



Newsletter

Second Term, 2007



The Competitors in the Wire Car Race.

Update, August 2007

To all of you who wrote and asked if the last issue should have been dated April, 2008, the answer is NO . . . I was a year behind, and still am. Those who received that issue can be forgiven if they had to reach for their anti-depressants after reading it. The forces that be had conspired against us and we had a tough time for the first few months of the year. During the second term however, we regrouped, readjusted the ballasts and managed to sail along rather smoothly. I say "rather" because we still had a few bull-headed boys who needed some appropriate prodding to get them through to the end of their national exams.

Since the last Newsletter was a bit short of stories about the boys, I will start by telling you about our camping trip to an island several kilometres upstream from the School over the 4-day President's weekend in July. Initially there was some dissention among the troops with a few of the boys saying they didn't want to go, the bull-headed ones I referred to above. Unfortunately for them, we all go or no one goes, so I talked later to the oldest and most stubborn of the 3 dissidents, giving him the "life is a two way street" routine and so on. He started to warm up to the idea so I told him to get the other 2 boys and we'd go down to the river and test out the double-decker barge we were going to use. That was fine by him and off we went with 2 batteries and 2 tanks of fuel. I was leading by example, carrying one of the batteries down the very steep hill to the river. We did our thing and found everything functioning and in order. Later that afternoon I took them in a smaller boat up to the island to make sure it had dried out after the flood and wasn't filled with campers. (Our kids and other people's property don't go well together, unfortunately.) The island was deserted, there was plenty of firewood (check that off the list) and there were big open areas for them to play football and softball. Perfect. I had thought everything was now ready until later that evening, back in my house, when I realised that one key for one of the two engines on the barge was not in my pocket. Not wanting anything to slow the next day's trip down I immediately started to think "hot wire". Then again the key could still be in the ignition, so let's go down there, find it, and have a good night's rest, right? I tried that option, but was chased away by an elephant, which isn't really true since I was running back to the School a split second after hearing it purr and can't really say what he was doing or where he was going, but he was somewhere nearby. (And yes, elephants do purr.)

The first night, after gorging ourselves, we had spelling and mathematics competitions and the next day we had wire car races.

The cover photo shows the competitors.

We came with extra wire and several pairs of pliers in case they needed to make any last minute adjustments. The boys made a track through the trees and then we timed each of them.

The cars had suitably pompous names like Turbo Charger, 747 and Scud. The crowd loved it. The boys also did lots of fishing. They were all given one piece of line and one hook, no more. Lose it and you borrow your friend's rig. As is the case with all the people who live along the Okavango River, no fish is too small to be eaten, and our boys are culturally sensitive. The cooking pots were continuously on the fire. Additional activities included frisbee, whacking the softball into the swamp, scavenging for critters and beating each other up. In fact, now I have gone too far because they were all so happy that they seemed to have forgotten about aggression. I had a couple friends along who brought more friends, so it was a very enjoyable trip.



We have a formal meeting with the students before our afternoon work sessions and start each one by calling up a student to discuss his behaviour. Most of them cruise through these with flying colours, and those that don't probably need to hear what is said. One little boy named Joel was always screaming like he was in need of a assistance, when in actual fact he was just having a grand old time. We told him the story about he boy who cried wolf which in

Botswana is the boy who cried hyena. Didn't it happen just like that a few days after his session. We were having a staff meeting and I could hear someone crying, confirmed by other staff members as emanating from Joel. I waited a couple of minutes and decided to go and find out what was wrong. Sure enough he was really crying, next to the sausage tree. When I asked him what the problem was he said he was upset because one of the older boys had put him in a dustbin.

One of the accomplishments we can claim is putting Sekanduko Village on the map. We are located on the edge of the village, which could more accurately be called a settlement. Populated by Bushmen, Hambukushu and a mixture of the two, there's not even a street vendor to be found or any employment opportunity aside from taking care of cattle. For this reason I am always happy when we are buying thatching grass from them. To date around P50,000 has been injected into the village and more is to come. A woman who has nothing and gets P1000 or more no doubt feels rich, relatively speaking.

