



# Newsletter

Second and Third Term, 2006



*The Vice President and Patron of Bana ba Metsi School, Lt. Gen. S.K.I. Khama, centre, poses for a photograph with the staff and students during his visit in July.*

## Update, December 2006

This is a special two-for-the-price-of-one issue of the Newsletter due to some problems. All has not been well here on the ranch, which will become obvious after reading this. I would like to thank my friend Jenny Egner for coming up with the brilliant suggestion of combining the second and third term Newsletters into one. At a stroke I would be almost caught up, so here it goes.

As regular readers of this Newsletter will know, second term is one of the more tedious during the year. It is long, cold and the time of the year when we get plenty of overseas and local visitors. For people from northern climes, the middle of winter (i.e. July) is the only tolerable time of the year in a desert in the absence of a multitude of air conditioners. This year we had 3 groups which kept us on our toes,

But before I delve into that, let me take this opportunity to thank the Vice President, Lt. Gen. S.K.I. Khama, for visiting us once again in July. I knew he was in the area, but didn't know he was going to pop in. When he arrived I was bending way over, showing a boy where to plant one of the new signs we had made. I heard a vehicle behind me, peered over my shoulder, and found myself staring at a Land Cruiser, a police vehicle, and a Botswana Defence Force Land Rover. We were expecting all the members of the Board of Trustees for a meeting, so at least the School looked presentable. The Vice President has been by our side since the School opened and a regular visitor. All of us at the School would like to express our gratitude for his interest in, and continuing support of, the School.

The day after his visit, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2006, a Board of Trustees meeting was held here at the School, something which we resolved should be an annual event, despite the inconvenience to the members in travelling all this way. For us, it is that kick in the bum we need on occasion to do some of the things we only talk about. For the Board, it's their chance to see what we are doing and verify that I'm not using all the money for a big party. They seemed to be satisfied that what we go through is at the other end of the spectrum from a party. One of our visiting groups was already here so the School was a beehive of activity, and they arrived on the same day the Vice President surprised me from behind so I was the proverbial headless chicken.

For some time now we have had a policy that the School would assist others in the area. This has included helping the clinic with their garden, an annual orphans' Christmas party and cleaning up at the ferry station. For one of our long weekends in July it wasn't feasible to go anywhere since we had another group of overseas students here and transport would have been a problem. With no luggage however, we could get to Mogothon which is only 11 km's away and decided to have a "fun day"



with them. The visiting Americans from Norwell High School, pictured above, were very helpful in arranging and (wo)manning the game stations with our students. All the little nippers from the village gathered on the primary school football pitch and had a whale of a time . . . in the desert. Duck, duck, goose. Pin the tail on the zebra. It was all there and seemed to be a success. The last group was from England, led by a British soldier who was in the artillery division and, understandably, very hard of hearing. He had them shovelling soil as if their life depended on it. I believe he was doing it the way they do it on the front line.

In terms of developments, the barber shop was inaugurated and we worked like beavers to put the finishing touches on one wing of our classroom block. This allowed us to move one class out of the library so that we could start using it as a library rather than a classroom. We also purchased some science equipment and set aside a portion of the library for a small lab. We still have a lot of work to do in the building, but at least things are starting to fall into place. Work also started on 3 staff houses, one of which was being built by our new volunteers, Tristan Williams and David Scott.

Malaria is an annual problem and a fact of life for us. This year however it seemed as though we had been spared. The disease has always peaked between January and May, tailing off as winter sets in, but there were only 2 cases during that period this year. What luck, I thought. Then in June when it was relatively cold and there were few mosquitoes we had 3 boys who became ill. I assumed it was the flu, which the boys get during second term, but when I sent the boys to the clinic they were treated for malaria. In the course of the next 10 days a total of 17 cases cropped up. Possibly this is just one more indication that global warming is a reality, although I heard that plans to build large mirrors and launch floating silver balls will allow people to continue to drive big cars. Ah, the marvels of technology. While I don't see the main contributors to the problem doing what needs to be done, it is at least refreshing to see that the debate has been put on the front burner. For us in Botswana where 40+°C is the norm in the summer, one wonders what is in store in the future.

