

ISLANDERS

Broken neck no deterrent to dream

Update on Jade Bell in advance of film festival

BY BETH STUPPLE
SPECIAL TO THE DRIFTWOOD

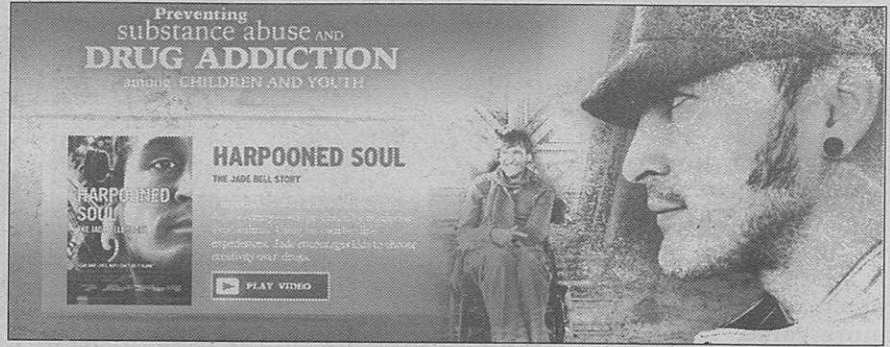
Stories like Jade Bell's are testaments to the strength of the human spirit.

Without being able to see, speak clearly, use his arms or legs and bound to a chair, Jade has managed in the last year alone to: head his non-profit foundation, co-create the groundwork for a music program for at-risk youth, prepare the launch of a full band CD release and fundraiser event, all while his third full-length album is well underway in the recording studio. Through this work, Jade continues to stay true to his poetic spirit by writing lyrics, creating musical collaborations and dreaming of life to come.

If that weren't a full plate; on the morning of Dec. 2, 2013, en route to the recording studio, Jade was parked on the landing outside his front door. To the shock of Jade and those with him, his brakes weren't on and he did a face plant off the six-inch drop, onto the lawn. The ambulance was called and Jade was brought to Lady Minto where he was treated for injuries to his forehead. He was released with six stitches and the notion that he'd suffered whiplash and a concussion. Five weeks later when the pain didn't seem to be subsiding, Jade got a CAT scan revealing news that was even more painful; he had in fact broken his neck.

Jade Bell suffered an anoxic brain injury in 1997 from a nearly lethal injection of heroin and cocaine while heavily intoxicated with alcohol. As a result, he lost his sight and mobility from a muscle disorder called dystonia and became dependent on 24-hour care. To communicate, his head taps sensors mounted on his chair, translating Morse code into letters, words and sentences. Since his overdose he has devoted his life to educating youth on the dangers of drug use and his message has reached over 200,000 students in our country with the aid of his computer-generated voice.

When asked how his neck feels today and what his ambitions for the future are, he smiled; then slowly mouthed letter by



WWW.JADESKIDS.ORG

Screen shot of Jade Bell's website.

letter to his caregiver, who interpreted what he said.

"It feels like King Kong Bundy has had me in a headlock for the last month. Some people assume, because I'm in a chair, that I'm paralyzed and can't feel anything neck-down. My condition is quite the opposite, for my sense of touch has only enhanced since my overdose. Sure the pain I felt with breaking my neck is indescribable, but I'm so grateful to still be able to feel, and to have the mobility I do have with my body.

"It seemed like the universe was being a big comedian when it happened because I was in the midst of organizing a fundraiser and CD release event for my second album War Stained Skin, plus working on my third album. The last thing I thought I needed to deal with was slower means of communication. I didn't postpone my event plans in trust that it would come together with the help of the community, and my team of angels who help me with my emails.

"My ambitions for the future are to live the emotions that inspire my creative expression. I believe pain has been a way to tap into a higher intelligence and creativity has been a tool for me to express my experiences with both pain and love. I hope to have a successful album release fundraiser, complete my third album, Black Swan and to launch a Kickstarter campaign that will fund a trial run of my dream project, the Salty Rock Music Recording and Mentorship Program. This is a program that encourages youth to explore creative expression, rather than harbouring their

feelings inside and masking them with drugs."

Jade wanted to end our short but poignant interview with this acknowledgement.

"I want to extend my appreciation to the collaborating artists and musicians who I have had the privilege to work with in the last seven years. It's been nothing less than magical to collaborate with artists like Ananda Sinclair, a soul brother who connects with my lyrics and mirrors their emotion with authenticity and conviction in his beautiful voice. As well, I want to thank the collective of totally amazing local talent that have volunteered their time to bring my words and message to life, in song, on March 28."

On March 2, the Salt Spring Film Festival is screening locally-filmed Harpooned Soul: The Jade Bell Story, which captures this man's inspirational quest to help kids choose a creative path over the use of drugs. Be sure to come and check out this life-changing film at the Gulf Islands Secondary School and follow the journey to the album release and fundraiser event on March 28 at ArtSpring. All funds raised at the War Stained Skin album release, and proceeds from Jade's album sales, will go directly to helping establish and sustain the Salty Rock Music Program.

For more information about the documentary and the Salty Rock Music Recording and Mentorship Program please visit Jade's registered non-profit foundation at www.jadeskids.org.

CREATIVITY

Writing group releases inner vision

GISS writers and adults meet weekly in Finding Our Voices

BY MAJA NORDINE
SPECIAL TO THE DRIFTWOOD

In the small Connecting Generations room in the confines of Gulf Islands Secondary School,

Writing is such a lost art I feel in this day and age, something that is a task unwillingly completed through tedious English assignments and essays.

What most people are unaware of is that true writing is simply your most inner thoughts and feelings finding their own way into words. I never feel the need to force my writing, because if I do I know it's not worth writing. Writers' group



Islands Trust

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