



The Torch



Edition 20

Celebrating Women

Landi Engelbrecht



Landi is geared up to go zip lining.



Pieter and Landi on their way to a ball.

How to forget someone is blind? Spend some time with Landi. Landi shared some insights with us about her life, the challenges she overcame and being a mother.

She describes herself as easy going and eager to learn.

Landi attributes her positivity to her faith in God and always keeps her mind set on the bigger picture. Her positivity she attributes to setting her mind on God. She does not allow small things to upset her and keeps her sight set on the bigger picture.

Landi is currently undergoing training to use the switchboard on the computer. This has been challenging for her as she is not computer literate. She does not like change and adapting to a new job was quite a challenge for her. Regardless of this, she is committed to make everything in her life a success.

“When I was younger and my kids were small, things were a lot more challenging. However, being blind had not made a difference how we raised our children,” she says. They are grown now and happily help where they can even though she can do it herself. Landi orders their groceries and pharmaceuticals via telephone. She is a good cook, and her husband is living proof of this.

Landi shared that she wished everyone would get vaccinated as she believes it will minimize the spread of Covid-19.

During these challenging times Landi is grateful that God spared them. She became closer to God and spends more time reading her Bible. The Bible fuels her spirituality. It has been difficult not being able to socialise as usual, but prayer has kept her going and keeps the mind healthy.

Hoe om te vergeet dat iemand blind is? Spandeer tyd saam met Landi. Landi het 'n paar insigte met ons gedeel oor haar lewe, die uitdagings wat sy oorkom het en om 'n ma te wees.

Sy beskryf haarself as gemaklik en leergierig.

Haar positiwiteit skryf sy toe daaraan dat sy haar gedagtes op God vestig. Sy laat nie toe dat klein dingetjies haar ontstel nie en kyk na die groter prentjie.

Landi ondergaan tans opleiding vir die gebruik van die skakelbord op die rekenaar. Dit is vir haar baie uitdagend, aangesien sy nie rekenaarvaardig is nie. Sy hou nie van veranderinge nie en om aan te pas by 'n nuwe werk was nogal 'n uitdaging. Ongeag alles, is sy toegewyd om alles in haar lewe 'n sukses te maak.

'Toe ek jonger was en my kinders klein was, was dinge baie meer uitdagend. Om blind te wees, het nie 'n verskil gemaak hoe ons ons kinders grootgemaak het nie. ' - sê sy. Hulle is nou volwasse en help graag waar hulle kan, al kan sy dit self doen. Landi bestel kruideniersware en farmaseutiese produkte per telefoon. Sy is 'n goeie kok, en haar man is 'n lewende bewys hiervan.

Landi deel dat sy wens dat almal die entstof sal neem, omdat sy glo dat dit die verspreiding van Covid-19 tot 'n minimum sal beperk.

Gedurende hierdie uitdagende tye is Landi dankbaar dat God hulle gespaar het. Sy het nader aan God gekom en bestee meer tyd aan die lees van haar Bybel. Die Bybel voed haar spiritualiteit. Dit was moeilik om nie soos gewoonlik te kon kuier nie, maar gebed het haar aan die gang gehou en die gees gesond gehou.



Michelle Botha

Michelle Botha obtained her PHD in Disability Studies at the University of Cape Town in July 2021.

Due to the pandemic, the ceremony took place virtually.

Michelle didn't wear the traditional toga. She wore a colourful dress with a red toga of which the material was gifted to her by a friend from Uganda.

She chose to wear this, to honour her friend.

'People don't believe I'm blind'



Watching Jerri Mather apply her make-up on her popular TikTok account, it's hard not to be impressed. Whether it's a frosty, metallic eye, a 'natural lip' or even an England flag painted onto her cheeks to celebrate the football, it's clear that the 20-year-old from Rotherham is having a lot of fun.

"I've always loved make-up and have always been artistic," says Jerri, who has recently moved into a new house with boyfriend Nick, also 20.

"Lots of people used to tell me that they liked my make-up so last November I started a TikTok account to share hints and tips and already I've got nearly 4,500 followers. I really enjoy it."

It is maybe not unusual for a young woman to take to social media to share make-up tips. But what is astonishing about Jerri is that she is blind. Born with only 50 per cent of her sight after suffering brain-damage during birth, she lost more of her vision last year when she was involved in an accident.

