



# Newsletter

First Term, 2004



*VP Visits Bana ba Metsi: The staff and students with the Vice President of Botswana and Patron of the School, Lt. Gen. S.K.I. Khama.*

## Update, May 2004

Our boys keep us busy, especially when the first term rolls around. I call it the "new students, new problems" syndrome. And, true to form, the first term of 2004 was no different. Of course there were the expected problems such as boys who couldn't work out how to get along and decided the solution was to pummel someone. Since I started this school I have developed the ability to stop a fight from 100 metres just by shouting. My Mother had the same skill. In order for the culprits to thoroughly appreciate how much I detest violence, I am currently designing a machine which makes real steam come out of my ears. We have 2 brothers who are fond of doing their Bruce Lee imitations in the middle of the school yard,

the problem being they really **do** want to hurt each other. One of these boys decided he didn't like what another boy did and hit him in the face with a plank. That, fortunately, only resulted in a couple of swollen lips. A related incident also occurred, the source of the problem being the wrestling programme shown on TV. We banned the students from watching it after one of the boys decided to drop one of our pint-sized students on his head. Again, we got lucky and he only had a sore neck. I was amused when our social worker reminded the students that they state clearly during the programme that you shouldn't try this at home.

Having recapped the run-of-the-mill first term problems, let me move on to the boy who set a new standard here at Bana ba Metsi School. I should point out that we have several students now who were convicted of house-breaking. One of them was from Ghanzi and wasn't very keen on going to school. After a day of counselling by our social worker, the boy's mother, and the Council social worker, the boy agreed to stay. Having lived in rural areas since arriving in Botswana I fell into the habit of leaving the keys in the car. (You can see it coming, can't you?) One night the boy from Ghanzi decided he was going to go for a ride. The watchman heard the car running and went to see what was going on and would have arrested the boy except that when he headed off to the car he had his torch on and the boy "escaped". The next morning after assembly one of the volunteers asked me if I knew that my motorcycle was parked outside the front gate. Hhhmmm, imagine that. Yes, it was true. The little rascal had literally stolen my motorcycle out from under my nose since it was parked outside my bedroom window. It seems he pushed it to the gate and then managed to start it. Having travelled a total of 10 cm's (that's centimetres not kilometres) he fell over and parked the bike. He was nowhere to be found and the trackers were sent out. We have several boys who can follow footprints until the sun goes down and they managed to find him. We dealt with him gently, hoping to encourage him into the fold, but a couple of days later he was gone again.

And here we get to one of the more interesting parts of the story. Pulling a trick which I had suspected would crop up eventually, he walked out of the school yard backwards. Yup, a case of the old reverse psychology. Of course the trackers assumed he had come back and was holed up in the school yard. We were then visited by one of the neighbours who said that one of our students was raiding his field, stealing watermelons. We went out to look for him, but came up empty-handed. The next day he was brought back by the police after stealing P30 from someone's house about 40 km's from the school. Keeping in mind that this was in the first few weeks of his arrival we phoned Ghanzi and asked that we receive some assistance in the matter as the boy showed no remorse and said he would leave again as soon as he had a chance. They came and after a day of fruitless counselling he was taken back home. A classic case of the horse at the river.

We had thought that taking younger boys would make our lives easier, but one thing which has skyrocketed is petty theft. Maybe, being smaller, they can crawl through smaller holes. One of the more common scenarios is a boy steals another boy's lotion, sneaks off to the village and trades it for some leaf tobacco, Dark Fire it's called. Another is they work their way into a staff tent and look for money or anything which could get them money. The tents can all be locked but the zippers are actually attached with Velcro, something they didn't realise for 2 years. Now it is common knowledge.

With that as a background, let's play "you're the child psychologist". Something has been stolen from a staff member. What do you do? According to the rules of the game, you are required to take a break now and think about it. Make believe this is a commercial break and go make a cup of tea. After you take your first sip of tea, you may continue. So what did you come up with? Possibly a search of everyone's belongings? That doesn't work since they usually bury their stash somewhere. (Imagine how a camera functions after being covered in Kalahari sand.) Try to get information from other students? They will either try to protect their comrades or be too afraid to talk, if they know anything at all. Hire 10 more watchmen? No money. If you have any ideas, please don't hesitate to pass them along to us.

We **did** try a new strategy at the end of first term. We have on occasion searched bags as the boys are getting into the truck to go for the holidays, but they can see it coming as soon as the first bag is opened and have plenty of time to get rid of the offending items. As well, there is a lot of commotion when we are ready to leave the School and things which weren't in the bags can be back in when the wheels start to roll. So at the end of the term we decided to load them all and then search them after we left. Mother Nature didn't like this idea however. After parking the truck on the football pitch outside the school fence and lining all the boys up with their belongings, it started to rain. Why does life have to be so difficult? (I can hear some of you grumbling, "because that's the life you chose . . . you idiot!", and I surrender to that.) Anyway, the whole thing was conducted in a hasty fashion and nothing was found. Some weeks later however, in the bushes where the truck turned to head for the football pitch, a radio belonging to one of the volunteers was found, trodden on by cattle and completely unusable. There's one thing to say about our students, they're clever little buggers. I hope those of you who live in Botswana, especially people in Maun, appreciate the fact that we, the staff of this School, are putting ourselves through these problems with the boys in the hope that **you** won't have to when they are adults.

