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NOVEMBER 2002

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the essentials

Actress to
Activist: Meet
**Kelly
Preston**
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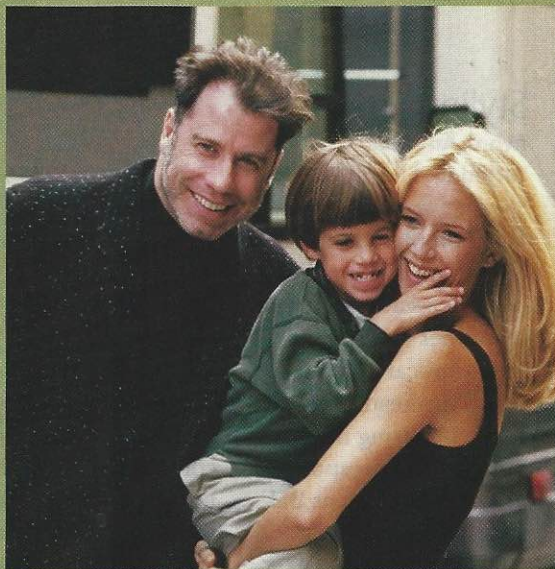
A Mother's Quest, A Son's Triumph: How one family beat cancer

THE POWER OF ONE:

KELLY PRESTON

We honor this healthy beauty for helping keep children safe from environmental dangers.

by Sheryl Berk



TOP PHOTO: MITCHELL GERBER/CORBIS; CENTER PHOTO: ION PAGES/FASHION STYLING: HAILEY HILL/ART HOUSE; HAIR: ADI MISHAN; MAKEUP: VERED/BERNSTEIN & ANDRIOLI; MANICURE: TATYANA GUBANA/TWI; BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO: REUTERS/NEW MEDIA INC.

EIGHT YEARS AGO, a near-tragedy turned Kelly Preston into a tireless crusader for children's health: Her son, Jett (then 2), almost died from a rare condition that doctors suspect may have resulted from exposure to common household cleaners. Since then, the 40-year-old actress has fought to protect kids from environmental toxins, which is why *Health* chose her as the winner of its first Power of One Award. The honor, which recognizes individuals for their contributions to the well-being of women and their families, was scheduled to be presented at the magazine's Healthy Beauty Awards luncheon at New York City's Rainbow Room October 29.

Preston and her husband of 11 years, actor John Travolta, believed they were just being good parents by having their rugs cleaned every two months. "We didn't know that while Jett was rolling around on those rugs, he was inhaling dangerous fumes," she says.

Jett was diagnosed with Kawasaki syndrome, which causes dangerously high fevers, rashes, and swollen lymph nodes. Doctors are uncertain what causes the disorder, but some studies suggest the culprit is exposure to certain carpet shampoos. One to 2 percent of sufferers die of coronary complications; Jett, who is healthy today, had to get regular heart checkups

ACTRESS TO ACTIVIST:
(Top) With husband John Travolta and son Jett at age 3; (right) Preston and Olivia Newton-John show off the video they created, *Not Under My Roof! Protecting Your Baby From Toxins at Home*.



for two years as a precaution.

"There is nothing more terrifying than the thought of losing your child," Preston says. "And then to think that something you did—or didn't do—might have caused this? It just ripped my heart out."

Once Jett recovered, Preston took action. "I have always been a health-conscious person," she says, "but I made it my mission to learn everything I could about protecting my kids and keeping us all healthy." Preston, who also has a daughter, 2-year-old Ella Bleu,

became a spokeswoman for the nonprofit Children's Health Environmental Coalition (CHEC). She parlayed her on-screen success (her films include *Jerry Maguire*, *For the Love of the Game*, and the upcoming *A View From the Top* with Gwyneth Paltrow) into a vehicle to reach the masses. "I try not to be preachy, just share what I experienced and how I learned from it."

With so little still known about Kawasaki syndrome—and about 3,000 cases a year—Preston is bringing much-needed attention to a

health concern that requires extensive research, says Elaine Faustman, Ph.D., director of child environmental risks research at the University of Washington in Seattle. "Children don't have a voice themselves; they're dependent on us," she says. "There's a real need for advocacy, for people to be proactive and for concerns to be raised."

Preston realizes parents don't like to hear that their children might be at risk. "I don't want to make parents paranoid," she says. "Instead, I'd like people to feel empowered. If you have all the information, then you ask the right questions."

A good first step is to check out CHEC's Web site (www.chechnet.org), which offers several simple steps to protect your family. "They're not hard at all, and they can make a world of difference," says Preston, who eats organic foods and avoids using pesticides in her backyard. She also follows the organization's suggestions to ban aerosol sprays and choose natural fibers over synthetics (which are often treated with flame-retardant chemicals).

In addition, Preston follows the tips for healthier living in the book *Clear Body, Clear Mind*, by Church of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard. It outlines how drugs and environmental pollutants affect people and offers a personal purification program that she swears by.

"Kelly has sacrificed her privacy to better inform parents as to how they can make safer choices," says CHEC president and co-founder Nancy Chuda.

Preston hopes others will follow her lead. "I know you may think, 'I'm just one person,'" Preston says. "But you can make a difference—in your home, in your kids' school, in your community. You owe it to your children and their future."

Sheryl Berk is senior entertainment editor at Biography magazine.

