

*Imfama is the Xhosa word for a blind person.  
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## **This Edition**

After dedicating our last issue to all things braille, this issue brings us back to business as usual... although the edition is far from ordinary... meet Jacob Kruger, a motor bike enthusiast who still enjoys solo rides on his Suzuki Bandit, despite the fact that he lost his sight over four years ago! See how GADRA keeps its members productive by having beekeeping or massage as activity options or read up on how a board game has brought fun into low vision learning. We also introduce the Australian indie-rock sensation known as Rudely Interrupted and give our readers a peek into the life of Endurance Horse-riding as documented by blind rider, Carl de Campos... if we've piqued your interest, great...if not, there's much more to delve into...so, either way...read on and enjoy!

## **Contents**

### **From the Desk of the Editor**

### **Features**

- More than a Blind Biker

### **Local News**

- The Braille Oscars

### **International News**

- Real-time Communication for Deaf-blind persons
- Louis Braille Bicentenary Celebrations – Paris 2009

### **Member Organisations**

- GADRA: from Beekeeping to Massage

### **Low Vision**

- New Game for Low Vision Learning

### **Braille**

- Of Taxis and Art

### **Education**

- History of Blind Physiotherapists in South Africa
- The Class of 2008

### **What's Happening**

- Bicentenary Celebration at Addo
- 60 recipes, 60 years
- Casual Day 2008
- Splish-splash at Midmar Mile
- Call for O&M Lecturers
- 2008 S.A. Sports Awards

### **Resource Centre**

- First S.A. Braille Atlas Launched

### **Science and Technology**

- Time for a Haptica
- The Meraka Notetaker

### **Arts and Culture**

- Rudely Interrupted
- Movie review: Blindness
- Book review: Cockeyed – *a Memoir*

### **Ian Hutton Column**

- Taking Care

### **Sports and Recreation**

- O'Neill Surf Academy
- Blind Endurance Riding

### **Back page**

- Visit the Resource Centre

## **From the Desk of the Editor**

### **Dr. Rowland's farewell to Jill Wagner**

Readers of *Imfama* will be aware that 2009 is for us a year of double celebration. Our previous issue was dedicated to the legacy of Louis Braille in anticipation of the 200th anniversary of his birth on 4 January, while later in the year an issue of *Imfama* will be devoted to the 80th birthday of the SA National Council for the Blind itself. The Louis Braille Bicentenary has truly captured the imagination of blind South Africans and their many sighted co-workers and friends as is again reflected in a number of articles we have included here.

But we also have to strike a note of sadness at the departure of Jill Wagner from the National Council after four fruitful years at the helm. At an informal goodbye function held in the Optima garden on 20 February staff and friends, as well as colleagues from government and various member organisations, took leave of Jill as she shared with us the bittersweet memories she takes with her after four tough but productive years at Council. An elegant touch was the making of a series of personal awards to colleagues and co-workers who had walked the extra mile with her and in their own way had made a difference in the lives of blind people. These imaginative awards took the form of miniature Perkins Brailers rendered in exquisite detail, also calling to mind the contribution that the manufacture of these writers in South Africa has made to braille literacy and the affordability of this essential item of equipment.

Jill came to us from the business sector with expertise in project

management and IT. It was this experience that enabled her to introduce a regimen of rigorous strategic planning to the benefit of service provision, while at the same time overseeing a remarkable financial turnaround. An innovation likely to be perpetuated into the future has been the creation of a project office to ensure that all time-bound projects are properly planned, executed, and evaluated.

As Jill takes up her new position as CEO of a major UK agency in the field of disability and development, we wish her every success in the international arena and personal fulfilment.

William Rowland

[Back to Contents list](#)

## Features

### **More than a Blind Biker...**

Lindie van Zyl

I pondered for a long time on how I could capture the essence of an interesting, multi-faceted man that I was introduced to. Which box could I put him in for a clearer description? I soon realised though that 36 year old Jacob Kruger does not fit into any box. In fact, Jacob casually sums up his whole existence in four words: "I am just me." He has been blind for just over four years now, but losing his sight never changed who he was. This is Jacob Kruger...

### ***Getting Back on the Bike:***

Let me start here...the accident. Jacob is a motorbike enthusiast and loves to drive around on his bike. In November 2005 he had a major accident with his bike when a motorist in the lane next to him, swerved into him. Jacob and his wife, who were both on the bike, were thrown off. He sustained serious injuries and was in a coma for almost

a month, taking just over three months to become lucid again. The serious physical injuries resulted in his loss of sight. Sadly, Jacob's wife was killed in the accident.

Doctors told Jacob that his brain moved around so much inside his skull during the accident that his optical nerve tore where it was attached to his brain – this caused his blindness.

He eventually left the hospital in March 2006, and started orientation and mobility training, which included getting used to walking around with a white cane, doing some cooking and so forth. The orientation and mobility training helped Jacob, however, the greatest enlightenment for him was finding out how to make use of technology without his sight, and getting back to using a computer. Since Jacob is a web developer and had basically lived on the internet since it became available in South Africa around 1996, re-learning how to use a computer was very important to him.

***Raising Hell with the Hellrazors:***

After his accident, Jacob did a Google search for 'blind motorcyclist' and came across a write-up about Billy Baxter, who was part of the UK army's motorcycle stunt team before he became blind. Billy is now in the Guinness Book of Records for doing 180mph on a bike after losing his sight. Jacob found Billy to be very inspiring and wanted to get back on a bike himself, but just sitting at the back was never an option for him.

When Jacob recovered, he was back at work and back in the biking scene. He is a member of a bike club called the *Hellrazors* (named after the Ozzy Osbourne song). The club members support Jacob in many ways, including guiding him when he rides his bike.

Once a year, normally in November, the Hellrazors organise their own track day at the Phakisa raceway in Welkom, and this is where Jacob gets on his favourite motorbike (a Suzuki Bandit 1200 Streetfighter), puts on a radio headset, full leathers and a good helmet, and rides up and down the main straight with his friend giving him instructions via a cellular phone.

Jacob enjoys this so much that he says: "Although I have a dark visor on my helmet since I don't need to let the light in, I reckon the 50 or so people watching me, cheering, shouting and taking photos must have known that I was smiling so broadly inside my helmet that it almost hurt my face."

***IT Enthusiasm:***

Jacob, who is an IT-fundi, designed the Hellrazors' website ([www.hellrazors.co.za](http://www.hellrazors.co.za)), his own website ([www.blindza.co.za](http://www.blindza.co.za)) as well as some interesting pieces of programming for and about blind people.

Although he knows only basic braille (he only uses it for labelling things like pills, spices and food), Jacob has written his own talking computer software, including a braille reference feature which gives instructions on how to write letters in basic braille as you type them on the keyboard. He has also invented his own talking version of snakes and ladders for the computer - using the original board, along with sound effects and speech output. The idea behind the game, as explained by Jacob, is for it to be used even by sighted kids so that they can form an idea of how visually impaired people use computers.

Jacob started the first e-mail mailing list for 'bikers' in South Africa in 1997, called BikerZA. He has now also started such a list for visually impaired persons and anyone interested in supporting them, or even just for

people who are interested in learning about their lifestyle. The link to the page for that mailing list is: [www.freelists.org/list/blindza](http://www.freelists.org/list/blindza)

***Dog Tags and Tattoos:***

Above all, Jacob is an excellent advocate for blind people. He is very approachable and carries the 'signs of blindness' with pride. As he puts it: "I wear leathers and have tattoos, so people are not afraid to ask me questions".

