



Newsletter

First Term, 2007



New Students, 2007.

Update, April 2007

Better late than never? Since this Newsletter is becoming very intermittent I will start by filling you in on where I left off in the last issue. After a difficult third term which ended with the theft of my computer, I headed off to Malawi on my motorcycle. It was definitely a breathe of fresh air, especially at 100 km/hr with an open-faced helmet. I was ready to tackle whatever 2007 had to offer, not knowing that storm clouds were gathering over my life before I had even arrived back at the School.

Some things in life, like death, are difficult enough to talk about and even harder to write about. Just before I got to the Namibia/Botswana border I received a message from Dave Bodington, our resident engineer, saying that his brother had 48 hours to live. A few weeks before, he had been diagnosed with leukaemia but the prognosis was good. Things didn't go well however and he was losing the battle so Dave had to travel to Cape Town. I rushed on to the School and when I got back the day guard told me that one of our watchmen, Bolokang Mosidi, had been killed in a car accident that morning. That was the 2nd of January, my body ached from the trip, and the news in the past 2 hours started to weigh heavy on my mind. I parked at my house, unloaded, made a couple of phone calls to get all the information straight and went to bed.

The next morning I decided I needed to go to Shakawe to see the watchman's family and buy the food and diesel we needed to get the first term off on the right foot. We were opening in 6 days and it wouldn't do our cause any good to be short of essential supplies. At the watchman's home I found out that he had gotten a lift in a BDF truck which overturned on a wet road. I spent a couple of hours with the family, bought the supplies and returned to the School to finish the preparations for the new year.

In December we had hired a social worker to replace my Deputy and he was supposed to be in Maun on the 4th of January to begin interviewing the new students, but I couldn't get him on the phone. Between the bike ride and my trip to Shakawe my body was refusing to move so I decided to rest after finding out my backup CD was blank. Argh. The next day, the 5th of January, I was still not able to contact the social worker and it started to look like I was going to have a real problem as it is an essential position in a school like this. We were bringing the boys up on the 9th and time was running out. I needed to get to Maun so that I could do the interviews myself if he never pitched up, which is what eventually happened. All I had to do was pack up and hit the road for the 450 km trip. I realised there was more to do however, when I tried to water the garden and the generator nearly came to a halt when I switched on the pump. Good grief. If we start with no social worker, at least we should have water, so Goweditse and I went down to the river to find out what the problem was. After poking around for awhile we found that the motor of the pump had literally fallen apart. Fortunately we had a spare motor and managed to get it pumping again by 2.00 in the afternoon. I then had a frantic packing session and made it to the ferry before it closed and on to Maun. During all of this, Dave's brother passed away. Without going into the details, Dave has had more than his fair share of misfortune and our hearts went out to him.

In Maun the weekend passed without incident and I managed to do the interviews. By Tuesday the trucks were at Nando's and the boys were gathering for the 8 hour trip back to the School. We left town at a reasonable time and it seemed we were at least going to arrive as planned, but that was too much to ask. Near Gumare, about halfway to the School, our small truck overheated badly and stopped moving. I hadn't noticed it in my rear view mirror but they managed to send us a message before we had proceeded too far. It seems Tristan, one of our volunteers, didn't realise that the gauges on the dashboard served a useful purpose. It was beyond the sort of repairs we could do on the side of the road so we unloaded the boys' bags and towed the truck back to Gumare. I wasn't happy to leave the marimbas and cement in the back of the truck during the rainy season, but we had no choice.

The staff and students were content to all squash into the 5-tonne truck with the luggage. A full load, to say the least. I was the driver, Steady Eddy, and we eventually reached the School, but minus one boy. No, he didn't fall out, he absconded at the ferry. About 30 minutes after arriving I got the news that one of our more irresponsible boys was missing. By that time the ferry was closed so all we could do is send a vehicle to the ferry station to see if he might still be there or walking in our direction. The police were informed, the vehicle returned without him, and I went to bed with a headache. Fortunately, the next morning the boy was located at a relative's house in Shakawe so I left it to him to work out how he was going to make it back to the School. We had already expended enough time, energy and worrying to accord him the pleasure of a special taxi service.

