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Options for staying warm as winter bites

We are now officially in winter or will be in 15 days' time (June 21), depending on how you wish to argue the point.

It is simpler for calculations working on calendar months rather than using the solstice or equinox as the yardstick.

Besides, working it that way would mean that June 21 (winter solstice) would make it midwinter, which it is not.

Believe me, we have plenty more cold nights to endure before we can start enjoying the spring blossoms.

So much so, that I am seriously considering revitalising my fireplace that has not been operational for years.

I always considered having one in the Bay a waste, as it never gets cold enough to warrant it.

Though on average we have 97 days with minimums below 10°C, we only really drop below 5°C on around 14 days in the Bay.

That is at the airport, and we know the western suburbs and especially Kariega/Uitenhage reaches those temperatures more often.

The older I get the thinner my blood has become, and the more I am starting to feel the cold, so where in the past I would consider below 5°C as cold, 10°C is already freezing for me.

Add to that windy and rainy nights, with a high wind chill factor making it feel colder

than it is, then the idea of a cosy fireplace to snuggle up next to sounds even more attractive.

Considering that the recent approved electricity tariff increase of 12.8% puts the cost well above R3 a unit and fast approaching R4 a unit, conventional electric heating systems are fast becoming unaffordable for many of us.

Built-in or free-standing fireplaces are thus becoming more attractive to the average homeowner.

There is even a move towards gas and outdoor wood water heaters known as "donkies" (Afrikaans).

This most especially considering that the price of wood from the roadside sellers has stagnated for years, with the average price of Black Wattle at R10 a bag and Rooikrans at R15. Maybe Eskom executives should take some tips from them.

I am even considering adding a gas heating water system as my solar geyser system does not provide sufficient hot water during winter, due to shorter days and fewer sunshine hours.

This means that my electricity account skyrockets in winter, as heating is the biggest user of electricity.

I do not think that there are many households that run conventional electric stoves and most have either gas hobs or



The Weather Guru

GARTH SAMPSON

induction stoves at the least.

Unfortunately, the high cost of electricity is pushing larger sections of the population back to the reliance on fossil fuels, and we all know the implications of them on the environment and especially climate change.

We fully understand that the underprivileged have no option but to rely on fossil fuels for warmth and cooking, but when larger sections of the population join this out of necessity due to high costs, then we should start questioning the damage that these prices

are putting on the environment.

Yes, the rich man sitting on his plush leather Chesterfield armchair and sipping a 12-year-old whiskey in front of a warming fire is romantic, but that should be left to a scene from a Hollywood movie and special evenings for young lovers. It should not become the norm.

In modern society, who wants to cart, chop and stack wood, then clean the fireplace afterwards?

It is more convenient to switch on a heater with artificial flames if you want to be romantic.

Granted, though most electricity is produced from fossil fuels, a certain amount is produced from nuclear and wind energy, thus slightly limiting the effect on the environment.

Staying with the strain that is being put on the consumer, our water tariffs are still at a high level, with most restrictions still in place that existed during the drought.

This even though we are only now entering our rainy season and have already had average rainfall for the first five months of the year. This has only occurred once since 2015.

We have just dipped below the 70% combined dam level mark and the seasonal forecast is not favourable, but if we compare how our water supply has been augmented through



and after the drought, one could say that the metro is in a healthy position waterwise.

Likewise to installing a fireplace, solar water heating or a gas hob to help escape high electricity costs, installing more water tanks can help to minimise the high costs of water.

Consider that we are not in a drought and the prices have not dropped drastically can only mean that they will also skyrocket with the next drought.

This week in history:

2013: Snow reported from Graaff-Reinet

Dam levels:

69.79% slightly down from previous week's 70.24%. Impo-fu down to 52.3%

Weather safety tips:

If you are using an open flame indoor fireplace for heating, always have a fire extinguisher at hand and use a fire screen to prevent sparks from starting a secondary fire.

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CORRUPTION/CRIME STRUGGLE

The Herald: [Justice] Malala, June 2 2025. And to crown the genocide story, if correctly remembered, two or three American tourists were killed when on holiday in SA in the last couple of years. Jip, the song by the Red Caps travelled far. And always made out as struggle songs. The only struggle that is on now is that the people stealing taxpayers money are struggling to spend it.

I. McLeod

Gesina

SENSELESS SCHOOLS BOOZE BAN

What a shame department of education: With this bad decision made by the useless department concerning liquor sales at school functions, this just proves how useless our education department is. Schools all over our region depend on extra funds to improve their infrastructure. What does not make any sense is that if a school hosts a reunion which is for adults, the same rule will apply. This just proves how pathetic this ruling will be. Schools do not have enough teachers and these funds sometimes are used to pay extra teachers as well. Wake up please.

Ratepayer

POOR SUFFER AGAIN

Metro sticks to 128% electricity hike. Our mayor looking so impressed with this hike, look at her smile.

Does she get the electricity for free? Let me tell you something, madame. More and more people will have less food on the table. But your departments are so pathetic. Millions of rands will be sending back what was meant for us who struggle to survive. It is time the residents in Gqeberha to go into action and refuse to pay for anything because of the waste of taxpayers' money and bad service delivery.

WATER METER CHANGES

They changed our meter June 2024. They read the meter every month. When added to my municipal account, they used the old meter. The meter was on 79kl when changed. Now my account shows 90kl. The reading on new blue meter is 8kl. That is why this council is in such big mess.

