

# Not even a slow puncture could tire Lewis from taking gold

**I**N APRIL 1912, the East Rand amateur cyclist Rudolph "Okey" Lewis, 24, was chosen to represent South Africa at the Stockholm Olympics. He participated in the only cycling event of the games – a punishing 315km individual time trial round Lake Mälaren, Sweden's third largest lake.

The route had been pioneered by Swedish cyclists and was known as the Mälaren Runt.

It was the longest Olympic cycling event ever staged and was held over narrow, potholed and twisting dirt roads which remained open during the race.

Lewis, a strongly-built farm lad who became a gold miner, was a member of the Germiston District Cycling Club, but had no international experience.

## The way we were



By Jackie Loos

He was drawn second of the 123 riders and left at sunrise (2.02am) on Sunday, July 7, expecting to be in the saddle for about 11 hours.

The competitors set off at two-minute intervals and rode against the clock. Lewis knew he had to post a good time to stand a chance of winning.

He soon passed the Frenchman who left before him and pedalled on alone through the unfamiliar countryside on his Swift 88, covering 2.25m with every revolution.

He later thanked the organisers for their precise instructions, saying he had had no difficulty in finding his way because the route had been marked with large red arrows on a white ground at all the crossroads and places where it was

possible to take a wrong turning.

He was troubled by a headwind during the early stages, but his greatest challenge came 10km from the end, when he suffered a slow puncture.

His only recourse was to pump his tyre every 400m, which gradually reduced his lead.

It was a hot day when Lewis reached the finish outside the main stadium at 12.44pm in a time of 10h 42m 39s, but he still had to ride into the stadium and do a lap for the crowd.

Then came the long wait to see whether any of the favoured contestants who started behind him had beaten his time. It wasn't until 5.21pm that the second-placed cyclist came in: "Freddie" Grubb, the ace British time-trialist of the

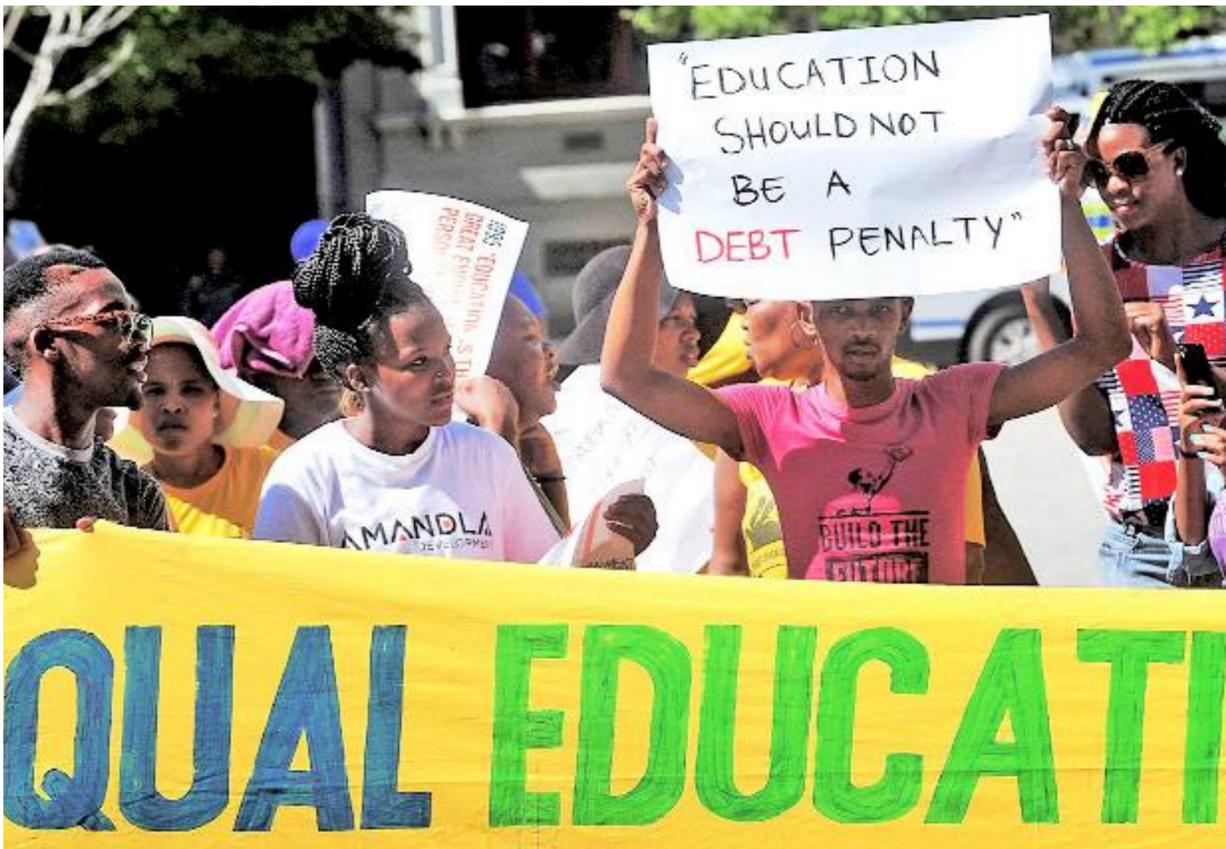
era, who finished some nine minutes behind Lewis. CO Schutte of the US was third.