True to his style, Jacob sports braille tattoos on his forearms, which consist of black raised ink dots. He is a firm believer in balance and therefore he has two words of equal length – one positive and one negative- on his arms. The left arm's tattoo spells out the word "depression" and the right one balances it with "positivity". He also wears a silver dog tag plate around his neck with his name brailled on it. Jacob uses his dog tag and tattoos to show people what braille looks like. I must say this is definitely more interesting than having braille explained on an alphabet card!

Jacob is also working on a set of instructions for newly blinded people. This will include who to contact, where to go for assistance and so forth. On this he added: "I refer people to Council as some people do not know about its existence."

***Motorcycle Gloves and a Dog called Inzamam:***

Jacob, who lives in Kempton Park, is still designing websites, but also started a new job in October 2008, programming in a Windows environment. He adjusted to his new world quite fast. Jacob also told me that he uses his motorcycle gloves for cooking, since they're thin enough to still be able to feel what he's doing without really having to worry about getting burnt. Although this is very ingenious of him, I wouldn't advise trying this at home!

A big black Labrador guide dog named after the great Pakistani cricket player – Inziamam ul Haq, joined Jacob in February 2009. Jacob and Inzamam are already getting along nicely.

### ***On Playing 'Happy Birthday':***

In his already busy life, Jacob still has time for hobbies! He says that he plays drums as a form of exercise as well as a way to vent his frustrations. Well, at least he's thought of a melodious way to vent... Jacob also recently acquired a mouth organ which he carries around in his bike jacket. He feels that this is one instrument where being able to see or not, has no impact on your playing of the instrument. He is practising whenever he has time, and has already mastered playing *Happy Birthday*, although I'm sure a few more interesting songs will be added to his repertoire very soon!

[Back to Contents list](#)

## **Local News**

### **The Braille Oscars**

Christo de Klerk

As part of the Louis Braille Bicentenary Celebrations, the South African National Council for the Blind and Blind SA made a joint effort to arrange a glamorous gala event during which people who had made major contributions in the field of braille would receive awards for their efforts.

A working group, consisting of members from Council and Blind SA, established a committee to consider nominations for the awards. This committee consisted of Dr. Obert Maguvhe (convenor), Antonnette Botha, Reinette Popplestone, Wellington Pike and myself. The committee received a number of nominations, but it applied very stringent criteria in deciding on which

individuals were to receive the awards, in order to make the awards so much more significant.

The dinner took place on Friday 30 January at Emperor's Palace. The master of ceremonies was the very popular Radio 702 show host, Kieno Kammies and live entertainment was provided by the singer Tim Baloyi. Together they created a vibrant and festive atmosphere supplemented by a very interesting and scrumptious three course meal.

The first highlight of the evening was a very informative talk on Louis Braille given by Dr. William Rowland. He spoke about Braille's life and his legacy of literacy. The handing out of the awards from the three categories later in the evening followed as anticipated highlights. The awards took the form of bronze and pewter busts of Louis Braille.

First, there were Pioneer awards, given to a number of people who had made major contributions in the field of braille, but are deceased. Bronze awards were handed out to the relatives of these individuals. Amongst these recipients was the late Jan Besselaar who was principal at the then School for the Blind in Worcester during the early 1930s.

The next and largest Public Awareness category awarded those who have made major contributions to braille in various areas, as braille producers, proofreaders, braille instructors, braille promoters and developers of braille codes. They were also honoured with bronze busts.

In the final Capacity Developer's category, six pewter awards were handed over to braille enablers. This category included illustrious people who are synonymous with braille, like my mentor Miss Connie Aucamp. Miss Antonnette Botha, who must be the

most well-versed person in all braille systems used in South Africa, including music braille and maths, was also awarded in this category.

All in all, the gala dinner was a memorable evening which did justice to the importance of braille.

[Back to Contents list](#)

## International News

### Real-time Communication for Deaf-blind Persons

*Written by Anna-Riitta Sippola - originally published in Helsingin Sanomat, February 2008, translated by Raili Ojala-Signell; abridged by Stacey Love*

When a sighted person with normal hearing goes bowling, he or she can see how successful the throw was, and also hear how successful it was based on the sound of the ball falling and hitting the pins. When a deaf-blind person goes bowling, he or she can neither see nor hear what happens in the bowling alley.

This bowling alley scenario is not an introduction to an article on disability humour; instead this scenario will help frame the ideas behind Riitta Lahtinen's dissertation. For her dissertation, Lahtinen - who is the Chief of Communications at the Finnish Association of the Deaf-blind - enlisted the help of her husband, Russ Palmer, in order to develop a way to improve communication for deaf-blind people so that their communication can take place in real-time; so that it can be intensive and filled with emotion. Lahtinen's quest to develop this real-time deaf-blind communication began when her husband's deaf-blindness started to progress in the 90's. Her study makes use of deaf-blind people who have lost their hearing and vision; those who were not born deaf-blind will benefit from this system of communication.

Using the bowling scenario we can explain how communication with a deaf-blind person usually happens. The deaf-blind bowler can have the success of his or her throw described by having a guide use sign-language into the bowler's hand. Alternatively, the guide can explain the situation letter by letter on the surface of the deaf-blind bowler's open palm. However, the use of either of these methods means that the communication does not happen instantaneously.

Lahtinen's method ensures that information reaches the deaf-blind person in real-time. In order to describe the movement of a ball which has been thrown down the lane by the deaf-blind bowler, she would draw her finger from the bottom of the bowler's back upwards towards the shoulder blade. Once the ball swings to the left, for example, her finger swings to the bowler's left shoulder too – she mimics the action of the ball with her finger movements.

Another example of where Lahtinen's system of communication works well is when a deaf-blind person is communicating and needs feedback on the reaction of the person who they are communicating with. Lahtinen stands behind her husband while he gives a lecture. To share the crowd's reaction to what Palmer is telling them, Lahtinen draws a smiling face on Palmer's back, or a direct line to show the seriousness of the audience's facial expressions. Her touch also indicates tone – the movement made to describe "yes" and "YES!" are different – the latter's movement is clearly faster and more vigorous. These reactions are thus conveyed to Palmer in real-time. Lahtinen and Palmer have also devised various symbols to represent colours through touch – the colour green is expressed by upwards movement, like growing

grass; whereas yellow is a slight brush and black is a heavy touch.

Usually the message of this new language, which is based on touch, is communicated on the arm or back of the deaf-blind individual. This also means that the individual does not have to free up his or her hands in order to receive a message - for example, a deaf-blind person carrying grocery bags, would not need to place the bags down in order to receive a message.

The directions of the movement on the deaf-blind person's back, as well as the emphasis of the movement and its rhythm all work towards the creation of the grammar in the language of touch.

Lahtinen believes that her study will benefit a variety of disability groups, their families and the professionals working with them. In Norway, this kind of touch-based communication is already used for rehabilitative purposes.

[Back to Contents list](#)

### **Louis Braille Bicentenary Celebrations - Paris 2009**

Pasha Alden

*Original article published in the Makwenzeke newsletter*

Helen Keller once said that blind people are as indebted to Louis Braille as sighted people are to Gutenberg. It was Braille's contribution to literacy, access and intellectual freedom, through the tactile rendition of the printed word, that blind braille users, teachers and producers from five continents came to acknowledge as they commemorated the birth of Louis Braille this year in Paris.

On 4 January celebrations commenced with a commemorative mass held in the chapel of the National Institute for

the Young Blind, followed by a wreath laying ceremony on the tomb of Louis Braille in the Pantheon. That evening an organ recital by blind organist Jean-Pierre Leguay took place in the Notre-Dame cathedral.

From 5-7 January the conference "Braille 1809 – 2009: Writing with six dots and its future", organised by the Valentin Haüy Association and the National Institute for the Young blind, took place at the UNESCO headquarters. The conference took a probing look at the past, present and future of the braille code and was attended by approximately five-hundred delegates from forty-six countries.

