



Newsletter

First Term, 2006



New Students, 2006.

Update, April 2006

January is always an interesting time of the year with a new batch of students. Birds of a feather flock together, so most of the new students don't have too much trouble settling in since many of them have friends here already. In the past, absconding students have kept us busy for the first month or so, but this year it was much better, aside for one boy. A little

over a week after starting the school year, Biki and I were in his office when he pointed out that he could see a boy in the bushes through his window. We both watched as one of our new students hopped around from one bush to another before bolting toward the gate. It was obvious he was trying to do a duck because, between his bag and what he was wearing, he had all of his clothes. I must say he looked a bit suspicious wearing 3 T-shirts and 2 jackets in the middle of summer. We went out and shouted for him to come back, but maybe shouting wasn't the right approach. With Biki not being the right size or shape for high speed running, we decided I would go after him. Just outside of the gate he hid in the bushes but came out after I used my sweetest voice, figuring he was probably scared and unhappy about something. As it turned out, he is a very intelligent boy, had a job at a car wash in Maun, is being raised by his sister who is 4 years older than him, and he was lonely.

One of the standard features of new students is that they are notoriously disruptive in class. Some of them are so high up the silliness scale they find it impossible to concentrate in class. Then again, if I were in a class being taught in a language I didn't understand, I would probably do the same. But the fact of the matter is that the medium of instruction in Standard 5 is English. Evening studies, when there is no teacher in the classroom is even worse. One night I was on duty and I could hear a fair amount of talking coming out of the Standard 5 classroom. As I approached their room I was preparing the tongue lashing I was going to give them, pumping myself up to put them in their place. I walked into the room, opened my mouth, and just before I proceeded to embarrass myself, I realised they were reading. They were all reading something different, but out loud. Not loud in the sense of trying to disturb others, but reading out loud seemed to be the only way they knew how to make any sense out of what they were looking at. I back-peddled out the door unnoticed and took it as a good start.

During the first term of every year, my best friend is my clinical thermometer. Yes, 'tis the season for malaria, this year starting out with 2 staff members falling ill already by the end of January. In general, it didn't turn out to be as bad as I had feared even though we had a rainy season like no other anyone could remember. Those who would be old enough to remember a rainy season like this are probably suffering from Alzheimer's, memory not being one of their strong points. Normal rainfall here is supposed to be around 600mm/year, but for the 20 years I have been in this area of Botswana 300 has been more like it. This year we exceeded 1200mm. One night around 7.00 in the evening it started to rain heavily, and I mean heavily. The area around the kitchen and dorm tents turned into one big pond which kept the boys busy. Some had to resort to sleeping in the classrooms and recreation room. Around midnight, while it was still raining, I decided to check the rain gauge. Good thing too since it was at its maximum of 100mm and had another 18mm by the next morning when we recorded it. For our American readers, that's nearing 5 inches. So, the vegetation is happy for once and the grass is long, but the down side of this will come in the second half of the year if we have too many bush fires.

Sniffing petrol is a problem which seems to rear its ugly head almost every year. My response? "Okay boys, since we can't leave this concrete mixer here at the building site because you might abuse the fuel, please bring it to my house when you are finished working. One hour before we go to work tomorrow you drag it back to the site. You got it?" Grumble, grumble, grumble. That one has worked in the past, and it teaches them a lot, teamwork, for

example. It's a bit heavy, that mixer. It's much easier is to pull it with the car, but it can be pulled by hand. With 8 culprits, well, that's just the right-sized team. I usually let them carry on like that for a few days and then have a final little talk with them about destroying your brain cells, etc. In the meantime, they struggle to get everyone together at the appointed moving time, get angry at anyone who doesn't pitch up, discuss the most optimum moving method. In short, they find out what it is like when you want to get something done that needs cooperation. (Maybe I should encourage all the boys to have a snort so that they don't miss out on these valuable lessons.)

