

ALUMNAE NEWS

Rustenburg Girls' Schools Alumnae Newsletter

December 2020

President's report

Dear Fellow Alumnae

It has been a different year for all of us, more so for the staff and learners at school. They have had to adapt to a new normal way of teaching and socialising. However, it seems they have adjusted well and I am sure we will have the same great results from the current matrics in their final examinations.

This will be my last note to you as president of the RA. I am stepping down at our next AGM but will be available to stand as a committee member for 2021. I would like to thank my committee for all their support over my one year of acting and three years as president. We have made great strides in bringing RA into the 21st century, we have our new name, logo, active Instagram and Facebook pages.

Please keep an eye on our website where details of Founders' Day and our AGM next year will be uploaded shortly: <https://www.alumnae.rustenburggirls.org.za/>

Wishing you a very happy and safe festive season

-Ruth Romburgh



This will be my last note to you as president of the RA. I am stepping down at our next AGM... I would like to thank my committee for all their support

Rustenburg Alumnae Membership

If you are receiving this newsletter you are probably already registered as an alumna on the Alumnet website – <https://rustenburg.alumnet.co.za/>. Don't forget to amend your email address if it changes to continue receiving news about reunions, alumnae events and what past pupils are doing now. Please encourage your classmates to register.

If you would like to join Rustenburg Alumnae, please visit our website at <http://alumnae.rustenburggirls.org.za/> where you will find the link to the membership form under 'About Us'. Everyone who matriculated after 2000 automatically became a member. For those who matriculated before 2000, Life Membership is R300. However for the duration of 2020, the membership fee will be waived for all alumnae who sign up. We encourage all who take this opportunity to make a voluntary donation on our website. A substantial portion of our income is used for the Rustenburg Alumnae Bursaries.

In This Issue

- COVID-19 relief fund
- Surviving breast cancer
- Alumna is canoeing world champion
- Who's on the committee anyway?

COVID-19 relief fund

RGHS Governing Body writes:

It needs little reminder from us that the COVID-19 pandemic has turned our lives upside down in ways we could not have imagined. And while the world is trying to find ways to manage COVID-19, sometimes in ways that make no sense, one thing is certain; there are countless families who have been severely affected by the fallout from the restrictions. The Rustenburg family is no different.

Some families have been fortunate to ride the COVID-19 storm, while others have had the economic rug pulled from under their feet. While the school does all it can to assist parents, it comes at the expense of everyone in the RGHS community as we are forced to cut back on spending elsewhere, and change the spending patterns of the school, thereby pausing the various projects that Rustenburg has earmarked.

Many parents have been asking how they can help, in a way that they know will directly benefit those people in desperate financial need. As a result, we have established the RGHS COVID-19 Support Fund (CSF), to help affected families. The funding received from the RGHS CSF will ensure that these learners can continue with their education at Rustenburg.

We would like to challenge you to support our Rustenburg family and help those families in distress. Our target is to raise enough funding to pay for the school fees for such affected families for a period of six months. This will go a long way in assisting them in being able to get back on their feet while not having to worry about school fees in these exceptional times.

We currently have a number of students whose families are unable or battling to pay their fees. By the time 2021 arrives, we expect up to 15% of learners will be in such a position. To pay for the fees of 15% of the learners (105 learners) for six months, we would require approximately R3m. If only half the families at Rustenburg were to contribute R8,600 (on average), this would raise the required funds. We are sure that many parents are looking for reliable and trustworthy ways to help their communities in these extraordinary times. Note further that this donation is tax deductible and an S18A Certificate will be issued to all donors.

Adequate oversight is critical and the Finance Committee will take ownership of ensuring that the funds collected are used for their intended purpose. This will be reported on to the School Governing Body for overall oversight. The identification of parents who require financial assistance towards their fee accounts will follow the normal process that is currently used for Fee Exemption applications.

