

## HOW JO-LI WENT FROM SUICIDAL ADDICT TO STAR PUPIL

## Off the drugs ... and on to distinctions

Jo-Ann Bekker

SIX MONTHS ago Jo-Li Kotze, a recovering addict, hated school.

Today the 19-year-old from Knysna's Oakhill School will learn that she passed matric with distinctions in all seven of her subjects. She has been clean for three years but still lives at MoSa-iCo, a treatment facility.

Born in Paarl, Kotze started stealing at the age of seven, drinking at 13, and bunked classes at her Stellenbosch primary school. She suffered from depression and tried to kill herself twice. At 14 she had an 18-year-old boyfriend and smoked cigarettes.

As a child, she witnessed violence but does not want to blame other people for her actions.

Her drug use quickly spun

'We would ... spray weed with Doom and smoke it'

out of control.

"It went from a cigarette one day, to weed the next week, to acid and ecstasy the next month. And then the weed became a couple of times every day."

Midway through Grade 9, she and a friend were expelled. Enrolled at a Strand school, she'd "go surfing and then lie on the pavement outside the school and smoke weed. Or I'd take acid before I went to class".

Later she hung out in pubs

until it was time for art classes.

"My parents would ask where I was going and I would give them whatever story I wanted. My using got worse and worse and my group of friends changed constantly to suit my using habits."

"And then it all went really dirty. I was throwing up every day and every night, mixing weed and alcohol. I started each day with a joint - "wake and bake" - and we would lace sometimes, spray weed with Doom and smoke it."

"Every now and then we went to Jeffreys Bay for a holiday and when I was using I had no inhibitions when it came to guys. It didn't matter who, what, where. People's parents didn't want me to be around their kids and I wasn't allowed in their homes."

Kotze hated anger because of how she'd seen angry people

behave.

"I sort of suppressed my anger to such a point that I was numb. Drugging helped keep me on a plane of numbness."

She showed the healed cuts and burn scars on the insides of her arms.

"I've been cutting my whole life."

Another suicide attempt resulted in a week in hospital and admission to a rehabilitation centre for children.

Kotze snorted a fellow patient's Ritalin and ran away. She was offered beer and marijuana in a bar and passed out at the entrance of the rehab.

Days later she was sent to the Serenity Care Centre outside Sedgefield before being transferred to MoSa-iCo, a treatment facility which promotes integration into society.

Initially Kotze had no desire to resume her schooling.

"They had to force me to go. I'd sit around reading, listening to my iPod. I didn't talk to anybody. I didn't wear the school uniform until matric. Many kids were scared of me."

Oakhill's former drama teacher Jaci de Villiers was her first friend there.

"She lifted everything. She encouraged my questioning and whatever I was passionate about. She showed me that even in the real world there are people who accept your thoughts and feelings."

"Here in MoSa-iCo they want you to share the darkness and lightness in you. But then you go out into the world and it's like no one can see it, and then that brings you back to drugging."

"But Jaci helped me to see there is no such thing as socially inappropriate feelings."

Six months ago Kotze stopped resisting school.

"I suppose I just started loving history. I liked studying the Cold War and the transition period between apartheid and democracy."

"And I'd always loved drama, and English." She became friends with two girls in her class.

When the school allowed her to change to maths literacy, her aggregate soared.

"I sometimes wonder if I would have done as well in a state school, but I don't think so. In the IEB curriculum I can use my emotional experience in the work I'm doing."

Shane Kidwell, headmaster of Oakhill School, was "blown away" by Kotze's seven As in her final examinations.

"Jo-Li realised the opportunity she had been given and influenced all around her for the good. She has been a wonderful example of determination and self-discipline."

Kotze's challenges haven't ended.

"Addiction is not like the flu. It's like HIV, it's always there. You can learn to live with it without dying, but you can never make it go away. You can learn to take responsibility, but you can never make the darkness go away."

Her plans for 2012 change every week.

"I've been accepted to study drama therapy at Rhodes. I know I want to do something like that, but I don't think this year."

"I want to walk through Lesotho, I love mountains. Or do drama in New York."

"Or do volunteer work and eventually work for the United Nations. But I'm scared to leave MoSa-iCo."