In terms of developments, we completed our third staff house, a very sexy little thatched cottage with a balcony bedroom. It was the prototype for several others we would like to build around the school yard. Changes were made (which is the whole idea of a prototype, right?) and another one was started. Work on the classroom block continued, something I will be saying for the foreseeable future, but at least there is light at the end of the tunnel as we should have one wing completed before the end of the year. That will enable us to move one class and use the library for the intended purpose. We also started a small barber shop. The boys love cutting their hair. And, chickens were slaughtered, eggs were collected, vegetables were grown, bricks were moulded and steel was cut, welded and fabricated into useful items. Those are run-of-the-mill tasks we engage in on a regular basis, just in case you were wondering.

Success as We See It

In a previous issue I told you a story about one of our ex-students, Morapedi Boile, who was in our second class of students who completed their primary education at Bana ba Metsi School. Last year I had found him at the ferry on his way to Maun, another 400 km's away, because he had no school shoes. He was attending junior secondary school about 50 km's down the road and the school authorities had sent him home for shoes, despite the fact that his mother has nothing. I took him to Shakawe and bought him what he needed and as we were parting he confirmed that another ex-student, Kanyetu, had been accepted for senior secondary school. He went on to promise me he would also do well at junior secondary and go further. I had jokingly told him that if he didn't get in I would make him reimburse me for the shoes. I am happy to report that he has no debt with me since he has followed in Kanyetu's footsteps. I wonder if it was the shoes?

Focus on Funding

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the Honourable Vice President, Lt. Gen. S.K.I. Khama who is the Patron of Bana ba Metsi School. He has made himself available to us when we need assistance since the inception of the School. He is also the Chairman of the Sponsor-a-Child Trust and the Lady Ruth Khama Trust, both of which have contributed funds to the School on many occasions. This year has been no exception with a donation of P40,000 which fell from Heaven in March, the largest single donation for the term. I would thus like to state here how much we appreciate having you on our side.

Another sizeable donation of P25,000 was obtained from Prefsure (Botswana), the third time they have contributed that amount. Thanks go to Bruce Sinclair, the Chairman, and Mark Paton, the Director, for supporting us. I seem to have gotten a nibble when I invited you both for a fishing trip and have been sharpening the hooks ever since. Why don't you treat yourselves and visit us? Considering the amount of money you have passed our way I will even throw in the meals and beverages!

In February I had the pleasure of getting to know Kopano Sechele, from Collegium Publishers, who visited the School to show us his textbooks. With a new syllabus in effect, and given the deteriorating condition of the books we were using, replacements were needed. Kopano was such a nice guy I hesitated to hit him with my standard needy-school story. But, that is my lot in life, so I rolled out the red carpet, rattled my tin cup, and told him our story. He was so friendly it was easy, like taking candy from a baby. He immediately gave us all the surplus samples he had and agreed to get more of what we needed once he returned to Gaborone. He was on a tight schedule so we didn't manage to get out on the river, but I have no doubt Kopano will return. Thanks go to him and to Johnson Chengeta, the Managing Director.

Air Botswana renewed its long-standing support with 8 return tickets between Maun and Gaborone. This will allow the Board of Trustees to travel to the School for an inspection and meeting sometime this year. It also allows me to travel efficiently to Gaborone for school business when necessary. I would like to thank Helen Chilisa and Philip Nkoku for approving the renewal and hope that you are able to find time to visit the School at some time during the year. Another supporter from the early days of the School is Dipesh Handa of Woolworth's who sent us P10,000. One day I hope to be able to meet you and personally thank you for your contributions. Possibly when you visit your Maun branch you could nip up for a look?

During the first term we received many donations from private individuals overseas, many of them friends and relatives. A group of people from the United States gave me some cheques which went AWOL and they had to wait quite a long time for me to find them, so let me start with them so they don't have to wait any longer. (The envelope, by the way, was masquerading as a bookmark.) Jane Warren (my aunt) gave us \$50, Ann Lagerkvist (one of my favourite women) \$100, Jim and Cleo Marshall (the favoured woman's father and mother) \$100, Susan Harpt (my mother) \$300, and Father Paul DeMuth (unmarried) \$400. I should point out that all of these people have donated a number of times in the past, so I want to thank you for your continuing faith in what we are doing for youth at risk.