We ask you as a key part of our family, if you are in the position to offer assistance, to help those in need. Please complete the online form below and confirm the amount you are able and willing to contribute.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CovidSupportFund>

We thank you in advance for your understanding, compassion and the ultimate assistance

RGHS transformation progress

Rustenburg Girls' High School has launched a page on their website to record their transformation journey. Learners, parents and alumnae are encouraged to visit the page at <https://www.rghs.org.za/transformation-at-rustenburg> to find out what measures have been put in place at the school and what work is currently underway.

The page includes information on the transformation timeline, areas of change, equity statistics, newsletters and resources on diversity and inclusion.

"As a school, we recognise the discriminatory and racist history of South Africa and its continued influence on our country and schools today. We are committed to ongoing transformation at Rustenburg Girls' High School and working towards equity and structural justice in and outside the classroom."



Imelda Bell shares her experiences living with breast cancer

I want to talk about the time Santa gave me cancer for Christmas.

I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer in December 2017.

I always thought that Father Christmas simply left coal instead of presents to those on the naughty list. I guess I must have been extra bad that year, and I would have gladly accepted a lump of coal in my stocking at Christmas, rather than a malignant lump in my breast.

I want to start by going back to when I was diagnosed, with this poem which I wrote for my book "Facing the Monster"

Diagnosis

I hear the words, "It's cancer"
My mind goes blank.
I can't speak, I can't think.
I am dazed and numbed
by the discord of my emotions.

Fear creeps into my soul and grasps my heart
With an icy hand and a vice like grip.
Dread climbs from my toes
Clawing at my sinews until it reaches the tip of my head
where it explodes in a frigid torrent of terror.

Sweat trickles down between my shoulder blades
and puddles in the small of my back
My breath restricts as panic rises from
The deep pit of my churning stomach
and a moan ascends from the boiling maelstrom below.

My head buzzes as thoughts rub together
in a frenzied dance
to the hum drum of my heartbeat
and the whoosh of the blood pounding my ears.

My knees start to tremble
and I stand outside my body
detached and severed
Looking in at the turbulent furor
which threatens to engulf my existence.

I want to shout, I want to run
But I am rooted to the spot
cold and paralysed
Stuck at this juncture with the heinous cackle
of this vile disease echoing in my every thought.

The scariest time, was the wait to find out 100% whether I had cancer or not, although my world had already crashed down around me, when I was told I almost certainly had cancer! Christmas was a whirl of hospital visits and tests and went by in a blur. The feeling of helplessness before a

treatment plan is put into place can be overwhelming. I wasn't so much scared of dying, but I was scared of losing what makes me, me. Photography is my passion, and I was scared of losing my creativity and not being able to come up with ideas any more.

Surgery took place in early January and I had a single mastectomy without a reconstruction. I imagined myself with one newly constructed breast and laughed at the thought of pushing 50, with one perky young breast and the other that I can tuck in knickers!

Biopsies revealed that my cancer had spread to my lymph nodes and just two weeks later I had a second surgery to remove my lymph nodes.

There was now no chance of lifting my camera, so tried to stay creative with colouring & drawing. It was a very frustrating time, but I got through it with the support of my wonderful family, friends, and the photography community as well as the many Rustybugs who remain friends to this day.

Chemotherapy was next on the cards, and although I was able to lift my camera after healing from surgery, I was advised to avoid contact with young children, which was the main subject I photographed in my business. It was then I decided to document my cancer journey through photographs and I continued to do so throughout



Imelda Bell (E'87)

chemotherapy.

Initially, I thought that having chemotherapy would put me out of action for months on end with no respite; I imagined being sick all the time and not being able to leave the bathroom. I think it is import to get across to other people facing a diagnosis, that this isn't the case. Treatment has come a long way and anti-sickness medication really helps. Treatment is full of ups and downs, but in between the downs, you can carry on and live and enjoy life.

