisphere to a child similar in age to mine. The comments I read online from people who don't understand what it's like to live in poverty.

* * *

The wave seems to have passed now. My breath comes in big sighs and there's a cold surge of energy releasing from my torso. Or maybe I'm just cold. September in Auckland might be almost tropical compared to our last place of residence – Glenorchy, in the heart of the South Island – but it's still not cozy in early spring.

I feel the rush of cold radiating out of my body. Witnessing. Observing. Noticing.

Where am I?

Who am I?

I'm not sure I know anymore. There's a chance I've become completely untethered – again. That I've drifted so far away from most people's idea of what constitutes reality that my inner world laid bare could be perceived as the unhinged ranting of a crazy woman. Ah, more tears. Perhaps that is what this is all about... maybe it is grief for the place I find myself.

Grief that I am no longer normal, and haven't been normal for nearly 14 years. That I feel things and see things and appear to know things that are beyond the mainstream ideas of what constitutes reality. Perhaps I cry because I have a sense, even now, that in writing this book, I am forever outing myself and that could mean banishment from society. From the Tribe.

* * *

Or perhaps it doesn't matter why I cry. Only that I allow myself to cry when I am sad without creating a story about what it means.

Breath, more breath. So crucial, so important. That was how I ended up here, sitting on the sheepskin rug I prefer over my actual yoga mat, beside the thin foam mattress filling in for a bed until I can find one within an easy driving distance to this new flat in Laingholm, West Auckland that is within my price range.

I had sat down to do my practice, the same practice I've done every day for the last 585 days. I'm on my way to 1000 Days, consecutively, in the hope that something magical might happen when I get there. Maybe these periodical bouts of sobbing and difficult feelings will finally subside and I'll feel happy again.

* * *

Happy.

Oh wow... I remember feeling happy a few years ago. Wellington, 2014. We were – my son and I – living with a close girlfriend in a huge old wooden villa perched on a hillside overlooking Lyall Bay. Access was via steep stairs, or one of those boxy little lifts that delighted my then 4-year-old every time we rode up. I preferred the stairs, but treated him to the lift whenever I had too much to carry, or too little emotional resilience to coax him into walking up the steps.

It was a Friday morning, that morning I experienced happy. Maybe it wasn't the last time, but it was a memorable time. That happiness was triggered because I'd been out on a date the night before with a sexy man. And it was fleeting, lasting barely the morning.

Why has happy been so damn elusive for me?

Possibly because I haven't valued it much over the years. Derided it even, turning up my nose at the pursuit of happiness as another fool's errand much like the pursuit of a good job, or a good income, or a house in the suburbs. Instead, I was in white-hot pursuit of the only thing that seemed real – truth. Or enlightenment, maybe.

Now, I'm beginning to fear that I've gone too far. That I'll never get to the thing that cannot be got to. And yet, in pursuing that thing, I've forever fucked with my perspective of life. So much so that I can never sink back into the herd and appreciate the small things in life, like

a years-old Women's Weekly at the local fish 'n' chip shop on a Friday night before tucking into a feed washed down with a Smirnoff Ice.

And, on top of that, sitting on this sheepskin rug beside my thin foam mattress staring at the altar I set up on the \$40 chest of drawers I picked up from the Salvation Army, I'm beginning to wonder if I've simply moved around so much that I am incapable of ever finding home. That maybe, just maybe, I have lost myself forever.

These are just thoughts though. I've trained myself to not put too much store in such thoughts. They sweep through the mind like raging storm clouds and as long as I don't pay them too much heed they'll expend themselves leaving behind clear skies and a still mind once more.

I am here.

This much is true.

I am here.

Crying again, yes.

But here. Breathing. Alive.

Which is more than can be said for the painter of the artwork I'm staring at on the wall above the old dresser – Chili Thom. He died this year, of cancer, an old friend from party days back in Whistler, Canada, when I found plenty of happiness on the back of a pill, or the snort of a line, or the pulse of the dance floor. Maybe I cry for him too, and all he brought and all he didn't have a chance to bring. Because he was even younger than I am now.