"My boyfriend and I were in a taxi coming home when a car that was being chased by the police smashed into us," says Jerri.

"Nick's head hit the handlebar above the door and he broke his nose and I suffered bad whiplash but within seconds of the crash, I realised that my vision had worsened too."

"It had become even more blurry and I couldn't see Nick as clearly. We were both taken to hospital where the doctors said they suspected I had a blood clot, but I now only have 20 per cent of my vision."

"It means that I'm registered as fully blind and now I have to hold things up to my face very closely to be able to see them at all."

"I was really upset at first. I'd adapted so well to having 50 per cent of my vision and was quite independent. Now I'd have to get used to only having 20 per cent vision and be reliant on so many other people. I got quite down about it, but Nick has been brilliant."

"We've been together for five years, since meeting at college and he's my carer now. He made me realise that life didn't have to be that different."

Jerri uses a range of modern technology to help her with day-to-day life.

"I have devices that use larger text and a volunteer system called 'Be My Eyes' which is like a one-way video. I call them up and ask questions like: 'Where is my tin of beans?' and show them around the kitchen and they can tell me. It's brilliant."

"I label all my individual make-up items with a special labelling machine so when you hover a pen over it, it tells you what the label says. It's so useful."

She decided to turn her hobby into a career earlier this year when she spotted a make-up course online. "I'd never thought about doing make-up as a career but I thought the course sounded cool and at first, the tutors didn't know how they would teach a blind person."

"There are obvious challenges such as colour-matching certain tones on skin so I rely on colour detectors to help me."

"But I passed the course and next week I have my first ever professional job. A lady wants me to do her make-up for a photoshoot. It's only a simple job, with a smoky eye but I'm really looking forward to it."

Her TikTok account @beautyisblind is gaining followers by the week but sadly she has also been subjected to some trolling.

"People say that they don't believe I'm blind but what would they know?" she says. "You've got to expect that with any kind of social media and I don't let it get to me. You have to take the negative with the positive."

Ignoring the trolls and focusing on the future, Jerri has plans to create a range of make-up for visually impaired people.

"Society doesn't realise that blind and disabled people also wear make-up and so it doesn't cater for them," she says.

"I've found one skincare range that has braille on the packaging but that's it. I want to create an eyeshadow palette that looks and feels different and has labels on each individual colour."

"That would make it so much easier for people to know what shade they are using. One day I'd also love to open a salon for blind and disabled people to show that although we may be forgotten by society a lot of the time, we are blind but not broken."

Source: [Yahoo](#)

Sight Tech Global 2021



Shortly after the first [Sight Tech Global](#) event, in December last year, Apple and Microsoft announced remarkable new features for mobile phones. Anyone could point the phone camera at a scene and request a “scene description.” In a flash, a cloud-based, computer vision AI determined what was in the scene and a machine-voice read the information. Learning that “a room contains three chairs and a table” might not seem like a big advance for the sighted, but for blind or visually impaired people, the new feature was a notable milestone for accessibility technology: An affordable, portable and nearly universal device could now “see” on behalf of just about anyone.

Technologies like scene description will be on the agenda at the second annual Sight Tech Global event, December 1-2, 2021. The free, sponsor-supported, virtual and global event will convene many of the world’s top technologists, researchers, advocates and founders to discuss how rapid advances in technology, many centered on AI, are altering — both improving and complicating — accessibility for people with sight loss.

[Register](#) today — it’s free.

At the heart of Sight Tech Global is the hard question: How do highly advanced, AI-based technologies actually become compelling, affordable products that folks who are blind or visually impaired readily adopt? It took 40 years, for example, for the \$50,000 “Kurzweil reading machine,” a boxy desktop device, to evolve into what blind people take for granted today, a free app available on any mobile phone that can “read” just about any text. As anyone working in the field will tell you, shaping technologies into truly useful, everyday, affordable tools for people with vision loss is no less demanding than it was 40 years ago.