Gesina

WEEKENDER

Well done on an interesting article about Lindsay Ziehl and her book. Unfortunately, the article on holiday venues do not interest me as most of them are way beyond the average South African's affordability as the article highlighted. Please bring back the gardening section and the book reviews to really round off the Friday Herald.

Carol-Anne Fowler

Single-sex schools still vital in SA's educational landscape

Jonathan Jansen closed his column, "An Educated Guess", in The Herald last week, with a tribute to Bill Schroder, past headmaster of Pretoria Boys' High School, whom he characterised as "one of the greatest school leaders I had the privilege of knowing".

He pointed out that Bill had not only "led a great school, but also used his formidable skills to improve education in Soshanguve with a single-mindedness that lifted the spirits of so many".

If he'd had more time and space, Jansen might have added to his tribute any number of other characteristics of this gifted man.

In the 1980s, Bill was one of those at the forefront of pushing the government to open the then whites-only schools to all children.

In 1991 he enrolled the first black pupils at Pretoria Boys' High and it remains part of his legacy to this day.

Thirty years back, in 1995, he was a driving force among a group of headmasters of the rather quaintly named "traditional, English-medium, state boys' boarding schools", who got together with a view to sharing ideas on how to play a meaningful role in the transformation process in their schools, while maintaining the standards they saw as non-negotiable.

In 1997, at a heads' conference for not only the English medium boys' schools, but also the dual- and Afrikaans-medium ones, the headmasters — they were all headmasters in those days — developed an important "statement of intent" which was published nationally.



LONG TRADITION: Grey High school is a single-sex school in Gqeberha
Picture: FREDLIN ADRIAN

In part it read as follows: "We, the headmasters of the country's historic state schools, have unanimously asserted our determination to continue as centres of excellence and to explode the myth that a general decline in state education is somehow inevitable ...

"Our message to the education authorities is that we are on the side with the new SA; we believe we have much to offer and we want to help where we can."

Bill remained true to these beliefs to the end of his life. After his retirement as headmaster he began mentoring one of the worst-performing schools in a depressed township north of Pretoria.

He channelled huge efforts and resources into school development in a particularly challenged part of the country, and he remained committed to the concept to the end.

Returning to Jansen's column, he opens it with reference to a meeting with the head of a boys' schools association.

The body in question is the Association of Public Boys' Schools of SA, the modern-day emanation of Bill's "heads of historic schools" initiative.

The current head of the organisation was seeking Jansen's assistance in considering strategically the future of boys' schools.

The professor was generous with his comments and encouraging of developments.

It came as a surprise, therefore, that in last week's column he chose to slate the country's boys' schools pretty mercilessly, suggesting their continued existence is "irrational" and there is "no good social, cultural or academic reason for their continuance".

It is a pity he did not look at either the facts or the research before penning his damning condemnation.

To offer just a few pointers — local and international —

which negate his stated view:

Democracy: It is no secret that Jansen chose to place his son at a boys' school — in fact, at Bill Schroder's old school; it is rather surprising he now sees it as apposite that government should usurp the parental right of choice and decree the sort of school young people should attend.

Shouldn't the choice be a democratic one, where families are free to decide what environment best suits their children?

Choice and Fit: Research from the US-based National Association for Single Sex Public Education suggests that when families are given the option, many actively choose single-sex environments due to perceived safety, focus and culture.

In SA, the long waiting lists for virtually every boys' school across the country show that demand is huge and growing

Academic Performance: In SA, single-sex schools (both

public and independent) frequently feature at the top of national matric performance rankings and consistently achieve high distinction and bachelor pass rates, producing top-achieving pupils across all subjects.

Beyond our borders, studies in Britain, Australia, the US and Jamaica have shown that pupils in single-sex schools generally perform better than the norm and achieve higher academic scores, even after controlling for socioeconomic status and prior achievement.

Leadership and Participation: Single-sex schools across the world reflect high levels of learner participation in leadership roles, sport and the arts.

In SA they have produced leaders of the calibre of Themba Bavuma and Siya Kolisi as well as top jurists, politicians and captains of business — and leading school headmasters like Bill Schroder.

Research by the National

Foundation for Educational Research in England indicates that single-sex schools increase the likelihood of pupils taking on leadership roles, particularly those from under-represented backgrounds.

Pastoral Care and Character Education: Boys' schools have developed strong traditions of mentoring, caring systems and values education — all designed to build character, emotional intelligence and respectful relationships.

Because they focus solely on boys, they can tackle the challenges of modern boyhood — including mental health, peer pressure and masculinity — directly and sensitively. Is that really all "meanings"?

Far from being Victorian relics of the past, SA's boys' schools are working incredibly hard at ensuring that their values reflect the best of 21st century thought; at innovating, reflecting on their cultures and taking pupil wellbeing seriously.

They are working to raise good men for a complex world.

That's a task worth protecting — not dismantling.

I could go on, but like Jansen, I have probably run out of both time and space. I am not knocking co-ed schools, and by all means let us have a rational conversation about schooling, but let it be informed by evidence, values and respect for reality, truth and parental choice.

Single-sex schools, like those run by the Bill Schroders of our world, remain a vital and valuable part of our educational landscape.

Tim Gordon

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