

Feeling Good

by Lois Nuttall
Thunder Bay Ventures

Kelly Ruberto starts each day with a walk and reading 'something positive' with coffee. Twenty-five years ago, she came to Thunder Bay to work and raise a family. Today Kelly has four older children, a new business and could live in a number of other places. But she chooses Thunder Bay - why? In her words because "of the people". "Thunder Bay is beautiful - the water, the mountains and it's very community oriented. I have extended family and lots of friends who are a huge anchor for me".

Kelly herself has been more than a friend to others. She was nominated as an 'Everyday Hero' by Sabrina who wrote: "She is the kindest person you will ever meet. People go in and see her just to feel good about themselves. She is good to all those she knows, and to those she doesn't. She has a radiance about her that is unforgettable".

Kelly began her hairdressing career with Shear Heaven and studied her craft in Florida, Toronto and Minneapolis. She also developed an interest in fitness, nutrition, Reiki and natural touch healing techniques. Many of her hair clients came to her because of medical circumstances causing hair loss and Kelly started to provide hair extensions, hair pieces and then wigs for them.

In 2003, Kelly became a volunteer at Hospice NorthWest which serves as a *shelter for those on a difficult journey*. There "Kelly would talk to people, read to them, pray with them, do their hair or wigs and make-up, give them hand and feet massages - whatever she could do to make them feel comfortable and at peace. She would always make these individuals feel beautiful and good about themselves". When asked why she chose to volunteer at Hospice, Kelly said: "I just knew that is where I was supposed to be at that time - and it felt like home for me too." Kelly volunteers as well for the *Look Good, Feel Better* program where patients learn to use donated commercial products - make-up, wigs, hats - to camouflage physical signs of their cancer treatments.

To provide clients with more accessible space and a confidential environment, Kelly established "Believe in Beauty" on Algoma Street in 2005. She describes it as "calming,



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comfortable, tranquil, confidential and safe". About the same time, Dave Gladun, husband of Melanie, a client undergoing chemotherapy, said he would do 'anything' for his wife and anything for cancer. That 'anything' was wearing a light pink hair highlight that Kelly secured for him. Through Dave, word-of-mouth about Kelly's pink highlights spread.

In December of 2005, Kelly's own sister died of cancer and Kelly began The **Highlights for Hope** Campaign in earnest. At special events, she and others placed the pink hair extensions into people's hair. Ten dollars from every \$20 pink highlight went to the Canadian Cancer Society. And it is growing. Kelly now has partners in seven Canadian cities on board with her and has raised over \$16,000 for Cancer. She has organized the behind the scenes structure (screening, volunteer training, etc.) of this private sector / public charity partnership and it has the potential to have great results nationally.

"The world is lucky to have Kelly Ruberto - Thunder Bay is even luckier to have her right here in our hometown".

Kelly Ruberto was nominated as an Everyday Hero by Sabrina Peterson.

Everyday Heroes is a Community initiative sponsored by Thunder Bay Ventures. Everywhere in the city there are people living, working, playing and contributing to the fabric of our community. To nominate a hero contact:

heroes@thunderbayventures.com