



# The Torch



#Edition 27

## Wonder dog

I found myself reflecting on the extraordinary gifts that I have been given in the form of my guide dogs. Ronnie, now with me for 4 years, and preceded by Gatsby and before that the late great Barklee.



The reason for this sentimental jaunt is that I have just read a terrific book, 'Thunder dog,' by Michael Hingson. Cleverly capturing one's attention immediately by mentioning in the forward that publication coincides with the sad passing of his memorable guide dog Roselle. Thereafter one is gripped by the story of how Roselle guided Michael down 78 floors of the North tower during the attack and destruction of the World Trade Centre on 9/11.

Afterwards, more impressively, guiding Michael through the drenched and crashing chaos of the lobby and out into the apocalyptic scene outside which included the explosive debris of the collapsing South Tower.

This is obviously a tough act to follow, and of course there can be no amount of training and preparation that can equip a dog, let alone anyone blind or not, to experience this.

But I was reminded of one situation, obviously not vaguely comparable to Roselles amazing feat, where I witnessed a guide dogs initiative and diligence.

In truth, actually, we are guilty of being blasé about most of what they do and take for granted what took months and months to perfect with training. However, what Barklee did that day in November 2013 was definitely above and beyond his training.

"How are you going to get home"? said my client as I weighed up my options for going home from town that day. Normally this wouldn't have been a problem as I would have simply walked from Dorp street to the station and caught a train home.

But today, I had totally failed to consider a massive strike and march by COSATU through town, scheduled for that afternoon.

The marchers were now in St Georges mall, Wale Street and lower Adderley. Sadly, this one was turning violent, and we could hear the sounds of destruction from St Georges Mall already.

This meant that I would need to try avoid the masses if I could.

Marches tend to walk in large bunches, so when there was a lull, I took off really fast, hugging the Eastern side of Adderley towards the station

I knew for certain that the station would be out of bounds as I could hear chanting coming from that direction.

So I thought I would be clever and turn Right into Darling street and walk a couple of hundred metres to a MyCiTi bus stop and hopefully catch MyCiTi to Salt River where I could then catch a train.

As I turned into Darling I ran slap bang into a late arriving batch of marchers, marching rapidly towards St Georges Mall.

It was like no experience I have ever had before or since. A body of several hundred people walking with purpose in one direction has a mass of its own and an inexorable momentum.

We were literally swept along, except that I was trying to go across their stream at 90 degrees to their direction. I had no appetite to join the destructive mob in St Georges mall.

I must point out here, that strangely, I did not feel frightened, despite the pace and the martial chanting. The marchers were not interested in me at all and ignored me completely.

I was however very disoriented and literally was not sure where exactly I was.

I raised my voice and said loudly so Barklee could hear, Station boy, station!

Barklee simply took charge.

He powered forward and turned fully 180degrees. I thought he was confused and nearly tried to correct him, but I kept quiet and realised that in the throng, we had both been turned around and were now facing the Cathedral.

Also, we were on the other side of Adderley.

Barklee turned us around, marched us through the now thinning crowd and headed toward the station.

I was right, the station was chaotic, with no possibility of entering or catching any trains.

"I wonder if My Citi will be running," I thought.

Usually, I walked to My Citi terminal, through the station then across the car park towards the Civic Centre.

But that route was out of the question with the station full of angry marchers.

The only option would be to walk along Adderley towards Herengracht, and cross Hertzog boulevard towards the Civic.

I hate this part of Town since it is very awkward with many busy roads to navigate and the large Herengracht circle is very confusing for pedestrians if you're visually impaired.

Barklee had certainly never done this route before.

And yet, he was clearly still in charge. I literally said nothing, trusting that he knew what he was doing. I have a very good sense of direction, so I knew where he was headed more or less, but I was fascinated that he knew where I wanted to go.

Past the station building, past the travel agent and the KFC, over the road, past the Metrorail head office, over another road, past standard bank and finally a very busy Hertzog Boulevard.

Crossing that was no problem, but I had no idea exactly where my citi terminal was from this direction.

I needn't have worried, Barklee drawing on heavens knows what inner guide, carried on without hesitating straight to the terminal.

Barklee worked with me from November 2007 until September 2015. He died on 14 May 2018.

## Blind people can now convert material to braille as ConCourt rules Copyright Act unconstitutional

A group of activists who advocate for blind and visually impaired people has emerged victorious in their court battle to prove certain sections of the Copyright Act unconstitutional for unfair discrimination.



The apex court delivered a unanimous judgment on Wednesday that sections 6 and 7 of the act are unconstitutional and granted Parliament 24 months to remedy the defects.

