

Newsletter

First Term, 2005



School Staff – 2005

(Front row, left to right) Ms. Lephalo; Ms. Moseki; Ms. Selepe; Mr. Ledger.

(Back row) Mr. Penning; Mr. Bodington; Mr. Tshere; Mr. Harpt.

Update, April 2005

What a difference a year makes. At this time last year we were, for all intents and purposes, bankrupt. Having put our fund-raising efforts into overdrive in 2004, we dug ourselves out of the quagmire and are now on solid footing. Being the one who has to write the cheques, I must say this has improved my mood immensely.

Abiding by our new policy to concentrate our efforts on younger boys, we duly admitted another group, many of whom were on the pint-sized side of the spectrum. As always there were some real characters, a few who were too big for their trousers and even a couple of headliners. One of the boys from Gaborone in particular gave us all the indications of being a walking tornado. The social welfare report on him was very long and included being expelled from school for giving rat poison to the youngest students and telling them it was sweets. He has, however, turned out to be a very nice boy despite lacking what would be considered normal social skills. The worst thing he has done so far is push a seed from a local fruit into his ear. Another boy, from Francistown, made it into the newspapers for stealing enough money to buy a new car, and he is only 14 years old. As the term continued, both Mr. Tshere and I were waiting patiently for the fireworks to begin, but nothing happened. Was it the calm before the storm? Seems it wasn't since the whole term was relatively trouble-free.

There were the normal problems such as new students deciding they didn't want to go to school and leaving without telling anyone. The first group of absconders totalled 5 new boys, all of whom were rounded up and brought back. The second incident involved 3 of the same boys, and by the third it was down to one. He was an older boy who slipped through the maximum-age net and was somehow admitted but has since left for good. We also had an incident of theft of staff property. Our solution to that problem was to detain all the students at the kitchen shelter during their free time so they could work it out for themselves. I believe it is called "collective responsibility". After 3 days they had narrowed it down to 4 boys and after that we had no further problems. The actual culprit identified himself at the end of the term. They know we are going to search them before they leave so the boy hid the volunteers' cell phone in the canvas flaps of the truck, early in the morning before we left. When one of the staff members was re-tying them, as we prepared to load the boys, out popped the phone. So, it was back to the kitchen shelter for everyone and, being anxious to go home, in 15 minutes the Headboy came to tell me they had a suspect, one of the original four. I talked to the boy privately and he admitted it was him. Case closed.

On reflection, it all made sense. When he saw the noose was tightening on him during the first detention, this same boy had, all of a sudden, come up with a story that he saw someone from outside jump over the fence near the volunteers' tent. That we found hard to believe since the boys had already been discussing the problem for 2 days and he never told anybody about this important piece of evidence. Giving him the benefit of the doubt and utilising the "it takes one to know one" principle, we called in our resident crime expert. He is one of our students who the Maun police describe as a "regular customer". After surveying the spot where the intruder reportedly jumped the fence our expert concluded that for a person to jump over a 1.8m fence there would have to be deep footprints in the sand that would last at least 3 days. As there were no prints the evidence was thrown out of court. The old smoke screen tactic didn't work.

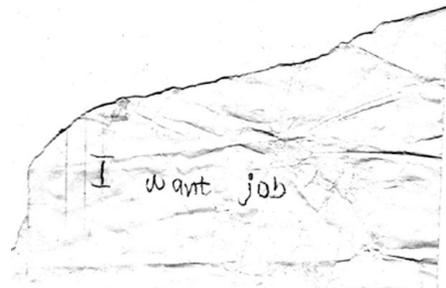
English is a problem for the boys, but we still try to use it as much as possible to help them improve. Before one of my trips to Maun I asked one boy, Mosotlegi, to fold up the small tarpaulin in the trailer because I wanted to take it along since it was the rainy season. It was getting late and I had to rush to get to the ferry before it closed, but when I got into the Hilux I noticed that the tarp wasn't in the car. I shouted to Mosotlegi, who was working in the garden, gave him a short reprimand and had him help me fold it up. When I returned

from Maun I noticed that the tarp on the 5-tonne truck was gone. I was having lunch with a couple of staff members and asked where it was. One of them said they saw Mosotlegi sweating to get it off the day I left for Maun. Ah ha, that makes sense. You have to appreciate the fact that it is made of heavy canvas and can't be lifted by one person but somehow he had managed to get it off. I looked into the back of the truck and there it was, folded very neatly the way I would have wanted it, if that had been what I asked him to do. That afternoon, during our daily meeting, I appealed to the boys to tell us when they don't understand what we say to them and apologised to Mosotlegi for being a bit short with him the day I left. We all had a good laugh about that.

