

Newsletter

Second Term, 2005



World Challenge group with the students of Bana ba Metsi School.

Update, August 2005

The better we do, the more boring the Newsletter. This edition of "Harpt's Believe It or Not" doesn't contain very many incredible stories, but it was a very busy term, so let me get on with highlighting some of the highlights. A bit of a Bushism, that.

Possibly the fact that the weather is better contributes to the number of visitors we get every year in July. An organisation called World Challenge has been sending us "gap year" students for several years. The students come in groups of 10 to 15 and spend a week here, doing whatever it is we are doing. The cover photo was taken just before their departure, in front of our newly completed recreation room, with the stylish mural the visitors painted while they were here. Our thanks go to the students of Monmouth (sounds Jamaican) Comprehensive School in England for the work they did here.

At the beginning of July we held a public function to officially launch our School Aids Policy. We wanted to do our part in publicising the extent of the problem in Botswana. To avoid a situation where no one came, we scheduled the event to coincide with a visit by Mike Main and a group of 5 English doctors and their families, thinking it was something they might appreciate. It all went according to the plan and a good time was had by all. The objective of the Policy is to create a caring and supportive environment for those who are infected or affected by aids, thereby encouraging disclosure and reducing stigmatisation. Getting it the way we, the staff, wanted it to be was an agonising process. Amazingly enough, one of our volunteers, a Dutchman at that, Thys Penning, was the most useful in finding the grammatical mistakes. After producing 5 drafts we decided that it was time to tell Thys to stop scouring and print it. I would like to thank our Deputy Director, Biki Tshere, who is a trained social worker, for all the work he put into producing the first draft.

As I have mentioned many times in previous Newsletters, many of our boys suffer from 'sticky fingers'. The plan has always been to give them each their own locker and a combination lock which should, theoretically, solve the problem. The locks however, have been a problem. There was the boy who wrote his combination on his shirt sleeve, many of the locks either wouldn't open, wouldn't close, or simply fell apart, and the kids don't seem to understand the meaning of a secret. In an attempt to solve the problem once and for all I ordered a new set of locks, with a sufficient number of extras. They arrived and seemed to be of better quality. The previous ones were made in China so I was comforted by the fact that the new ones were made in Hong Kong. I then set about engraving them with the locker number and recording the combinations. By the time I got to the 11th one I noticed a combination that seemed familiar. Looking over the list of 11 sets of numbers I found that not 2 but 3 locks already had the same combination. Would the boys figure out that there were other boys with the same combination? The answer is a definitive 'yes'. Back to square one.

While on the subject of theft, I believe we are making progress, aside from one very sweet boy who seems to have a genetic predisposition to stealing. Possibly being sweet is his problem since he prefers biscuits and soft drinks. In fact, there were 3 cases (that's cases) of hard sweets which he somehow managed to work his way through before he was caught. The only evidence left were the wrappers. Getting back to the progress, one night we had turned on the sprinklers and I noticed that one of them wasn't spraying properly, so I went into the garden to fiddle with it. On my way back out of the garden I could see through the darkness a student running across the garden, not something one would want to do when the pump is on. He descended upon me and

burst out laughing. I asked him what he was doing, now dripping wet, and he said he thought I was a student stealing carrots. Good job, Ogaufi.

In terms of developments, getting the recreation room ready for the launch of the Policy took up much of our time. We also made good progress on a small staff cottage which is pictured at the right. It necessitated the hiring of Bahiti Kgomotso who is a thatcher by profession. We also started putting up the main beams in the classroom block which will eventually be thatched as well. It was during this exercise that I realised Mr. Kgomotso is one of the bravest men on earth. I sometimes get wobbly looking at the floor from my bed, but teetering 6 metres off the ground is no problem for him. The boys were, as usual, very cooperative with the development work. There was one incident of a brick in the head which shook up the pitcher as much as the poor boy who ended up with the ostrich egg on his head. I want to thank my friend, Cheryl Arneson, a nurse, for assisting me by phone with that one. She is always willing to do whatever needs to be done for the School, but at least this time it was right up her alley.



