

Alumni Connections

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do come true!*

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HASKAYNE
School of Business



FEATURE ALUMNI PROFILE

Fairytale Dreams do come true!

Not even Disney could have scripted a more heart-warming scene. A school in rural Kenya. A dusty courtyard. A beautiful, sparkling, fairy replete with frothy pink gown, gossamer wings, jewelled tiara, magic wand and a smile as bright as the day's glorious sunshine. Surrounded by 700 young children staring in wide-eyed wonder, hanging on the fairy's every word and gesture. "Magical" scarcely describes it.

Toothena the Tooth Fairy was making her debut in Africa — and CoraMarie Clark's spirit was soaring.

The story of how this day came to be goes something like this: Once upon a time, a smart young woman started her career as a dental hygienist. From the beginning, she was fascinated by teeth and passionate about working with kids. Fast forward 20 years, including mom time raising three fabulous kids, and she's looking for new career avenues and a way to develop her professional perspective.

She immerses herself in full-time studies at the Haskayne School of Business and completes her MBA in Venture Development in 1999. Shortly afterwards, she launches a consulting practice and then founds Strategix, a successful management/consulting company helping dental practices across North America boost their performance and their bottom line.

And then magic happens.

A member of the National Speakers Association, she attends the group's conference in 2006. Very moved by somebody delivering a presentation in character, she wonders how she could use a similar context to make a difference in the world. Two weeks later, she awakens from a deep sleep and says with crystal-clear certainty: "I've always wanted to be the tooth fairy!"

Toothena the Tooth Fairy is born and CoraMarie Clark has embarked on a life-changing journey that is already exceeding her wildest imagination.

"It's what I was put on this earth to do," she says with her trademark multi-megawatt smile. "It's in my genetics. I come from a family with long involvement in dentistry and in education — it's a perfect fit. And it's a powerful opportunity to have people listen about something important."



Photo Bolin

On Toothena's wings, Clark has travelled to schools, children's hospitals and events across North America to teach kids and parents about dental hygiene and to share her brand of tooth fairy joy. She has written a book — *Emily's Magical Journey with Toothena the Tooth Fairy* — to spread the word and to encourage families to start their own tooth fairy traditions.

And because the tooth fairy can fly everywhere in the world, she has launched her most ambitious and most important project to date: The Tooth Fairy Children's Foundation.

"I've been really troubled about the lack of dental care for children in developing countries," she explains. "About 90 per cent of tooth decay in these countries goes untreated. Kids with toothaches can't sleep at night. They're in pain. They miss school. It has an impact on their overall health today and when they become adults. We just can't let this go on."

The trip to Kenya from Oct. 22–Nov. 13, 2008, was Toothena’s first venture into Africa. It was made possible through a close association with Eric Rajah, whose Alberta-based A Better World Foundation helps construct schools, medical facilities and orphanages in 14 developing countries.

As Toothena, she travelled to schools and villages, met with children supported by the Feed the Children organization, the Abandoned Baby Centre and the Maasai Development Project. It was complete confirmation that the message of good dental hygiene, if not the tooth fairy herself, needs to be shared with kids and parents worldwide.

“I read my book to the children and we talked about the different beliefs and traditions for when baby teeth are lost in Kenya and in North America,” she says. “It’s an important rite of passage in all cultures. None of the kids in Kenya had heard of the tooth fairy, but once they would catch sight of me, there would be bedlam and they’d come running out of their classrooms.

“We had hoped to do small groups of maybe 200 kids or so, but once they would see me, well, that plan just wasn’t going to work,” she says with a laugh.

“I would talk about oral hygiene and have two little volunteers help me show the children how to brush and floss properly. They were so excited ... giggling and squirming. Then I would give them new toothbrushes from the Foundation.”

“One poignant moment stands out. I was at a school for children with disabilities, in a dorm area for about 50 boys. They all shared one sink and next to it was an old peanut butter jar full of old toothbrushes. They were overused and yucky brushes — full of germs and bacteria—and were freely shared among the boys. It was thrilling to give them all new toothbrushes of their own.”

Neither Toothena nor the Foundation would have been possible, she says, without her time at Haskayne. “It was an incredible two years and the business skills I rely on now were honed at Haskayne. People comment on the business skills they see come through.”

They are reflected, for example, in her decision to surround herself by business people who serve on the Board of the Foundation and in some of the broader initiatives that make sense on a strategic, business level.

“Dental hygiene is part of basic health care,” she explains. “When people have dental problems, bacteria can be forced into the blood stream. That has an impact on overall health. Also, issues like clean water, nutrition and sanitation are important to dental hygiene and to health.

“There are many non-governmental organizations doing good work to improve health care in developing countries. I hope to get some of them together to share ideas and to see how dental care can become part of what they’re doing. Ideally, I’d like our Foundation to play a

leadership role in helping the entire North American dental community get more involved in international development.”

Her Haskayne education also shines in her ability to write a compelling business plan, craft proposals and approach potential sponsors and partners. She also credits it for the overall pace of the Foundation’s progress.

“It makes everything go faster,” she says. “I expect this momentum to continue for many years. I rely on what I learned at Haskayne to grow and expand the Foundation — and also to build a strong base that we can build on in the future.” In 10 years, she hopes dental clinics will be key components of all medical facilities built by the A Better World Foundation, and possibly others. In 30–50 years, she hopes every child in the world will have access to dental care.

“So far, the level of support from the outside community has been staggering. It gives me goose bumps and tears of joy.”

Given the magical rejuvenating properties of Toothena’s wings, she’s well on her way to lighting up the world, one smile at a time.

Find out more about Toothena and The Tooth Fairy Children’s Foundation,

and how you can help give kids in the developing world access to dental care by going to www.thetoothfairychildrensfoundation.com or www.toothenthetoothfairy.com.



Photo: Dave Duncan