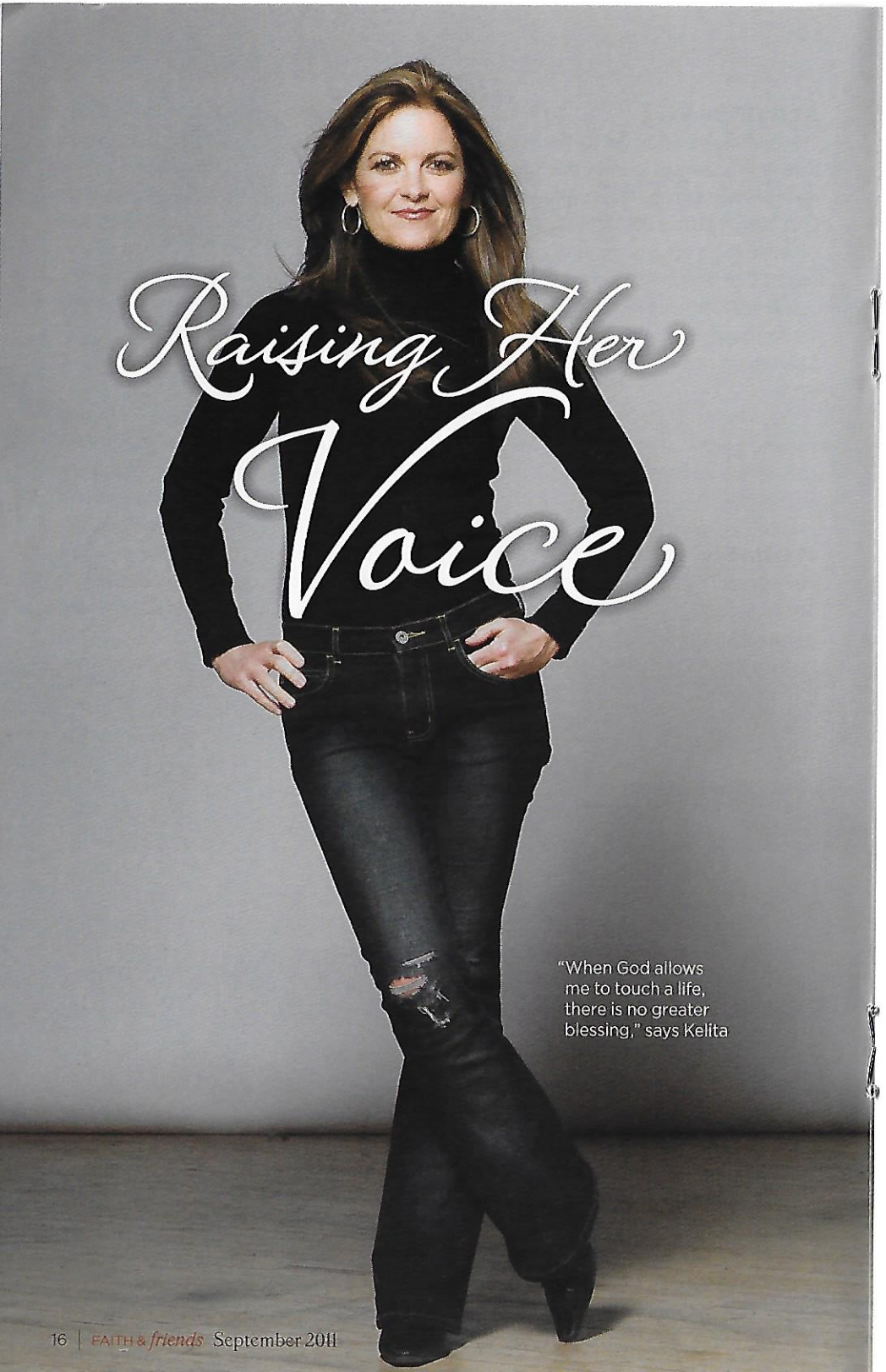
Raising Her Voice



"When God allows me to touch a life, there is no greater blessing," says Kelita

As a sex-abuse survivor, Kelita Haverland found healing in her own life. Now the popular singer is helping girls in Cambodia do the same by Julia Hosking

KELITA HAVERLAND'S ABILITY TO WRITE MUSIC WAS FIRST discovered at the age of 11, two months after her father's suicide.

"I was playing the piano and singing, pouring my heart out," Kelita recalls. "Even as a young child, I sensed something supernatural was taking place, that God was with me and He was giving me this beautiful gift to express my sorrow."

Since then, Kelita has written six albums that share her personal stories and emotions of fear, pain and joy. The Canadian singer-songwriter has received five Juno Award Nominations and her album *Because of Love* won the Canadian Gospel Music Association's Inspirational Album of the Year in 2001.

Kelita's desire to share her lessons and faith are not only fulfilled through her music. She is also often a guest speaker at community and church events.

"I share the experiences behind my songs and how God walks with me," she explains. "I soon realized that this resonated with people. For example, one evening, I spoke about my abortion and sung *Goodbye April*. Afterwards, a woman told me that she, too, had had an abortion and never told anyone. By me speaking my truth, she decided to tell her husband. Doing so was the first step to forgiving herself, moving forward and finding healing."

