

I'm Kean Broom and I teach English at St Alban's College in Pretoria, South Africa. I am married to Kim and have two children – Kai, aged 4 and Kalli aged 7. My personal interests include rock climbing and scuba diving, and my favourite thing to do is to explore new places. As well as teaching, I also run the outdoor education program at the College. This consists of grade camps, hikes, adventure travel, and the Form 3 Journey.

The Form 3 Journey is a 23-day continuous Journey of 450km's that is undertaken by our grade 10 learners. The boys cover the entire distance on foot, by bicycle, in canoes, and on horseback. There are 6 groups, each comprised of 16-18 boys and 2 staff members. The groups set off from the College a day apart from each other. The main focus of the Journey is to allow boys to have meaningful time for introspection and personal growth away from the influences of home and their normal surroundings. During the 23 days the boys must make their own decisions and accept the consequences of those decisions. The staff members in each group do not get involved in decision making unless it becomes a safety issue. At the end of each day, each group has a debrief session to unpack the day's events and discuss issues that may have arisen. Communication with parents and friends is allowed only by letter, and boys can only start sending and receiving letters after day 8.

The Form 3 Journey is a rite of passage. It falls into that critical stage in a boy's development where there is a strong need for acceptance and for establishing his place within the group. At St Alban's we are continually trying to refine our outdoor program so that the interventions we run in each grade will build on the experiences that the boys had in the previous grade. The form 3 Journey forms the pivot around which the other outdoor experiences hinge. Six years ago, we realised that there was a compelling need for a significant and defining experience in the grade 9-10 age group – something that could act as a rite of passage, and on which we could further develop the leadership potential in the group. The idea of a Journey was not a new one. There are schools around the world who offer similar experiences, including one in South Africa called Somerset College. Somerset College run a 28-day experience that they call 'The Trek'. We based our Journey largely around the way they run their 'Trek' – and we are grateful for the assistance they gave us in this regard.

There are a number of elements that are key to what the Journey is about.

Time away from normal surroundings:

This allows the boys the freedom to make choices and decisions based on the 'here and now'. At home, decisions may be influenced by parents, by time constraints, by peers etc. It also allows boys to have 'time out' – in some cases, the normal surroundings may create an environment of pressure or stress.

Facing challenges:

The Journey brings boys face to face with many challenges. Mostly the challenges are unpredictable and could include things like meeting a snake, running out of water, getting lost, crossing a river, sustaining an injury. Other challenges are predictable because of the nature of the Journey and include things like covering long distances on foot or by bike, getting on with boys you don't know so well, cooking your own meals, spending time alone in the bush etc.

Communication by letter:

In today's society, communication by letter is largely a thing of the past. However, it plays a vital role on the 'Journey'. The feedback that we have had from parents over the years has indicated that communication happens at a much deeper level in the letters that they receive from their sons.

Factors that play a role in this are: Time away from home that creates the need for communication; available time in which to think, reflect, and express feelings clearly on paper – something which doesn't often happen in the business of normal life at home.

#### Solo time:

Time spent alone, during which reflection and introspection is encouraged. Many boys come back after the Journey feeling that the solo times were some of the best times they experienced on Journey. However, some boys are quite uncomfortable about solo time and try to get it behind them as quickly as possible by sleeping.

#### Debriefing:

This aspect of each day is vital in re-enforcing lessons that may have been learned. At the debrief, boys are encouraged to discuss the events of the day freely with each other. Initially, this might take a certain amount of guidance from the staff members but soon the boys begin to chat candidly about their feelings. It is important that the staff members guide the boys into creating an atmosphere of security in the debriefs, where conversations can be frank and honest, but constructive at the same time. It is during these times that the boys learn a lot about how others perceive them and the feedback that they get about themselves is extremely valuable. It also gives the staff members a unique insight into the character of each boy.

#### Experiencing consequences:

Experiencing consequences is something from which many boys have been protected. The Journey provides a forum in which each boy has to experience the consequences of his decisions and of his actions. For example: Quite often boys will finish their water early in the day and then ask other boys for water. If the other boys refuse, then they will go without water until someone relents or until they reach the next camp.

Certain ground rules are laid down before the Journey. One of these is that there will be zero tolerance towards litter. Often, in the first few days of the Journey, we will make a group walk back to a campsite (sometimes up to 15km's) to clean up litter they have left. It doesn't usually happen twice to one group.

Physical transformations are common. Weight loss is a common occurrence and some boys have lost 15 kg's whilst on Journey. Every year, a couple of boys' lives change significantly as a result of the weight loss they experience. Kyle lost 14 kg's on Journey in 2006. Before that he led quite a sedentary life and was not an active participant in any sport. After returning from Journey he felt motivated by his weight loss, joined the tennis club, and ended up being the number 2 player and captain of the club in his matric year.

Lebogang lost 15 kg's on Journey. He kept the weight off, lost more, started playing rugby, and his self confidence increased dramatically. From almost failing in form 1 and form 2 with a highest mark of 42% he finished matric with an average of 75%. He attributes the change in his life entirely to the Journey.

Another common outcome is an increased level of appreciation of what they have. Parents remark frequently about the fact that their sons demonstrate a better understanding of the fact that they are privileged. The boys are more willing to help, complain less, and are more grateful for what they are given. Although the improvement in this regard is dramatic directly after the Journey, and tails off somewhat later, parents feel that there is nevertheless a sustained improvement in this regard.

Changes in attitude occur regularly too. James had a very critical outlook on life and almost didn't go on the Journey because he thought it would be a waste of his time. On the morning of departure

his Mother convinced him to go. He came back having enjoyed the experience thoroughly and his whole attitude to life became positive.

Thlogi suffers from Leukemia and felt that the challenges he had faced already had prepared him for life. He also decided not to go on the Journey, using medical concerns as his excuse. His Dad talked him into going at the last minute. He found the experience life changing.

Deeper relationships develop as a result of boys working together toward a common goal, enduring hardships together, solving problems together, and spending uninterrupted time together. I always ask the boys whether there are boys who they would have voted for as prefects before they left on Journey, and who they would no longer vote for. The answer is always a resounding 'yes'. The opposite also holds true. In this way, the boys are 'unmasked' and the group as a whole has a much better understanding of the individuals within its ranks. This pays dividends later on when they choose leaders.

In 2009 we launched a pilot study to see if there were any benefits to EQ. A pilot group of 28 boys participated in the study. A statistically significant improvement in EQ was seen in the the test group. (See appendix A)

The problem solving abilities of boys improves as they face challenges that they cannot avoid. As boys are forced to deal with problems rather than avoid them, we see an increase in the level of creativity that boys apply to problems. For example: A group was doing one of the cycling legs and they forgot to pack spare tubes into their cycling packs. During the morning, one of the boys had a blowout. The boys' first reaction was to ask the support vehicle for another tube. However, the support crew would not give them another tube because they were supposed to carry one with them. For a while the boys just sat around claiming that it would be impossible to complete the remaining 30kms if they could not get a new tube. Once they realised that they would not be given another tube however, they started to think of other possible solutions. Eventually, they stuffed the tube with grass to replace the tube and managed to finish the last 30km on the grass-filled tyre.