



Newsletter

Third Term, 2007



Future Pilots

Update, December 2007

As I sit down to write this issue of the Newsletter my intention is to surprise the purgatory out of you with the speed at which it has arrived. I am giving myself until the 15th of December which is three months from the release of the last issue. How, Mr. Harpt, can it take you that long to write one measly Newsletter? Don't worry, I'm capable of that.

While you are gazing at this page I will point out that the above photo shows 3 of our students in the pilots uniforms which Air Botswana donated to us. These boys had just

finished their education at Bana ba Metsi School and I was in the process of taking them home for good, boo hoo. Yes, the final trip to Maun with the boys who have finished their Primary School Leaving Exams is always a bit difficult for me. It really doesn't matter how much trouble they gave us during their 3 years at the School, it is still hard to say good-bye to them. Rascals, yes, but also very loveable when you get right down to it. And the fact that the vast majority of them can carry on with their lives without getting into serious trouble makes me believe that we are doing something positive for them.

Air Botswana has been a long-time supporter of the School, providing us with complimentary air tickets between Maun and Gaborone since we opened in 2000. In September Helen Chilisa and Sophie Dimbengu visited us with several big boxes of clothing, including some pilots' uniforms. When I took the Standard 7's on their final trip to Maun several students wore them. They looked so cute, as you can see from the cover photo. While Helen was at the School I had asked her about the possibility of sending Otsile, who is from Gaborone, home on the plane and she gladly agreed. He had also finished his exams, was a very curious boy (in fact a veritable busy-body) and I thought he would really enjoy having a trip on a plane. We left the School on a Saturday morning in October and had a tight schedule to get to the airport for the 5.00 pm flight. With 45 minutes to spare we unloaded Otsile's belongings at the airport and then, accompanied by the pilots, we headed for the check-in desk. The Maun manager, Mr. Mampane, was there along with several other Air Botswana staff members. I informed him that his new pilots were ready to be shown to the cockpit which brought a smile to everyone's face. I want to thank all of the Air Botswana staff, both in Maun and at the Head Office for their contributions and cooperation.

Those who received the last 2 issues of this Newsletter know that 2007 did not start out well. (A bit of an understatement, that.) By third term however, we had managed to coax the School back to normal and the Standard 7's were taking the preparations for their exams seriously. When the results came out in November we were pleased to see that 4 of the 16 students obtained a B, which was very good for us, and another 7 passed with a C. Of the 5 who failed, 3 had no chance from the day they arrived, one **should** have passed and the other boy thought he knew everything and didn't need to study. What can you do? It's the horse at the river that won't drink.

At the beginning of every term we have students who don't arrive on time. Some days later they come up to Shakawe on the bus and get a taxi to the ferry where they are instructed to talk to the ferry drivers, all of whom are mates of mine. I let them know that a boy is coming and ask them to help him find a lift to the school. If they manage to do that the ferry driver sends me a text message to say the boy is on his way, and how. I must admit I resent having to make special arrangements for boys who don't get to the truck when we are leaving Maun at the beginning of the term. They have a 4 week holiday to take care of whatever it is they need to do and the ones who are not there are usually the irresponsible ones. Nonetheless, what can you do? We want them back and have to do what we can to make sure they get here and finish their primary education. On occasion we have to go to the ferry (about 40 km's away) to collect them if they arrive late and there are no vehicles to get a lift. A week after we started the third term I heard that 2 boys were coming up on the bus. By 6.00 there was no sign of them so I took off in the car to try to find them, stopping to look in every vehicle going in the opposite direction. By the time I got to the ferry the drivers had knocked off but one of them confirmed he hadn't seen them and then took me

across in a motor boat, leaving the vehicle behind. I mistakenly thought I could still find a lift to Shakawe, 12 km's away, but at night it's really the road from nowhere. You're either coming from the ferry or the border, both of which are closed at night. My friend Nat rescued me when I was a few km's from the village. We checked where the bus parked for the night and the driver said they had gotten off but he didn't know where they went. The next morning I hitched to the ferry, crossed to get the car and returned to Shakawe to look around. By 10.00 in the morning I gave up and returned to the ferry to find them sitting under a tree, all smiles. They didn't seem to find it at all unusual to be plonked down in a village they didn't know. We'll just walk into the nearest yard and ask for accommodation, right? I don't know what possessed me to worry about them when every student in the School is a survivor.

Success As We See It

I have talked about our marimba band on many occasions. The problem we face every year is that band members leave when they finish their education and then you have to put together a new band. There are always a few members who are in Standard 6 who can serve as the



foundation of the band, but it takes time to get up to speed when the Standard 7's leave. This year however, the Standard 6's were ready from the start. One morning at our daily staff briefing someone pointed out that the new band sounded quite fantastic. In past years it took 6 months before the band was fit for public consumption.