At the end of the term we had to say good-bye to our Project Trust volunteers, Tristan Williams and David Scott. They had finished their year at the School and were making way for fresh recruits. We have had volunteers from this organisation since the School's second year of operation, when things were quite tough. They take care of the library, supervise kids at the pool, run errands, do a little teaching, coach the football team and whatever else needs to be done. It has been a mutually beneficial arrangement as the volunteers do a lot of growing and the School has more hands on deck. We would like to wish Tristan and David the best of luck in the future and thank them for their valuable service.

Success As We See It

I eliminated this section of the Newsletter in the last issue since I couldn't think of anything during the first term which could be viewed as successful. A forgettable term. Let me revive it, in light of the fact that things have settled down.

As most of you know, the students are involved in the running and construction of the School in order to learn life skills. One of the posts we have always had is that of the generator operator. Meet Omatla, pictured at the right, who secured the position for 2007. He's small, but clever enough, and we no longer have our crank-start Lister engine. His responsibilities include turning the generator on and off, monitoring the fuel levels and assisting with the servicing of the machines. The more experienced operators we've had could even do the servicing on their own. Often we ask interested students to write an application letter for a vacant post, giving them even more practice for their life ahead. For the most part, the students who are given posts of responsibility are able to manage their tasks, with varying degrees of success. In addition to the generator operator we have a kitchen supervisor, dorm supervisors, class monitors, someone who takes care of the pool, a plumber who takes care of the toilets, 6 prefects, and a Headboy and his Deputy. These students draw up the schedules for cooking, taking care of the chickens, meal supervision, and cleaning the dorms and classrooms. And while they don't always realise it, these responsibilities will help them later in life. Agreed? I can see your heads bobbing up and down. Thank you.



Focus on Funding

We are fortunate to have as our Patron the Honourable President of Botswana, Lt. Gen. S.K.I. Khama. He is also the Chairman of Sponsor-a-Child, an organisation which gave us a crucial boost in 2001 with a P300,000 contribution. Since nibbling my way through that donation, Sponsor-a-Child has been making annual contributions. In 2007 the grant was increased to P60,000, for which we are most grateful. The President has been incredibly supportive since our inception and I would like to thank him once again for everything he has done for us.

Another long term supporter is First National Bank which pledged P250,000 (which I prefer to think of as a quarter of a million) in 2004. In August we collected our 4th annual instalment of P50,000. I would like to thank those in the Gaborone head office for their confidence in us, and the staff of the Maun branch where our accounts are held. The Manager, Mark Rijntjies, has always been just a phone call or email away, ready to help. In fact I was just on the phone to him to see if the payment for the Lear Jet had gone through. He was, by the way, the one who drove me from Shakawe to Maun when I was bitten by the puff adder in March.

Rob Penning, the father of one of our ex-volunteers, tried to give us €1000. In case you are wondering what the squiggle is, that's a Euro, and they are worth more than P8.00 each. The initial donation was in the form of a postal order which really threw our bank into a tail spin. After many months I was informed that they didn't know how to deal with it. Rob and his wife Joke (no kidding) persevered however and sent a bank draft which brought a smile to Mark's face. The next day our account was credited P8262. My apologies to the Penning family for the problems, and our thanks for your help and persistence.

I did one fun thing during the April school holiday, which was to fly into Oddballs Camp for an extended weekend with some friends. My old buddies Lorien and Jonathan Gimpel were there and couldn't resist popping out P2000 for the School. They are darlings. My friend Peter Midgley, who used to work in Botswana, is now back in England at Westhaven Special Needs School. But he hasn't forgotten about me and regularly diverts some of the proceeds of their fund raising events to us, this time £100. While walking through a parking lot in Maun I bumped into Noel Strugnell who had a cheque for P650 from the Maun Ladies' Book Club. Noel is a man so I'm not sure how he got the money, but as I scour my brain I seem to remember something about selling books at a flea market. A group of UK youngsters from Bromsgrove School visited us in July. They painted some funky murals on the classrooms and storeroom, and left us with \$200. To all of you a very warm thank you for thinking of us.