Photography became my lifeline during this time and times in the studio were times I could forget what I was going through and be back doing something I loved. I eventually started to take photos of other people who had had cancer and the collection of photos grew.

My hope was that the images would tell a story not just of sadness, but show the range of emotions, which accompany a cancer diagnosis. There were times I was sad, angry, scared and frustrated, but I also discovered how wonderful people could be. The support from my family and friends was overwhelming and I was even touched by kindness of complete strangers.

The series of photos lead to me becoming a Master Craftsman with the Guild of Professional Photographers, and I was awarded a Fellowship with the Society of Wedding & Portrait Photographers, as well as receiving the award for the Best Fellowship Panel 2018 with the Master Photographers Association.

The photos eventually were picked up by a publisher and published as "Facing the Monster", part of The Monster Series of books about cancer, along with my diary and a foreword written by Benedict Cumberbatch.

Having being touched by cancer, although I am currently cancer free, it is a constant devil on my shoulder, whispering in my ear from time to time to threaten and scare me, and I know I must live with this long after treatment ends, as the threat to one's existence after an experience like this does not go away. It stays with you and leaves you changed.

So yes, Santa gave me cancer for Christmas, but it was a gift that restored my faith in humanity and showed me love, joy, bravery and kindness that we as humans can share in good times and in bad. It taught me how even in the face of death what everyone wants is to be treated as the person they are, not as a disease and most of all we want to love and be loved.

I try to use my experiences to do my little bit to make the world a better place and to help people through my photography and writing, where I can.

I recently released a free eBook called "The Little Germ who Travelled the World" to help young children understand Coronavirus and I have also written "The Nasty Beast who Wanted to Stay" to help children understand what may happen when a loved one goes through cancer treatment and several more books are in the planning.

Life has so many ups and downs, but whatever you are going through, just keep your head held high, be proud of who you are and be kind to yourself, as well as others.

Learning under Lockdown published

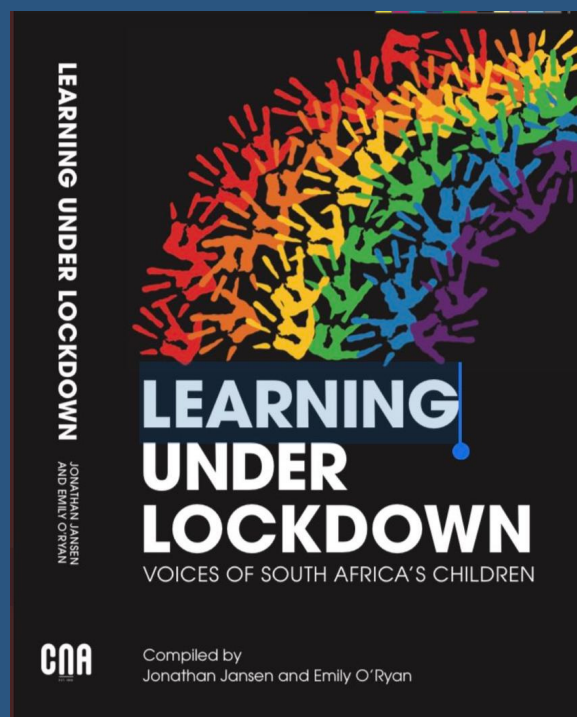
Learning under Lockdown, a compilation of 400 essays by South African school children from all parts of the country, was released by CNA in September this year.

The book was compiled from over 640 essays by Stellenbosch University (SU) Professor Jonathan Jansen and SU graduate and Rustenburg alumna Emily O'Ryan (E'15). The pair decided to spearhead the initiative when they realised that the voices of learners during the COVID-19 pandemic were underrepresented compared to those of adults.

In the featured essays, the learners explore their feelings, experiences and challenges with continuing their education during lockdown, including how the change was navigated within families, issues experienced with remote learning and effects on mental health.

The book was published by CNA and the profits of sales will be donated to school feeding schemes. This is the first title that CNA has published in 50 years.