During the session titled "Braille in the world in various languages", participants covered braille practices and challenges of braille production in languages such as Japanese and Arabic, and highlighted the significance of braille for deaf-blind people, while participants in the session "Braille unification: success and obstacles", raised persuasive arguments for a more uniform braille code.

"User's perspectives over the world - braille in the developing countries", covered challenges faced by third world countries, such as the high costs of assistive devices, Braille paper and the like.

The session "Braille in the context of new technologies, addition or competition", covered braille and scientific research, braille and school integration, braille in our daily life and highlighted the significance of braille in professional and social integration.

The following resolutions were taken at the conference:

- World Blind Union (WBU) and the International Council for Education of People with Visual

Impairment (ICEVI) to be urged to promote the teaching of braille to blind children, as well as adults (according to personal needs);

- WBU to be urged to re-establish the World Braille Council in order to unify all elements of braille and the various braille codes and commission a third edition of "World Braille Usage" from a source with the necessary expertise and means to achieve such a task;
- UNESCO, in collaboration with the WBU, to be urged to convene an international conference to advance the unification of braille;
- WBU to be urged to promote the use of braille in public spaces and to mark consumer products.

On 8 January various exhibitions showcased cultural objects of braille production, such as first slates and styluses and the first braille book to be produced. Delegates also had the opportunity of visiting the Pantheon, the final resting place of Louis Braille or of visiting Louis Braille's place of birth and his workshop, where Braille's inventions, including the raphigraph, could be viewed.

The future of braille lies in the hands of its users. Much needs to be done to ensure that children attend school, learn braille as early as possible, have access to libraries and enjoy the benefits of literacy, professional and social integration as bequeathed to us by Louis Braille.

[Back to Contents list](#)

## **Member Organisations**

## **GADRA: from Beekeeping to Massage**

Pauline Mitchell

*Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association (GADRA) Advice & Community Work* took over the Civilian Blind Society in 1996. Since that time we have offered braille training and independent living skills. More recently, these programmes have been expanded to offer a more holistic training. We have fitness training, bowling and current affairs discussions as well as computer and braille lessons. Numeracy, geography and history are included in the classes.

In 2007, with the assistance of the *National Lottery*, we were able to purchase computers that were loaded with JAWS. This financial assistance also allowed us to purchase our own set of Marimbas. We had been enjoying drumming sessions with the Rhodes University Drum Society who bought us a set of 9 African drums. Each Tuesday afternoon we would have a music session. This music session grew and developed into a band, which is now so popular that we are often called to play for functions around town and we have even produced a CD.

*Greater Good South Africa* gave another sponsorship in 2007, this time for our bee keeping project. Makana Meadery is a local training centre for bee keepers. This centre asked GADRA to make bee suits for them, which was possible because we had a sewing section. From the theory that bees are less active in the dark, came the idea of keeping bees in a container which blind people would be able to work in. With careful selection we found six blind people who were not afraid to learn about beekeeping and they passed the course with flying colours. Together with a sighted leader, we have collected swarms from around

the town and have kept bees for the past two years.

Gardening became our next big project as bees need pollen to make honey. Bongani was a keen gardener before losing his sight and when we received a volunteer Social Worker in 2008 from New Zealand, who happened to have green fingers, she became a perfect match for Bongani. Frances has mentored Bongani in water wise gardening and introduced him to crop rotation and planting methods previously unknown to him. His garden is so successful at GADRA that he was able to sell seedlings and vegetables and was making R180 per month from a small patch. This year, the gardening project is expanding to a bigger patch and we will be creating food gardens in the homes of interested blind people.

Massage therapy is another project that blind people can master and after receiving training from Jean Moore in Auckland Park, three blind people from our group began offering Thai foot massage.

Recently, we built a four bed-roomed hostel which allows us to accommodate blind visitors from out of town. We had our official opening ceremony in March.

GADRA saw the need for an outreach programme when early in 2007 we found a visually impaired family in Alexandria with a five-year-old on the verge of becoming blind through congenital cataracts. Axola went from having less than 10% to 90% vision because of our intervention. GADRA is always glad to offer assistance wherever we can and we look forward to the further development of our skills training for blind people.

[Back to Contents list](#)

**Low Vision**

## **New Game for Low Vision Learning**

Lindie van Zyl

Charles Schwartz, a trainer who works with elderly people who have low vision, realised that people often react negatively to being educated on low vision and on various adaptations which are necessary for daily life when living with such a visual impairment.

Schwartz put a lot of thought into different teaching methods and has subsequently created a game that helps teach people how to live independently when they have low vision.

After researching the concept for two years, Schwartz launched the game for occupational therapists and caregivers on 29 January 2009 in Wheeling, West Virginia. Although the game is not yet available commercially, and has yet to hit South African shores, Schwartz had this to say about its purpose: "It's a fun, educational approach to teaching people skills and the best practices for living independently with low vision".

The game, called the *Road to Independence* is a one meter by one meter board game comprising large squares, icons and playing pieces - similar to a Monopoly board. Each icon represents a specific topic of interest to people with low vision - including proper lighting, health and nutrition, staying organised, protecting the eyes from the sun, heroes and legends and more. The facilitator of the game asks a question or gives information about the specific topic.

"I did research on learning theories and know that people learn more when they're having fun," Schwartz said.

The heroes category of the game is designed to address the aspect of depression that people with low vision sometimes suffer from. One of the questions asks the player to name

famous painters who had low vision. Claude Monet and Mary Cassatt are possible answers. The facilitator would then show examples of the artists' work and talk about their lives.

"The game is designed to educate people on how to maintain their independence," said Schwartz. He added that: "The game approach to education really helps reinforce key lessons and makes the learning more engaging."

Schwartz, as a low vision advocate, has worked with physicians, therapists, support group leaders and community leaders to help those who are living with low vision. Schwartz has also conducted seminars and presentations on the topic.

At this stage, the game is primarily being sold to educators, therapists and professionals. A co-sponsor for the launch was *Active and Able*, a Des Plaines catalogue company that sells innovative products dedicated to making daily living easier for baby boomers and beyond.

[Back to Contents list](#)

## Braille

### Of Taxis and Art

Written by Taryn Cohn – originally published in *Classicfeel Magazine*  
Shortened by Stacey Love

"The South African taxi industry has offered artist Susan Woolf an opportunity to formalise a new language in South Africa – the language of local travel.

The South African taxi industry is estimated to have an annual turnover of R16.5 billion rand and provides 65 per cent of our population with transport on a daily basis. It is an industry that keeps our workforce moving and yet, up until very recently, it was an entirely self-funded and unregulated organ of civil society. As a non-nationalised system of transport, the taxis of our cities were not resourced with printed maps, colour-coded and numbered routes, and other such niceties. And as most road users will know, no well-signed taxi stops grace our busy roads. Every corner is a taxi-stop hell, as practically anywhere is a makeshift taxi stop and every pedestrian a potential fare!

An intricate system of gestures and finger manipulations are bandied about our streets with the ease and grace of mime artists. Communication zings about us at a rapid rate, the meanings of which are lost on a good portion of the population who are cocooned in their cars, narrowly avoiding rear-ending taxi drivers who are as nimble with their steering wheels as they are with their fingers.

Enter Susan Woolf. A fine artist by profession, Woolf is currently completing a cross-disciplinary doctoral study (PhD) in anthropology and fine art at the University of the Witwatersrand. The topic of her work is *'Taxi Hand Signs in Social Spaces'*. Woolf is documenting the plethora of signals that make up the language of commuters all over South Africa, which, up until now, have remained undocumented, despite the fact that almost eleven million people use these signals every day. More than that, the artist has developed a system, or 'alphabet' if you will, that decodes these signals. This tool will give literate, illiterate, local, foreign and even blind commuters access to public transport in South Africa.