All in all it was a busy and tiring term and scant attention was paid to writing the first term Newsletter, which would be the last one you received. But as the deadline approached I

loosened up my fingers and got at it. By this I mean hooking up an inverter in the Land Cruiser so that I could work while Dave and I headed for our holiday destination 1200 km's away. Yes, I had an appointment on the salt pans with my psychiatrist pictured at the right. Dave's doctor is also in the photo. We arrived at our departure point, Makgadikgadi Lodge, with much work to be done on the Newsletter. The next day was D-day (D for departure) which coincided with the motorcycle races on TV. The lodge had a small TV room so I set up my office on a table in front of the tube while Dave



*The Psychiatrists*

sorted out what we were going to take along outside the door. The bikes were there, luring me on, making my fingers move even faster. Around 4.00 in the afternoon the races were over and the Newsletter was finished, but it took until 5.00 for me to get it sent out on my cell phone. By that time everything was packed and ready to go, the pans being less than 500 metres from the door of the TV room. It was wet on the pans and there was no moon so we didn't get far but we were free at last. (Reference is made to Dr. Mberé's walks for charity: well, this is the kind of place she likes.) We were out for 8 days and saw 2 people in all that time, and even then only passing in the distance. When we got back all my psychological problems were solved. (Any comments?)

With my head on straight, third term started out peacefully enough. It is normally the most quiet term since all of the boys have been there long enough to know the routine and the Standard 7's are more serious since their national exams are starting in the beginning of October. While there were a couple of shining lights in the group, overall they were academically weak and ended up doing poorly on their exams. (Honesty is the best policy, right?) It will always be like that for us though since our boys are very rambunctious and not that interested in sitting in a classroom. In fact, they are much easier to deal with when we are doing the manual work. By the time they are in Standard 7 you can conduct a normal lesson without too much trouble, but since it has taken them so long to realise that they need an education, they have missed a lot. In one ear and out the other. In addition to this there is always a percentage who have learning disabilities which led them to drop out in the first place and there isn't much we can do for them academically.

An institution is only as strong as its staff and it was becoming obvious that we had a problem in that regard. To cut a long story short my Deputy resigned due to some ill-considered actions. When you are trying to reform naughty boys you have to at least work with honest people. This left us without a social worker for the last 2 weeks of the school year, which we survived without too much trouble, but the whole affair was very traumatic. When we finally reached the end of the 2006 school year I was most relieved, although as you will realise later in this Newsletter, my problems weren't over with his departure.

On a similarly sad note, the bushman sitting in front of the boys in the cover photo, Poti Samaha, drown in the river a couple weeks after the picture was taken. He was a bit of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde sort of character depending on whether he had been drinking, but one thing is certain, he was a regular feature around the School. He visited us several times a day, always with some scandalous story about something or someone. The boys liked him since he was quite a story teller. So, despite the fact that he could be a royal pain in the neck at times, we missed his presence. May he rest in peace.

Life is funny. There are days when you should overhaul your car engine before going to bed since you know nothing could go wrong. There are other days when it is better to go to bed and hope things will improve when you wake up. I had one of those days in July. I muddled along for most of the day, knowing nothing good could come of it. After sunset I stepped on a very large camel thorn, although I didn't sit on one when I hit the ground. Pulling it out I felt like a cowboy pulling out a bullet. Grin and bear it. At that point I decided it was better to just sit in a chair and went to watch TV with the boys. I had a hooded sweatshirt on, hood up, and crowded in with the boys to watch. After about 15 minutes there was an almighty blow on top of my head. I thought one of the tent poles had fallen down but as I looked around no one else seemed to notice, all except one boy who had a very worried look on his face. Seems he thought I was one of the boys. No punishment was needed as he was already suffering when he realised whose head he had walloped. At that point I decided it was better to go to bed since the boys were beating me up and even just sitting down and minding my own business wasn't possible.

