

Newsletter

First Term, 2003



Men in Blue: New students admitted in January, 2003.

Update, May 2003

I have received a couple of complaints about the font I was using, so I have changed it to something a bit closer to standard type, without going all the way. Conformity and I don't get along. For those with poor eyesight, don't forget, you can always zoom in.

We are now into our 4th year of operation here at Bana ba Metsi School. How time flies when you're having fun! The cover photo shows our new boys in their new overalls and work boots. New admissions totalled 21 bringing our enrolment up to 47. With the theoretical limit being 50, we are essentially full again this year. New students always bring new problems, although the group seems to be manageable and there are some interesting characters among them. A rather phenomenal thing happened on the first day of school. When we arrived here with the students there were 3 extra boys in the truck. It seems they wanted to be with their friends and just jumped in when we weren't looking. Needless to say a message was sent to Maun and they were promptly returned before the police started to look for them.

Wanderlust, itchy feet, the desire to travel, call it what you want, but this is our major problem. Keeping the boys in the school yard will be a continuous problem. Introducing new activities will occupy their minds and help to keep them out of trouble, but keeping their attention on these activities requires even more effort than setting them up. To this end, the German Development Service has agreed to pay for a used fibreglass swimming pool. We are using the carrot to get the boys to improve their behaviour which means we need to offer them incentives to change. What I know about Batswana children is that they love swimming, and to have the privilege of going to the pool withdrawn could be something which motivates them to change. It should also be noted that from October on through the summer the temperature can be 40° C or above almost every day. For those of you using the old (and illogical) imperial system, that's over 100° F. I feel cooler just thinking about the pool.

Discipline during the first term was as it usually is first term. I was raised under the principle that you don't hang your dirty laundry out in public, so I won't go into all the details. But there were a few incidents which did not impress the staff or me. The approach we took was to use it as an opportunity for the boys to examine their attitudes and behaviour. They have always been told that it is they themselves who determine the extent to which we clamp down on them. And during the first term it was decided that we needed to round them up and take role call on a random basis. Inside the school yard they don't give us any problems. What they did behind our backs however, was not pleasing. We are all living and learning, aren't we?

In terms of developments, we completed (for all practical purposes) the library, which was paid for by the Canada Fund. Now comes the more difficult task of finishing all of the finer details. We also began our biggest project to date, the classroom block which will look like a three-winged boomerang with the central section being the staff room. Each wing will house one of our 3 classes. The whole structure will be thatched which makes my mind do a belly flop whenever I think about piecing it all together, but at least it will provide plenty of work for the boys. And finally, we started to build a recreation room where we can safely store the marimbas, table tennis table and other out-of-class items. As it is, there has always been a frantic scramble whenever it rains. Admittedly, in a desert, rain is rare but it often comes in the middle of the night and I don't have pyjamas.

For all of you who are supporting the School, I want to assure you that this is not a 3-ringed circus. We get the odd 1-ring performance now and again, but in general it is peaceful. And in my own biased opinion, we **are** making progress.

Self Portraits

In the last issue of the Newsletter I included profiles on the staff of the School. In this issue I thought it would be instructive if you had a chance to hear from the boys. Below are essays from 2 of our students:

Me, Atang Thebe, I left school in April, 1999, when I was doing Standard 3 at Malsaakgang Primary School. I left school and changed myself into being a beggar at the mall. By then my Mother asked me lots of questions about why I left school.

Then I went to Kanye and stayed there with my Grandmother, doing bad things like sniffing glue and doing piece jobs. I then realised that I was so foolish and spoiling my life. I told my Grandmother that I wanted to go back to school and she told me that there is no reason to go to school because I am going to leave school again.

One day she took me to the social worker of Southern District Council. The social worker said that I will go to school later but I prepared myself to return to school. That's how I came here. If God will help me I want to be a doctor when I grow up.

