



Newsletter

Second Term, 2003



Nice Load Harpt: Bringing home the pool.

Update, August 2003

There probably comes a time when everyone needs a good kick in the bum. I got mine in the last few months. I'm not sure I deserved it, but I got it. Into the goal and through the net. After I wiped the dust off, I realised I needed to pull up my socks and redouble my efforts. "What is this guy talking about?", you may be asking. In the last Newsletter I told you that I had gone to England with the marimba band I organised when I was a Headmaster in Shakawe. We had the surreal invitation to play at Prince William's 21st birthday. All went well and it seemed as if we were all on top of the world. We were, after all, in newspapers all over the world.

I returned to the school however, to find our very elderly teacher, Mr. Tshoagong (Nteki to those who knew him well), in the hospital and seriously ill. He was 82 so it is not surprising that he would, on occasion, suffer from something. But this was more than that. And, as I reported in the last Newsletter, he passed away a few weeks later. We were heading into the end of the term and the internal exams, but he was owed his due so I headed across the country with 3 students to his

village in the eastern part of Botswana, over 1000 kms away. But lady luck was not on our side. A court dispute held up the funeral and the most we could do is meet a multitude of other relatives who had travelled great distances, for the funeral that was not to be. When it finally materialised we were into the final week of school and couldn't attend, if for no other reason than to keep the whole place functioning.

The school holidays are supposed to be a time when we all refresh ourselves before the next term. For some of us, however, it was not to be. One of our teachers lost his mother about the same time that Nteki died and he had to deal with the associated problems this caused. I travelled to the US to see my Mother and had my computer, digital camera and documents stolen from a car in front of her house. This has set me back more than I care to think about. On the tip of every computer wizard's tongue is the question, "did you have backups?" Live and learn. When I returned to school I found out that I was actually better off than our Social Worker, Biki, who was pistol whipped in South Africa by 2 Afrikaner bank robbers, taped up (including his mouth), thrown in the boot of a stolen Mercedes (no small chore considering his size) and left on a farm lane as the gentlemen drove off in the vehicle he had just bought in Durban. The situation may not have been so bad if not for his friend from Soweto's fluency in Afrikaans and reluctance to give up the car. I guess there are times when it is better to just shut up.

Despite all of these setbacks, everyone was back at work and ready to give it their best shot, under the circumstances, when we re-opened. Biki is still a bit sore and moves slower than usual, but is thankful that, having lost everything, he at least left South Africa with his life. Maybe we should find those guys and admit them as students here at Bana ba Metsi! I am slowly but surely rebuilding what I lost, but when I consider the e-mails, financial records, correspondence and photos that the surly buggers walked off with I feel like disappearing into the Okavango Delta.

So where were the students during all of this? Oh, they were there, making the best of it like the rest of us. Behaviour was much better than in the first term, as usual. The "new students, new problems" phenomenon. If you received the last Newsletter you heard about the 3 "students" in the truck who were never formally admitted to the School. They were promptly sent back to Maun. One of them however, was back at the School second term having arrived in the very same truck. I was driving, the staff were in the Land Cruiser behind me, and none of us saw him climb in. Can you believe that our main problem with the whole thing is that he's a nice boy? Our specialty is "youth at risk" and they tend to be difficult to deal with. Is he not at risk of becoming difficult to deal with? In the final analysis we threw up our arms and let him stay. He's still a nice boy and one can only hope we can keep him that way. Maybe he will rub off on the others!

Tsodilo Hills Trip

Every term has a 4-day weekend. Rather than trying to monitor the movement of the students for 4 days it is actually easier to pack up the truck and take them somewhere. For the President's weekend we decided to go to Tsodilo Hills. This was my preferred destination since it is only 120 km's away and the road to the Hills has recently been improved. In the "old days" the final 35 km's took over 3 hours. Heavy sand meant first and second gear, and, if you didn't have 4-wheel drive,



don't even think of going there. Admittedly the School's 5-tonne truck is a 4WD, but the prospect of grinding all the way there with a full load of boys never appealed to me. On the one hand they could all be mobilised to push in a pinch, but there was always the possibility that things could go horribly wrong.