The project required Woolf first to document the hand signs used for the various major routes in a city using photographs. She then deconstructed the positioning of the hands into a series of hieroglyphic-like signs, but didn't stop there. Keeping in mind that the current system of signals is inaccessible to blind people, Woolf created an equivalent of braille code for her taxi signals. By feeling the signals, blind commuters will know how to position their hands in order to get to their chosen destination.

Woolf has created 14 basic shapes that form all of the taxi hand signs. The symbols are based on the use of the simplest of shapes as a precursor to teaching braille to blind people and are made of raised, textured braille dots that can be easily explained to blind commuters. Woolf's project has already resulted in a booklet of most of the Gauteng signs and research into the development of similar booklets for different urban areas is underway."

To view original article in full, visit this web address:  
[http://www.classicfeel.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=100](http://www.classicfeel.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=100)

*\*Look out for our follow up feature on the Braille taxi hand signs guide as discussed in an interview that Imfama will have with Susan Woolf later this year...*

[Back to Contents list](#)

## Education

### History of Blind Physiotherapists in South Africa

Written by Stafie Pelsler; abridged by Hazel Smith Marshall

Since the mid 1920s until now, approximately 70 blind physiotherapists have practiced in

South Africa, some in private practice and others in public and mine hospitals and in special needs schools. Blind physiotherapists who specialised in the rehabilitation of physically disabled patients, mainly injured mine workers, included Marius Blom, employed by Anglo Health Services at Orkney; Bob Geddes and Elmer Curry, who were employed at Western Deep Levels and Ernest Oppenheimer Hospitals respectively; Ernst Kruger at the Johannesburg General Hospital and Stafie Pelser, from 1967 to 1974, at Nompumelelo Mission Hospital at Peddie in the Eastern Cape.

The majority of these practitioners were trained at the Royal National Institute for the Blind School of Physiotherapy. This school, established in 1915, was situated in Great Portland Street, London, until 1976 when it was moved to a purpose-built training and accommodation facility on Highgate Hill in North London. Here, its name was changed to the North London School of Physiotherapy for the Visually Handicapped and it thrived under the leadership of its dynamic Principal, Mr (later Professor) David Teager. The official opening of the North London School, conducted by Queen Elizabeth II, was attended by the Chairman of the SA Society of Physiotherapy, Molly Levy. She handed over a gift of a braille thermoform machine on behalf of all the ex-students up until 1976.

For many years the school maintained strong links with the Middlesex Medical School and many practitioners still feel privileged to have been taught Anatomy by such great teachers as Professor Wall and Dr. Da Silva and Physiology by the well-known researcher, Dr. Green.

The first blind South African, Alan Hamilton, qualified in London in 1926, closely followed by the second, Gerald Schermbrucker, in 1928. Both

practiced in Cape Town – Alan at Groote Schuur Hospital until the late 60s and Gerald in private practice until 1980.

The first South African student of colour, Brian Blankenberg (partially sighted), qualified in 1961. He subsequently immigrated to Canada where he became a Professor of Physiotherapy at a Canadian university.

In the beginning, students were sponsored by their friends and families, but from the 1950s onwards bursaries covering course fees and accommodation have been provided by the Department of Labour. The first female bursary holder was Hazel Marshall (neè Smith) who qualified in 1965. Robbie Robinson was an excellent example of good labour practice. After losing his sight in a tragic mining accident, the Chamber of Mines sponsored his training and then re-employed him at their own hospital in Johannesburg.

Maarten Olivier has the distinction of being the only blind physiotherapist to have qualified at the University of Pretoria, where he trained from 1964 to 1966. In the past two decades or so, a number of partially sighted physiotherapy students have qualified at the University of the Western Cape.

Several blind and partially sighted physiotherapists have played a significant role in the affairs of the South African Society of Physiotherapy at national, branch and Private Practitioner Association level. These include Johannes van der Walt in the Free State, Stafie Pelser in the Goldfields and Bob Posselt and Hazel Smith in the Eastern Cape.

A rather short-lived venture was the Association of Blind Physiotherapists in South Africa, founded in 1962 by Ernst Kruger and Bob Geddes with the

support of two sighted colleagues, Joan Lansdale and Dianne Pearman. A lasting memorial to Dianne, who died in a mountaineering accident near Rustenburg in 1963, was a floating trophy bearing her name, awarded to blind physiotherapy students who had excelled in their studies. The first recipient was Fanie Jacobs in 1963 while the last was Derick Greeff in 1976.

The profession of physiotherapy has been very good to blind and partially sighted practitioners, allowing them all to provide adequately for themselves and their families and enabling many, including several mentioned in this article, to make major contributions to public, church and community life, including the blindness service sector at local, national and international levels.

We conclude with two fine examples of blind physiotherapists who, interestingly enough, began their working lives, then altered their careers and furthered their academic pursuits in Cape Town. Reinette Popplestone (neè du Plessis) obtained a Masters degree in English from the University of Cape Town and is currently the head of that University's Disabled Students Unit. William Rowland, who obtained a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Cape Town in 1984 and stepped down from the position of National Executive Director of the SA National Council for the Blind in 2005, continues his strenuous voluntary schedule in numerous spheres and is at present the Immediate Past President of the World Blind Union.

[\*\*\*Back to Contents list\*\*\*](#)

### **The Class of 2008**

Dr. M.O. Maguvhe

2008 marked the first year in the history of South African schooling that

Grade 12 students sat for the National Senior Certificate Examination. This Certificate is a brand new qualification based on South Africa's National Curriculum Statement (NCS).

It is certainly the first national examination that has been administered in the free and democratic South Africa.

Being the first candidates to have written the national school leaving examination, the 2008 Grade 12 learners will also be the first to receive this new qualification. The examination was also the largest in terms of candidate numbers.

In 2008 there were 589,912 candidates in comparison to the 564,000 in 2007. Of this 2008 group, 142 were blind and partially sighted students from Special Schools.

On 30 December, the Minister of Education released the long awaited 2008 Grade 12 results. A total of 588,643 candidates wrote the 2008 NSC (National Senior Certificate) Examination. Of the 533,561 candidates with a full set of results, 333,681 candidates (constituting 62,5%) met with the requirements for a National Senior Certificate. The national pass percentage was thus 62,5%.

A total of 20,2% (107,462) of students achieved the minimum pass required for entry to undergraduate study at a university or a university of technology; this is an increase from the 16% (85,000) figure in 2007. Another 124,000 students achieved the minimum pass required for entry into a diploma or non-degree programme at a university or a university of technology. 102,130 learners achieved the requirement for entry to higher certificate programmes.

The drop by 2,5% in the national pass rate is of great concern to all who work assiduously in this sector. According to the South African National Council for the Blind's 2007 stats, the blind and partially sighted students' pass rate was 77,5%, while in 2008 it was 73,7% - this is a troubling drop of 3,8%.

Blind and partially sighted students' ability at these Special Schools is gravely hampered each year by a lack of accessible learning and teaching support material. Although visually impaired students are expected to write the same National Senior Certificate Examination as sighted students, they are not afforded the same learning and teaching support material as their sighted counterparts, which puts the former group at an unfair disadvantage. This is an issue that needs to be addressed by the Department of Education.

In terms of scarce and critical skills subjects, the situation is still dire at Special Schools. Many Special Schools are reluctant to introduce science and mathematic related subjects.

