

## WOMAN OF VISION

# Calgarian transforms into Tooth Fairy



LINDA OLSEN

## Third World kids taught value of dental health

Ask children in Calgary what to do when a baby tooth falls out and they know the drill. Put it under your pillow and the Tooth Fairy may just secretly appear in the middle of the night and leave some money behind for you.

Ask a child in Kenya what happens when one of your baby teeth falls out and, as CoraMarie Clark learned while on a charitable mission there last fall, it's quite a different tale.

"One group of children believed when you lose a tooth you should throw it up into the sky and it's taken by the gods and makes the new teeth that come in that much stronger."

The beliefs may be different, but the message Clark shares is the same wherever she travels. Her vision is to teach children how important their dental health is and to get a toothbrush into the hands of every child who needs one. She also works to ensure their access to dental care.

With that mission in mind, Clark created, and became, Toothena the Tooth Fairy, complete with pink gown, wings and a wand. The character is a real-life version of the one in the children's book she wrote, *Emily's Magical Journey with Toothena the Tooth Fairy*.

In character, Clark does presentations at schools and children's events, teaching good oral hygiene. But she has taken this fairy tale further, travelling to Kenya through the Tooth Fairy Children's Foundation, the non-profit organization she created in 2007. What Clark discovered was startling. "I was appalled at the intense need, worldwide. In developing countries, 90 per cent of decay that children will get will go untreated."

With more than 20 years experience as a dental hygienist, the 52-year-old Clark knows the long-term impact of poor oral health and she saw it first-hand in Africa.

"If bacteria enter your bloodstream, it can go through your body, and if you have a bad toothache, it's not that far to your brain. So, the plight of these kids lying awake, not able to sleep at night because a tooth hurts... I just thought I need to do what I can to turn that around."

Clark went to Africa in October 2008, handing out 4,000 toothbrushes to children in need. She plans to return, and working alongside another charitable organization, intends to establish dental clinics and ultimately have Canadian dentists volunteering their time there. "The potential is massive to make a difference."

Clark recently returned to university to earn an MBA.

After graduation, she went on to create Strategix, a management/consulting company for the dental industry. But her charitable work as the Tooth Fairy is where Clark's heart is, bringing a smile to the faces of so many children from Calgary to Kenya.

"It makes my heart pump... it's why I was put here."



Courtesy, Kelly Bolin  
Calgarian CoraMarie Clark, dressed as Toothena the Tooth Fairy, teaches oral hygiene to children from Kenya to Calgary.



Courtesy, Tooth Fairy Children's Foundation

LINDA OLSEN ANCHORS GLOBAL CALGARY'S EARLY NEWS AT 5 AND PRODUCES THE WOMAN OF VISION SERIES. THE STORIES RUN THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH ON THE NEWS HOUR AT 6. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO NOMINATE A WOMAN OF VISION, GO TO WWW.WOMANOFVISION.CA.