

BLIND SA
Newsletter/Nuusbrief
April 2016 April
NO./NR. 124
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This publication is made possible with financial assistance from the Department of Arts & Culture.

Partially blind Cape boy
wins international award

NEWS/02 March 2016

By: Zodidi Dano

Cape Town – A 12-year-old partially blind boy who lives in a backyard will soon be jetting off to New York after winning an international writing competition.

Joel Greek, a Grade 7 pupil at the Athlone School for the Blind, in Bellville, also won \$5 000 (R77 921) after entering the International Lions Essay Contest.

Joel Greek, 12, of Athlone School for the Blind, has won the International Lions Club's Essay contest grand prize.

Joel's win will be announced at the award and prize-giving ceremony in New York on March 12, where he is expected to address a crowd of over 500 people as well as delegates from the UN.

Joel was diagnosed with optic glaucoma at the age of six months. He was born able to see, but his vision has since deteriorated. He now has partial vision in one eye and is blind in the other. He lives with his single mother in a backyard in Kuils River. From early childhood, Joel attended mainstream schools, but later moved to the Athlone School for the Blind after a doctor's recommendation. Joel entered the writing competition, with the theme Share Peace, in September. Inga Greek, his mother, said when Joel came home and told her about the competition she was a bit reluctant. But despite his demanding hospital visits, Joel managed to enter a winning piece. His essay spoke of how people, despite the challenges they faced, could become successful or make an impact. He wrote about Anne Frank who had to go into hiding during World War II to avoid the Nazis, American Laura Bridgeman, who became the first deaf and blind person to learn a language (50 years before Helen Keller) and South Africa's famous child Aids activist, Nkosi Johnson. He wrote: "I myself am a young boy with a disability, the only one in my family. Yet they accept me knowing I am capable of anything. We have an

opportunity to change the world. By accepting our own selves, our differences, our imperfections, our shortcomings, we will be able to accept others, their differences, their imperfections and their shortcomings.”

Jimmy Lang, the president of the Gordon's Bay Lions Club, who handpicked Joel's entry as a submission for his district, said he knew the essay stood a chance to win. Lang received three essays from the school, but could only enter one from his district.

“When I received it, I was impressed with it. I thought it was good. He spoke about his peers, about himself being disadvantaged and how it (disabilities) should not discourage people. You could tell he read a lot.”

Greek said: “I am so proud of my son. The amount of research and passion he put into writing that essay was amazing. This is one of the things that will be a stepping stone for him to explore the world and be the voice of many of his peers.”

source URL: <http://mini.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/partially-blind-cape-boy-wins-international-award-1992234>

(Joel was announced the overall winner at the competition in New York. I will publish a follow-up article in the next edition of this newsletter. On behalf of Blind SA, I would like to congratulate Joel on this outstanding award ED).

BLIND COMPUTER SCIENTIST CAPPED

Cape Town – After dreaming as a child of making a career of problem solving and analysis, Stellenbosch University (SU) graduate Willem Venter was on Monday officially given the tools to make this dream a reality. The blind student was awarded his degree in computer science from Maties while his proud mother, aunt and uncle looked on, and is in the process of finalising his appointment as a programmer for a software company.

Hours after being capped, Venter, 27, said over the past seven years he has gone from feeling out of place and homesick to being an independent student who has made lifelong friends in the first mainstream institution he has attended. He was raised in a home where he was encouraged not to allow his lack of sight to stand in the way of his dreams. "They were also realistic, but always pointed out that you don't know what you can do until you try," the graduate said. He always dreamed of entering a technical field and initially aspired to becoming an engineer, he explained.

"But this involved technical drawings and as a blind person I would have run into difficulties," Venter, who was born blind, said.

Computer science was, however, not without challenges of its own. "My material was accessible thanks to a screen reader, but mathematics had access issues as there was no way to translate it into a format I could read." A tutor helped Venter over this hurdle.

While he said he chooses to see the positives rather than focus on difficulties, lecturers were also sometimes not open to adapting. "Some were just not open to accommodating me, because they wanted to continue things the way they had always been done and that's that. But I solved that with a combination of stubbornness and diplomacy."