Thys and James

At the end of the term we said good-bye to our 2 volunteers, Thys Penning and James Ledger. Thys was a keen football fan and assumed the role of team coach. How many primary schools in Botswana could boast having a Dutch coach? (Even that, however, didn't stop the Xakao Primary School team from beating us 3 - 2.) We had a small going away 'party' for them on our way back from Gaborone, camping on the side of the road in the Kalahari Desert. Everyone was given a chance to say what they wanted, and one boy, Keemenao, impressed me when he said he was happy they were leaving because it meant they were taking another step in their lives. Good logic. Both Thys and James were well-loved around the School and will be missed greatly. Good luck guys!

Success as We See It

This story starts with some people breaking into the house of my friends, Mike and Phil Murray-Hudson, taking much of what they had. Also living in that neighbourhood of Maun are Reiner and Birgit Kohler who employ a young man, Meshack, who told Reiner he thinks he knows who broke into the house. In fact, he thought it was his cousin Onneetse. Phil, Reiner and I went to the Headman's house and reported the matter. The boy, along with his friend, who had recently been expelled from junior secondary school, were called. As is typical in Africa, a small group of relatives and neighbours gathered, and the case began. It was obvious they were guilty, but they were reluctant to give back the goods. Pulling teeth. With a lot of encouragement they

would go and retrieve something if we specifically asked for it. Where are the hiking boots? We don't have them. Yes you do, go and find them. More dithering before they go off and dig them out of their hiding place. This went on for a long while, by which time maybe half, at most, of the items were sitting at our feet. Onneetse was obviously the leader since he was very bold and obstreperous, the other kid being a couple tins short of a six-pack. I couldn't help feeling he needed a trip to the woodshed.



That was January, 2003, the day before we opened for the new school year. A few days after arriving here at School, Reiner phoned to ask if we could take Onneetse. Being one of the most disrespectful boys I had met in a long time, he definitely qualified. I told Reiner who to phone at the Council since they are the ones who recommend kids to us and the next week he arrived in a Council vehicle. He turned out to be another example of a boy you expect a lot of trouble from, but turns out to be quite reasonable. He was simply too big for his trousers. Realising that he was now in a group of nuts that were equally hard to crack seemed to put him in his place and his real personality started to come out.

As it all turned out, he was given the responsibility of operating the generator, being a very clever kid, and he went on to become the School's Headboy. Through all the shenanigans we had from some of the kleptomaniacs we get, he never touched anyone else's belongings.

Impressions of Teachers' Day by David Bodington

Time does not seem to be of much importance here at Bana ba Metsi School. As staff members, we live and stay at the School the whole term. A Monday is no different to a Sunday as we are always busy and 'on duty'. If you are in the right place at the right time you have to do whatever is at hand. No passing the buck. I am an engineer, but I was called on to deliver Mr. Harpt's Teachers' Day speech in Gudigwa since he couldn't be there. It turned out to be a very entertaining day. I was to pick up a few teachers from the next village who needed a lift, Steve having told them there would be room for 5 people. When I arrived there, all 8 teachers decided they were going, a decision which was out of my hands. We thus had a very long and slow journey down a road which is rarely maintained, and ends at Gudigwa. The day's proceedings were to start at 9.00 am sharp. Let me please explain the term 'sharp'. The vehicle collecting the supplies had left for Maun the day before and was due back the same day, virtually an impossible mission considering it is around 600 km's one-way. We arrived at 9.15 am, thinking we were late, but no truck had yet arrived. I walked around the primary school and had a 2 hour sleep, to be awoken by a few cheers and sneers at 11.30 am as the truck arrived. Things could now get under way. The day started with the teachers marching and singing through the village to the Kgotla. After throwing a few kid goats over the fence the speeches, singing and dancing commenced. We then lead ourselves back to the school and 'breakfast' was served to the VIP's at 2.45 pm. I really do take my hat off to the ladies that had risen at 4.00 am to prepare the breakfast and had blind faith that the vehicle would miraculously appear at that hour. We sat

around for an hour, chatting and exchanging ideas and problems and successes, and low and behold at 4.15 pm lunch arrived, the most delicious goat, chicken, rice, porridge and salad. I hoped it wasn't one of the goats from the Kgotla. We then watched some grudge football matches between the various villages in which most of the teachers were involved. Following the match the rest of the people ate their lunch (5.00 pm), and after a few refreshments we headed home. It was a wonderful day. I salute all the teachers who dedicate themselves and work under these severe conditions in a remote area. No water, no electricity, no telephone, no cell phone coverage, no public transport, and most importantly, hardly any equipment. Some children have to walk 8 km's to school in the winter with no shoes. These teachers' efforts overshadow those privileged and often complacent teachers who live and work in the urban areas.