## Success as We See It

One of the standard features of schools I have been involved in is a marimba band. In fact, much of the music which is played in Botswana was written by Shakarimba, the band I started when I was the Headmaster of Shakawe Secondary School. They were so well known that we even travelled to England to play for Prince William's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party. The leader of that group was Baitshapi Mwachesenge, a boy who had music in his bones. He has gone on to make music his life and in 2006 was voted Botswana's "Best New Musician". He no longer plays marimba, but that was how he got started.

Here at Bana ba Metsi School we have had marimbas since the School started in 2000. It took a few years to get to a point where we could play for the public, but now that it is part of the culture of the School, there's no stopping it. The boys have a standard list of about 12 songs which almost all the boys in the School can play, some better than others, and they have written 3 songs of their own which I am sure will one day be part of the nation's musical repertoire. A new boy who is interested in learning will be able to play something within a term. It really is a self-perpetuating activity and one which may help someone find their niche in life, as it did with Baitshapi.

What I consider to be one of our successes in 2006 was being invited to play at the National Stadium for Independence Day. Our thanks again go to the Vice President for helping us to arrange for a Botswana Defence Force plane to take us to Gaborone. The flight was very smooth despite the fact that the runway in Seronga Village was a bit short. The pilot had me drive him up and down it in my car before we took off. Once we were in the plane he reversed it a few metres at the end of the runway before heading off in the direction of the river because there were fewer trees. Needless to say I was happy when we were in the air. Once in Gaborone, the capital, Quill Hermans, ever-helpful, lent us his car and Ollie Groth, another essential friend, collected us at the airport with his trailer. Driving around the city, Alec, one of the band members, provided us with non-stop entertainment practicing his English and commenting on everything he saw. As for the performance itself, in my own unbiased opinion, it was a smashing success. As often happens we were asked to play a few extra songs and Alec was so moved that he did a bit of a jig for the TV cameras, losing his hat several times in the process. When it was over we did the usual things one does with bush kids in a city: eat ice cream, travel on an escalator and elevator, attend a movie in a proper cinema, shopping in a mall. The boys cost me an arm and a leg, but it was worth it.

One of the highlights for the boys was attending a football match between Botswana and Cameroon. As is typical among football fans, wearing the national colours is the way to go. Our boys are not well endowed with nice clothes however, so we had given each of them a track suit that had arrived as a donation from the group led by Bill Burns. Of course they thought nothing of wearing them to the football match. Unfortunately for them none of us was thinking properly when they were dressing since the track suits were green which just happens to be Cameroon's national colour. Oh well, at least they got to see the match.

I would like to thank my friend Bankonne Mpuchane who spent a lot of time with us and supervised the boys at the mall while I watched the motorcycle races at my friend's house. I would also like to thank the BDF pilots who were very helpful and kind to the boys.

## Focus on Funding

Even under normal circumstances when the Newsletter covers only one term, this section tends to be very long. But this is a special "two-for-the-price-of-one" issue so it's twice as good. Yes, when you are a beggar, money is good, and my friends and corporate acquaintances did a sterling job in terms of assisting us in funding the School. Where to start is always a problem, but just because the sum donated goes down as I progress doesn't mean that the amount of appreciation follows suit. Everyone who helps us is, in my heart, a part of what we are doing. So, with that, let me get on with it.

I've pulled a rabbit out of my hat and it says FNB so that's where I will start. First National Bank has been a long-time supporter, starting in 2002 when they granted us P180,000. This was followed in 2004 with P250,000 over five years, the third P50,000 instalment of which arrived in September. I thank my lucky stars I still have them to count on for the next 2 years since the account can start looking a bit anaemic by the time August arrives. I would like to thank the FNB management for their substantial contribution to the School and extend my compliments to the staff of their Maun branch who have given me so much support and assistance.

While I am on the topic of long-term support, Y-Care needs to be mentioned. This is the trust set up by Dr. Nomsa Mbere to assist worthy projects through charity walks. And I'm not talking about strolls through the park, I'm talking about trudging through the sand in unbearable temperatures and then sleeping with elephants outside your tent. Being a clever lady, Nomsa even manages to convince people to pay to walk! One of the people who was always there to assist on a voluntary basis was Stellan Bengtsson who has now joined Y-Care full time. My thanks go to Nomsa and Stellan for all that they have done for us. Of the proceeds from the 2006 walks we were given P30,000 which went a long way toward the developments of the School.

