

'DitzAble'd' author brings message to area

*'Disabilities are a perk,'
says eccentric Jewel Kats*

BY GENE WARNER

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Jewel Kats is a character – and a fashion eccentric.

The 34-year-old Toronto woman wears ultrabright “Ruby Woo” lipstick, sports permanent tattooed eye makeup, and uses two hot-pink crutches.

She's also a woman with disabilities who has a message, contained in her Web-based comic strip, the “DitzAble'd Princess.”

“The DitzAble'd Princess is empowering to women with disabilities, because it demonstrates that they can be fun-loving, take care of themselves and have the world at their fingertips,” she said in a phone interview.



Jewel Kats wears her disability with pride - along with her feathers, tattooed eye makeup s and hot-pink crutches.

The writer is bringing that message to Buffalo for two public appearances this weekend, at the “Museum of disABILITY History,” at 3826 Main St., near Eggert Road in Eggertsville.

On Friday, she'll talk to people with disabilities, human-services staff and the general public from 7 to 9 p.m. The following day, from 1 to 3 p.m., she'll read from her children's fairy tale, “Cinderella's Magical Wheelchair.” The museum is a project of People Inc.

Kats never plays the victim, despite physical problems and chronic pain dating back to a car crash when she was 9 years old. She's had eight surgeries and suffers from osteopenia (low bone density) and arthritis.

“I don't let that shape my life,” she said. “I think everyone has problems. It's just that mine are more visible. I just take it in stride. It's life.”

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Kats takes an old cliché – not being limited by a disability – and turns it on its head, suggesting her disabilities help her.

“Disabilities are a perk,” she says. “They make you stand out in a sea of ordinary folks. Limitations are just a perceived mindset. Nobody, nothing should stop you. You’re entitled to reach for the stars in your very own way.”

The former Michelle Katyal took the name Jewel Kats while working as an actress.

A big fan of Archie comics, her husband suggested that “Jewel” was like a comic book character. So why not write a comic strip about herself?

“I poured my life on the page, and it became like a diary,” Kats said. “I think people relate to the fact that I can poke fun at myself.”

The DitzAble Princess, released on tapastic.com website every Wednesday and Sunday, has had 650,000 Web hits since February, she said.

Kats explained the image she wants to



‘Cinderella’s Magical Wheelchair’ is one of Jewel Kats’ Web comic strips highlighting women with disabilities.

leave on her Buffalo audience.

“People with disabilities – you may not find us in toy boxes. We may not be Barbie, but we can be the ideal woman, in our

own shape and form.”

That’s the persona of her comic-strip princess.

“I think princesses can come in every shape, form, type, color or age,” she said. “Anybody can get a prince, but you don’t necessarily have to get a prince to be a princess. You can do it on your own.”

Kats knows how to grab attention. Two of her seven books are “Cinderella’s Magical Wheelchair” and “The Princess and the Ruby: An Autism Fairy Tale.”

The Cinderella story, of course, has its own message.

“She doesn’t rely on a prince to rescue her,” Kats said of her Cinderella. “She makes it on her own. She’s business-savvy, and she opens up her own jewelry store. She’s wheelchair mobile, but she’s also empowered.”

That’s the lasting image Kats hopes to convey to her audiences this weekend – empowerment for people with disabilities.

Anyone wanting to RSVP or learn more about the two events may call the museum at 629-3623.

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