I bought that painting when he announced on Facebook that he had cancer. Or that the cancer had come back. I can't remember which. But I just knew then – now. It has to be now. It's titled *Mountains in My Mind*, and in classic Chili style shows puffy, snow-weighted trees in the foreground leading into roiling pink and blue tinted clouds covering sweeping mountain vistas.

I lived in that mountain paradise for seven years, and it was magic. I'd dreamed of owning a Chili Thom since the days when my Australian boyfriend and I used to drink a couple of litres of hot sake over a three-hour sushi dinner while staring at a whopping big painting claiming space on the entire restaurant wall – yes, one of Chili's. He was a waiter at the restaurant, Sushi Village. And, like many of the tribe I hung with,

talented and creative as all hell. I would stare at Chili's painting through the increasing blur of sake, mitigated when necessary by lines of blow sucked up in the toilets down the hall, and I vowed that one day, when I had a house big enough and money in the bank, I would buy that painting.

When Chili announced he had cancer, I had neither the house, nor the money. And shipping something that big – metres by metres all the way to New Zealand, was not an option. But I jumped on his website, and I moved some money around, and I used my overdraft to buy the biggest damn Chili Thom I could afford. Which wasn't big. 60cms by 90cms. But I bought it, finally fulfilling a dream I'd cherished for 15 years, just not in the style that I'd envisioned. Of course, I never envisioned back in those sake-fuelled days that Chili would get stomach cancer and die at the age of 40.

The last time I remember seeing him was on a dance floor at a four-day festival. I was high on acid. Likely he was high on something too. It was Sunday, and daytime, and we were all at the beach stage, beside the river, dancing up a storm to most excellent beats. He was still married then to Kelsey, an Australian fairy princess drowning in creativity of her own, with a mane of red hair and freckles to match.

I remember watching him and Kelsey, and the crowd of friends around them, and feeling like they were the mother and father of us all, or the King and Queen... that in some way, they nourished and sustained every one of us through their off-beat, quirky creativity that knew no bounds and burst out of them in all directions in unexpected ways. That they were the glue for something far bigger than just this dance floor party. And so, armed with this acid-deep understanding of the power they wielded and the role they played, I scuttled off to find them some nourishment – something to eat and drink, something to take care of them, in the way that they took care of everybody else.

Yeah, I was fucked up on acid.

And it was all true.

Chili was the glue, in so many ways, for so many people. He lived more in his 40 years than most people live in lifetimes, not giving a

fuck and splattering his enthusiastic, creative, crazy, wild ways in every direction.

I may have never seen Chili again, after bringing him that food.

I don't remember. That acid trip at Shambhala Music Festival spiralled out into a psychotic episode that landed me in a psych ward with psychosis. A month later, my fiancé dumped me, triggering a second episode and a second visit to Lion's Gate Hospital Psych Ward in nearby Vancouver. It guaranteed that the only trip I was taking for the next while was a one-way trip home to New Zealand, exactly eight years after I'd left Auckland and a promising journalist career for my big OE (Overseas Experience).

I was 29 years old.

I'd just spent the happiest time of my life living in Whistler, BC with a community of people I adored in a town I loved.

They were my tribe – the first time I'd felt completely accepted for who I was, and completely free to be who I was.

OK, the drugs had a lot to do with feeling free and feeling accepted and loved...

But those feelings were real. My tribe was real. The wild and crazy and creative times we had were real. MY fiancé was real – he who I loved so fucking much.

And it was all gone.

And it felt like I was all gone, too. My audacious, powerful, joyous, light and free self.

I was gone.

Nothing was left.

Nothing but debt, a broken heart, and a broken mind.

Oh, and a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. That too. I had that. Although, technically, you can't 'diagnose' bipolar disorder. Technically, what I had was a classification. Because bipolar disorder is the observation of a collection of behaviours grouped together under a name.

But how did this happen? How did I – a middle-class Pakeha (white) woman from Dunedin New Zealand, who was runner-up to Dux at high

school and a talented writer – end up going crazy? Surely my childhood wasn't that fucked up? Surely I wasn't that fucked up?

* * *

Laingholm, 2017

The waves of sobbing have passed now.
I feel okay.
Fragile. But okay.
Now, I can practice.
My mind seems still too.
I like this – the stillness.
I can rest here.
It may not be happy, but happiness is fleeting.
Stillness, now... stillness is forever.