Summary of Grade 12 Special Schools' Student Results for 2008:

<b>Total of Schools:</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Total of Students Entered 2008:</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Total % Passed:</b>	<b>73.7%</b>
<b>Total Passed with Admission to a Degree Course:</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Total Passed with Admission to a Diploma Course:</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Total Passed with Merit:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Total Passed with Exemption:</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Total Passed with Conditional</b>	<b>5</b>

<b>Exemption:</b>	
<b>Total Passed with NSC for Special Schools:</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total Passed with Senior Certificate:</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Total Failed:</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Total Doing Supplementary Exam in 2009:</b>	<b>23</b>

[Back to Contents list](#)

## What's Happening

### Bicentenary Celebration at Addo

A commemorative celebration of Louis Braille on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth was held at the Addo Garden Centre on 4 January. Around 100 guests gathered under a large "Wit Stinkhout" tree to honour Louis Braille. Guests at the function, which was sponsored by Blind SA, were treated to a scripture reading, a music interlude, and key-note address on the opportunities created by braille which was delivered by retired physiotherapist, Stafie Pelser, as well as an award ceremony presented by the President of Blind SA, Cathy Donaldson. 27 people were honoured for their various contributions to braille in South Africa. At the conclusion of the function, guests were guided through Addo's beautiful herb garden, which is accessible to visually impaired visitors as all plants are marked with braille signage.

[Back to Contents list](#)

### 60 recipes for 60 years

A print format recipe book, compiled and edited by Phil AH Hing, was launched in commemoration of *Nkosinathi Foundation's* 60 years of service to the visually impaired community in South Africa. The book's

60 recipes, which range from starter and dessert dishes, to fish, chicken and vegetarian main courses, were contributed by blind professional chef, Peter Lee. Hazel Marshall, who is Chairman of the Nkosinathi Foundation's Board, as well as a long time activist for the rights of visually impaired people, contributed a comprehensive article on the history of Nkosinathi for inclusion in the book. Entitled "60 years, 60 recipes", the book is available from Hazel Marshall for R60 per copy, excluding postage costs – all proceeds will go directly to the Nkosinathi Foundation. Electronic copies are also available. To secure your own copy email: [sabwoec@mweb.co.za](mailto:sabwoec@mweb.co.za) / phone: 041 487 1150.

[Back to Contents list](#)

### **Casual Day 2008**

Every year, on the first Friday of September, South Africans are asked to show their support of the disabled community by purchasing a Casual Day sticker and dressing to a theme. The Casual Day project is a "FUNdraising" campaign that benefits various persons with disabilities. According to the Casual Day website, "there are 6 National Beneficiaries in this project. Their services include job creation, poverty alleviation, upliftment, housing, education and much more. By supporting Casual Day, you do not only support one organisation but a whole range of accountable organisations in the field of disability. About 200 Local Beneficiaries also participate in the project every year. They make use of this opportunity to raise funds for their organisation's needs via the infrastructure of Casual Day." With Council as one of the National Beneficiaries, we are proud of the achievement made by one of our member organisations - Tshilidzini Special School – as the welfare

organisation to sell the most golf shirts and caps overall– 2026 and 1200 respectively. The school also sold the highest number of stickers – 42 505 – amongst other NGO's overall. Imfama congratulates Tshilidzini on its hard work!

[Back to Contents list](#)

### **Splish-splash at Midmar Mile**

A total of 13575 swimmers at this year's 36<sup>th</sup> Telkom Halfway Midmar Mile braved the world's biggest open water race for varying reasons. But a common goal – to cross the finish line with a special sense of victory – would see everybody as a winner in their own right.

Every individual shares the goal of finishing the race, but what makes this weekend of splish-splashing worth the effort, is the camaraderie.

A special mention must be made of Michael Arbuthnot who has not only swum in all 36 events, but who also assisted Neville Clarence – a blind participant – in this year's race. Michael's help has allowed Neville to experience the thrill of swimming across the finish marker. The last time a blind swimmer crossed the finish was in 1984.

Original extract from: *Witness*  
February 2009.

[Back to Contents list](#)

### **Call for O&M Lecturers**

The College of Orientation and Mobility, which is a division of the South African Guide-Dogs Association for the Blind, is looking to employ two Orientation and Mobility (O&M) lecturers as soon as possible.

The College trains O&M Practitioners who are studying for their National Diploma in Orientation & Mobility Practice for Blind and Partially Sighted People.

The two O&M lecturers should, besides having a recognised O&M qualification, have practical experience in the O&M field; have excellent communication skills as well as a driver's licence. For more information on these offered positions, please contact Moira Higgerty – Principal of the O&M

College - via email:  
[mobility@guidedog.org.za](mailto:mobility@guidedog.org.za) / or fax:  
027 0865314364

[Back to Contents list](#)

## **2008 S.A. Sports Awards**

We reported on the outstanding performance of our Paralympic team in our previous issue. Well, the recognition for their exceptional achievements did not stop there. They harvested more than half of the available awards at the 2008 SA Sports Awards hosted by the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC).

From the 11 available categories, our Paralympians walked away with the following:

- Natalie Du Toit managed to secure the Sportswoman of the Year, Disabled Sportswomen of the Year as well as the Sports Star of the Year awards.
- Hilton Langenhoven, the visually impaired athlete who won 3 gold medals and whom we featured in our previous *Imfama* issue, won the award for the Disabled Sportsman of the Year.
- The Paralympic Team won both the Disabled Sports Team of the Year as well as the Sports Team of the Year awards.

Congratulations to Natalie, Hilton and the collective Paralympian team for their achievements which have made South Africa a very proud nation.

[Back to Contents list](#)

## Resource Centre

### First S.A. Braille Atlas Launched

Schalk Hugo

The Chief Directorate Surveys and Mapping, a division of the Department of Land Affairs, together with the Pioneer Printers in Worcester, has achieved a milestone in producing the first Braille Atlas of maps covering South Africa. A decision to produce the atlas was taken in terms of the Departmental Disability Strategy and the constitutional right of access to information by disabled persons.

Pioneer Printers and the Pioneer School for the Blind played key roles in assisting the Cartographers of Surveys and Mapping during the preliminary stages of the atlas production. Many issues arose concerning the size and format of tactile maps and how the blind user is able to assimilate information. During the initial stages, interviews and workshops were held with pupils and teachers at the School for the Blind and based on their recommendations, a decision to produce an atlas rather than a single map, was taken. The blind user relies on variances in the texture of the tactile image to distinguish between for example boundaries and roads or water and land. The themes portrayed on the map must be kept simple and line, point and area symbols must be easily distinguishable in terms of shape and texture. The legend or reference on the map is placed on the opposite page to the map image. This is done to enable the user to navigate the map separately from the legend

and is usually referenced to numerals or letters of the alphabet.

Pioneer Printers has specialised equipment used to produce braille text and embossed tactile images. Computerised systems used by Pioneer Printers are powered by proprietary embosser technology. This allows embossers to interact with Windows software in a similar way to ink printers - creating a perfect tactile copy of the same information - text, graphics, charts etc. The embossers use different dot heights to create the tactile impression - as colour densities get darker or lighter, so the dot heights vary, just as an ink printer would use more or less ink to reproduce an image.

The tactile atlas comprises an introductory section describing maps and how they are used to inform the user about spatial relationships and scale. A Teacher's Guide booklet has been included with the atlas. A CD which explains how a blind user should follow the audio and use the atlas (even if this user cannot read braille) is also included.

The atlas is a first in South Africa and is primarily intended as an educational tool for blind persons who can read braille. In terms of the Constitution and the right of access to information by people with disabilities, this publication will enable blind South Africans to be "in touch with your world".

[\*Back to Contents list\*](#)

## **Science and Technology**

### **Time for a Haptica**

Bonga Mazibuko

Time... Our whole life is shaped by it. When we wake up in the morning, the first thing we do is check the time. We do this to plan our day and to see how

much time we can dedicate to things that we need to have done.

Keeping to our planned schedule, we check our watches - without being given 'the eye' by people around us. Unfortunately it hasn't been the same for visually impaired folks - man, do talking watches take the whole privacy thing away!