Since you may now be in need of some good news, let me tell you about a boy who broke into my friend Mike's house in Maun. Another friend in the same neighbourhood, Reiner, told one of his workers about it and after a few days the worker came back with enough information to start cracking the case. I happened to be staying with Reiner that night so I went along with him to the Headman's house to watch the show. In true Botswana fashion, a small crowd gathered at the house as the boy was summoned. I've seen a lot of hooligans in my life, but this boy was the most obstreperous character I had ever met. When it was all said and done, the boy was guilty, most of the goods were recovered, and after a few weeks he was brought to us in a Council vehicle. He was another classic case, "too big for his trousers". It was understandable how he got into his situation being an orphan who is taken care of by his blind grandmother. He could basically do what he wanted and hung around with the wrong people. Now, more than a year later, he is one of the most responsible students we have. He is in charge of running and servicing the generator and is the one I call on whenever there are technical jobs to be done. He's excellent to work with since he has some sense, is keen to learn, and will do whatever you tell him to do. I guess the moral of the story is, don't judge a book by its cover.

All in all, problems aside, the term went quite well. The boys are fantastic, especially when it comes to the development work or when dealing with them socially. In class they can be quite lethargic but are very enjoyable to work with, characters to a man. They usually undertake

all of their assignments without complaint and are learning valuable skills in the process. One of our former students was a very good builder, brick walls as straight as an arrow. In class however, he struggled immensely, despite the fact that he really tried hard to do well. After leaving us he trudged through one term of junior secondary school but left to get a job laying bricks. It was something he loved and excelled at, and in my book he's a success story. At the beginning of the year we did a survey of past students and found that 31 out of 36 graduates were in secondary school and 2 had permanent jobs.

### **My Goodness, What's That in the Chicken House?**

I felt a bit bad disturbing his meal but, left to his own devices he would have devoured more than just the P20 chicken he had in his mouth. No we didn't sell the chicken, but we did catch and release him, the python that is. It was a medium-sized specimen, smaller than the one we found there 2 months after that. The most recent one hit the flock when the chickens were still young and already had 4 in his belly. He must have thought he was in heaven . . . until I put the rake over his head and loaded him into a box for the 8 km trip to a gravel pit.

Want to hear about the mongoose? Two friends, Cheryl and Ollie, helped me bring 600 day old broilers and 40 layers up from Maun, 450 km's away. We left late in the afternoon and, to cut a long story short, we never made it to the School until the next morning. But we did care for the birds all the way and were happy to get them home alive. I thanked my friends for their help when they left the next morning, all of us laughing about the problems we had along the way. That afternoon a local bushman who helps with the chickens during the holidays came and said there was a problem with the broiler chicks. What's the problem? They're dead. How many? All of them. Where's the steam from the ears machine when you really need it? The chicken house looked like it had a fuzzy yellow carpet, all 600 nipped in the head by a mongoose who must have been having a raging good time. There wasn't a twitch in the whole house so I suspect he was very efficient. Talk about a dead loss! The one consoling thing about raising chickens in the bush is that elephants are vegetarians.

### **What I Like about Bana ba Metsi School**

One of the more popular sections of this Newsletter seems to be things penned by the students themselves. We get lots of used clothing from various sources so I used a nice pair of trousers as first prize which was guaranteed to get the boys writing. I have decided to copy the essay as it was written. Below is what the new owner of the trousers came up with:

*My School is 30 metres each side. It is beside the Okavango Country. My school is in the country. There are 48 people in the school. We have seven teachers in a school and the buildings are very new. They is electricity and water in the school. They are many more trees in our school and out side school. I like these school because they are many more jobs.*

*These jobs is for building for cooking and they are many more something. This something is for playing marimba for playing spin sports for play table tennis. And I know all of people in the school they like to playing marimba to building materials and me I liked to do that.*

*This school is very nice school and I know is very good school. And all teachers in school they liked me. And me I like him. I liked the school because last term we going to play football with Mogotho. The football match are play Mogotho. The match was played next to Mogotho Primary School. The match started at 3.00 pm. After twenty minutes the score was 1 - 1 and the Bana ba Metsi School playing well against the big boys. Mogotho did not play well. At half time we were losing 3 - 1. In the second half Bana ba Metsi School played very well and scored five more goals. At full time the score was 4 - 1 Mogotho had been beaten very heavily.*



*By, Orometswe Mbango*

One thing I appreciate is a sense of imagination. Orometswe seems to need a bit of help with his mathematics if his review of the scoring in the football match is anything to go by. The final score was, in fact, 3 - 3. And I would like to assure you that the school is bigger than "30 metres each side". Orometswe is a Standard 5 student, our lowest level, who arrived in January. I thought it was a good effort for a former out-of-school boy after only 3 months back in the saddle. And on top of that, we struggled to keep him here since he was always saying he wanted to go back home. "Patience, my boy", we kept telling him.