Originally from Worcester, relocating to Stellenbosch to live in a residence was a big move, he said.

"In the beginning I was very homesick and out of place. But people were friendly and accommodating and I adapted quickly into res culture." While most students were friendly and accepting, others were less welcoming. "I find their negative attitudes annoying. I think it stems more from ignorance, not meanness," Venter said. "If I wanted to be a pilot without being able to see, I would be worried too. But to do computer science, one should just be able to think out of the box and apply reasoning."

Venter was also part of the university's choir and played goalball for SU. Goalball is a team sport for visually impaired players in which a ball containing bells is thrown at a goal. He is currently the captain of the provincial goalball team. Venter said he looks forward to applying what he has learned in the past seven years in the workplace. "I enjoy a challenge, so I look forward to the next one."

Once again congratulations are in order. Well done Willem, you are showing the rest of the country what blind people are capable of achieving ED.

MEDIA STATEMENT SADA
9 MARCH 2016

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For immediate release

MEDIA STATEMENT

South African Disability Alliance walks out of Disability Caucus on the eve of President Zuma addressing the Disability Summit

The South African Disability Alliance (SADA) had no choice but to walk out from the Disability Caucus on the eve of the Disability Summit where President Zuma is to be the keynote speaker and where he will meet members of the Presidential Working Group on Disabilities.

SADA was forced to withdraw from the Disability Caucus held at the St George's Hotel and Conference Centre on 9 March 2016 in view of Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) refusal to

discuss a letter addressed to SADA. The Disability Caucus meeting on 29 September 2015 resolved that DPSA and SADA needed to meet to address differences that affected the relationship between the organisations. The meeting was also called in view of the pressure Government was placing on a single unified voice for persons with disabilities.

SADA attempted over many years and more intensively during the past six months to meet with Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) to work closely in the interest of persons with disabilities. SADA's attempts have been rejected by DPSA. However, SADA strongly supports the principles of democracy and the freedom of association and will continue with its advocacy work in representing, promoting and protecting the human rights of persons with disabilities in South Africa.

SADA is regularly portrayed by DPSA as an organisation not representative of persons with disability, yet SADA members and their respective affiliates throughout South Africa provide programmes, projects and activities in terms of advocacy, empowerment, development and rehabilitation services for the inclusion of tens of thousands of persons with disabilities (including members of DPSA) in civic, economic, cultural, sports, social and political life. SADA endorses the general principles of dignity; autonomy; participation, inclusion and accessibility; respect for difference; non-discrimination and equality as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (particularly the Bill of Rights) and the recently approved Cabinet White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and consider these as core international and national instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights for persons with disabilities.

SADA members and their affiliates are recognised by State Departments in all three spheres of Government, including the Departments of Social Development, Health, Labour, Basic Education and Higher Education, as well as the SA Human Rights Commission and Independent Electoral Commission.

SADA will not be distracted from its mandate to advocate for the human rights of persons with disabilities including the provision of services to improve quality of life for both persons with disabilities and their families. SADA therefore calls upon Government to recognise the right of SADA in respect of representation, dignity, autonomy, participation, inclusion and accessibility, respect for difference, non-discrimination and equality and not constantly insist on the disability sector being represented by a single organisation.

SADA members and a few national non-member organisations met and continued the agenda of the Disability Caucus in preparation for the meeting of the Presidential Working Group on Disabilities and the Disability Summit.

About SADA

SADA membership comprises 16 National Disability Organisations, including Parent Organisations, as well as two National Professional Associations. SADA was established in 2007 to provide a platform to promote collaboration between role-players in the disability sector and

between the disability sector and other societal role-players, including relevant organs of state, in joint initiatives, campaigns, programmes and projects.

SADA's objectives include:

- a) Providing a platform for consensus-seeking and reaching common positions on issues relating to key policy issues relating to disability;
- b) Developing approaches to public communication on disability issues, concepts, key messages and the shaping of public perceptions of disability and of disabled people;
- c) Appropriating services and methods of service delivery to disabled people based on norms and standards acceptable to disabled people;
- d) Developing common positions on disability issues;
- e) Developing joint strategies and inclusive positions on cross-cutting issues that affect disabled people;
- f) Promoting the involvement of disabled people in national issues;
- g) Providing leadership for disabled people in South Africa in disability issues;
- h) Public education and awareness raising; and
- i) Supporting, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of policy, legislation and other legal instruments on disability both nationally and internationally.