SEVEN OF THE BEST: Jo-Li Kotze, a recovering addict, received seven distinctions in the Independent Examinations Board matric results. Picture: JUSTINE EDWARDS

## Matric results hailed by the head of IEB

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IEB chief executive Anne Oberholzer said that despite the "very small" dip in the results she was very pleased with the schools' performance. "We are very pleased indeed. The schools have done very well. The teachers and the learners have worked very hard."

She said the decrease could be attributed to six new schools which may have had trouble settling into the new system.

Oberholzer said it was particularly important to note that all pupils had qualified to study further.

"A key purpose of schooling is to prepare our young people to take up their place in adult society, be it at an institution of further learning or in the workplace. A trainable youngster is one who has developed the maturity to understand that their educational destiny rests in their own hands, who understands that true learning goes beyond preparing for an examination and developing the cognitive skills required to do a job

of work."

She said the IEB was concerned that the number of pupils who had chosen physical science as a subject had dropped from 52.3 percent in 2008 to 47.4 percent last year.

Oberholzer said that it was heartening to see an increase in the uptake of the subject by girls, from 45.5 percent in 2008 to 47.4 percent in 2011.

The 13 Western Cape IEB schools are Bridge House in Franschoek, Cedar House in Kenilworth, Curro Durbanville, Curro Langebaan, Elkanah House in Sunningdale, Glenwood House Independent School in George, Knysna Montessori School, Oakhill School in Knysna, Principia College in Oudtshoorn, Reddam House College in Green Point, Reddam House College in Constantia, Silvermine Academy in Sun Valley and Somerset College in Somerset West. Fees at these schools range from about R45 000 to R68 000 yearly for matrics.

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## RESULTS AT A GLANCE

98.15 percent pass rate, down from 98.38 percent in 2010

8 281 pupils from 173 schools nationally

636 pupils attended 13 schools provincially

2 of 59 outstanding pupils in the Western Cape

6 of 61 commendable pupils in the Western Cape

7 of 8 top provincial pupils attended Reddam House (pictured) in Constantia



## Matric results to be released in stages

Sandiso Phaliso

MATRIC results will be released in stages, with the national results announced by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga in Pretoria this morning, Western Cape Education Department spokesman Paddy Attwell said.

Pupils and parents interviewed like this approach, saying it should continue so that pupils are the first to know their fate, instead of being told by the public if their names don't appear on the provincial list of pupils who have passed.

Attwell said matriculants could get their results at their respective schools tomorrow morning, while those not close to their schools could access them on the department's website in the afternoon after first entering their identity and examination numbers.

The general public would only be able to view the results in newspapers on Friday morning, Attwell said.

## US advocacy groups demand review of laws which criminalise HIV-positive people

David Crary Sapa-AP

NEW YORK: A man in Texas is serving a 35-year prison sentence for spitting at a police officer - because he has the virus that causes Aids and his saliva was deemed a deadly weapon. In Michigan, an HIV-positive man who allegedly bit a neighbour during an argument faced a bioterrorism charge.

Charges for the same acts would have been far less severe if the defendants had been virus-free. Now a coalition of

## Many existing laws were made early in the Aids epidemic

advocacy groups - backed by an outspoken champion in Congress - is campaigning for a review and possible repeal of criminal statutes specifically targeting HIV-positive people.

"These laws are archaic,"

said Republican Barbara Lee. "They're criminalising a population of people who should not be criminalised."

Lee introduced a bill in September that would provide states with incentives and support to reform criminal laws aimed at people with HIV. Lee assumes the bill has little chance of passage while Republicans control the House of Representatives, but hopes it will help raise awareness about the state laws.

"It's very important to start these debates, to get governors and legislators to look at it,"

she said in an interview.

Thirty-four states have criminal laws that punish people for exposing another person to HIV, according to the advocacy groups working with Lee. Prosecutions occur even in the absence of actual HIV transmission, and the laws generally do not consider use of a condom as a defence, the groups say. Many of the laws were enacted early in the AIDS epidemic, when fear of the disease's deadliness was at its highest and before advances in understanding how HIV was transmitted. The laws have not

been revised even though Aids - thanks to medical advances - is no longer viewed as a death sentence.

Scott Burns, executive director of the National District Attorneys Association, suggested that most prosecutors would oppose Lee's bill and argue that the laws remained necessary to deter HIV-positive people from reckless or irresponsible behaviour.