During one of the 2005 walks I met Boitumelo Sekwababe from Shell Oil - Botswana who agreed to provide us with all of our fuel requirements for a year. Being a substantial proportion of our overall operating expenses the donation was greatly appreciated and B2, as he's called, followed that up with a 2 year extension on the donation. Since we generate our own power we use a significant amount of diesel, on top of our transport needs. I bump into B2 now and again, always reminding him that he has promised to spend a weekend with us, along with Benjamin Nthaba, the very cooperative owner of Shell's Shakawe filling station. Our thanks go to both of you.

Anyone who can remember the last time there was a Newsletter may remember that I promised some fund raising feats of endurance. In honour of their long standing efforts to assist us I will start with John and Rosemary Cox. The event was postponed in the first instance because John had a sore throat, but in June he did it, a marathon reading of John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. I don't even think I could read the book in one day quietly in my

bedroom, but John managed to get through the whole thing in front of a throng in Salisbury Cathedral, raising £3600 in the process for 3 charities. The £1200 which came our way converted to nearly P13,000, a tidy sum for a private initiative. Ever-giving, John and Rosemary followed this up with their annual £200 Christmas present.

Endurance was the key word again when 2 men, Simon Blackburn and Christo Potgieter, set out on the Okavango Challenge. The question to be answered was, could someone paddle faster, or run faster, from Shakawe to Maun, and do it in 5 days. By river the distance is 430 km's and by road it's 374 km's, so again we're not talking about a stroll in the park.

Simon, with the assistance of gravity, managed to paddle his kayak to Maun in 40 hours while Christo, ready for the hospital when he arrived, ran all the way in 47 hours. In the picture at the right, I am the scrawny antithesis of an athlete in the middle with Christo on the left and Simon on the right.



Good job guys, and thanks to all the other people, a small army, who assisted in the operation. Again it was 3 charities benefiting from the exercise (and exercise it was) with each of us receiving P15,000 as our share. Heaven awaits you all.

In the last Newsletter I made an appeal for football shoes and our prayers were answered by Lisa Irwin-Roddy who scoured Portland for 25 pairs. This was a group effort however as the shoes somehow made their way to my friend Bill Burns in Lake Tahoe, California, who brought out one of the student groups in July . . . and the shoes. By American standards they were classified as used, but to us they looked brand new.

The corporate community in Botswana has been very generous from the School's inception. I would like to acknowledge the support we receive from Bruce Sinclair at Prefsure (Botswana) for the P25,000 they donated. The good news was that they intend to make this an annual donation. The fish bite best in June, Bruce, and I have the boat. Fatema Khan from ITI, a computer firm in Gaborone, sent us the second of three annual donations of P10,000. Stanbic Bank, which was instrumental in the early stages of the School by providing us with P50,000 and the 3.5 tonne truck which we still use regularly, sent us P5000. Air Botswana continued to provide air tickets for the Board members to fly from Gaborone to Maun for our annual meeting, which they have been doing since we started.

In addition to the corporate contributions we are blessed with a very long list of individuals, John and Rosemary being excellent examples, who regularly send us donations. My friend Anders Lavik, the man I would call if I had a problem with my bulldozer, sent us P5000. He's in the earth moving business. Jenny Egner, the Secretary of our Trust, sent us P6000, bless her heart. She's a writer. Rob and Laalage Jackson, the most formidable veterinary team in Botswana, popped out P5500 and removed my dogs manliness for nothing. Anthony Johnson, retired hotelier, sent us P10,000 out of the blue. Allen Shelton, the father of Pam Shelton, who is the mother of the Botswana Book Project, sent us \$1000. Barbara Mogae, the First

Lady of Botswana and Trustee of the School, dug up P5000 from various sources, as she does quite regularly. Ann Uren at Audi Camp, who has contributed every year since we started, forwarded P3000. David Savil, the uncle of my friend Lucy Dixon-Clark, was instrumental in organising £500 from Cricket St. Thomas Church in England for the electrification of our library.