“The collective voice of the disability sector in collaboration”

The full members of SADA are Autism SA, Blind SA, Cheshire Homes SA, DeafBlind SA, Deaf Federation of SA (DeafSA), Disabled Children's Action Group (DICAG), Down Syndrome South Africa (DSSA), Epilepsy SA, Muscular Dystrophy Foundation of SA (MDSA), National Association for Persons with Cerebral Palsy (NAPCP), National Council for People with Physical Disabilities in SA (NCPDPSA), QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA), SA Federation for Mental Health (SAFMH), SA National Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Persons (SANABP), SA National Council for the Blind (SANCB) and SA National Deaf Association (SANDA)

The associate members of SADA are the Occupational Therapy Association of SA (OTASA) and the SA Association of Audiology (SAAA)

ENDS

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National Federation of the Blind
Applauds Transmission
of Marrakesh Treaty
for Ratification

Urges Senate to Ratify Treaty to End Book Famine Immediately

Baltimore, Maryland (February 10, 2016): The National Federation of the Blind today applauded President Obama's transmission of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled to the United States Senate for ratification, and urged the Senate to act immediately to ratify the treaty.

Mark A. Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind, said: "this crucial treaty will substantially ease the book famine that currently limits education and opportunity for the blind of this nation and the world. When it is fully in effect, it will give blind Americans the ability to access books in Braille, audio, and other alternative formats from across the globe, as well as provide more books to the blind of all nations. We strongly urge the United States Senate to ratify it without delay."

The Marrakesh Treaty was officially proposed in 2009, successfully adopted in June 2013 by the World Intellectual Property Organization, and signed by the United States in October 2013. For more information on the treaty, please visit <https://nfb.org/marrakeshfactsheet>.

The React Blind Rally
by Niall Burns

I am currently in South Africa preparing for the upcoming SA Championship series opener here at the Goldfields Rally. Today I took some time away from my preparations to take part in quite a unique event, The React Blind Rally. This event is for blind navigators, who use instructions given to them in braille to navigate their drivers in a regularity aka TSD (Time-Speed-Distance) type event. I was asked to drive on this event by sponsor Andy Haigh Smith and I have to say it was an amazing experience.

My navigator for the event was the local experienced Cairie Van der Vyver. She has 28 years experience competing on these type of events and was quick to get me up to speed on what was expected of me and what the route may be like. We were seeded 29th and once I helped Cairie into the car, a very fancy Toyota Etos, we lined up for the start control. There, 4 minutes before our due time we were handed our time card which was printed in an ordinary style, a clock which is the drivers responsibility to keep an eye on and route instructions which were all done in braille. Cars are released in 2 minute intervals and once you are at the start control, clocks are

zero'd and you begin. We started from the Killarney Race Track and Cairie began to read me the instructions to the first control which was north of Cape Town towards Malmesbury.

I should explain regularity (TSD) type events like these are not about high speed, they are about timing and accurate navigation. Cairie would instruct me to points such as a T-junction where I turn left and I must keep a speed of 36kph to our next instruction which may be a speed sign post where I may or may not increase my speed. Our instructions tell us what times we should reach certain controls. As an example, once we left the start control we should arrive at Time Point One in 4 mins 32 seconds. This means not only must the navigators' instructions be spot on but the driver must pay close attention to the speed they travel at. If we approach these controls early or late there are penalties which count towards our result. The driver must also keep an eye on the clock to make sure we are on time. On a few occasions today where I mentioned we may be 5 seconds down at an instruction point, Cairie was not shy to tell me to speed up! At controls a marshal will ask for your time card and clock where they will confirm from their instructions if you are on your correct time. The winner is determined by whoever has the least amount of penalties, so you're essentially trying to get a clean sheet if possible.