Imagine a visually impaired person checking the time at work with a talking watch - each time he/she checks the time almost everyone knows about it, because they hear it too. People might even see time-checking in the work-place as a negative thing - it can be seen as rude or reveal the person's impatience.

Ladies and gents, introducing *Haptica*. This is a new digital/braille watch, designed by David Chavez. It's a movable braille timepiece for the visually impaired, which enables the user to get a quick and accurate time reading while maintaining user discretion.

Now, one would think that many digital watches are available for this very purpose, but none are quite so easy on the eye. Mina (me) - I'm definitely buying one of these watches, despite the fact that my sight is perfect and I cannot read braille. The design is what I call hot, baba! It's definitely nicer than most watches I've seen on the market lately and this reason alone stands as a great selling point. Guess I'll be registering for braille lessons soon. And seeing as they don't know how to read braille either, I won't have to worry about any Tsotsies bothering me - this watch has more plus points than I'd originally thought!

*Source:*

[www.tuvie.com/haptica-braille-watch-concept](http://www.tuvie.com/haptica-braille-watch-concept)

[Back to Contents list](#)

## **The Meraka Notetaker**

Willem van der Walt

Louis Braille's development of the braille writing system gave blind people the ability to read and write independently.

Two centuries later, sighted people are increasingly making use of electronic notetaking devices like Personal Digital Assistants (PDA's) and more recently, mobile phones with similar capabilities. Speech and braille-enabled devices performing similar functions as these notetaking devices had been available for quite a number of years, but these custom devices were in most cases too costly for the average blind person – cost is just one of the many obstacles presented to blind users of these notetaking devices.

Technical problems comprise yet another obstacle. When they arise, these notetaking devices often have to be sent to the overseas manufacturer for repair. This means that users have to pay a lot of money for the international repair, while also being without their device, during the time of repair, for an extensive period of time.

Further problems lie with the devices' fixed feature settings, which are usually geared towards either the American or European markets. Features like speech in one's local language and the ability to write contracted braille in a local language are mostly unheard of functions in these devices.

With all of these obstacles in mind, I managed to motivate my employer, the Meraka institute, which is managed by the CSIR, towards the end of 2005, to consider developing a local notetaker.

Our goal for this project was to develop an affordable, portable information device for blind consumers, which would allow input through a standard keyboard and output through speech. This device, we decided, should adapt to the changing needs of a blind person through his/her life with no costly software upgrades and a feature set, which would be dictated and limited only by the imagination of its users, the blind population of South Africa. Our device would be free of the vested interest of a single manufacturer.

The principals followed during the development of our local notetaker were to make use of standard, mainstream hardware components as far as possible, to make use of open-source software and to write software only when it isn't in a speech-friendly form, like open-source.

Currently, two prototypes exist and work is taking place on a third one. Although the need for a device as described might be quite obvious to the blind community, the first prototype served to prove the feasibility of the concept. It was too large and there were problems with the short-lived battery life, however its development did prove that a device like this would be welcome. For the second prototype, we made use of a flexible rubber-like keyboard. This prototype was smaller and lighter than the first one, with the same features. The third prototype is being developed using hardware that did not exist when the first one was being developed.

Meraka would eventually like to get all eleven official languages speaking on the notetaker. The last two prototypes presently only have English and Afrikaans through Espeak. The first prototype has a concept Zulu voice.

The Meraka institute is in discussion with a hardware manufacturer

regarding the production of the final product. We want to release both the hardware design and all the software on the Internet, so that any individual or company can build and/or support the device.

The eventual cost of the device would be somewhere between R5000 - R10 000. Hopefully, the device will cost closer to the lower end.

Once the first version is in production, we will look at offering a nine-key braille keyboard as an option. I have also had informal discussions with leaders in the blind community in India and in Thailand on collaboration, as they have a similar need, especially with regard to minority language support.

In conclusion, a current, but not exhaustive features list follows here.

The notetaker:

1. is navigable through a customisable menu system;
2. has support for email and web connectivity through one or more of the following communication methods:
  - Ethernet through a local area network or ADSL,
  - Dial up through an internal or external modem,
  - Connectivity through wireless LAN.
  - Connectivity through mobile phones is under consideration;
3. has support for speech synthesis in local languages for English and Afrikaans and possibly Zulu, with others to follow as they become available;
4. has a powerful scientific calculator which can be expanded into a financial calculator;
5. contains an English dictionary, which makes it easy to lookup

- words – this is expandable to other languages;
6. facilitates an easy search of topics in an offline copy of Wikipedia, which is a free encyclopedia;
  7. facilitates the creation and use of a personal database;
  8. allows for the reading of Daisy books in Daisy 2.02 format with expansion to include Daisy3 when a player becomes available - the current player supports synchronising of text with audio;
  9. has the ability to record audio in digital format, preferably in high quality, suitable for recording in lecture rooms and the like;
  10. features easy-to-use editing for audio files, allowing deletion and insertion of sound;
  11. facilitates the writing of data and audio compact disks;
  12. Reads DVDS disks - both data and commercially available films;
  13. facilitates word processing;
  14. allows for the reading of various document formats including PDF, ODF and MS-word - It is currently not possible to edit Microsoft documents, but ODF will be fully supported at some point;
  15. allows for access to external USB storage devices;
  16. facilitates the uncompressing of a number of different compressed file formats, e.g.: zip, bz2, rar 7zip and so forth;
  17. supports on-the-fly changing of synthesiser language;
  18. supports document conversions, e.g.: pdf to HTML;
  19. supports output via external refreshable braille displays through the brltty program.

For more information on the Meraka Notetaker, e-mail Willem van der Walt: [wvdwalt@csir.co.za](mailto:wvdwalt@csir.co.za)

***[Back to Contents list](#)***

**Arts and Culture**

## Rudely Interrupted

Stacey Love

"Their music is some of the most energetic and genuine to emerge from the Australian rock 'n roll underground in recent times" – *The Muse Box*

While the above type of complimentary description has become somewhat of an endemic within the realms of music journalism, this time I urge you to take what you read to heart. Genuine, energetic, inspirational even... allow me to introduce a new indie rock sensation – the six-piece Australian band, *Rudely Interrupted*.

And how have these six musicians succeeded in piquing popular attention? Well, putting their inherent musicality and catchy tunes aside, of course, what you wouldn't guess while listening to *Rudely Interrupted* is that five out of the six members have some form of disability. Here, inspiration takes on a whole new meaning...

Seasoned musician, Rohan Brooks, who now fulfils the roles of band manager and back-up vocalist, originally put this indie sensation together as a therapeutic activity for the disabled members. No one could have predicted the success this band would have. Yet, they've been likened to the sounds of *The Killers*, *R.E. M*, and even *Foo Fighters*.

Rory Burnside, the Rudies' lead singer and guitarist, has Asperger's syndrome and was also born without eyes. Marcus Stone, who also has Asperger's syndrome, is the band's highly competent keyboard player –despite the fact that he is deaf. Drummer, Josh Hogan, who has some physical abnormalities, also shares some of Rory and Marcus's autistic traits. Connie Kirkpatrick, who is legally blind, has Down's syndrome –she is affectionately referred to as the band's "tambo-girl". And lastly, bass player,

Sam Beke, who is described by his band mates as "the ultimate performer", shares Connie's disability, as a person with Down's syndrome.

*Rudely Interrupted* is a talented and determined six-piece, which has already won over many indie rock fans with the single "Don't break my heart". The lyrical content is refreshing in that, despite its suggestive title, the single does not speak to cheesy broken romances or teen relationships – the song was actually written in memory of a very important role model in Rory's life – his teacher, who sadly passed away after a long battle with cancer. Rory's loss as manifested in the band's hit single thus speaks of heartache in a new and different capacity. Explaining their single and shedding light onto the band's choice in name, Rory says the following: "Because of the challenges I've been through in my life, I've had lots of rude interruptions – my blindness, my Asperger's syndrome and, more than anything, the loss of my teacher." While Rory struggles to empathise with people around him – a character trait related to his Asperger's syndrome – he manages to find an emotional connection through music – a connection that all members seem to feel and amplify.

