



Newsletter

First Term, 2008



Oops

Update, April 2008

With 2007 behind us, we, as a staff, vowed to have a good year. We had succeeded in getting some hard-nosed kids through their primary education and are now turning our attention to those who are left, along with the new crop of boys. They were a rowdy bunch with their fair share of knot-heads, the kind of kids with whom you're better off playing hard ball. (For those who don't know, that's an American expression for dealing with someone one step above soft ball and two steps above saying, "hey, don't do that again".) But for every tough nut there were another four boys who were easy to like from the start.

One of the new boys was a very familiar face, as he would be to anyone who lives in Maun and goes to the grocery store. A very small boy, he was always at my service whenever I went shopping, as friendly and innocent as they come. I knew he would eventually be with us here. One of the problems we face is that the little nippers have too much energy and to tire them out seems to be impossible. They lay bricks, swim, play football and go to bed later on Saturdays, but on the first Sunday of the term my favourite boy sustained a compound fracture, fooling around with another new boy. It was all quite traumatic for us. He was eventually transferred to Francistown for surgery. Time will tell whether he suffers any lasting effects. It wasn't a very good way to start the new year, considering our vow. But after a shiver or two down my spine, remembering what we had gone through in 2007, it was quiet again.

Life never ceases to amaze me. A couple years ago we had twins, Itseng and Tirafalo, who graduated and went on to junior secondary school. I found it hard to tell them apart, even after 3 years with them. Academically there wasn't much difference between them either, and all of us were very pleased they were both able to pass their national exams. How similar can twins be though? Let me tell you. In the secondary school northern zone athletics finals they finished 1st and 2nd in the 400 metre race. Running like the wind was the way I heard it described. I believe they found the competition a bit steeper at the national level, but we would like to congratulate them for their accomplishments.

About a month into the term I asked our social worker, Joel Kakwenga, when the storm was going to start. We both laughed and agreed that it had been unusually peaceful in the school yard. That night, while waiting for my pasta to cook, I was trying to imagine how I had been feeling one year ago. The difference between this year and last was like the difference between a guinea pig and a warthog. With calm returning to the School I was "suffering" from natural highs, but I decided not to complain. Even my dogs seemed to be in a better mood.

In March the marimba band had the pleasure of entertaining a very full Kgotla meeting in Shakawe to say farewell to President Mogae who had come to the end of his term. The boys did well and had the crowd on the tips of their toes to see them. Botswana TV was there and included the band in the evening news broadcast. Unfortunately they also included the little jig I did for the benefit of the people of Shakawe. I served as the Headmaster of the secondary school there for 11 years so I'm no stranger to the community. A few weeks later I jokingly reprimanded the TV crew when I bumped into them and told them the dance wasn't for public consumption. All of us at the School would like to compliment Mr. Mogae for his competent stewardship of the nation, and extend our thanks to Mrs. Mogae who is an active member of our Board of Trustees. The world needs more people like the two of you.



The band, entertaining the President.



President Mogae.

People often ask me why I like living in Botswana. For starters, while it may seem trivial, in this entire district of Botswana there are no traffic lights. That means I never have to spend even one second waiting for the light to turn green. But the thing I appreciate most about Botswana is that it's a peaceful country. In fact it's so safe that an important parcel can be sent up to us in the President's helicopter. This is what happened when President Mogae visited Shakawe. Since the band was playing for the event we wanted to sell some of our CD's while we were there, as well as give one to the President as a present, but we hadn't received the first consignment from Gaborone. I was given precise information on the President's route and arrival time, and the box materialised, unopened. In many countries, if not most, that poor parcel would probably have been bombarded by every type of ray known to mankind and then ripped to shreds before it was put in the helicopter. My apologies, but I am rather cynical about the demise of trust and the depths we have had to stoop because of a few of the world's bad boys. Extrapolating forward in the direction we are going, the day will come when we will all have to board planes stark naked! If as much money was spent on peace as is spent on war we'd all be better off and living with the kind of freedom we have here in Botswana.

And finally, Bana ba Metsi School would like to welcome Peter Sono, a retired Head Teacher who has joined the staff. He has a wealth of experience and a very pleasant nature, two things we really need here. In addition, we would like to congratulate Ruth Lephalo on her promotion to the post of Deputy Director of the School. She previously served as a prison warden and, as such, feels right at home here. We would like to wish them the best of luck.

Success As We See It

I have worked as a teacher in Botswana for 28 years and there is one thing which you can always count on. If you travel with students you aren't going to have any problems. The kids love getting in a truck and going somewhere . . . anywhere, even if it's just to a nearby rubbish pit. There are 3 long weekends every year in Botswana and with 4 days off it's better to take the boys on a trip for at least 2 days, lest they get irritated with each other from boredom.