The Swedes, who'd chosen a well-prepared squad of 12, had to make do with the team prize.

When the results were announced, Lewis's Springbok teammates carried him high.

The Swedish Olympic Committee called his victory "magnificent". Not only had he beaten the course record by 40 minutes, but his average speed for the whole distance was a remarkable 29km/h.

He rode without the assistance of pacing and his cycling prowess aroused great admiration among the Swedish spectators.



AFFORDABLE EDUCATION: As recent protests by equal education demonstrators in Cape Town showed, the writer is not alone in having difficulties in paying school fees.

PICTURE: DAVID RITCHIE

## Tavern of the Seas



By David Biggs

## Your smartphone is busy turning you into a 'Smombie'

**T**HERE was a seven-metre tall statue of a pair of clasped hands in the garden of Salisbury Cathedral in England. It was erected across a path, so visitors could walk between the wrists.

I said "was", because the authorities have decided to move the statue after smartphone addicts kept bumping into it and hurting themselves. (No, I am not making this up.)

I find it hard to believe that anybody could fail to notice a seven-metre high statue in front of them, but that's what happened. And it obviously happened often enough to worry the cathedral management.

Here in South Africa we have a record of removing statues, but not because people have bumped into them.

A recent article in The Week magazine referred to smartphone zombies as "Smombies", and said they were becoming a growing menace in the UK.

Many pedestrians have been injured when they have stepped off the pavement without looking where they're going – head down, focused on that little screen.

In the US, too, according to the article, "thousands of pedestrians have been injured as a result of being absorbed by their mobile phones".

Reporters from the London Sunday Times monitored five busy London streets recently and found that one in seven people walked down the street concentrating on their phones rather than on the busy traffic around them. At one busy intersection, 19 people crossed the street in 10 minutes, without taking their eyes off their phones.

I'd love to know how many smartphone-related accidents have been reported in South Africa.

In Cape Town, I've noticed more examples of Smombie rudeness than dangerous pedestrian behaviour. (Our drivers casually continue to use phones while they drive.)

I've seen shoppers going through supermarket checkouts with eyes glued to their little screens, never so much as greeting the teller or making eye contact.

The same happens in restaurants, where I've often seen waiters arriving with the diners' food, putting it down in front of them and never communicating in any way – no "thank you" or smile or even a glance. The busy diners are totally absorbed in a conversation with somebody far away.

Very often two diners at the same table will spend an entire evening texting on their phones, and not to each other. One wonders what the point is of going out together if you spend the evening chatting with somebody else.

We buy cellphones in order to keep in touch with the world, but it seems that the very opposite happens. As soon as we switch on that evil little screen we shut out the real world around us.