What I have always found interesting about teaching is seeing new groups of students arrive. They are, outwardly, just a mass of bodies indistinguishable from each other. As time goes on you start to see their individual personalities. Our new students can hardly be called students since they have been out of school and, in many cases, do not know how to behave in a classroom. The first term is always the worst, as could be expected. To get them to listen and participate constructively is a challenge. To get them to be quiet, almost impossible. Slowly things get better. This point was driven home to me when I was invigilating their end of first term English composition exam. They all seemed to want to help each other and I was quite amused when one of the boys asked me how to spell the word "please". Sorry, can't do that.

All students are given a locker and a combination padlock. We explained to new students that we would teach them how to use the lock and give them a number which they must keep secret. A few boys were having a problem getting it right (left, right) and were dealt with in a second round of lessons. When one of the boys was brought back he had his combination written, very prominently and in ink, on his shirt sleeve. My goodness, boy, why did you do that?

One of the things we try to teach students is how to apply for a job. We do this anytime we have a position of responsibility which we want to fill. During the first term we were looking for someone to take care of the pool. You will forgive me for copying Oletile's application letter in its entirety at the right. I politely asked him if he could elaborate.



In February the Board of Trustees held a reception for donors. It was our way of thanking those who have assisted us and providing them with information on the School. A slide show was presented, questions were answered and refreshments were served. I would like to thank all those who attended and hope you feel you know us better for having come.

Success as We See It

In the last issue of this Newsletter I introduced this section and, provided there are successes, I will continue with it. I have 2 items for the term, the first of which involves a boy, Goweditwe Kebonyewetsho, who I featured in the last issue. He is the very good

builder we had who finished his primary education here but dropped out of secondary school so that he could ply his trade instead of struggle with academic work, which he couldn't manage. When we heard that he was running short of work we decided to hire him to supervise the building projects here at the School. To his credit he is proving to be a very valuable addition to the staff. The arrangement we have is that he attends Standard 7 lessons in English, Mathematics and Science since these subjects will help him in the future. In the afternoons he oversees the students who are doing brickwork. This has greatly improved the standard of our building and also helps the students to learn more. He is very good with the students, all of whom respect him for what he knows and is able to do.

The second story is about one of our ex-students who is attending secondary school in Seronga which is down the road from the school. One night after crossing the ferry I found Morapedi looking for a lift to Maun, despite the fact that it was just after the term had begun. He explained to me that he had been sent home by the school authorities for not having school shoes. He was one of the first boys I collected when I started the school in 2000 so I know his home situation. His mother doesn't have two coins to rub together and I couldn't see him returning to Seronga for some time. Just the transport costs to get back from Maun would have been prohibitive. So, I told the boy to get in the truck and I took him to Shakawe to buy him a pair of shoes. He thanked me for the shoes and the P20 I gave him to get back to Seronga. As he turned to leave I asked him if it was true that Kanyetu had been admitted to senior secondary school. He said it was. "What about you?", I asked him. Shaking my hand he said, "Mr. Harpt, I promise you I'll make it." Time will tell, but I know he is a very smart and studious boy. If he can go on to do something worthwhile in his life I am sure his mother will have an easier time of hers.

Five Years On

On the 16th of March, 2005, the School passed the 5 year mark. It is hard to believe that much time has passed since I first arrived at this site. Let me re-tell the story for those who haven't heard it. I had borrowed a 7-tonne truck from a local secondary school to collect the first batch of boys along with all of our camping equipment. The last 2 km's was very sandy so we had to transfer all of the equipment with my Land Cruiser and trailer which took about 3 hours since we had to cut a track into the site. We then spent the next 2 days setting up tents and organising ourselves before getting out the brick moulds and starting with the construction of the School. The boys didn't believe it was a school, which was fair enough since the plot was completely undeveloped. The core concept of the School has been that the students themselves build it and learn life skills in the process. Some people said I was crazy if I thought I could get boys such as this to do the work, but they have. In fact, working with them is much easier than teaching them. Let me do a quick inventory of what has been accomplished to date:



Library	Dormitories x 2	Staff houses x 3
Workshop	Generator House	Poultry houses x 3
Brick yard	Slaughter House	Storerooms x 2
Kitchen Shelter	Irrigated Garden	Ablution Blocks x 2
Swimming Pool	Perimeter Fence	Water System

What started as a camping trip has turned into a school. (Local people often describe it as a small town.) Several other projects are in progress such as another staff house and our classroom block, our biggest project to date. Jan Van Ravens, if you are reading this, the system we are using is effective in dealing with youth at risk and deserves your attention. Children the world over should be given more opportunities to assist in the development of their schools. Aside from the skills they learn, it also helps students develop a positive attitude toward work and gives them a sense of ownership. It is their school, they are proud of it and will, consequently, treat school property with more respect. Kids **do** like to work, provided they are eased into the idea.