Learning under Lockdown is available at selected CNA stores.



Rustenburg alumna is world champion

Mary Rose Berrisford, (Trainor, E'56, Staff 1989 – 1998), writes:

It is perhaps a first in the history of who we used to call Rustenburg Old Girls that one is a World Champion, in fact a double World Champion. Lis Hart (Andersen, E'83) last year won for the second time the Masters Ladies' Canoe Marathon World Championship in Shaoxing, China. Her first win was in Győr, Hungary in 2015. Altogether she has earned nine World Championship medals. Back at home Lis does things like paddle round Cape Point.

Lis is a structural engineer living in Constantia, married to Rob Hart and has two sons, one of whom recently came 4th in a World Championship in his age group; the other is a star paddler in the Berg River Canoe Marathon.

Lis is especially grateful to the late Jo McIntyre, headmistress and English teacher of Rustenburg, for instilling a love of English so that she long ago bought herself a set of Shakespeare's works and still buys books of poetry.



Lis Hart on the podium of the Masters Canoe Marathon World Championship in Shaoxing, China

For very old RA's, Lis' husband Robert is the grandson of the late Isa Hart (Parker) one of the famous six Parker sisters at Rustenburg. Their father, John Parker, was Chairman of the School Committee from 1917. His influence on the school is recorded in "White Stoep on the Highway". In fact, after his death his firm of architects designed the new school high school buildings. Some of the descendants of these sisters who are RA's include the late Marion Newmarch (Sneath, E'60) and her sister Bronwen (E'62) whose mother was Jess Sneath (Parker, E'22). Marion's daughter is Rosalind Watermeyer (Newmarch, E'91) whose own daughter, Sophie, is now a fourth generation Rustybug.

More chat for those elderly RA's: Jess Sneath was a great friend of legendary Rustenburg science teacher, Win Heath. Bronwen told me that when she and Marion came to high school they were cautioned not to call her 'Auntie Win'. My own four children grew up calling her just that, hard to have predicted during my years in her class.

Rustenburg alumnae leading as principals

In our last newsletter, Mary Rose Berrisford wrote to tell us about Alison Jennings' recent installation as a school principal and wondered "Who are some of the other RA's to have been heads of schools?" Some of our alumnae wrote to us to let us know.

Lesley Satchel (McDonald, E'63): *I was principal of Stepping Stones Preprimary and Prep school in Knysna for nearly 30 years! It was a small school with 120 – 150 learners, and is now a fully fledged Primary School, with the new name of Riverwood.*

Janet Wilmot (Hillier, E'71): *Some years ago I started a network here in Perth, Western Australia for Women in Educational Leadership to provide a forum where women could network and share their stories. Our track record for gender equality is not good and sadly education echoes the commercial world where a disproportionate number of men hold leadership positions that could easily be held by women whose qualifications, and experience make them ideal candidates.*

I wondered how many Rustybugs, like me, had become heads of schools outside South Africa? It would be interesting to know. I spent twenty years in school leadership prior to taking on the role of Educational Consultant in Leadership and School Improvement with the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. My first role was as Head of Primary at John Wollaston Anglican School and then as Head of Junior School at Presbyterian Ladies' College here in Perth. I am now semi-retired though I still run a course for Aspiring Leaders and conduct school evaluation visits for the International Baccalaureate Organisation across the Asia Pacific region. To my knowledge the Hout Bay International School is the only one teaching the IB the Cape.