## **Sad News**

It is with profound disappointment that I have to announce the death of one of our teachers, France Kushuka. He passed away on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 2004, after a short illness. He joined the School in January, 2001, and had been a faithful member of our staff since arriving. In addition to his teaching duties, France was responsible for the garden and the poultry project. We knew each other from our days in Shakawe since he was a temporary teacher at the primary school and I was running the secondary school. Even before I started Bana ba Metsi School he was always pestering me for a job. I liked his character but was not in a position to hire him, although that did not deter him from inquiring every time he saw me. Eventually, as we headed into our second year of operation I relented and gave him a job. When dealing with the kind of boys we have, a passion for the job is half the battle of success, and he had it. He was one of our most dedicated staff members, always willing to help when needed. I personally, will miss him greatly. May he rest in peace.



## **Focus on Funding**

Before getting to the meat of this section, let me point out that this Newsletter is the closest thing I have to a log book. In light of that, I try to make it as chronological as possible which means that some of you may get this after donating but don't find a mention. Need I say more?

Every once in awhile I have the pleasure of being able to say, "let me start with the whopper", a whopper being American slang for a very big fish. (I am not going to plug any American corporations by mentioning the hamburger.) The whopper first term came from the British High Commission's Department of International Development (DFID) in the form of assets belonging to a development project which was being closed down. To mention all of the items we secured would take up more space than is available in this Newsletter. The most valuable however, were 4 prefabricated houses and a Hilux Raider pick-up in very good condition. When that arrived at the School I could hear my 1983 Land Cruiser pick-up breathe a sigh of relief. Also included in the package was used furniture, kitchen appliances, gas bottles, a computer, tool set and many others. I should also point out that it was DFID that helped greatly in getting this School started. In 2000 they provided us with money for the generator, water pump, tank, stand, cabling and piping. I am happy to report that the pump is still pumping and the generator is still producing electricity. To all the staff at DFID and the British High Commission, my sincere appreciation for all that you have done for us.

Some of you may remember me rattling my beggar's cup in the last Newsletter and Sponsor-a-Child, a long-time supporter of Bana ba Metsi School, rose to the occasion with a grant of P50,000. They are still in the process of trying to get capital development funds for us and I can only wish them good luck and thank them for standing by our side. The Lady Ruth Khama Trust put in another P20,000 and thanks for this go to our Patron, the Vice President, Lt. Gen. S.K.I. Khama, for lobbying on our behalf. He is also the Chairman of Sponsor-a-Child, so we are in good company. Other cash donations were also received. A big thank you goes to my friends Ollie Groth and Alan Egner who, through their company Botswana Craft, gave us over P14,000. This came at the beginning of the term when we were at rock bottom and I was having sleepless nights worrying about our survival. The Students' Donations Committee of Bishop Wordsworth School in England, sent us a tidy sum of P10,000. Good job guys.

Moving along, there are our annual regulars who have been faithful supporters since we started. Longman Publishing again gave us this year's book requirements. As many of our previous books were old and tattered this year's allotment was bigger than usual. Premier Clothing again gave us overalls for the new boys and a substantial discount on the work boots. And Etsha Coop contributed 50 mosquito nets as part of our efforts to avoid malaria. Thanks go to all of you for your continued support of the School.

My good friend Dan Rawson from Ngami Marine donated a very large cool box for transporting frozen chickens to Etsha. Lucy Clark donated revision books for use by our completing students. Delta Sport gave us a softball bat and Teddy Egner organised ice block bags and refused to take any money for them. Teddy is one of the people who is always willing to run around Gaborone to collect things we need.

## **And in Conclusion . . .**

When it comes to this Newsletter, the rate of delay is directly proportional to the level of stress. The loss of Mr. Kushuka has put us back both physically and emotionally. At times it probably sounds like we are living in Hell, but the fact of the matter is that normal daily life

at Bana ba Metsi School is actually quite peaceful. The bad things that happen are undertaken where there are no eyes, in the shadows, or behind the bushes. Outwardly the boys are very well-behaved and discipline is generally good. It is the darker side of a minority of the students which keeps us busy.

As many of you know, I have been digging up old photographs to share with you, in the hope that they will bring a smile to your face. Having grown up on the fringes of the hippy era, a photo of me as a Peace Corps volunteer might have done just that, if I could find it. In this day and age I wouldn't be caught dead with a hair style like that. So, you will have to settle for the one at the right, taken in March, 1984, when my big brother and I took a motorcycle trip across Africa. My big brother,



Jeff, is actually 5 years younger than me, but a head taller. We were on a small passenger ferry travelling the length of Lake Tanganyika from Zambia to Burundi. The motorcycle trip was, as I like to call it, a 10,000 km obstacle course, and it wasn't just the roads we had to contend with. By the time we were arrested by the army in Cameroon Jeff was at the end of his rope, although he soldiered on and was glad he did. My advice to anyone who is taking a long trip, don't arrive in a country on a motorcycle, covered in dust, a month after an attempted coup.

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