This year the Easter weekend fell during the term so we decided to go camping. It was further decided that we would take the marimbas with us and stop in all the villages along the way and entertain the people. This is a fantastically beautiful part of Botswana so you don't need to go far to be in a special place. (I would even argue that the School is a beautiful place, but the boys needed to get out.) The plan was to head down the road to nowhere, through Seronga, and on to Beetsha or even Gudigwa if we had enough time. Along the way there are several very small villages, all with fewer than 1000 people except Seronga. The routine was to stop in whatever looked like the middle or most populated area of the village, unload the instruments, start playing and wait for the people to come. Needless to say they really enjoyed it and we had the privilege of seeing some very interesting dancing.



On the first day out we stopped at a place we have visited on many occasions, to have a meal. It is on the edge of the floodplain so the kids can swim and there are dozens of baobab trees scattered around. Upon our arrival the Hilux ended up in a trench (see cover photo). Fortunately that's not much of a problem when you have 50 boys to help lift and push. Trust me, it didn't take long to get the car out. After eating we loaded up and carried on to Seronga where

we played outside of Anne and Willie's shop, drawing quite an enthusiastic crowd. We repeated the same exercise in Gonotsoga and then looked for a place to camp. The road eventually ran next to a flood plain with plenty of good water and LOTS of elephant biscuits. Our students are quite good about camping out and they agreed with me that it was a very beautiful site, so we parked and set up. By setting up I mean laying out a monstrous tarpaulin, scattering the mattresses on top of it . . . and hoping it doesn't rain.

The road in front of our camp was hard and wide, a perfect place to play football. As night fell a full moon crept up from the flood plain, eventually giving us enough light to be able to move around without a torch. It was one of my best moments camping with kids, and I've done a lot of camping. There was a frantic game of football going on with lots of noise. Cutting through the top of that were several Frisbees with glowing lights that I stole from Ollie. (In actual fact it was a communication problem. I was supposed to take one small Frisbee, not ALL the Frisbees.) The rest of the boys were horsing around on the mattresses, laughing like hyenas. The fire was going, the pots of food were cooking, the staff were happy, and I was relieved that the trip was working out. The only problem was that one of the U-joints in the front prop shaft of the truck was well and truly finished which simply meant that we needed to stay away from heavy sand.

The next day was a leisurely journey to Beetsa for another concert, at which point we decided to turn around and head back to the School. As the sun was setting we were playing our last concert in Mogocho which is 11 km's from the School. By the time it was dark we were home after a very successful and enjoyable trip.



I hope all of you are sitting in a comfortable chair because the list of donors for the term is very long, much to our appreciation. Let me start with the big one from the Department of Culture and Youth, which sent P101,200 for rehabilitative expenses and skills training. The Department has helped us several times in the past when Mr. Phorano was the Director. The new Director is Mrs. Ndzinge who is very friendly and approachable. We would like to sincerely thank her for her understanding and cooperation.

In the last Newsletter I talked about my trip to Gaborone with the marimba band, and the fact that one of our gigs was for the First Lady's Charity Golf Tournament. Mrs. Mogae has been an active member of Moremogolo Trust for many years, the Trust being the legal

owners of Bana ba Metsi School. The Trustees are responsible for monitoring the activities of the School and raising the necessary funds. We are grateful to Mrs. Mogae for earmarking the money raised at the tournament for us, a total of P42,500. Below is a list of the companies who responded to Mrs. Mogae's plea:

Associated Fund Administrators, P5000	Eve's Club, P10,000	BMS, P5000
Investec Asset Management, P2500	Lion Motors, P5000	BCL, P5000
Botswana Eagle Insurance, P2500	Profrieght, P2500	Motswedi, P2500
Thata Construction, P2500		

With corporate donors we often get multi-year contributions, something we appreciate since it makes budgeting easier. Dafin Sales has been giving us P15,000 for the past several years, thanks to the generosity of Ian Thomson. Another annual contributor is Anne Uren of Audi Camp in Maun. This year she increased her donation to P5000. In addition to her financial assistance, she often accommodates our marimba band when we are in Maun. We have had quite a few rocking evenings in her restaurant, watching the tourists dance. Thanks Ian and Ann.

The people of Britain have been helping us for many years, and when it comes to converting foreign exchange, there's nothing better than pounds sterling which are almost always over P10 per quid. The champions of the group, at least in terms of effort, are Rosemary and John Cox who have been assisting us since the School opened in 2000 and never pass up an opportunity to spread the word. They are practically professional fund-raisers as we are not the only organisation they assist. If you've been a long-time subscriber to this Newsletter you may remember that John spent a whole day in Salisbury Cathedral reading John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. (There is a rumour, probably unfounded, that a certain additive to the punch helped get him through.) Every year they also have a lunch at their house to raise money for the causes they support and usually several hundred pounds come our way. In addition to this, they have been faithfully sending us a Christmas present of £200 since the school opened in 2000. In the beginning of January, right on schedule, their annual present arrived, as always. Our thanks to both of you for your continuing assistance.