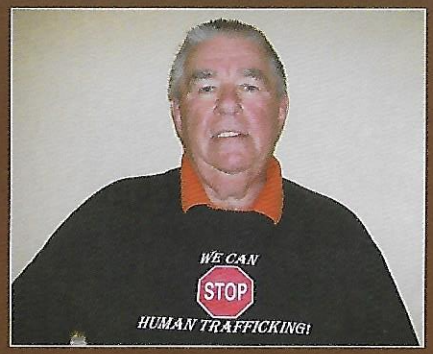
"I was horrified by what I heard and saw. I knew I couldn't stand by. I had to do something"

Waking Up to Life

Kelita grew up in Alberta, where one of her brothers—who later died from a drug overdose—sexually abused her. Three years after her father died, her mother passed away from breast cancer and Kelita was left to live with an emotionally abusive stepfather. Among the sadness and trauma, however, Kelita found hope in God.

"My faith got me through my dark

Photo: Denise Grant Photography



One Man's Mission

Stan Burditt was a member of The Salvation Army in London, Ont., involved in his church and choir. But there was something missing.

"Every year, The Salvation Army has an international day of prayer for the victims of sexual trafficking," says Stan. "Something urged me to find out more about it so I started to use the Internet and other sources to find out more."

The results stunned him.

"I thought that sexual trafficking only took place in Asia and other faraway spots," he says. "I was shocked to find that the problem exists right here in North America. My heart reached out to these innocents whose lives were shattered by the greediness of others who took advantage of them."

Stan's two brothers, Rob and Gary, are in a band called U-Turn. Stan uses their music to help raise awareness of human trafficking. He's also arranged concerts featuring singers such as Kelita Haverland to raise funds to combat this scourge, and just this past summer alone, rallies have been held across the country, including Winnipeg, Toronto and Ottawa.

"Human trafficking breaks God's heart," says Stan, "and my prayer is that I can help The Salvation Army in the fight both here and around the world."

teenage years," she says. "I attended church and sang in the choir. It was a safe place and it got me out of the house."

God became a distant memory, though, when Kelita moved to Toronto to attend university. Instead of singing at church, she pursued a country music career and fell into drugs. She married and soon abortion, adultery and abuse entered her life. Then, after 10 years of marriage, Kelita was in a car accident.

"I hit the ditch, literally," she says. "I walked away from the accident without a scratch. It was a pivotal point for me in coming back to a relationship with God and turning my life around."

Two days after the accident, Kelita told her manager-husband that she was leaving him—just as he was negotiating a major record deal for her in Nashville.

"I was excited and scared but I definitely had a peace about things," she says. "The accident forced me to wake up to life and to the gifts God had given me."

In time, Kelita got back on her feet and focused on God, her music and speaking career—as well as her new family: husband, producer and co-writer Gord Lemon and son Keldon, now 18.

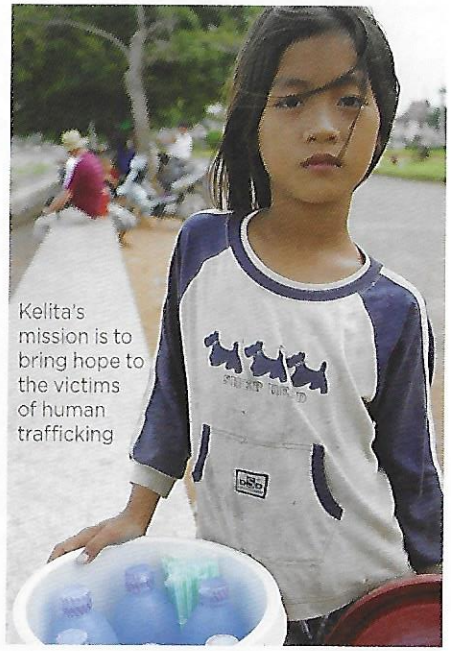
A Passion for Others

Kelita's music and experiences are not just helping people in Canada to find healing. She's also using them to assist girls in Cambodia who are rescued from sex trafficking, a passion spurred by a TV documentary she watched in 2006.

"I was horrified by what I heard and saw," she recalls. "As I watched and listened, I began to weep. I knew I couldn't stand by. I had to do something."

She immediately contacted Brian McConaghy of Ratanak International, who had been featured in the documentary, and asked what she could do. Several months later, she was in Cambodia at the recently opened Agape Restoration Centre.

"This restoration centre is known for taking girls from some of the most horrific situations you could imagine," Kelita says. "Young girls are being tortured, drugged, raped and imprisoned. I used to lie in bed at night in Cambodia thinking of the activity that was possibly taking place next door, because the whole country is rampant with this industry."



Kelita's mission is to bring hope to the victims of human trafficking

Taking Action

Kelita set a target of raising $25,000 for the Agape home, using proceeds from a concert and the release of a Christmas album, *Heavenly Night*. Interest grew and she has since held other concerts, spoken at various schools, churches and businesses and dedicated partial profits from her recent CD, *Heart of a Woman*, to the cause. To date, more than $250,000 has been sent to care for the girls.

"The centre provides social workers, therapists and medical support as well as basic needs—education, clothing, food, shelter and caregivers," Kelita explains regarding the use of the donations. "As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I have a small understanding of the extensive damage and trauma caused to these children. It has been my heart's desire to advocate on behalf of the victims and to aid in the healing and rehabilitation of those being rescued."

Kelita's passion for fighting human trafficking has also led her to several connections with The Salvation Army's work in this area. Recently, she spoke and performed at a fundraiser in London, Ont., organized by The Salvation Army's Stan Burditt (see sidebar). Whether telling her story, speaking about the girls in Cambodia, or singing at a church or community event, for Kelita it all comes down to bringing hope.

"I can't think of a better gig," she says. "When God allows me to touch a life, there is no greater blessing."

For more information on Kelita and her work in Cambodia through her organization Heavenly Night, visit kelita.com and heavenlynight.org.

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