Jenny Lobban (Hunt, E'74) attended Rustenburg from Sub A until matric, after which she went to Mowbray Teachers' Training College to prepare her for her

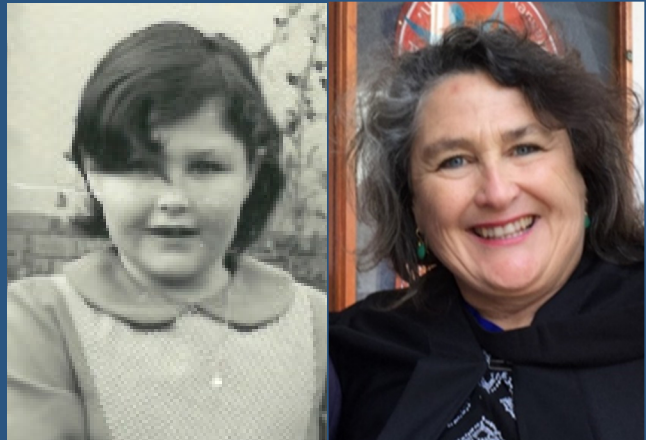


Jenny Lobban (Hunt)

teaching career. She was headmistress at St Johns College Pre-primary from 2003-2018 before joining as the head of Bishop Bavin pre-primary until the school closed this year. She now does home schooling for children between the ages of two and five.

Farewell to Biddy Ryan

Ms Brigid Ryan has taught in the Geography Department for 34 years. She has overseen many things, most recently, several trips with learners on World Challenge, President's Cup, Representative Council of Learners and Busty Bugs. She is retiring at the end of this year. Some of her peers shared the following with us:



Biddy Ryan: then and now

Perdita Norval: *Biddy was at RGHS two years ahead of me in the late 70s. She matriculated in 1977 and me in 1979. As I have told her, her exuberance meant I knew who she was. Although I did not know her very well at all, I found out when I came to teach here, ten years ago and twenty years afterwards, that we had taken the same person to our matric dances, a very confident man, very good looking and much older! I am not sure how Biddy's dance ended but she enjoyed it she says, but "our" date refused to wear a suit for mine, was actively looking for the prettiest girls at the dance and promptly abandoned me at the after party.*

Biddy has fond memories of many of the teachers at that time including Ms Joubert, Ms Lennox, Mrs Smit and Miss Burton, with her long nails and ultra-long suede boots. Her favourite was Mrs Shreve, the Geography teacher. Like most pupils she was petrified of Miss Thomson. Biddy has fond memories of giggling hysterically at the carol service rehearsals on the quad lawn (while being bitten by ants), run by Ms Dose. Biddy's best memories involve the school dogs, who had the run of the place including coming to assembly and sitting on the table on the stage when they felt like it, without getting a detention, and causing major disruption to netball matches. Some of the dogs belonged to the head and teachers and others just came for entertainment of which there was much.

Jordan Tame: *Biddy is an institution at RGHS. After serving the school for 34 years, next year will be very strange. I knew Biddy as a teacher, when I was at the school (2007 - 2011). As a friend of my uncle, who lives in Mexico, we often joked about taking a trip there. Being her colleague for the past three years has been a treat. I have enjoyed getting to know her as a person and sharing our love of books.*

Who's on the committee anyway?

In each newsletter we will feature some of the committee members to get to know them better. Jenna Lavin (E'03) is the current treasurer of the RA Committee and June Watson (E'71) is involved in organizing first year reunions.



Jenna Lavin

of the Association of Professional Heritage Practitioners, am Vice-Chair of the International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) for South Africa and am a member of the International Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management (ICAHM). I am on the board for the new Elands Bay Museum up the West Coast and I am also part of a NGO called OpenHeritage that provides access and information about heritage using innovative digital methods. I am also a mom and enjoy hanging out with friends (many of which I still have from school).

What advice would you give your younger self at school?

Enjoy yourself more! School is a time for fun and new experiences. There is plenty of time in the future for hard work. Take every opportunity that life throws your way .

Tell us a memory you have of your time at Rustenburg.

My favourite memory from school is the time I spent doing the Umfolozi Trail (Does the school still do that?). On the trail, we learnt how to tell the time by the stars, and we got to spend a week walking and camping in the bush. Unforgettable!

What motivated you to be a part of the Alumnae Committee?