"Those with print and visual disabilities suffer from a scarcity of access to literary works that persons without these impairments do not due to the Copyright Act, which, therefore, constitutes unfair discrimination on the basis of disability," said Justice Jody Kollapen.

Kollapen, who was delivering a judgment written by Acting Justice David Unterhalter, read that while Parliament was still rectifying the act, visually impaired people should not have to wait and were allowed to convert the material to accessible formats without requiring authorisation.

BlindSA was represented by Section 27.

"We are ecstatic that we have a judgment that provides for the exceptions that we have been advocating for so long," said Jace Nair, CEO of Blind SA.

"We would like to thank the Constitutional Court for recognising the impact this violation has had on the lives of blind and partially sighted persons for decades."

The nonprofit organisation pointed out in its evidence that children and university students who were visually impaired struggled to secure books in accessible format copies for educational purposes.

In September 2021, BlindSA obtained a Johannesburg High Court order that declared the Copyright Act of 1978 unconstitutional. The high court also ruled that the proposed section of the Copyright Amendment Bill be immediately inserted so that people who were blind could access the books they wanted to read.

The Copyright Amendment Bill was proposed five years after it was introduced and is still being debated in the National Assembly because of disagreements with some of its provisions.

Earlier in May, the constitutional court sat to consider, confirming that the act was unconstitutional. The minister of trade, industry and competition, Ebrahim Patel, who was

cited as the first respondent, did not oppose the confirmation of invalidity; however, he made submissions in favour of the suspension of the declaration of invalidity to assist this court to determine the appropriate remedy.

The minister of international relations and cooperation, the National Assembly and President Cyril Ramaphosa were also cited as respondents.

Source: [News24](#)

## Studying at Unisa

By Shani Little – Unisa Graduate

To decide to study through Unisa could seem like a daunting prospect. If you want to do a diploma course, you are looking at a full-time study of at least 1 to 3 years. If you dare to do a degree, you have to ready yourself for at least 4 to 7 years. This will of course depend on how many modules you take per semester, whether you study full-time or part-time if you have family, work, or other commitments. If you are employed, an average of 2 to 4 modules per semester is realistic. If you are doing it on a full-time basis, 4 to 5 modules per semester are doable.



Unisa has a variety of careers that will be accessible for visually impaired students, including law, teaching, social work, office administration, human resources, theology, linguistics, political sciences, and media studies.

Before you decide on a qualification, your mindset should be in the right place. You have to know that there will always be challenges to face. You have to meet certain deadlines for assignments, material may not always be accessible and you may have difficulty getting hold of relevant staff and lecturers. However, for every challenge, there are solutions, you just need to think out of the box, and learn the necessary skills to do things yourself.

If you know other students who studied through Unisa, build a network of support with them. Ask them how they did things, and how they overcame their challenges.

The first thing you should do is apply for your qualification during the application period. If you want to start in January 2023, the application period is usually around August or September 2022. Make sure all your documents, such as ID, Grade 12 certificate, and any other qualifications are sent in before the closing date. If you get accepted, you need to register as early as possible during January. You need to indicate that you are a student with special needs, and make sure you contact the disability unit as soon as possible. Fill in the necessary forms which will permit you extra time during examinations, as well as to receive handbooks in electronic formats. Mrs. Vukati Ndlovu assists with registrations, and Mr. Pintius Nkuna helps with the procurement of textbooks in electronic format.

Next, you need to familiarise yourself with the MyUnisa website, as this will be your platform for everything, from submitting assignments, checking your examination results, changing any personal information, etc. You need to sign in to your MyLife email address and create a MyUnisa password. If you have a smartphone, immediately download MS

Outlook, and set your MyUnisa email up on your phone, so you can always be updated regarding any communication your lecturers may send. This will be the only way you can communicate with the university. They do not accept communication from students via external email addresses, it has to be from your MyLife email.

Remember that each Unisa student has access to free Office 365, therefore, you can access your email on your laptop or computer too, as well as do your written assignments in MS Word 365. Set it up on your computer as soon as you can.

Furthermore, join all the related Unisa Facebook groups. There are general and support groups, as well as groups related to each qualification, and sometimes even some of the modules have their groups. There, you can contact students who do the same qualification as you, and their assistance and advice are crucial. Sometimes you may feel utterly alone on your Unisa journey, especially if you are a student with special needs. By joining support groups, you will feel more part of the Unisa family, and you will notice that all students have different challenges to overcome.

Also, join as many WhatsApp groups as you can regarding your modules. Students post valuable information there, and they help each other daily.