Educational Trip

At the end of the second term we loaded up everyone and took a trip to Gaborone, over 1300 km's from the School. It was a long drive but well worth it from the kids point of view. Even now, what is left of my prehistoric tail is still painful from the trip. Karsten Luetkens, who is a paediatrician, and his wife Gesa, who is a clinical psychologist, do some private fund raising among their friends in Germany and pay for students to visit Mokolodi Nature Reserve outside of Gaborone. The Reserve has an education section, staffed by enthusiastic and friendly staff who are very good with kids.

I dare say the service was better than it is at School. The boys had hot showers, nice beds, plenty of blankets and good food. The staff of the reserve have quite an extensive list of programme items for the boys to choose from, and they really enjoyed it. My compliments to all the staff of Mokolodi and to Mr. and Mrs. Luetkens.



Students visiting the National Assembly.



The Gaborone Express: Starting off on the last leg of our return journey.

The trip also gave our students a chance to see the big city. We visited the National Assembly, saw Sir Seretse Khama's statue and we even went to show the boys what a train really looks like. We were in a bit of a hurry the day of the city tour and didn't get around to riding on an escalator. My thanks to all the staff who went along for their efforts and for enduring 2 nights sleeping in the bush.



This is always the scariest section of the Newsletter, fearing I might omit someone. I will begin with a very energetic and fun-loving group of women who are members of the Gaborone Ladies

Circle. Every year they hold a black tie fund raising event in support of two charities. This year the Gaborone Women's Shelter and Bana ba Metsi School were chosen for their 25th anniversary Silver Ball. I had been asked to try to drum up donations for a raffle and the Maun community responded in good spirit. The list is long, so bear with me. Suzy Lumsden provided bed nights at Nxamacere Lodge and air tickets to two camps with Sefofane Air. Henny and Angie Rawlinson, the owners of Great Explorations, donated a weekend for 2 at Xigera Camp. Sally-Anne Follett-Smith at Okavango Wilderness Safaris donated a weekend for 2 at their new Vumbura Plains Camp. Jan and Eileen Drotsky donated a weekend for 2 at Drotsky's Cabins. To add to the Maun packages, Peter Sandenburgh donated a P500 gift certificate at General Trading, Klaus Boll, lunch at Bon Arrivee, and Hillary Crous, breakfast at Hillary's Restaurant. In Gaborone, Quill Hermans, our faithful Chairman, secured a weekend for 2 at Chobe Safari Lodge and two sets of return tickets on Air Botswana to Maun and Kasane. Ollie Groth, a Trustee and my close friend, donated a very large and beautiful basket from his collection at Botswana Craft. Thanks to all of you for your support.

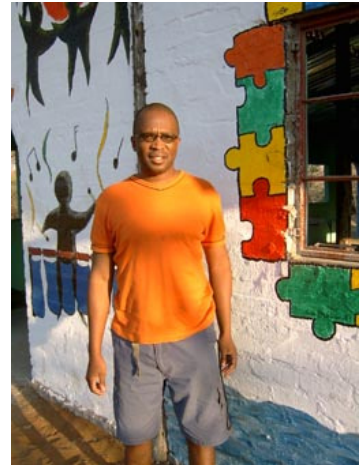
As for the event itself, being a bit of a bushman, I was dressed by my friends Alan and Jenny Egner in an expensive suit and Italian shoes that felt like they were shaped like Italy itself. (I ended up with a corn the size of Sicily.) I was asked to give a short speech, but the spotlight hit me square in the eyes, the audience disappeared and my tongue turned to rubber. I babbled for about 15 seconds and whimpered, "are there any questions?" Good speech Harpt. All that was missing was my big toe popping through the side of my shoe. The long and the short of it all is that everyone seemed to have a raging good time until the early hours of the morning and our share of the proceeds, over P40,000, was enough to pay for a new, desperately needed, generator. Our thanks go to the Ladies Circle committee, especially Sarah Jones who I dealt with in preparing for the event, and Nasreen Essack who arranged for the payment of the generator. You are an amazing group of women. Please carry on with your kind-hearted spirit.