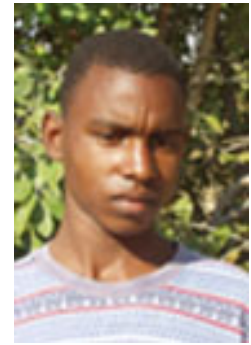
Atang Thebe



Before I came to Bana ka Metsi School I was looking after the cars, sniffing glue, drinking beer, cleaning busses and sleeping in the bush. When I came to Bana ka Metsi I told myself to leave those bad things and I left them. I was not growing well when I was doing those bad things. Some days when I was sleeping in the bush I would dream some snakes and scorpions were coming to me.

I like this school very much because it gives me the time to sit down and think about myself. I like this school a lot because I learn things like playing marimba, playing guitar and using a computer. When I finish the school I want to be a teacher because I want to remind other boys who look after the cars to leave those bad things and take them back to school.

Onkabelse Makara



Focus on Funding

Let me start with our annual “regulars”, all of whom have been contributing since the School opened in 2000. Both Macmillan and Longman provided us with our book requirements and Maun Printers continues to provide the School with its stationery. Premier Clothing again donated new overalls for all of the students and gave us a substantial discount on the work boots. Stanbic Bank has been a solid supporter of the School since its inception and this continued with the provision of a new computer and printer, the first new computer we have received. What I appreciated most about this donation was the fact that it was donated by the Bank’s social club. In other words, it was the employees themselves who raised the money to buy the computer, which showed that it was not just the Bank’s top management who felt the School was worth supporting, but all the staff as well. Top honours to all of you.

As mentioned above, the German Development Service donated the funds for the swimming pool and all the accessories. The total cost was P22,000. My thanks to all my German friends who spoke on our behalf in support of the request. Great Explorations, from Maun, donated P1000. And in the last Newsletter I stated that Carole VandenLangenberg had donated \$300 when in fact it was \$500. Sorry about that Carole.

Sad News

Those of you who received the last Newsletter may recall that there was a profile on each of our staff members. You may also remember that we were blessed to have the wisdom of an elderly man on our staff, Phalatse Tshoagong, who was a trained building instructor. On the evening of the 15th of July he passed away at his home in Philikwe in the eastern part of Botswana after a short illness. He was 82.

I had been away for over a week and a few days before I returned he was taken ill. He was referred to Gumare Primary Hospital where his condition did not improve substantially and he was discharged for home-based care. The night after we transported him to his home village he passed away. I travelled to Philikwe to attend the funeral and was told by his younger sister that he kept asking if he was home. In my own mind, he decided to call it a day once he was sure he was home. One thing you can say for him, he was a productive member of society up to the end. He will be sadly missed for his lively debates. He knew something about everything and



relished a good discussion. Whether it was about world politics, golf or agriculture, he was able to hold his own. May he rest in peace.

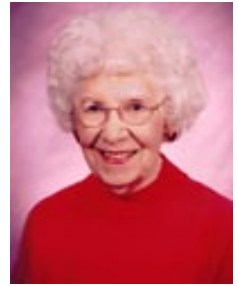
And in Conclusion . . .

It is becoming a standard feature of these Newsletters that I defend my missing the deadline. This time I have a whale of an excuse. I was preparing Shakarimba, my marimba band from Shakawe, to play at Prince William's 21st birthday. We returned from England on the 23rd of June . . . and I have been writing ever since. Believe it or not! Since this Newsletter is the closest thing I have to a log book, I will give you evidence in the next issue.

Continuing my biographical update on the Director's family tree, I am including a photo of the jewel in the Kowalski crown, my Grandmother. A couple of things need to be said about her. The first is that she is 96 years old and zeroing in on the world record. And secondly, she is more than willing to play Scrabble with you, but you won't win. And if you do, well . . . you know how people can be when faced with a new situation.

I will end with something I overheard in a classroom. The English teacher advised the students, "don't use very big sentences when you don't know what you are talking about." Right. Got it. Bye.

Steven Harpt
Director.



Margaret Kowalski

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