Telegram is another option, but it is very inaccessible for blind students. However, if you have sighted assistance, someone may help you to download previous question papers and tutorial letters from this platform.

Once registered, you should read Tutorial letter 101 for each module. This is the basis of what you will need. The outline of the course is discussed, as well as which prescribed books you will need. Procuring prescribed books could sometimes be a problem, that is why you should contact Mr. Pintius Nkuna as soon as you can. Otherwise, you can buy some of the books from websites such as Takealot or Loot.

If you are very fortunate, you could sometimes contact the authors, and they may in some cases permit you. However, beware that authors and publishers are very aware of students distributing illegal copies. You will need to fill in a statement that you will not distribute these books, and you will have to send proof of your eye condition. Remember that this is a special privilege that the publishers and authors grant special needs students. Please kindly keep to this agreement, to keep the road open to students who may come after you.

Some of the tutorial letters and study guides may not be accessible with all the screen reading software. Make sure that you have an app such as VoiceDream Reader on your phone, I found it the most useful app, it is even more accessible for different formats of books, even more than Jaws or NVDA.

Sometimes, you may need to convert some PDF documents to Word. There are applications available, such as File Converter, or E-Book converter, which work well with most materials. If you still encounter problems with inaccessible materials, you can contact Mr. Netshituni or Mr. Moodley at Unisa's disability unit.

The Unisa website is quite accessible with a smartphone and computer. However, the library services are difficult to navigate. For that, they have staff available to assist with library services, but it could be a long process. If you need prescribed articles for assignments, students are quite willing to share these.

Online examinations were quite a revolution for everybody. The examination website is accessible, but you need to do it on a computer, not a cellphone. Special needs students are exempted from using the Invigilator application because it is quite inaccessible for visually impaired students. This is an application that tracks your sound and movement during the writing of exams, so they can make sure you are not perhaps cheating. Sometimes the app would ask you to take a selfie or a photograph of your ID. This is of course impossible for visually impaired students, especially if you do not have sighted assistance around at the time of the examinations.

If you however can organise sighted help on your examination days, it could be beneficial, especially if you want to make sure that everything is submitted on time. Your sighted help could for instance read you the question paper and you could just write your exam.

The next thing to remember is to make sure of all your due dates of submission of assignments, as well as examination dates. Make a list, so you can know exactly when which assignment has to be submitted. Always try and submit before the due date, as the website may be congested or even down towards the due dates.

Remember that some of your modules may contain visual material, such as statistical formulas, graphs, and figures. You may additionally have to make use of visual materials to do your assignments, such as making a poster or inserting photographs or drawings. For these, you will need sighted assistance. Make sure you understand your theory well, so you can give your sighted helper clear instructions on what to do for your assignment. You still need to do the work, your assistant may just insert the visual material which you cannot. Sometimes you may even contact people in your community. I had to contact our local police office for crime statistics in our area, and I had to find out about non-profit organisations in my area.

Very important, to build an excellent rapport with the staff at the disability unit, as well as other Unisa staff and lecturers. If you encounter problems, respectfully explain to the relevant staff, and always show appreciation and goodwill.

The road to qualification may not always be moonshine and roses, and sometimes you may need to stay awake until 4 AM to complete an assignment on time. You may have to say no to social engagements or ask your family to give you some study time. Sacrifice is inevitable. But, when you stand on stage one day at your graduation ceremony, wearing your gown and cap, and you receive your certificate, you will know that all the hard work was worth it.

So, go and grab your future. It is possible if you persevere.

## No computer? No problem – visually impaired kids learn to code using old-fashioned puzzles

Confronted with a desperate need to introduce coding in schools that did not have computer laboratories, a professor and one of his honours students turned to the age-old craft of –building puzzles.

From the man who figured out a way to teach children how to code without computers comes a new plan to make innovative coding puzzles accessible to the blind and the visually impaired.



Professor Jean Greyling launched the pilot project, Tangible Africa, in Gqeberha last week.

Tangible Africa, in partnership with the Bona uBuntu Programme, is an engagement project of Nelson Mandela University's computing sciences department and the Leva Foundation.

Using cardboard puzzles and cellphones, Greyling's original programme has helped to teach thousands of children across the continent since 2017.

When confronted with a desperate need to introduce coding in schools that did not have computer laboratories, Greyling and Byron Batteson, one of his honours students, turned to the age-old craft of -building puzzles.

"For many years my students said we must do something to make children aware of software development," said Greyling, who has been a lecturer at Nelson Mandela University since 1992.



Jackson Tshabalala, the operations manager at the Leva Foundation, said: “All that is needed to play these offline coding games spearheaded by Tangible Africa is a smartphone, a coding kit and eager learners.