Carrying on with our British connections, Ross and Julie Goldsworthy have a charitable organisation called Books for Botswana. After volleying a few emails and informing them of our book needs they sent us a whopping £2000 which converted to over P24,000. Half of the money was used to purchase the materials needed to electrify the classroom block and the rest we used for new library books. I am hopeful I will be able to meet the two of you one day as this is the second time you have contributed to the School. Also from the UK, Cricket St. Thomas Church, for the second time, sent us £500. The architects of this donation are David and Pauline Savill. If I have it correct, David is my friend Lucy's uncle. She has always promoted our cause and has given us textbooks in the past. And from Scotland, the mother of an ex-volunteer, Dorothy Graham, sent us her annual £50. Rest assured we appreciate all of your contributions.

Bana ba Metsi School also has a rather extensive following in the United States. Linda and Paul Smith have donated on many occasions and again sent us \$500. They are friends of our Chairperson, Quill Hermans, and, as seems to be quite common with donors, I have never met them in person. The same goes for Kathy and George Cawman who popped up in my inbox and said they wanted to help us with \$500. They are friends of Cleo Marshall, my brother's

mother-in-law. The Marshall family has supported us for a long time and when the Cawman's told her they had visited Botswana, well, you can imagine what one of the topics of discussion was. George and Kathy have supported educational initiatives in Green Bay, Wisconsin, so giving is in their blood. Also from Green Bay, friends from my childhood days, the Romenesko family, sent us \$100. As a youngster I had a reputation of eating everything in sight. When I'd get to their house, Clyde and Mugs would start feeding me, like one of those geese they eat in France.

Those of you in the United States who would like to assist the School and get credit for your efforts on your tax return, you can contact Megan Biesele at the Kalahari People's Fund. Her email address is meganbie@gmail.com Megan has been helping us since the School opened and I would like to sincerely thank her for her very valuable assistance.

And last, but not least, personal friends of mine came to our assistance. From down under, Cathy Zerbe succeeded in sending us AUS\$600. I say "succeeded" since the first time she sent us money it went around the world many times before disappearing in the Indian Ocean. Crispin Sanderson, my mechanical guru, popped out P1000. He, his family, and 2 of his friends from England borrowed my boat and had a whale of a time on the river. I think the donation was the result of over-exuberance, but much appreciated. And an ex-Peace Corps Volunteer, Bill Burns, sent us \$25 testing out a pay pal button on a website of his. He brings groups of people from the States every other year to hang out with us for a week or so, and get their hands dirty. On one of their previous trips they arrived with 25 pairs of football boots.

On behalf of the staff and students of Bana ba Metsi School, I would like to thank all of you for allowing us to continue helping the boys. As I often say in my thank you letters, it is only because of people like you that we are still in existence.

And in Conclusion . . .

While working here does have its challenges, it also has moments that keep you going. One day a boy asked me what the word 'nigger' means. I think I did a good job of explaining to him why it was a very bad word that should never be used. I had a bit of a problem, however, when he asked me why, if it's such a bad word, black musicians use it in rap songs. I suggested that he ask a university professor. Another day a boy came and asked me what 'constipation' is. Comparatively speaking, that one was easy. I often go up to the dorms to see what's going on and one night there was a bit of a commotion, more laughing than anything else. When I asked what was going on, Kenosi, the Deputy Headboy said, "this boy said my eyes look like a coffin". I didn't know what to make of it and couldn't get anymore information from them because they were all laughing so hard. I could still hear them laughing when I got back to my house. One afternoon I went to check something at the generator house and found two boys standing in front of the radiator of our bigger generator with something in their hands. I was getting all set to give them a tongue lashing for whatever it was they were doing when I noticed they were holding a small table they had made. It turns out they wanted the paint (water-based and non-sniffable) to dry faster and were holding the table in front of the hot air blowing out. All I could do was compliment them for using their heads.

With that, I believe you can understand how much fun it is to work here. Are you looking for a challenge and a change of scenery? I am compiling a list of people who are interested in taking over from me. Seriously! Of course, I have no intention of going anywhere yet, but for the sake of forward planning and preparedness, I'd love to hear from the willing. I don't think the list will be long, so even if you have never had a job, send me your name and you can tell people you were on a short list!

Steven Harpt
Director.

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