

Memoirs of an Oakhill Mom

By Jo-Ann Thesen

As far as I know, our elder son Leo was the first baby born to an Oakhill staff member. He was certainly the first child born to a male teacher, since headmaster Allan Graham had to draw up the school's paternity leave policy for Guy, the founding art teacher.

We spent a special week together as a new family - sleepless with excitement and anxiety. My mother and I fussed over the tiny miracle while Guy - alarmed at the prospect of having to provide for a family - worked night and day on his art history notes.

After his first day back at work Guy came home and told me he'd enrolled Leo into the Oakhill Grade 0 class for the year 2000. I thought this was a bit premature. He said the other teachers insisted there'd be a waiting list by then.

And they were right.

Leo's year was special in that they were the "born-frees". Born in 1994, they were always as old as South Africa's democracy. (Leo was born as President Nelson Mandela was addressing parliament for the first time.)

And their school career was bracketed by two highly anticipated events:

The turn of the century was meant to be cataclysmic. Doomsday prophets forecast if not the end of the world, then at least chaos in the world's computers as they switched over from 1999 to 2000.

But the bunch of five and six year olds who joined Caroline Dix-Peek's Grade 0 class in January couldn't have been more relaxed and eager for the adventure ahead.

The year 2012, their matric year, would be the year the world ended, according to certain interpretations of the Mayan calendar. On December 21 to be precise.

On December 28 when the earth was still intact - and the matrics had survived Rage - our usual family supper felt very special.

The next day I'd be driving Leo and his girlfriend Georgie to Oakhill for the last time, to collect their matric results. They were excited and nervous. Our younger son David, who'd just finished Grade 9, was envious.

"Looking back over your 13 years at Oakhill what did you enjoy most?" Guy asked Leo.

Was it the friends he'd made, fellow surfers in other grades, class camps, the sports he'd played (hockey, soccer, waterpolo, tennis), the sports tours (to Holland, Spain, Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg), special teachers like Peter Bishop and Melanie Cloete?

"I can't decide," he said. "I enjoyed it all."