The rest of the first week actually passed by rather pleasantly. Aside from a couple of altercations it seemed we would be able to get on with it, despite the fact that we had no social worker. I even decided that I could afford to go with a driver to tow the Cabstar back from Gumare, something which we managed to do although I kept expecting a 747 to crash land on top of us. It was only during the second week that the problems resumed. The long December holiday always sets the boys back a bit, but this was something else. Lots of boys wanted to go home, but not the new boys as is common. There were general complaints about things we have been doing since we opened in 2000 without a stir. Fighting between students was rampant, some of them involving shovels and bricks. By this time Joel Kakwenga joined us as the social worker, a post he held when the School first opened. But despite the fact that we were all working overtime and trying our best to settle things down, the problems continued. On top of it I was the victim of bank fraud when 2 withdrawals were made from my account using the bank card that was in my back pocket!

One Standard 6 boy in particular was giving us a lot of problems. His motto was "No Peace" and this could be found written here and there in the school yard. The boys called him Mr. Mangamanga (messing around). He relished the name and didn't disappoint. In the end he had to go since we needed to regain control and decided that it was time to weed the garden. There was also another boy who, although quiet by nature, was not the kind of person you wanted to be around when he lost his temper. Last year he had gone off on a volunteer and attacked him with bricks. When he tried the same stunt this year we decided that he would have to follow Mr. Mangamanga. Lo and behold, relative peace returned.

In the middle of February Dave returned, by which time we were functioning more or less normally, albeit with a lot of effort on the part of the staff. On the 5th of March however, close friends tragically lost their young son in a road mishap and Dave went to Maun to help them out. The same night, before Dave arrived there, I was bitten by a puff adder, a rather poisonous snake. The ferry doesn't operate at night so it was like being trapped here, but after going to the local clinic for a cortisone injection someone came by boat from Shakawe to collect me, a one hour ride. I had called a doctor in Maun as soon as it happened to find out what I should do, and another person in Shakawe to find out if the doctor was around. Being a small community, word spread fast. Calls were coming in, plenty of plans were bounced around, the battery in my phone was starting to fail and I myself was also a bit flat. A veterinarian friend of mine phoned and told me to remain calm but I told him that was a bit difficult with all the panicky phone calls I was receiving. To cut a long story short, it was a small snake (under my sink), I didn't get much venom, did travel to Johannesburg for treatment, but essentially ended up with just a black blister on my finger. Anyone who

looked at it could have been forgiven for thinking I had hit myself with a 4 pound hammer. A storm in a teacup? Yes, but it was a new experience for me and leafing through my snake book after it happened didn't do much for my confidence.

To their credit, the staff kept things together for the 5 days I was away, and we could all at least look forward to the end of the term in 3 weeks. We still had several hard-headed boys to contend with, although we seemed to be making some progress with them. But the events had taken us to our limit. On two occasions I could feel something in my head threatening to snap. By the time the Easter weekend arrived and the boys were home for the holidays we all breathed a sign of relief. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Bolokang Mosidi, Pablo Baar and William Bodington.



I will start with the one moment during the term when something good happened. In March we were informed that the Ministry of Education had decided we would get an annual grant to fund our educational expenses, an amount of P240,000 for the 2006/07 financial year. After 7 years of scraping by we could finally rest a bit easier and start paying the staff what they deserved. Special thanks go to Jacob Swartland, a member of the Board of Trustees, for steering our request through the Ministry, and to Archie Makgothi, the Deputy Permanent Secretary, for appreciating that we are serving the nation by rehabilitating boys who have slipped through the net. In light of all the problems we were having during the term it was refreshing to receive some good news, just the mood-booster we all needed.