After 12 time points and a lot of fun on the back roads of Cape Town we finished a very respectable 27th overall. Cairie did a fantastic job on the navigation, pity about my driving but we have always next year to redeem ourselves, that's if she'll ever co-drive for me again! The event is so unique and it's a real credit to the organizers who do a fantastic job from getting all the navigators to the venue and providing them with drivers. I would urge any motor club who might have an interest in organizing one of these events to do so. You certainly won't regret it. I have to say it was one of the most rewarding events I have taken part in and hopefully I will be back for next year's event too.

Now it's back to training and preparations for our rally next weekend and hopefully I'll be back to answering more of your questions which I have been emailing soon.

Source URL: <http://openpaddock.net/2016/02/28/the-view-from-the-right-seat-by-niall-burns-episode-4-blind-rallying>

What I'll Say the Next Time
Someone Asks If I Know
Stevie Wonder Because
I'm Blind Holly Bonner

By Holly Bonner Feb 16, 2016

The 58th Annual Grammy Awards was held in Los Angeles on February 15, 2016. Artists representing every genre of music packed the Staples Center as fans from all over the country watched for performances and fashion alike.

With so many losses felt within the music community since the beginning of the year, Stevie Wonder and Penatonix honored Earth, Wind & Fire's Maurice White with an emotional performance of "That's the Way of the World." Wonder, who became blind shortly after birth,

then preceded to remain on stage as Penatonix members read the Grammy nominees for “Song of the Year.”

After video played, the camera cut back to Stevie Wonder, who was holding the winner's card. As he began to fumble with the card, attempting to open its seal, Wonder murmured, “So, I'm gonna break this open, pop it open ... you know, what the hell?” The audience laughed while Penatonix members awkwardly looked on, seemingly wondering if they should intervene or let the music icon continue to open the envelope.

Wonder quickly attained success and upon turning the card towards the audience, it appeared to be blank.

“OK, so you all can't read this huh? You can't read it; you can't read Braille. Nah, Nah, Nah, Nah Nah.”

The audience erupted with laughter. Stevie, glided his fingers over the dots adding, “I just want to say before saying the winner, that we need to make every single thing accessible to every single person with a disability.” The audience applauded Wonder as Ed Sheeran took home the win for his song, “Thinking Out Loud.”

As a blind woman, I've had a love-hate relationship with Stevie Wonder since losing my vision in 2012. As one of the most famous blind people in the entertainment world, people often say to me, “Oh, I can name a blind person, (pause) Stevie Wonder.”

I also get asked, “Do ‘you’ know Stevie Wonder?”

Know him? Of course I know who he is. I've heard his music. Are we going out to dinner or texting each other daily? In a word ... no.

Surprising as it may sound, not all blind people hang out together. We exist in this world. We participate in our communities, and if we do happen to encounter a fellow individual with a visual impairment, then yeah, we compare notes. Maybe we swap numbers, similar to sighted people when they meet someone who shares a similar interest.

I know enough about Stevie Wonder to expect a great performance, but I was equally surprised by the Grammys' choice to have him hold the winner's card. Even as a blind woman, I was thinking, “Man, is somebody going to help him with that envelope?” and “How is he going to read that thing?”

Well, Stevie showed me. Hell, he showed the entire musical community. A blind man read and announced a Grammy winner.

He didn't need assistance. He didn't require a sighted person to do the job. He just did it. Elegantly. Professionally. Perfectly.

But beyond that, Stevie Wonder light-heartedly used the opportunity, perhaps even unbeknownst to him, to educate the world about “inclusion.”

“We need to make every single thing accessible to every single person with a disability.”

Inclusion for all, whether it's the blind celebrity announcing the Grammy winner or the autistic child looking for matriculated classes in their school. The disabled community craves accessibility. We sometimes require accommodation. But we all, disabled or not, want inclusion.

The next time someone asks me if I “know” Stevie Wonder, I won't be frustrated by their innocent ignorance. Instead, I will proudly say, “Yes, he's the guy who killed it at the 2016 Grammys by showing the world how accessibility for the disabled community is so empowering.”

YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzdDy8PoxMI>