

Joburg scholar recalls a "beautiful Eureka moment" during matric finals

In anticipation of this year's Independent Examinations Board matric results, King David Linksfield scholar Adam Krok says he's confident he's holding a full house in his hands, and this bright spark isn't one to have false expectations.



Adam Krok, matric pupil at King David Linksfield.

Chatting to the 18 year old about the exams, Adam distinctly recalls a "beautiful Eureka moment" he had while writing his maths final. "I thought Maths Paper 2 had some really challenging questions which unnerved me at the beginning of the exam," he says, "but as I slowly analysed the seemingly impossible questions, that beautiful Eureka moment came almost instantly. After that, I knew what I had to do."

A well-rounded scholar who loves both languages and the sciences, Adam attributes self-pride and the seriousness of matric helped him stay focused throughout the year and kept his eye on the ultimate goal of acing his final exams.

"I wanted to challenge myself to see what I was capable of."

"Also, matric is the ultimate year of schooling that determines your tertiary education and the jobs available to you in the future. It is a horribly arbitrary distinction but nonetheless has to be adhered to."

The Krok family are originally from South Africa but lived in the United States for several years before making a decision to return to a new South Africa in 1994. Two years later, Adam was born. With a passion for debating, public speaking and Shakespeare, combined with his natural leadership and social skills, Adam excelled throughout his entire schooling career. He arrived at King David High School to write his first English essay on Greek mythology, mimicking the epic style of Homer, and which was well-received by his English teacher. Fascinated with the classic theme, he later begged his mom,

Karen to order a Latin textbook on Amazon and proceeded to teach himself Latin during Grade 10. He later sought out the help of an experienced Latin teacher for his Grade 11 and 12 year.

"Latin is now almost non-existent in SA, but has experienced a great resurgence in the UK and USA. One of the highest honours at Harvard and Princeton is to be allowed to give the graduation speech in Latin," he explains.

In recognition of his sterling dedication and service to his school and his peers, Adam received Honours in five cultural categories: Debating, Public Speaking, Shakespeare Challenge and Performing Arts. He also achieved a Gold Medal for academics and was the overall highest matriculate for prelims. A passionate and outspoken speaker for truth and a student leader representing his fellow students, he was co-captain of the debating team, and an active member of Habonim Dror Southern Africa - a Jewish youth movement involved in civil society.

Last year, while in Grade 11, Adam set himself a goal - to take 10 subjects in matric, and get a distinction for every single one of them. Not one to shy away from a challenge Adam chose Advanced Placement subjects including Math and English. A more stringent Matric you could not find. Adding to this, he also took Latin as an extra subject after hours, as well as writing entrance exams like the SAT for American universities.

"It was a busy 2014, but I managed to remain committed to some of my passions. I visited Marikana for a weekend to learn more about the tragedy of the miners and such a seminal event in post-apartheid South Africa. I read the Economist regularly so as to keep up to date with the current situation worldwide. I find reading relaxes my mind and keeps me grounded."

While many teens swear by a strict studying routine, Adam didn't set up a 'study schedule'. Instead he learnt his subjects on an intuitive basis so that he knew them well and then as each one approached he would concentrate on the upcoming exam. "I sacrificed a lot of reading and general learning," he says. "I prioritised my schoolwork and so ended up neglecting my other interests such as European Enlightenment history, reading novels and playing soccer. The hardest part of matric was not so much the learning but the feeling of constriction; that the syllabus must be covered and that there's no time for deeper engagement with the subjects. I also gave up playing PlayStation for the last six months of the year so that I could have fewer distractions."

Although completely prepared for the exams, some of the papers were still challenging, especially Chemistry/Science and Maths. When it comes to favourites, Adam's best subject is Science yet he found it was one of the hardest papers. "I think Science is the great bridge between English and Maths and helps us understand the reality around us. You need Maths to define quantitatively certain phenomena like gravity or electromagnetism but you need English to describe those phenomena accurately. "While it's by far my favourite subject, I found the Chemistry/Science Paper 2 tough. I knew the answers but some of the questions were unexpected. Twenty fourteen was the year that Geometry was put back into the Maths syllabus. Last year Maths Paper 3 was a separate Paper, this year it was put back into the syllabus and was no longer optional, this made the Maths Papers far more challenging".

"Escapist yes but even more effective."

He says that whenever he felt nervous or anxious during an exam he would take a break. "It's very counterproductive to work if you're overburdened," he says. "I would watch a show on TV like Gotham or The Walking Dead just to take my mind off of work. There's nothing like being transported to a different world to get your mind off functions or Afrikaans Woordeskat. Escapist yes but even more effective."

Adam says while he didn't rely on lucky charms to help him during the exams, he did develop a curious superstition that he should write with the same pen or else something disastrous might happen. This particular pen, he says, will be a treasured token and serve as a reminder of his matric year. He'll also never forget the teachers who helped him achieve his academic goals. "King David really has teachers who are personally engaged and committed. I don't think one of my teachers at King David could sleep if they knew you weren't ready for exams," he laughs! "My English teacher and mentor Dr Quince is the most interesting and passionate man I have ever met. His fierce love for Shakespeare in particular and the English

language in general has been passed onto me. Without a doubt, all the students in my class were more eager to listen to his endless knowledge and anecdotes than they were for the syllabus."

Adam explains that he and his school suffered an emotional end of year when King David lost long-standing, recently retired teacher Ronnie Mink .passionate teacher Warren Mendelow (two teachers past away during their final week before exams with Daniel Copans co-matric student passing away during the first week of the final exams. His tragic death, says Adam, was the lowest point of matric. All three were cancer related deaths and rocked the school

Adam says he also drew inspiration from his older brother, Devin. In the Krok family, the bar of excellence had already been set pretty high with Devin having also achieved exceptional results in matric. In 2012, Devin pulled in 10 distinctions and is now studying Computer Sciences at Stanford University in America.

"I really admire my brother because he had the most incredible work ethic. He encapsulates the Latin motto 'labor omnia vincit' - hard work conquers all. I think Devin is a great role model for anyone. There's a big misconception still hovering around that people are smart because they're born that way. Genetics and birth do have a role but I think it's more behavioural and practice and Devin epitomises that for me."

Next year, Adam will be leaving his family behind for Paris, where his love for languages will continue and study French (the height of a romance language) at the Sorbonne University for a few months. He aspires to fulfil his dreams by enrolling in an Ivy League University in the US when their semester starts in August 2015.

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