The [agenda for last year’s Sight Tech Global](#) convened [many of the best minds across the spectrum of accessibility-related technologies](#), including Microsoft’s Saqib Shaikh, Amazon’s Josh Miele, Apple’s Chris Fleizach, Orcam’s Amnon Shashua, civil rights lawyer Haben Girma, author and professor Sara Hendren and researcher and professor Danna Gurari. In addition to those speakers were [a dozen well attended breakout sessions](#) led by Perkins Access, Salesforce, APH, Humanware and others.

Because the event was free, virtual and [highly accessible](#), more than 4,000 people from 70 countries attended the event last December. All the sessions (video and transcript) are still available on demand via [the agenda](#) or on [YouTube](#). Attendees gave the event a generous thumbs up: 4.7 out of 5 for programming and 4.6 out of 5 for accessibility.

Now is the time to register so that our all-volunteer team can keep you posted on agenda updates and ensure you have a chance to sign up for limited-attendance breakout sessions. [You can register here.](#)

Got programming ideas? We are happy to hear from you — especially founders, inventors and researchers who have working technology products! The programming committee includes Jim Fruchterman (Benetech / TechMatters), Larry Goldberg (Verizon Media), Matt King (Facebook), Professor Roberto Manduchi (UC Santa Cruz) and Will Butler (Be My Eyes). Contact us Info@sighttechglobal.com.

Calling all sponsors! We’re delighted that Google, TechCrunch and Verizon Media have already signed on for 2021, and nearly all [last year’s sponsors](#) have signaled that they plan to renew their

support for this significant event. Private donors are also welcome! To learn more, [read here](#) or contact us a sponsor@sighttechglobal.com.

Sight Tech Global is a production of the [Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired](#), a 501(c)(3), that has been serving the Silicon Valley area for 75 years. Vista's executive director, Karae Lisle, is the event's chair. Vista is the beneficiary of all sponsorships and donations to Sight Tech Global. In 2020, 92% of the proceeds from Sight Tech Global went to support the Vista Center's work to help thousands of people with vision loss in the Bay Area lead their best life.

Please join us at Sight Tech Global in December!

Source: [Tech Crunch](#)

Protecting children's mental health during Covid-19



The writer says that to address the long-term effects of Covid-19 on children's mental health, policymakers must make investing in children a priority.

DHAKA (THE DAILY STAR/ASIA NEWS NETWORK) - Recently, many parents in Bangladesh are expressing concerns about the behavioural changes of their children and feeling worried about the impacts of Covid-19 related restrictions on their health and wellbeing.

During an interview, Nancy Close, Assistant Professor at the Child Study Centre at the Yale School of Medicine and Associate Director of the Yale Program in Early Childhood Education, explained what parents may be experiencing with their children (from toddlers to university students).

"I've been seeing a lot of regression and more than what, in typical times, is developmentally appropriate. I've seen children regressing through using baby talk, needing help with routines, needing help with sleeping and toileting-and much more than what's usual for them.

Coping with and expressing strong feelings can be really challenging, so we're seeing temper tantrums in older and younger children and even college students. We are discovering that consistency and predictability have been more difficult to achieve during Covid-19. This can lead children to feel anxious and frustrated which can certainly result in behavioural dysregulation."

Covid-19 is primarily a public health emergency, but it has lots of secondary impacts on children's education, health and protection, in the short and long run. Due to prolonged school closure and social isolation, children have lost their regular lives.

Covid-19 has created stress for parents all over the world. Many of them are struggling to manage working from home and looking after children. In our society, we hear about this in general discussion and media also highlights the challenge.

However, are we realising that children are used to going to schools, interacting with friends and being taught by teachers? Staying at home is stressful for them also. Are we viewing things from children's points of view? Are we listening to their concerns meaningfully?

"Impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the mental health of children in Bangladesh: A cross-sectional study", published by Children and Youth Services in October 2020, highlighted that children are suffering from depression, anxiety and sleeping disorders. Estimates of moderate and severe mental disturbance were 19.3 per cent and 7.2 per cent respectively.

Different children are reacting differently to the situation. Many children have been resilient and adjusted to the crisis. However, there are many who need support to go through this difficult time. It is important that parents, caregivers, teachers and other adults of society have the sensitivity and capacity to respond to their needs.

Research on effective parenting in the last 30 years demonstrated that parents need to provide warmth as well as structure, according to the age of their children. Parents should understand how children think and feel at various stages.