Their genuine connection to their music has taken them far, helping put the band on the map as the first rock act to perform at the United Nations in New York – a gig which they obliged to celebrate *International Day of Persons with Disabilities*. With this accomplishment under their collective belt, *Rudely Interrupted* has continued to tour, playing sold-out shows at various venues in New York, Toronto, Bristol, Manchester and London. But perhaps we should let the music speak for itself - listen to *Rudely Interrupted* by visiting their website: [www.rudelyinterrupted.com](http://www.rudelyinterrupted.com)

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[Back to Contents list](#)

### **Movie review: *Blindness***

Stacey Love

Director Fernando Meirelles (of "City of God" and "The Constant Gardener" fame) has adapted Nobel Prize winner, Jose Saramago's novel "Blindness" to film. The film, which keeps the novel's title, was screened in South Africa for the first time on 19 March.

The allegorical plot follows an epidemic of blindness that sees the "infected" population being quarantined in an old asylum which is then guarded against escape by heavily armed militia. The survival of the main characters, most notably, that of a doctor and his wife (played by Mark Ruffalo and Julianne Moore respectively), is documented alongside the increasing depravity and savagery of the caged blind population who co-exist with them. All characters, the city included, remain nameless in order to focus attention on the main thrust of the allegory at our disposal.

With its theatrical release in the U.S. in October last year, reviews on the film adaptation were overwhelmingly critical of its outcome...

"Blindness' turns out to be an elegant car that never quite cranks up. It's fascinating to look at but not nearly so interesting to sit through. [The] struggle between the decent and the depraved... works much better in the novel... Meirelles, a talented director, has given us a thoughtful film based

on a disturbing work of art. It achieves moments of beauty, but also leaves us wanting to like it more than we actually do." – N. Tucker, Washington Post

"In its original incarnation as a novel, "Blindness" belongs with those other important 20th-century allegories that use an imagined communal disaster as the laboratory for a moral thought experiment... Mr. Meirelles... sometimes seems overly enamoured of arresting images, manipulating light, colour and composition at the expense of emotional or narrative clarity... "Blindness" is not a great film, mainly because it can't transcend — and, indeed, lays bare — the intellectual flimsiness of its source. But it is, nonetheless, full of examples of what good filmmaking looks like." – A.O. Scott, New York Times

"Saramago was making a point about our greed, rage and incivility, particularly in times of heightened fear. But our state of heightened fear has become permanent and institutional in the years since the book was published in 1999, leading to, among other things, an outbreak of outbreak movies. But compared with more successful examples, such as "Children of Men", "28 Days Later" and even the spotty "I Am Legend"... "Blindness" feels stilted, claustrophobic and more stylish than substantial." - C. Chocano, The Times

"Bottom Line: A visually energetic and morally provocative film that ultimately is too premeditated... Removing a fable from the comfort of the printed page to the photo-reality of film can sometimes lead to its own kind of blindness." - K. Honeycutt, Hollywood Reporter

Bad reviews aside, further criticisms of the film came from the visually impaired community, as voiced by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB)

in the U.S. Members of the NFB planned a mass protest to make known their outrage at the film's use of blindness as an allegory to represent all that is deprived in human nature.

Dr. Marc Maurer, NFB President, who is himself a blind man, found the movie to be highly offensive, saying: "The movie portrays blind people as monsters, and I believe it to be a lie. Blindness doesn't turn decent people into monsters." Miramax studios, who were responsible for the release of the film, issued a statement that read, in part, "We are saddened to learn that the National Federation of the Blind plans to protest the film Blindness." The NFB shunned their statement as condescending.

The film had a dismal opening weekend at the Box-office, which I believe can be attributed to the film's unsuccessful leap from the pages of a book onto our movie screens, as well as to its insensitivity to a group of people, who had the courage to speak up for themselves, thereby exposing the ugly nature of yet another stereotyped representation.

*Sources:*

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***Back to Contents list***

**Book review: Cockeyed - A Memoir**  
Korky Levanon

There have been many books written about the achievements of blind people, but not so many on the transition of going blind. Ryan Knighton's *Cockeyed* is an account of his journey as a sighted man who slowly immerses himself, by no choice of his own, into the world of visual impairment as seen, or rather not seen, through the eyes of a blind person. Initially he is not aware of his condition, retinitis pigmentosa, and as his field of vision diminishes, he convinces himself and others that there is nothing wrong, that he is just clumsy by nature.

Knighton relates the challenges faced by him and those around him, once his condition is diagnosed. As much as possible he tries to continue his life the way he has known it, but eventually, he realises where he has been going wrong. He has been trying to live the life of a sighted person, when this category no longer defines him.

Because people tend to judge others by their own experiences and norms, we would probably, ignorantly judge the actions of a blind person, thinking that they "see" and do things in the same way a sighted individual does. Yet tasks such as eating for example, presents challenges to a newly blind person; challenges that sighted people are often unaware of. Knighton's memoir attempts to give the sighted reader a glimpse into the sighted world as experienced by a blind person, sometimes with hilarious detail – one notable story involves Knighton losing his pants in a nightclub.

Reading through the book one laughs and cries along with Knighton, sharing his frustration when dealing with dependence on others – whether in the comfort of his own apartment, in a public toilet or in a foreign country.

Without revealing too much about the book, *Cockeyed* is a "must read" for

anyone, whether you are family or friend of a blind person, or whether you are a blind person yourself or even if you're simply looking for an interesting read. It is easy reading and written in a style that is appealing to all ages.

Knighton teaches at a college in Canada and is published widely as a journalist. With the successful publication of the memoir, *Cockeyed under his belt*, Knighton has also been signed for the writing of two new books in 2009-2010 – read more about his upcoming publications on his website: [www.ryanknighton.com](http://www.ryanknighton.com)

Knighton, Ryan. 2006. *Cockeyed*. Canada: PublicAffairs.

\*Available from Exclusive books or online at Kalahari.net for between R150.00 – R180.00

[Back to Contents list](#)

## Ian Hutton Column

### Taking care

It's half-past one in the morning; there's this persistent banging noise and a man's pleading voice coming from somewhere up the street. I can't quite catch his words. Sounds, though, like there's been a lovers' tiff - he's been locked out.

I sigh and step outside. Still, I can't catch his words. So, I whistle through my teeth and shout, "Hey, voertsek man"! The banging gets louder and I hear, "Why you say voertsek? Help me! PLEASE!"

Now my key's in the gate and I pad barefoot towards where I think the noise was coming from. Suddenly, the banging's here, right next to me! It's from inside a car! My hand's on the door and I'm yanking it open.

"What's going on here?" "I am in de boot! Help me! Please! I am hijacked."

"This is dangerous for me," I say.  
"No, no, please. Try find de keys."

I check my back and reach inside. Nothing in the ignition or among the cassettes on the floor. On the driver's seat, though, is a long knife.

"Listen. No keys. Must I phone the police, or what?" "Yes. Phone dem."  
"Ok my brother. Stay calm. You are alive."

Two rings and they answer. "The driver is in the boot," I'm saying.  
"What is the make of the car? I don't know. I'm blind." "Blind?" "Yes. Doesn't matter though. I'll be next to the car; I'll have a white stick."