Speaking of spirit, a Gaborone dentist, Dr. Nomsa Mbere, is an inveterate walker. She originally started an annual walk across the Makgadikgadi Salt Pans in support of Life Line, but has now expanded her fund raising efforts through her new charity, Y Care. As for the Pans walk, it must be understood that it is one of the more inhospitable areas of the world and the walk covered several hundred kilometres. This year they decided to arrange a walk from Red Cliffs, on the Okavango River near the School, to Tsodilo Hills, the world-famous site in the NW of Botswana with thousands of rock paintings. We benefited from this walk when one of the participants, Boitumelo Sekwababe from Shell Oil, agreed to give us 12,000 litres of fuel per year. The price of fuel is always rising so this is the kind of donation that keeps getting better. With care, the 12,000 litres should almost cover all of our needs for transport and electricity generation for one year. In addition to this, the School received P10,000 of the proceeds from the walk. We would like to thank Boitumelo and Nomsa for their assistance, along with Peter Durkin, the organiser of the walk.

Fulfilling their pledge to provide long-term funding to the School, First National Bank forwarded the second of their P50,000 annual donations. The good news is that this will carry on for another 3 years! To all of you in the upper echelons of the Bank, I will tell you now that I intend

to take you fishing at some point during that time so that we can become lifetime friends. You are one of our biggest supporters and I want to show you how much we appreciate it.

Thanks go to Kabelano Trust for sending us the last portion of their P39,000 donation for the construction of our recreation room. Moraki Mokgosana, a Trustee, visited the School recently to see for himself what we are doing. He was a bit delayed in getting here. When he finally arrived he said he didn't believe the damage an ostrich could do to a rental car. We did however, have enough time to take what I hope was a memorable trip on the river. Moraki, could you possibly act as our travel agent and visit the First National Bank headquarters? And then you work on the rest of your Trustees, okay?



Moraki

Several cash donations arrived during the second term. Norman Hardie, who visited the School a couple of years ago, sent us \$1000, Barbara Mogae, a Trustee of the School and Botswana's First Lady, secured P5000, Anne Uren from Audi Camp, a long-standing supporter, sent us P3000, Rosemary and John Cox, our most faithful benefactors, sent £370, and the doctors who visited the School in July pooled together £300. Our thanks to all of you.

And we still aren't done. There are people in my life who I refer to as gurus and my heavy machinery guru is Anders Lavik who has an earth moving and road building business. He can take apart and reassemble a bulldozer with one arm tied behind his back. Anders has provided us with a lot of assistance in the past and continued by supplying us with parts for our Land Cruiser pick-up at a value of nearly P5000. Other 'in-kind' donations consisted of 50 T-shirts from Rocket Fashions, our thanks going to Al-Firnas Patel for agreeing to this. Ollie Groth offered to print the shirts for our aids event which, through the sale of the shirts, helped us to raise some money. Nadeem Mustapha, through his company Mega Tyre, provided us with 2 tyres. Thanks to all of you. I would also like to thank John Foley who provides us with free internet accounts through Bytes Technology Group, and Megan Biesele from the Kalahari People's Fund for processing our American donations.

All of you who I have mentioned above have helped us get through another term, and the future looks quite bright. And to all those who receive this Newsletter, if you have some money kicking around the house that you don't know what to do with . . . well . . . there are worse places to send it. Think of it as a Newsletter subscription fee.

And in Conclusion . . .

A combination of the efficiency of the Botswana primary school testing service and my procrastination means I can pass along some information which should really be in the next Newsletter. This year we were fortunate to have a wonderful group of Standard 7 students. In

all my years running schools in Botswana it has always been the case that your national exam results are never as good as you hope. This year I had expected 5 C-passes and 4 D's, but two of the boys we thought would get D's managed to pass with a C, AND, the other 5 all got a B-pass, by far our best results to date. To all of the boys, well done!

What's in a name? When you live in a foreign country, not much. My name is Harpt, pronouncing all the letters. However, I have to settle for anything that is close to that. In this area of Botswana I am called, among others, Haft, Harpootee, Herbst, Hobbit, Obbit (silent H), and from one Zimbabwean who couldn't get a handle on my name, Happy Toes. The problem with that one is that it probably fits me better than an Italian shoe.

Steven Harpt
Director.

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