Effective parent-child communication is critical at any and all times, and particularly during the Covid-19 crisis. Positive parenting messages, as well as messages on how all members of society can be more child-sensitive, should be promoted through print, electronic and social media.

Children need to feel they are being loved by parents and caregivers. It is also helpful when family members spend quality time together. Children should be encouraged to play, read books, maintain an active life by engaging in various activities, and reduce over-reliance on electronic devices. Parents should also limit their own screen time, as children follow what adults do.

Children have a lot of questions, especially during crisis periods. Parents can share age-specific information with their children on how the virus spreads, what they can do to protect themselves, and the efforts that are being taken throughout the world to fight the pandemic.

Parents can take initiatives to limit children's consumption of news to avoid unnecessary worries. The pandemic also provides an opportunity to teach children the importance of receiving information from credible sources.

There is no need for parents and caregivers to ask too many questions on how children are feeling. But children should feel reassured that there is someone they can talk to if they want. Some may like to draw. Some may want to talk. They should be encouraged to express themselves in ways they are comfortable with.

Children get their emotional cues from adults. So, parents should not express anxieties in front of children. Parents need to find support around managing their own stress as this can ultimately help their children's wellbeing.

If a child continues to show signs of distress that affects daily functioning and/or are not regular (for example, sleeplessness, lack of concentration, acting in a way that is suitable for children younger than his/her age), then parents should seek support from a trained mental health expert.

As a society, we should also learn to understand that mental health is very important for our overall wellbeing, and there should not be any stigma about this.

The capacity of teachers should be developed so that they are able to respond to the needs of children when they return to school. They should be trained on mental health concerns that children are likely to face, what signs of distress may look like, and how to intervene with appropriate action and referral. Schools should also support teachers to manage their own stress.

The executive director of United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) has cautioned that if children's wellbeing is not adequately addressed, "The mental health consequences for a generation of children and young people could far surpass the immediate health and economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving long-term social and economic consequences in its wake."

Children's health, nutrition, education, protection and overall wellbeing will be profoundly influenced by the impacts of the global pandemic. The next decade could see a huge reversal in children's rights or be a significant moment in the fight for a world where all children can grow up to realise their potential.

It will depend on the decisions we make today. If we are serious in addressing the negative consequences of Covid-19 on children's lives, which includes stopping developmental regression, and protecting their mental health, then policymakers must make investing in children a priority.

- The writer is an international development worker. The Daily Star is a member of The Straits Times media partner Asia News Network, an alliance of 23 news media organisations.
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Source: [The Straits Times](#)

Farewell Les



Les Masterson is retiring from the Board of St Dunstan's.

As if Covid and our strange new world had not thrown enough curveballs at us all, yet another change is facing us at St Dunstan's.

In the days when zoom meant to magnify an image or referred to the noise that a toy plane makes, we used to meet at the Pinelands office in the board room for our quarterly board meetings.

Les Masterson would take his usual seat just next to the chairman and quietly participate in every board meeting.

What a wrench it will be, when we do finally return to the board room, to not have Les sitting in his spot, carefully scrutinising every word in the minutes and other documents. With his precise lawyer's brain, he would pick up the slightest grammatical, spelling or contextual error and have no qualms about stating this fact in his distinctive voice; "Mr Chairman", he would say, never Brian or Dave, always Mr Chairman...

After a staggering 37 years serving on the Board of St Dunstan's, Les, sadly, is retiring.

I don't doubt that he would have stayed on forever, but our mandatory 75-year retirement age put pay to that.

Les's contribution to St Dunstan's can only be called incalculable since his natural affable generosity meant that he took on innumerable tasks and favours for the organisation.

Every little matter requiring a legal opinion, or every conveyance issue was undertaken by Les or the firm of Attorneys Pincus Matz, that Les was a partner of, and from whom he has also retired, (although I notice he still goes into the office every day!).

Apart from his very long association with St Dunstan's, Les also had an even longer association with Cape Town Rifles, affectionately known as the "Dukes" who he served as OC for many years.

This military connection gave him special kudos with our St Dunstan's beneficiaries who adored spending time with him on our reunions.

Les's deep compassion and clear thinking throughout his tenure on the Board will be missed most sorely. Most sorely missed.

Jeremy Opperman