“This partnership is called ‘Bona Africa, coding for VIPs [visually impaired people]’. The name is significant because we want to show Africa that we can develop homegrown solutions for our own people, to promote digital inclusivity in Africa.

“Many people are disconnected from the digital economy, especially visually impaired people, and we want to help reduce this with digital education.”

The pupils from Bona uBuntu were the first to try out the new games for visually impaired learners in Gqeberha last week.

“They had a lot of fun, and it was great to see that the same skills of teamwork and collaboration were used during their sessions.

“Our prototypes are basic for now, but we would love to design tools specifically for blind and visually impaired children to play the games, including adapting our existing apps or developing a specialised app,” Tshabalala said.

One of the pupils who tried out the games said: “This is the first step to get me ready for coding. I would love to be a software developer one day. It was hard at the beginning, but I practised a few levels and started to love it.”

Robyn Fick, Bona uBuntu’s programme coordinator, welcomed the coding classes and collaboration with Tangible Africa.

“Our focus is on inclusivity and accessibility for blind and visually impaired children, so we are very excited about the future opportunities that coding can offer our children,” she said.

Read more in Daily Maverick: “Ingrid Jonker Prize winner Jacques Coetzee on political awakening, blindness, poetry and music”

Greyling said a crowdfunding page would be used to raise money to develop the apps even further – adding tactile elements, adding Braille to the game tokens and designing the app to have better contrast and audio.

“Two children have already told me that they would love to become software developers,” he said.

Tshabalala said: “We have a dedicated crowdfunding page for Bona Africa so anyone who would like to make a difference – from individuals to corporates – can support us.

“We also have a team of cyclists who were the first to come on board to support this cause.”

Greyling’s wife, Louise, will head a team of cyclists who will ride the Karoo to Coast Mountain Bike Challenge to raise funds for Bona Africa later this month. The race is a gruelling 100km off-road challenge from Uniondale to Knysna via Prince Alfred’s Pass.

She said: “We are practising hard and will be wearing the Bona Africa colours with pride. We are a group of about 27 cyclists who like to make a difference. I know the cause of introducing visually impaired learners to coding will give us that extra drive and energy to complete the race for a purpose.”

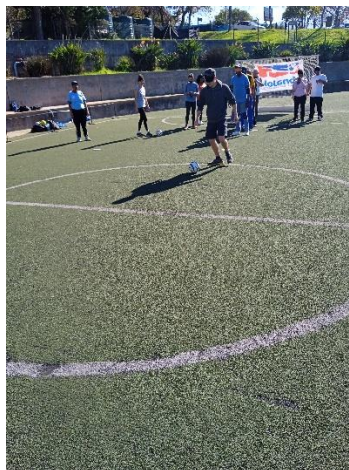
This story first appeared in our weekly Daily Maverick 168 newspaper, which is available countrywide for R25.

Source: [Daily Maverick](#)

## Blind Football Coaching

The University of Cape Town ParaSports Club hosted a historic Blind Football Coaching Workshop from 14 to 17 May. The workshop was facilitated by Keon Richardson, an international facilitator who is passionate about the growth of the game, and came with a wealth of experience. 6 Organisations participated and all involved grew immensely from the experience. The organizations were UCT ParaSports Club, Innovation for the Blind, Athlone School for the Blind, League of the Friends of the Blind, Cape Town Society for the Blind, and Gugulethu United Goalball Club.

The facilitator made sure to keep the sessions interactive so all participants could influence how the training took place. There was a strong balance between the theoretical and practical elements of the sport. The first key element we were taught was safety. Building from safety, we went through effective communication including tactile coaching techniques. When we took to the field we went through attack, defence, goalkeeping and how to combine play. Emphasis was still placed on safety, effective communication and fun. Exercises escalated in complexity therefore allowing players and coaches to establish the fundamentals and build from them. One very positive habit the facilitator instilled in the participants was to end exercises on a good note, e.g. end a passing exercise with an accurate pass, or end a goalkeeping exercise with a successful save.





By the end of the four days, everyone was exhausted but also energised by the knowledge and skills gained. Much like the exercises from the workshop there's now an escalation: participating organisations have been provided with Blind Footballs and blindfolds so they can start practices with the aim of establishing a Western Cape Blind Football league. Proceeding into 2023, we hope to have friendly matches and possibly a follow up workshop so as to keep the sport growing while we lay the foundations for formalising the league.

## Little Habits that make people stronger and more resilient

By [Lisa Newman](#) – Written on May 30, 2022



**1. Savour the moment.**

The best things in life are often found in the small moments of pleasure and connection. Your first cup of coffee, a child's hug, or appreciation of a blooming flower. We all have these moments even during the most challenging circumstances.