In the last Newsletter I mentioned how we get money from people who don't know us or have never been here. Nancy and Ross McDonald sent us a superb donation of \$1000. Nancy is the sister of Pam Shelton who is the newest member of the Board of Trustees. Donating to the School is, in fact, a family affair with Pam's father, Alan, also sending us \$1000, and not for the first time. None of these people has ever been here and they don't know me from Adam, but that didn't stop them. Pam herself has been a long time supporter of the School

through The Botswana Book Project which she started many years ago. In that time our library has been graced with hundreds of books from her. She is also one of those people who is always willing to do whatever needs to be done.

And in the same vein, Dr. Hermann Bussmann and his wife Christine were scouting around on our behalf and came up with P5000 from the Cappel family who were their neighbours back in Germany. Elizabeth Liao, another friend of the Bussmann's, donated \$200. I have since appointed the Bussmann's Honorary Fund Raisers since they seem to have a knack for it. Don't know what I would do without friends.

Our North American team always comes up with something. During the term my mother sent \$50 in memory of Mildred Demuth, my aunt, Jane Warren, sent \$50 in memory of my grandparents Margaret and Ben Kowalski (love that Polish blood), and Jane Olmstead, a Peace Corps Volunteer who served with me in the early 80's, sent \$200. In addition to all of the people above, I would like to thank Megan Biesele from the Kalahari Peoples Fund in Texas who deals with the American donations on our behalf.

In July I met with Portia and Isang Tshoagong from Medi Publishers to discuss the possibility of getting some Setswana books from them. Isang is the son of Phalatse Tshoagong who taught here from January, 2001, until his death in July, 2003. While Phalatse was over 80 years old he still had the need to do something productive and was a big asset to the School. I met Portia and Isang for lunch in Gaborone and was struck by how much Isang was like his father. They were similar in appearance but it was the hearty laugh which put me back to the days when Phalatse was here. It was really a pleasure to meet them and we are most grateful for the books and wonderful science kit which they donated to the School.

Donations come in many forms. We often receive boxes of used, but good quality, clothing which we distribute to our neediest students. To all those who have made such a gesture, I want you to know that you have put lots of smiles on lots of boys' faces. My friends Mike Murray-Hudson and Frances Combs sent us a very good 35mm camera and a box full of camera supplies. It has gotten me thinking how much fun a darkroom would be. Amanda Hayward, another friend, has a fabric painting business . . . and a heavy duty sewing machine. After one of her visits to the School she offered to repair our tents, a service I have made liberal use of. Mr. Raj at Pioneer Stationers often gives us very large sacks of drink powder and soup mix which saves us a substantial amount of money. You all qualify for a day-trip on the river for your generosity.

As you can see, our web of supporters stretches around the world and includes people from all walks of life. Having started with a vacant plot of land we have managed to create a school with your help. Based on previous experience, I am sure you are going to hear more about these people in upcoming issues.

And in Conclusion . . .

I need a big, mean and ugly bouncer to force me to sit down and write these Newsletters since I would prefer to fix something which is broken or play with the table saw. I DO intend to get caught up one of these days. Until then I would ask that you bear with me.

For all intents and purposes, we live in the bush. That, of course, is by design since you need to get the boys far away from all the negative influences that got them referred to us. Late one afternoon I got a call from a friend who had just driven out of the school yard. He said there was a pack of wild dogs a few kilometres from the School making a meal of a dead donkey. A small expeditionary force went out to have a look and came back all smiles since wild dogs are a rare sighting. One of the joys of going to bed at Bana ba Metsi School is listening to the elephants wandering around outside the fence when the generator goes off and the silence goes on. From June to November this is an almost nightly occurrence. We've had kids scampering for the school truck while collecting firewood, and one rogue male, some years ago, showed up at the football pitch and wanted to play, but for the most part the elephants are very well behaved. One night this term however, an intruder had no difficulty pushing over our 1.8 metre security fence. He was headed for the swimming pool when the watchman's torch warded him off. But he was a clever guy and minimised the damage by exiting where he had entered. Let's do a little stretching exercise. Put your arms out in front of you, finger tips touching, and try to make the biggest circle you can with your arms. That is about how big the foot prints were. One day I need to just go out there and talk to them because I'm sure they would be good fun to spend some time with. Can you see it, trying to talk to the boss of the herd? "Excuse me, ma'am? I'm your neighbour and I was thinking we should get to know each other." Toot, toot, splat.

Steven Harpt
Director.

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