Peer pressure (lol). I attended a Founders Day event and the committee were looking for new members. I like the idea of giving back to Rustenburg, a school that I feel gave me so much.

What do you think makes the alumnae of Rustenburg special?

This year has been really tough as an alum. Many girls have come forward to share their experiences of their time at Rustenburg that were very different to my own. This has given us all the opportunity to be really introspective about our own time at the school. Being on the RA committee has given me insight into the ways that the school is evolving to make sure that all girls feel like they are welcome and belong at the school, and their experiences are heard and are taken seriously. Being on the RA committee lets me be part of that process.

How do you spend your time when not working for the RA committee?

I am an archaeologist and heritage practitioner, and in this capacity I consult on archaeological issues across South Africa. I am chairperson



June Watson

Tell us a memory you have of your time at Rustenburg.

I made life-long friends.

What motivated you to be a part of the Alumnae Committee?

Accidental attendance at a meeting as a representative of the RGHS Music Fundraising Committee while my daughter was at RGHS and subsequent request to join the Alumnae Committee

What do you think makes the alumnae of Rustenburg special?

Supportive interactions with a common goal between motivated and respectful co-workers

How do you spend your time when not working for the RA committee?

I started a project 15 years ago as a hobby to start/further the game of golf for girls. It is now a passion- a portfolio on the WP Golf Exec where I serve and model for other provinces furthering girls' golf and transformation.

I had an interesting career as an industrial pharmacist and have been

retired for decades. I spend time with my children which requires a visit to London. I love to travel to different places to appreciate ancient civilizations, history and different cultures and am usually accompanied by one of my children.

My hobbies over the last five decades have included playing competitive squash, badminton, golf, and horse show-jumping. Other hobbies have included pottery, sewing, being treasurer for the local Cubs, serving as RGJS PTA functions co-ordinator and organizing the RGJS Morning Market for three years, heading up the RGHS Music Fundraising Committee and serving for ten years on the Mowbray Golf Club Ladies' Committee where I am currently Lady President.

What advice would you give your younger self at school?

So long ago that any advice I would give myself is redundant. Other life experiences have taught me more.

Thank you, Sakeenah

Sakeenah Kerbelker (E'12) stepped down from the RA committee in August. In her time on the committee, Sakeenah worked very hard to establish a mentorship programme with the high school. Last year, she started an Instagram account for RA in order to connect with a larger group of Rustenburg alumni using different social media platforms. Most recently, Sakeenah engaged with a number of alumni to form a sub-committee focussed on assisting the transformation process within the Rustenburg schools.

Sakeenah's passion for making the world a better place, and her hard work towards doing so were an invaluable asset to the committee. We would like to thank her for her contributions to the Rustenburg community and wish her well for her future career in education. Sakeenah, we know that you will have a positive impact on the lives of young people wherever you go.



Obituary

We received the sad news that Yvonne Helen Emery (née Forshaw) passed away at the age of 43, in London, on June 14, 2020 after a long illness. Yvonne attended Rustenburg High School from 1990 to 1994, and stayed in the boarding house as her family was living in Oranjemund, Namibia at the time.

Until her passing, Yvonne had been working for Coca-Cola in London for the past 17 years. She worked in the position of Global Mobility Consultant.

She leaves behind her husband and two children.

May her soul rest in peace.



Follow us on social media

Have you joined Alumnet yet? <https://rustenburg.alumnet.co.za/>

Find us on Facebook and Instagram by searching for @rustenburgalumnae or by scanning the Instagram nametag and Facebook QR code below with your smartphone.

Our Facebook page can also be found at <https://www.facebook.com/rustenburgalumnae/>

Any pictures or news of interest for social media should be shared with Anél (see contact details in column on the right).



Contact Us

Please feel free to contact any of the Committee members for information or suggestions.

Please also send news of alumnae and interesting stories to alumnae@rustenburggirls.org.za or Lesley.vanhelden@gmail.com for inclusion in future newsletters.

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