We keep worrying about the threat of robots taking over our jobs, but haven't we almost become robots ourselves, slaves to the little screen?

## Last Laugh

The managing director of an international company was reading vital reports and signing important contracts.

"Brenda!" he suddenly yelled to his secretary.

"Where the hell is my pen?"

"It's behind your ear, Mr Jones," she answered calmly.

"Dammit, woman," he shouted, "you know I'm a busy man. Which ear?"

*The Wanderer*

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# Supporting my child's right to a basic education

Single mom describes fight she faced from kid's school in trying to get a partial fee reduction

**O**N TUESDAY, March 22, the Western Cape High Court will hear the matter of Michelle Saffer versus the Head of Department, the Western Cape Education Department and others. The case highlights the discrimination that single mothers face when seeking to ensure access to schooling for their children.

**Saffer, a divorced mother of one, is the applicant in the matter. This is her story.**

The past years have been exhausting for me. I am a single parent with one child, a difficult enough thing in itself.

When my child was in primary school, I did my best to pay the school fees but every year the fees increased.

Then, when my child entered high school, the fees were far higher than primary school and I realised I would not be able to afford them.

That is where my trouble started.

In 2010, I applied for my daughter to be admitted to a high school in the Western Cape.

I was unable to pay the full amount of school fees, and sought a partial fee exemption.

The application form required financial information about both myself and my ex-husband, and the school's process for fee exemption applications treated me and my ex-husband as a

"family unit".

The form also required me to commit to being "jointly and severally" liable for my child's school fees.

Not only could I not afford the school fees, but it would mean I would have to be answerable for the actions of the father of my child, someone with whom I have had a difficult relationship.

As I put it to the school: "I am in no way a family unit with my daughter's biological father. I divorced him soon after she was born.

"Divorced is another way of saying we are separated. I know very little about his life. I do not have the kind of relationship which would enable me to do financial calculations as a 'family unit'."

Despite my appeals, my fee exemption applications were ultimately rejected.

Schools are certainly in a difficult position, having to face funding constraints and various demands.

However, parents also have no choice.

Placing your child in a school is not like shopping, when if you can't afford one retailer, you can move to another, more affordable option.

Your neighbourhood school is your neighbourhood school, and parents have a legal and moral obligation to educate their children.

Given my circumstances as a single mother (and custodian parent), I applied for a partial fee exemption – hoping that I could have a fee reduction rather than a total fee exemption.

However, this unleashed a harrowing barrage of letters of demand from the school's lawyer and accounts with threatening bold warnings, saying that I would be blacklisted.

It was a terrible experience. I was treated as if I were a pariah.

Indeed, in annual parent meetings the atmosphere created was that divorced parents lied, drove around in big cars, went on overseas holidays and refused to pay fees.

The strain of the experience created such stress that my health eventually suffered.

Each letter through the postbox was another source of extreme anxiety. I wanted to give up all the time, but I was angry that I had been treated this way and, more than that, I was angry because I had heard of other parents who had also been badly treated, but had not been able to fight.

One woman said she had parked her car on the

side of the road and just cried when she opened a lawyer's letter of demand. She had to get a second job to pay the school fees.

It was for parents like them that I knew I had to battle on.

I started doing my own legal research, empowering myself.

When reading one of the Supreme Court of Appeal judgments that dealt with fee exemptions, I recognised the name of the advocate, Geoff Budlender.

I contacted him and he suggested I get in touch with the Equal Education Law Centre.

From that moment on I learnt to breathe again. The Equal Education Law Centre was able to offer legal support, and in doing so helped me cope with the looming awfulness of the school, the school governing body and the lawyer.

I saw that how I had been treated was an example of the unfairness of the system with respect to single parents. I am hoping that the courts come to the assistance of other single mothers like me.

But, in my case, it is now too late.

I ultimately could not face going through the fee exemption process in the fifth year of high school and emptied out my savings and used most of my salary to pay the school fees.

Others should not have to do the same.

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