Looking out for the small enjoyable moments that occur throughout the day and anchoring them into memory with a bit of extra attention will go a long way toward keeping you in a positive state of mind. This promotes positive emotion and interrupts negative rumination.

## **2. Focus on positive emotion.**

All emotions are adaptive, meaning that even what we think of as a “negative” emotion has a positive role in our lives. But the emotions we think of as “positive” hold special power.

It's thought that positive emotions evolved as a way of helping us broaden our outlook past the immediate crises at hand and to help us maintain supportive social connections.

Thankfully you don't have to wait for positive emotion to come naturally. You can induce positive emotions by watching something cute or funny (which might be why cat videos are so popular), turning your attention to something or someone you love (such as a tree, artwork, person, or pet), or moving in a way that's enjoyable (such as dancing to an upbeat song).

## **3. Take a deep breath.**

This timeless advice is rooted in science because our breath is the quickest way to bring slowly and deeply also ensures that oxygen reaches our brain and muscles.

When practiced over time, deep breaths enhance cognitive and psychological flexibility. Even one deep breath can be rejuvenating and give you the pause you need to make better choices.

## **4. Do something menial.**

You may not see a link between making your bed and meeting your long-term life goals, but taking any small action gives energy and shows you that you're capable of getting things done.

Additionally, small actions can jump-start a chain reaction of more action. The idea is that, while the way we think can influence the way we feel and act, the opposite is also true. In actuality, these loops are the result of the complex interplay between thoughts, emotions, goal-directed behaviours or actions, and imagination.

We can change our moods and thoughts indirectly by taking action. When you're feeling unmotivated pick any small, even micro, action, even one completely unrelated to your goals. Then stand back and acknowledge your work.

## **5. Play a little.**

It may seem self-indulgent when you've got too much to do but a short play break can work your brain in different ways which can help you stop worrying and instead better access your creativity and problem-solving capabilities.

An app, word game, puzzle, or craft will do, as will throwing a ball in the air, or shooting a few hoops. Anything you find fun for 15 minutes or so will give the needed boost.

## **6. Counter a negative thought.**

We're often brought low by our own negative thoughts, and when times are tough these negative thoughts add unnecessary weight to our load. Try countering negative self-talk that you become aware of with a statement of self-compassion.

Sometimes people have the erroneous belief that self-compassion is an excuse or harsh self-talk is motivational. But research has confirmed the benefits of kindness over criticism.

Simple statements to yourself like "you're doing your best," "this is hard," or "everyone makes mistakes" can lift your mood and give you the energy to keep going.

## **7. Take a brain break.**

Taking a break from thinking is deeply restorative. One easy way to do this is to shift focus onto the senses by paying attention to what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch.

Doing a body check-in is another way to give your brain a break. Do this by scanning your body and asking what you're experiencing inside. This can be physical needs like thirst, hunger, or exhaustion. It could also be emotional manifestations like butterflies or a knot in your stomach.

## **8. Eat when you're hungry.**

In our culture of dieting and food restriction, it's easy to forget that eating is important to maintain both energy and brainpower. The brain is an energy hog, accounting for only 2% of our body weight but using 20% of our energy. It requires continuous glucose to function which is why eating when hungry is so important to maintaining strength and resilience.

Everyone who has experienced becoming "hangry" knows that getting overly hungry can put you in a negative mindset leading to anger and other negative emotions.

Paying attention and honouring your appetite signals rewards you in multiple ways. Not only does it ensure that you get the nutrients you need when you need them but it also

## **9. Practice gratitude.**

Research shows that gratitude is an important practice for staying strong and resilient. A prayer or thank you before eating is an easy way to practice gratitude. This also brings your body into relaxation which aids digestion.

You can take a moment each day to reflect on three things you are most grateful for. When done at the end of the day, this has the bonus effect of putting you in a relaxed positive space which is helpful for better sleep.

Building tried and true little habits like these can have big impacts. They can help you feel stronger in the moment as well as build resilience over time.

You can do any one of these actions until it becomes a real habit, or you can keep a list handy to pick from when you need a power-up. You can even stack them for greater impact. Think "taking deep breaths" plus "being grateful" plus "savouring the moment" while taking a meal break.

If something seems too hard, break it down further into individual, doable actions. The most important thing is to bring some focus onto what's good in life to help balance out the rest.

Source: [Yourtango](#)

## Birthday Wishes



Peet Botha celebrated a very special birthday in September which he celebrated with friends and family. We wish Peet many more happy years ahead.