



## Kathy Hay – taking a “Leap of Faith”

...continued from newsletter

*On June 23rd, one of AboutFace's wonderful members will be sitting back and watching people skydive, knowing that she has made a difference in a child's life. Kathy Hay is fundraising for the 5th Annual Leap of Faith Event, an event to raise awareness and funds for Camp Trailblazers, a camp for kids with facial differences. It is a cause so close to Kathy's heart, she decided to raise as much as she can for it, in hopes that she will provide children today with an experience that she was never able to have growing up. Here is Kathy's story:*



Kathy Hay (red jacket) and others at the 2011 Adult Retreat in Ontario

I first got involved with AboutFace in the mid 80's when I wanted to research more about my facial difference, called Klippel Feil Syndrome; a birth defect, resulting in facial features not being symmetric with each other, such as slanted eyes and lower set ears and a short neck. My intellect remains completely intact. I sought out an American organization that was mentioned on a television talk show. They then referred me to a CANADAN organization called “AboutFace”. I corresponded with this office, and they assisted me with information I so needed. However, due to the distance factor, it was always at an “arm's length relationship”, and I was never able to get involved with the various activities that took place in the Toronto area. I admit I was disappointed, but I comforted myself with just knowing there was a Canadian organization out there and had no choice but to just look forward to getting their newsletters. These often featured an article about a person who is dealing with life while having a facial difference. These kinds of stories definitely inspired me. In later years, my keeping in touch with the Toronto office paid off and they finally agreed to

having a workshop called “Building Bridges” come down to the Windsor area. It would be a weekend workshop, held at The John McGivney Centre, an area Children's

Rehabilitation Centre. As a result of this workshop, plans were put in place to have a support group. This was held for a period of time, and several people became involved. When the support group decided to stop, I still kept in contact with the office. Just this past year, the camp director informed me of the 1st annual Adult Retreat to be held in Huntsville. Ready for the challenge I motored the 9 hours, met some outstanding adults who were established in the working world. This was exactly what I needed to know. If they could do this, so could I!!

It was at this Adult Retreat, that we were told about a fundraiser being held at Skyline Burnaby in Wainfleet, called “Leap of Faith”, to enable children to attend “Camp Trailblazers”. Again, up to the challenge, I attended and again watched many families with youngsters who have a facial difference



just having “fun”. You have to remember, that I never experienced this kind of event as a youngster. When I was born in the 50’s, my parents, my siblings, and myself were in this alone. Support groups or “family activities” were unheard of in those days. I was never around other children who have a facial difference. For all I knew, I was the only one. I knew after leaving this event that I would definitely be involved in further fundraising for “Camp Trailblazers”! I just didn’t have to “jump out of a plane”. Maybe one day we’ll have a “hot air balloon” fundraiser and that would be something I’d love to do!

Before the Adult Retreat, and the Leap of Faith last year I hadn’t really been overly involved in AboutFace and fundraising. The only excuse I have is that the distance factor, always compelled not to, since I never saw a real reason to. I always envied what was going on in Toronto and since I couldn’t be a part of it, I felt discouraged by it all. However, once I attended the Adult Retreat last year in

Huntsville and then with the Leap of Faith skydiving fundraiser in Wainfleet – I certainly came away from it all, with a good sense of purpose into wanting to be involved with it, in whatever way I could. I truly believe in the cause, and that is what’s most important. I came back home, realizing that this was something pretty big and one that I wanted to be a part of. Many people think Ontario stops at London, and I wanted to put the Windsor area on the map so to speak. Unfortunately, this is my first bout of doing fundraising for About Face, but I definitely don’t see it being my last. Although I consider myself quite experienced with fundraising and volunteering



– having done it for several other worthwhile causes; this one especially “hit close to home” for me, since I could identify 100% with it. Volunteering for me began in the late 70’s with becoming a Big Sister, and it continues on to this day where I am a board member for a community agency, and sitting on the Business committee at my church. I feel we all have a responsibility to give somewhat of our skills to better mankind, and would you not know in this particular case of fundraising, I may be helping to change a young person’s life. That is what it means to me!

My initial fundraising goal for this years Leap of Faith was \$1,000 but I truly believe “the sky is the limit” as to how much I end up raising. Why this cause is so important to me is because I never had this opportunity as a youngster of going to camp with other kids who share the same walk by having a facial difference. My parents and family wanted to bring me up as “normal” as possible – in many ways that has helped me to be the person I am today. However, on the other side of the coin, I had to “bottle” up all my feelings. When I moved as a teenager, it was at this time that peers reminded me very quickly that I did indeed “look different”. I experienced teasing and ostracizing, to the point that I endured emotional obstacles in relation to getting along with others and this would carry me into the employment area as well. To know that I am contributing somewhat to a cause that will help other young people gain the “people skills” to enable them to have a good handle on their self-esteem, their self-worth; all qualities that I never had in my teenage years. To have the support of an organization that has people behind you, rooting for you to succeed – it has to be on the “icing on the cake”. Thankfully, as an adult,



I have somewhat learned the tools. This is why I believe so much in what Camp Trailblazers stands for. I look forward to helping AboutFace pave the way for all these young people and making their growing up years promising and fulfilling ones for them. We'll never know what famous people may lay behind facial differences. If "JR Martinez" can do it, by appearing on "Dancing with the Stars" and succeeding like he did – we'll never know, will we?