Bruce Page-Wood's involvement with us goes back to his days at the Gaborone Sun Hotel when the School first opened. At that time he organised a P50,000 donation which was instrumental in getting us off the ground (literally, since we had no permanent structures when we started). At that time he seemed quite pleased to be instructed by his Board to visit the School and attended our Official Opening in 2001. Now at the Grand Palm Hotel, he hasn't forgotten about us and dug up another P50,000. We were also the grateful recipients of 6 big boxes of bedding and towels which the boys continue to appreciate. Our door is always open to you and your wife, Bruce, if you ever feel the need to escape the traffic in Gaborone. The "main" road past the School averages 2 vehicles an hour which would be a change of pace for you. Just say the word and I'll sharpen the fishing hooks.

C.A. Sales has become a regular contributor and passed along another of their P15,000 annual donations. Our thanks go to Ian Thomson, the MD of the company, who I finally met when I bumped into him at an Indian restaurant in Gaborone. I hope to be seeing more of him in the future. Another company that pledged a multi-year commitment is ITI, a computer company in Gaborone. We would like to thank their Chairman, Fatemah Khan, for passing along the final instalment of their P30,000 donation. Anne Uren, the owner of Audi Camp, has assisted the School every year since its inception and increased her donation this year to P4,000. My friend at Collegium Publishers, Ben Sechele, has been working on our behalf to get us the textbooks we need and another P10,000 batch of much-needed books arrived at the

beginning of the year. Thanks go to Ben and Johnson Chengeta, the Editor, for sharing his enthusiasm and agreeing to the donation. As an industry, the publishers in Botswana have been very supportive and Lesedi Seitei from Heinemann needs to be thanked for also sending us a shipment of textbooks valued around P10,000.

As much as we appreciate the corporate donors, we wouldn't be where we are today if it wasn't for the many private individuals who dig into their own pockets and find something for us. As usual, there is a long list of such people. Christina McKinley, friends of the ever-helpful Cox family, sent £220. The money was raised at the wedding of Christina's friends Sarah and Jon. May they live happily ever after. Quill Hermans, the Chairperson of Moremogolo Trust and the backbone of the School, sent us P500 which he received for an article he wrote for Air Botswana's in-flight magazine. Dorothy Graham, the mother of an ex-volunteer, sent us her annual £50 in honour of the positive effect working at the School had on her son. He is now a professional snow-boarder, a skill which he did not acquire while he was here. We would like to wish him the best of luck. St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Minnesota sent us \$500 via Jeff and Gina Smith who do development work in this area. Elaine Inglis, a friend of one of our volunteers sent us £40. Being a youngster, I suspect this was a substantial percentage of her pocket money. I mentioned Ian Milne from Swampland Safari Trails in the last issue. He is the safari operator who looks for more than animals when he is out with clients. Once again a campfire story about Bana ba Metsi School fell on sympathetic ears. Upon their return John and Vivienne Moore sent us a cheque for £100.



And in Conclusion . . .

At the right is a photo which shows how our fund raising effort works. Many of the people mentioned above have never met any of us or been to the School. They found out about us from others, which is heartening, as is the photo. I am currently waging a war against mice in my house, so I think the little guys in the picture are gerbils. The one on the top is Ian, the one in the middle is Vivienne, and the one on the bottom is . . . the School. Our thanks and appreciation go out to the many people who assist us in whatever way they can. Starting, developing and running this School has truly been a group effort.

This issue is long overdue and probably paints quite a bleak picture. But if you would like to look ahead, I will reveal that the roller coaster bottomed out in this issue and there should be more to smile about from here on. Hopefully, having gone through the worst will make us more appreciative of the good times. To the future of the School! Cheers!

Steven Harpt
Director.

© Bana ba Metsi School
April, 2007
Private Bag 06, Shakawe.
Tel: 72 437948
E-mail: banabametsi@info.bw