"It's me," I say. "The police are coming." He responds with a muffled grunt. In the near-distance there's the scatter of barking dogs, the buzz and squeal of occasional cars, the remote shouts of late-night revellers. Here in the street, only the odd cricket chirps. We say nothing. I keep sharp. The ones with the keys may be back. I feel in my pocket for a cigarette. I want to offer him one and then realise that I can't. If he smokes, it would be cruel for me to light up now. I light up anyway.

"What's your name," I ask, softly.  
"Jabulani." It sounds like his face is buried in his arms. "I'm Ian," I say.  
We wait. I listen. My cigarette's finished. I flick the butt into the gutter.

And now, a largish, rough-engined vehicle is nosing round the corner. It doesn't accelerate. It draws level, without slowing down. I hesitate. I raise my white cane. It carries on past us and then, it stops. The engine stays running. Two doors open. There is an unmistakable metallic click. Quick

footsteps are beside me. No one speaks. A police radio beeps and crackles into life.

Then a voice asks a question in Sesotho. Jabulani answers haltingly from inside the boot. A taller voice asks him something in Isizulu. Jabulani answers.

Meanwhile, the shorter one is opening the front door. I can hear him rummaging among the cassettes. Now he's back here at the boot. "No keys," I say, trying to engage him. "No. No keys." A click and the boot springs open anyway. Jabulani climbs slowly out.

"You have done very well here tonight," I say to short-voice while tall-voice is talking with Jabulani. "My name's Ian by the way. And yours?" "Ja, thanks. Sergeant Moses."

I ask what's happening now. "He's got someone he knows who can tow him. We are taking him there. If you hear anything funny with the car here again, you must just phone 10111."

I go back inside and sit smoking and listening out.

Now there are big engines arriving, voices, a chain clanking. I step outside again. A tow-truck driver-voice is saying through the ticking over of motors, "You better put on your hazards. You don't want someone driving up your backside, on top of everything else, hey?"

A truck door bangs, a bit of revving, and Jabulani and his car are towed away. He hadn't said a word to me since he'd been sprung. The other engine revs, Sergeant Moses barks a "Cheers Ian!" and they're also gone.

And, here I stand at half-past two in the morning, barefoot, white cane in hand and it's as if I didn't exist. But, that's ok.

[Back to Contents list](#)

## Sports and Recreation

### The O'Neill Surf Academy

Original article posted on The Surfer's Path website, August 2008;  
adapted for Imfama by Bonga Mazibuko

What would your life be without sight? The reply you get from most people is sappy, sad and negative. For the O'Neill team, there are no boundaries, which is the case for many visually impaired people. For two days on the Dutch coast, visually impaired children were taught how to surf as part of the "Out of Bounds program" within the O'Neill Surf Academy.

Out of Bounds is the inspirational brainchild of photographer and surfer Yael Dahan, who worked with O'Neill to create the first program of its kind in Europe. These guys travel to different coasts breaking the stereotype that blind people cannot do certain things. They treat visually impaired individuals to a whole day of surfing. Anyone from the age of six is welcome. Each person is paired with an instructor and two volunteers from O'Neill - a 'buddy' and a 'catcher' - who are there after each wave to assist the surfers.

Only good feedback has been given about this programme. For 10-year-old Dion Terlingen, who is autistic and completely blind, it wasn't only his first time on a surfboard, but also his first time in the sea. The boy was so happy - and this is the aim of this program. O'Neill volunteers, like Femke Terpstra, were encouraging him to stand up on the board. As time went on he surprised everyone and stood up on the board. He was so confident; he played around in the waves non-stop for the rest of the day.

There were moments in the water where, if you looked around, you would fail to find a single face without a smile, said Yael, "There is just

something about the ocean that affects us all in such a positive and profound way". For the O'Neill team, it's a different experience in some ways – like having to describe the motions rather than just demonstrating them. "But essentially it's the same as teaching fully sighted children. It's about getting in the water, having fun outdoors on the beach, and getting a thrill from standing up on the board," says Joey Hudson, who has been on the surf academy for seven years. According to The Surfer's Path, it was not just the kids who came from all over Holland who benefited from the day in the water. O'Neill volunteers, instructors and also the parents of the children, "walked away with a smile from the whole experience". The Out of Bounds program will return to the beach next year, to "not only provide kids with another opportunity in the water, but also to open up the joy of surfing to a new group of kids". To all South Africans: What is stopping us from starting up a similar programme? Share this story and ask the same question to your friends, family and colleagues. Hopefully I'll be writing about a South African boundary-breaking article for the next *Imfama*...

*Source:*

<http://surferspath.com/news/out-of-bounds-with-the-oneill-surf-academy>

***[Back to Contents list](#)***

## **Blind Endurance Riding**

Carl de Campos

For a blind person, riding a horse is an experience of freedom. It's very therapeutic and it gives you a great boost of confidence, although it can also be dangerous. I started riding at a game park where they offer horse trails for beginners, where the horses are calm and simply follow each other. This is an ideal way for a beginner or a blind person to get onto a horse.

In 2008, I made it my goal to start doing Endurance rides. I met Kobus Smit, who, despite suffering from cancer, holds the record for highest mileage participated in an Endurance ride in S.A. in 2008 - he is now my sighted guide. He also sold Billy to me. Billy is my first horse - a black gelding of cross breeding. Billy and I had our first 30km ride in Randfontein in April 2008 and after joining ERASA (Endurance Ride Association SA) in September, we did our first 80km ride in Liandra.

Endurance riding is a set-out marshalled route. There are many rides on any given weekend, country wide. Most riders camp close to the route for the weekend, with their horse's portable paddock near their camp site. Friday night comprises the route discussion and a pre-vet check to ensure your horse is sound for the ride. The ride usually kicks off very early on Saturday morning. Most rides are divided into multiple legs - the first two legs are 30km's each and the last leg is 20km's. There are compulsory vet checks after each leg, where you can easily be vetted out of the ride if your horse is either lame, dehydrated, or if its pulse is too high. If you are vetted out you lose your kilometres for the entire ride; if you pass the check, your kilometres and vet stamp are added to your rider booklet as well as to your horse's passport booklet. On Saturday nights we have a prize giving and a braai, before packing up and heading home on Sunday.

Although I usually ride with Kobus, I have also finished a ride with a different guide as Kobus was vetted out - this happened on my first 80km ride. I mostly ride in front of Kobus as Billy sticks to the paths. On a very challenging route, you need to think for your horse, which is why it is necessary for me to have an

experienced guide to advise me – so, I'm grateful to have Kobus as my guide. Although I need a guide, I do have a developed sense of direction and a feel for the terrain on the endurance routes which I attribute to the fact that I often ride alone at home to train my horse. I use a mental map of my surroundings to navigate when out alone - hearing landmarks via echoes, and feeling the changing terrain below.

My goal for 2009 is to do at least two more 80km rides to qualify and then ride my first Fauresmith, which is the Comrades of Endurance rides as you ride 201km's over 3 days on challenging terrain and in ice-cold weather. I just have to face the fact that Billy isn't a highly bred Arabian horse and that he can be vetted out very easily. Another problem is that the endurance rides cost a lot of money, as does the horse's transportation to the ride. Kobus and I are looking for sponsorship to assist us. In doing so, we also want to encourage other blind riders, as well as anyone with a disability, to come and enjoy this amazing sport on our amazing Equine friends.

[Back to Contents list](#)

## **Back page**

The Resource Centre facilitates computer accessibility for the visually impaired community by stocking various magnification and screen reading software and other accessibility technologies. Contact the Resource Centre for a quote on Jaws screen reading software or for a quote on a Dolphin pen, or for Zoomtext/Magic magnification software with speech, computers, braille embosser and so forth on: +27 12 452 3811 / E-mail: [adam@sancb.org.za](mailto:adam@sancb.org.za)

[Back to Contents list](#)

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[Back to Contents list](#)

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[Back to Contents list](#)