Focus on Funding

As I mentioned above, for the moment we are out of imminent danger as far as funding is concerned. It was very pleasing to see how people reacted when we hoisted the red flag. In an attempt to make budgeting easier we asked companies to make multi-year commitments to provide funds to the School. Last year First National Bank pledged P50,000 per year for 5 years, and since that time other companies have followed suit. Barloworld Botswana agreed to P150,000 over 3 years which was our most significant donation for first term. Thanks go to Peter Stevenson and Dorcus Mokgato-Malesu for this. After contributing P100,000 last year, the Department of Culture and Youth added another P98,500 at the end of the term. Once again, it was Gaogakwe Phorano, the Director of the Department, who kept us in mind. Another multi-year commitment came from ITI, a Gaborone-based information technology firm. I would like to thank Mukesh Chauhan, Fatema Khan, and Ralph Wheeler for their P30,000 contribution over 3 years.

Rob Jackson, who is the School's Official Veterinarian, and his wife Lalage, are always looking for ways to help us. This time they came up with a laptop, printer, mosquito nets and P5,000. I look forward to returning the favour when you, one day, make it to the School. Western Union, through its Helping Hands programme, donated P20,000 for building materials for the classroom block. This was a much-appreciated donation since it gave us the energy to continue with the classrooms. Every year we host "gap year" students from England and often they come up with something for us when they get back. My compliments to the kids from Caterham School for their impressive contribution of £1500 which converted to over P12,000. Thanks also go to their leader on the trip, Rick Mearkle.

Art Bruestle, whose name seems to appear on every tenth receipt, sent us 2 donations of \$300 and \$500 in the space of 6 months. Go Art Go! I have a wild idea to take my Shakarimba marimba band to the States. If I do, we're coming to visit you Art. You deserve a private concert. A friend of mine from Germany, Thomas Nicolai, sent us the equivalent of P1700. He said it was a questionable tax return and thought it best to spend it as fast as

possible. The parents of one of our ex-volunteers, Iain and Zara Milligan sent us a cheque for £150. Their son Ivar still holds the record for being the most useful volunteer. Steve Cunningham, who was a volunteer here in Botswana in the early '80's sent another cheque for \$150. Manhar Mooney from Trans Africa continued to assist us with P1000. A mysterious deposit in the Trust account of P1000 has now been traced to a former District Officer in Botswana, Meindert Roozendahl. Janet Hermans and her friend Betsy Stephens contributed P800 between them. And last but not least, Jim's Farm Supplies donated chick drinkers and feeders. To all of you, a big thank you.

It might be appropriate to put this all into perspective. It currently costs us around P750,000 to run the School for one year. In dollar terms that is about \$150,000 or \$3,000 per student. The effort to keep the money flowing is like running on one of those tread mills that increases the angle of ascent as time goes on. Last year we were at the bottom of a steep incline, on the verge of falling off. The mill has levelled off since then and we are breathing easier. With your help we can keep it that way.

And in Conclusion . . .

I had my first urban motorcycle accident in February in Gaborone. In actual fact I only bumped into a brand new VW Jetta during a rain shower. I picked myself up from the road, a bit dazed, and 5 people in flowing green and white gowns emerged from the car. For a moment I thought I was in Heaven but concluded it couldn't happen that fast. Certainly you have to go through some sort of interview first. It was an unfortunate end to a very enjoyable 175 km ride with my friends Ollie and Alan through the bush NW of Gaborone. I have received a bit of flack for riding a motorcycle, but then again, I need to maintain my sanity, right? Around school my motorcycle is referred to as my psychiatrist. Quill made me laugh, after the bump, when he told me he wanted a signed copy of my will, a management manual, my Mother's phone number, e-mail and postal address, and a list of potential candidates for the post of Director, Bana ba Metsi School. I have now done all of that and asked my psychiatrist to proofread them. In all sincerity Quill, thanks for caring about me.

May I finish by thanking all of you who have written to comment on this Newsletter. You keep me going.

Steven Harpt
Director.

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May, 2005
Private Bag 06, Shakawe.
Tel: 72 437948
E-mail: banabametsi@info.bw