With the road now gravelled, the time had come to show the boys rock art and the anomaly of a small mountain in the middle of the desert, so off we went. We arrived at the Hills with no problems around sunset and proceeded to approach the Male Hill on the wrong road. The right road is in the 5-tonne, but the wrong road is in the Cabstar which was following me with the bulk of the camping gear and a few boys. For those of you who don't know what a Cabstar is, it's a small flat-bed truck with double wheels on the back, not good in heavy sand, and the front wheels aren't connected to the gearbox. I sailed along in first gear as the Cabstar ground to a halt. By this time the sun was long gone and we were, basically, in trouble. There are times when you need a kick in the bum, and other times when you wish you weren't in charge. I suggested Biki make a decision on what we should do, but he just shrugged his shoulders. Okay, I'm back in charge. The boys and I walked around with a torch and tried to find a place to camp, but the whole objective of the trip was to be near the Hills and they were still a ways off but visible in the moonlight. We tried pulling the Cabstar with a heavy chain but only got so far, even with 44 boys pushing the inappropriate half of the expedition. It wasn't meant to be an expedition in the first place, but smooth sailing was now not part of the plan.

We were close to a nice place to camp, next to a massive rock wall with paintings on it, but it was up a sandy hill and there was no way to get both vehicles there. Being in charge, I decided we would put all the gear in the 4WD truck, pick up the Cabstar and move it off the road to a place where we could turn it around, and the boys would walk to the campsite. When I told the boys what I, the man in charge, had decided, they said "huh?" But they were all excited about being where they were and probably would have moved the Hill, if I had insisted, so after lots of grunting and groaning the vehicle was safely off the track and we were all heading off to a desert paradise. Being devoid of problems, the rest of the trip was rather uneventful, although we did have a very good time climbing the Hills and eating lots of food. We finished off the weekend with a memorial service for Nteki at a sacred spring in the Hills.

Focus on Funding

During the second term we continued to receive assistance from various quarters. One of the more unexpected donations came from 2 opera singers from Japan, Koji Ohashi and Ko Nakajima. The converted amount came to over P40,000. Thank you Koji and Ko for the breathing space this has provided us, and also to Barbara Mogae who secured the funds while on a State visit to Japan. Barbara is Botswana's First Lady and the newest member of the Board of Trustees.

Every year we are visited by British students through an organisation called Fulcrum Challenge. They spend a few days with us, doing whatever it is we happen to be doing. This year they came bearing gifts in excess of the pens and stationery they usually bring. One of the group members from 2002, Ben Anderson, raised the equivalent of P11,393. Good job Ben! Mike Maine, the local yocal who takes them around Botswana, is always willing to help in transporting materials. He and Fulcrum bought us lots of paint for the library and also transported citrus and banana trees which

were donated by Mathias at Sanitas Nursery in Gaborone. Another one of those group efforts! Thanks to all of you.

Noel Strugnell assisted the School with a P2000 donation for the second year in a row. John and Vivian Sandenburgh are also regular contributors with another P1500 donation. Their office is also my office, when I'm in Maun. Similarly, Willemien and Braam le Roux in Shakawe also welcome me into their office when I have work to do. If you send me an e-mail, chances are it travels down one of their phone lines. Thanks a megabyte.

On a sadder note, one of our most faithful contributors, Sir Peter Fawcus, passed away. He was the penultimate colonial administrator of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, Botswana's name prior to Independence. Nearly £900 was donated to the School in his memory by individuals in the UK. May he rest in peace.

And in Conclusion . . .

Best wishes go to Felix Wright and Ivar Milligan, our 2 volunteers from the UK who completed their 1 year service at the School in August. Thanks for your hard work and faithful service. I am sure you will both go as far as you decide to go.

On the cover of this issue is a picture of the pool, in transit, which, as I mentioned in the last Newsletter, was donated by the German Development Service. As we passed through Shakawe there was a football match in progress. Word spreads fast in a small village, and the word was that I had bought a new boat.

In keeping with previous issues, I am including another historical photograph of my roots. The one below is of my Father, Elton, and Grandfather, Omar, next to their Bonny and Clyde car. If you look closely you can see the machine gun leaning against the back seat. My Dad is the little guy.

In closing, I will leave you with something I saw on the cover of a boy's exercise book: "I have riched the plateau of learning."

Steven Harpt
Director.



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