But my relatives weren't done with me. Another donation of \$325 was sent by my aunt and uncle, Janet and Roger Harpt. They are also past contributors, as is Art Bruestle who sent \$100. An old friend (as in I have known him for a long time), Peter Midley, works at Westhaven School which caters for complex needs youth. He organised email penpals for our students, did some fund raising for the School and sent us £125. Noell Walker, a personal friend of the ever-helpful Cox family, sent us £100. Crocodile Camp held their annual "Tree of Light" fund raising on our behalf and secured P1840 thanks to Karl-Heinz Gimpel. Dorothy Graham, the mother of an ex-volunteer, sent us £50 and said she would make a donation every year. Jean Wright, a friend of the Leith family who once visited the School, sent us \$50 after reading one of our Newsletters. Thanks to all of you.

Two friends of mine, Marc Barr and Yvonne Ward-Smith, sell some of the finer things in life which they buy from around the world, one of them being drums. What is a marimba band without a drum? Borrowing one for big shows was a hassle so I decided to buy one. In the end it was given to us by Marc and Yvonne. Marc knows a good drum when he hears one and when I saw it I could only wonder how long it would last in our boys' hands. It's a beauty. The good news is that it has survived more than 3 months so far. Thanks to Marc and Yvonne, and to John Sandenburgh for bringing it up from South Africa. You all get free admission to our next show.

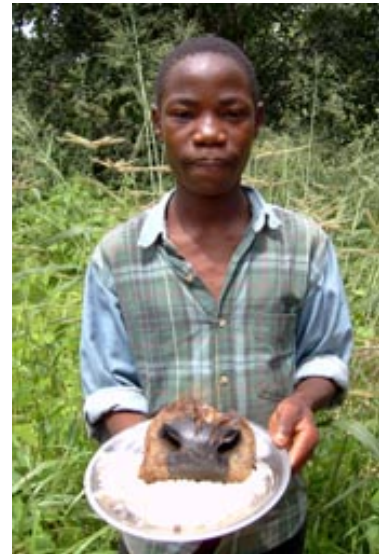


The Band and the Drum

In the last issue I stated that I would be making suggestions on how you could help us and went on to mention that John and Rosemary Cox had an idea which was worth telling you about. But, John had a sore throat, so I am going to keep you in suspense for another term and move on to a morbidly good idea I had. As my grandmother used to tell us when she was handing out a bit of money, "you can't take it with you." So my idea is that we get a bye-line in your will! We at Bana ba Metsi School would, of course, mourn your passing, but receiving some financial assistance from your estate would make it easier for us to accept.

And in Conclusion . . .

I have always assumed that those who read this Newsletter realise that much of what I write is, as they say, tongue in cheek. I wonder where that term comes from since my tongue is always in my cheeks. Be that as it may, this publication is meant to be light-hearted and every effort is made to avoid offending anyone. The mailing list (over 300) includes a wide range of people, from a head of state and first lady to a parish priest and famous author. And then there are plenty of common folk like you and I. Thus I do try to mind my P's and Q's and I have never had any serious complaints. You can imagine my surprise then, when all of the Air Botswana mailings came back due to a banned word. God how I would love to know what it was, but the returned mail message didn't provide me with that information. A few years ago my Newsletter was killed by my second cousin's spam-buster. Was it that bad? Ha, ha, ha. Like it or delete it. My apologies, but I get a real kick out of things like that. In fact, I would like to predict, at this very moment, that the sexy staff cottage will give someone's email software something to think about.



Fox: Our Pint-Sized Headboy

I have often thanked donors, friends and staff for everything they have done for us. This time around I would like to thank . . . the boys. While they keep us busy, they also provide us with an endless supply of satisfaction and joy. Characters they are, and a bit naughty, yes. But deep down inside they are gems

that just need a bit more time in the polisher. With the help of those who read this Newsletter we can hopefully continue to encourage them to get where they belong.

Steven Harpt
Director.

*© Bana ba Metsi School
April, 2006
Private Bag 06, Shakawe.
Tel: 72 437948
E-mail: banabametsi@info.bw*