School groups that visit often go back and raise money for the School and Catherham School did it again by coming us with £885 which converted to over P10,000. I should add that the Catherham group came out several years ago and this is their second contribution. The Norwell group that came this year went straight back and got their hands on \$300. Norman Hardie, who has been behind us for several years, did it again with a \$1000 donation. Richard Arden, Rosemary's brother, sent us £50, and an ex-Peace Corps friend, Jane Olmstead passed along \$200. Ian Milne of Swampland Safaris joined in the fun with a P2000 donation. Subsequently he convinced one of his clients to contribute \$280, and continues to beat the bushes for more when he's on safari. The mother of one of our ex-volunteers, Dorothy Graham, has pledged £50 a year for the positive influence working at the School has had on David, her son. Julie Holder, the mother of a teacher I worked with, donated the £50 royalty she got for publishing something she wrote, as did Quill Hermans, the Chairperson of the Trust, who sent us the P1000 he received for an article he wrote for Air Botswana's in-flight magazine. Dries Krausse from Okavango House Boats always adds 10% onto what we charge to do work on his boats. Back in the pine forests of Wisconsin, and in between the dairy cows, there is a sturdy group of supporters. Rev. Paul DeMuth once again sent \$400, my mother \$300, my aunt Jane Warren \$50, Jim and Cleo Marshall \$100, Roger and Janet Harpt \$325 and Ann Lagerkvist \$100. Mike and Kirsten Maine continue to give us books and moral support. To all of you a very big thank you.

As you can see we are well endowed with supporters, but it goes deeper than monetary assistance. When you live in a rural area you find alternative ways of solving problems, like getting someone else to do it. We rely on a vast network of friends who are always willing to take things somewhere or pick up something we need. And while the list is too long to include here, and even too long for me to remember everyone, I want to pass along my compliments for their contribution. You know who you are, and we appreciate it.

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

"So why, Mr. Harpt, has it taken you so long to get this issue of the Newsletter finished," you may be asking. Well, the icing on the cake for the 2006 school year was when my computer mysteriously disappeared at the end of November in Maun, a couple days after dropping the boys off for the school holiday. In fact we were on our way back to the school for the long December holiday, and I must say it wasn't the best way to start it. I had a back-up disk of sorts, but not recent enough to contain the second term Newsletter which was nearly finished. But even if I did have a copy I had no email addresses to send it to. By the middle of December I had a new computer and was starting the construction process but got bogged down in the sheer scale of the task. What I said to who became a fog and there is probably still someone out there who never got a thank you for something. My apologies.

So what's a guy to do when mental chaos reigns? Go and see your psychiatrist, of course, so I set off for Malawi. A bit ambitious, which my backside reminded me of when I eventually got off the motorcycle, two weeks and 4325 km's later. Despite the pain it was fantastic and I had a lot of time to think. I had one "accident" when my bike fell over in the BP filling station in Lilongwe because of the full fuel load, and I lost a rain cover which someone found and managed to return to me on my way back from Monkey Bay, reaffirming my faith in humanity. What I enjoyed the most was being anonymous and meeting new people.

Inspiration is elusive, at least for me. When I am in the mood to knock off a lot of work I usually have to choose between the Newsletter and finance. Maybe if I taught English instead of mathematics the Newsletter would win those mental competitions more often. As it is, writing doesn't come easy for me, aside from a few hours a year. Little did I know that as soon as I arrived in the school yard from Malawi for the new year the trouble was really going to start. Stress and inspiration don't go well together so nothing got done in the first term. And as this issue stands right now I can't say I am completely satisfied. Too many stories have gotten muddled together and there are too few addresses in my email programme. But I need to get back on track so I am sending this off. Please feel free to pass this issue along to anyone who has an interest in the School and write to me if you have addresses I should add. The first term, 2007, issue will be easy to write since it was so eventful, albeit in a negative way. With that as a teaser I will bid you all farewell for now and thank you for all you have done for us.



*Lake Malawi: I like the tree. Do it where others won't.*

Steven Harpt  
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