"Notwithstanding that we've made tremendous medical advances, I don't know anyone who'd want to be infected with HIV and go through the

treatment regimen," he said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, HIV is spread primarily by unprotected sex with an HIV-positive person, sharing of tainted needles or syringes, and births by an HIV-infected mother.

HIV is not spread by saliva, tears or sweat, and there are no documented cases of its being transmitted by spitting, according to the CDC. As for biting, the CDC says there is no transmission risk if the skin is not broken; in a "very small number of cases", transmission did occur when a bite drew blood

and caused severe tissue damage.

While prosecutors defend the HIV laws as appropriate for certain cases, some activists argue that criminalisation of exposure to HIV can backfire and actually fuel the spread of the disease. They note that under most of the state laws, people who don't know they have HIV are less culpable than those who do know. This could deter some people from learning their HIV status, and thus preclude some HIV-positive people from getting treatment. A better approach, the advoca-

tes say, is to encourage responsibility and disclosure without the underlying threat of arrest and prosecution.

The Obama administration's National Aids Strategy, released in July 2010, echoes those concerns, saying some of the state laws "may make people less willing to disclose their status by making people feel at even greater risk of discrimination."

"It may be appropriate for legislators to reconsider whether existing laws continue to further the public interest," the strategy says.

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## Man nearly drowns at Melkbos

A MAN from the Witsand informal settlement in Atlantis nearly drowned at Melkbosstrand Beach and, after he was rescued, refused to be taken to hospital for a check up.

Anele Nduka, 34, found himself in difficulty in the water yesterday

afternoon, but was saved by a city law enforcement officer who pulled him out, said Disaster Risk Management Centre spokesman Wilfred Solomons-Johannes.

He said Nduka was stabilised after receiving CPR. - Staff Writer

## Elephant population in Tanzania being decimated

DAR ES SALAAM: The number of elephants in two wildlife sanctuaries in Tanzania has fallen by nearly 42 percent in just three years, a census showed yesterday, as poachers increasingly killed the animals for their tusks.

The census at the Selous Game Reserve and Mikumi National Park revealed elephant numbers had plunged to 43 552 in 2009 from 74 900 in 2006.

The census was carried out by the east African country's wildlife authority, Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute, as part of a government plan to conserve wildlife.

The rapid fall prompted President Jakaya Kikwete to order an investigation, his office said yesterday.

Conservationists estimate Tanzania has a total elephant population of between 110 000 and 140 000, making it one of the largest sanctuaries in Africa.

But in recent years, Tanzania and neighbouring Kenya have suffered a steep rise in poaching as criminals killed elephants and rhinos for their tusks and horns for sale in Asia.

Traffic, a conservation group

that tracks trends in wildlife trading, said in a statement last week that last year had been a record year for ivory seizure. It pointed to a surge in elephant poaching in Africa to meet Asian demand for tusks for use in jewellery and ornaments.

Elephants are also under pressure in many parts of the continent from loss of habitat to humans, pollution and climate change. Their number has fallen to between 470 000 and 685 000 from millions just decades ago, conservationists say.

Kikwete also ordered the Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute to investigate the disappearance of the rare Roosevelt's sable antelope from national parks, and to look for ways of reintroducing the animal in at least in one of the parks, the statement said.

The last Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in 2007 agreed to a nine-year moratorium on any further trade in ivory, after some 105 tons of elephant ivory had been sold from Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to China and Japan. - Reuters

## That dam New Year's prophecy!

BANGKOK: Thai police have summoned a 73-year-old man to face charges of causing public harm by publicising a prophecy that one of the country's largest dams would burst on New Year's Eve, reports said yesterday.

Police in Tak province, 380km north of Bangkok, gave Thongbai Khamsi until January 10 to acknowledge the charge or face arrest, the Bangkok Post reported.

Thongbai last month informed local media of a prophecy made by his son, a purported five-year-old psychic, that the Bhumibol Dam would burst on December 31, 2011.

It did not. The boy made the prophecy 37 years ago, shortly before his death. Thongbai said his son had correctly predicted that a tsunami would hit Thailand in 2004.

Officials said the false prediction caused a 90 percent drop in tourist arrivals to Tak during the holiday season and a loss of 400 million baht (R107m) in income. - Sapa-dpa

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