It has been my experience that once every decade or so you stumble upon someone who has music in his or her bones. It has now been almost exactly 10 years since Baitshepi

Mwachesenge, a student at Shakawe Junior Secondary School, led our Shakarimba band to fame. We went on to perform for the Princes, William and Harry, on two occasions, the second time at Windsor Castle for William's 21st birthday party. Baitshepi went on to become Chris Manto 7, currently one of Botswana's big musical stars and the winner of Botswana's Best New Musician award in 2006.



This year at Bana ba Metsi School it's Terrence "Spiro" Keakantse. He's not the best in class, but give him a musical instrument and he will make it sing. (I think it has something to do with left brain/right brain.) On top of that he is very good at getting other boys to understand his ideas and help him come up with music that will bring tears to your eyes and make the hair on your arms stand up. That's Spiro in the photo, looking like Pablo Picasso.

To kick off their careers, the band travelled to Gaborone at the beginning of the December holiday to perform at the National Stadium for International Aids Day. Given the way the 2007 school year had gone I was supremely ready for a holiday and wasn't really in the mood to travel 1350 km's with 7 boys. Fortunately, the Botswana Defence force agreed to collect us in a small troop carrier in a village 55 km's away. For me, flying lessened the burden to the point where the whole thing sounded manageable.

Upon arrival in Gaborone, and while we were still doing a major tuning of the instruments, I got a message from the First Lady, Barbara Mogae, asking us to play for the closing ceremony of Stanbic Bank's First Lady's Golf Tournament. Mrs. Mogae, who is a member of the Board of Trustees, had identified Bana ba Metsi School as the recipients of the funds raised at the tournament. It was just a coincidence that I happened to be in Gaborone with the band. We rapidly finished tuning and putting the instruments back together and headed for the golf course in pouring rain. When we arrived I thought the lighting at the clubhouse was a bit peculiar. In actual fact, there were no lights at all since the storm had knocked out the electricity. What light there was came from a few cars with their headlights on. Undeterred, we set up under a bit of roofing and started our gig. There was a bit of spray moistening the boys and the marimbas but they carried on until the rain was blowing horizontally and literally soaking them. Not so bad for the boys but if the marimbas could talk they would have been complaining bitterly.

The Aids Day event in Gaborone was organised by the Sbrana brothers, the founders of Botswana's oldest rock band, Nosey Road. During the day we played for the official ceremony on the football pitch at the stadium. Moses succeeded in putting his mallet right through one of the baritone keys, no doubt a result of the amount of rain they had absorbed. In the evening we played on a big stage, along with many other bands, to raise money for the School. The previous evening at the golf club I had been approached by Duduetsang Chappelle-Molloy, whose name wouldn't fit on most bank forms, and asked if we could play at Stanbic Bank's Christmas Party the next evening. I, personally, never say no to a Christmas party, so after our set at the stadium, on the big stage, we loaded up and headed for the bank. The boys feasted on some of the most delicious food they had ever seen, did their gig and then it was time to go home and sleep. A very busy day.

But it all went very well and the next day we were invited to Nosey Road's studio to record a CD. Most of the songs we recorded on the first take, but after having a meal the food seemed to be weighing the boys down and we had to re-record a few songs. At one point I wondered why Otsile had stopped playing. He answered my question when he answered his cell phone. Everyone else was banging away while he was busy talking. Cut . . . turn the phone off . . . same song . . . take two.

I would like to thank Ivo and Renato Sbrana for the tremendous amount of work that went into organising the event, and for the P54,000 they managed to raise for us, not to mention the time we spent at your house eating your food and recording the CD. For anyone who likes rock and roll you should check out Skinflint, the band started by Giuseppe, Ivo's son. Very good. I would also like to thank Alan and Jenny Egnor for giving us their house for the weekend, and Ollie Groth for the use of his car, trailer and the baritone key that Moses pierced. (Ollie sells marimbas and gave me permission to pinch the key.)

Focus on Funding

Donations, big and small from here and there, continued to keep Bana ba Metsi School afloat. We have plenty of stalwarts without whom we couldn't survive. Nomsa Mbere is a dentist . . . and a walker. Many years ago she started leading groups of people through the salt pans to raise money for worthy organisations which led to the creation of the Y Care Charitable Trust. Nomsa has expanded her walking programme and now visits other areas of interest in Botswana. Give her enough time and I'm quite positive she could walk around the world. The smooth running of the Trust is the responsibility of the Coordinator, Stellan Bengtsson, a very friendly and helpful Swede. We would like to thank both of you for your annual donation of P30,000. For those who would like more information on Y Care and see what it's like on the pans, one of my favourite places, visit their website: www.ycare.org.bw .

Another long-time supporter is the insurance company, Prefsure Botswana, which has been sending us P25,000 every year since 2004. Again this year they didn't disappoint us. Our thanks go to Mark Paton and Bruce Sinclair who, unfortunately, I have never had a chance to go fishing with here on the Okavango River. In general, the corporate community in Botswana has been very sympathetic to our cause and Prefsure is at the top of the list. May all your insurance claims be small.

Every year we have a Christmas party for the orphans in our area, usually around 100 children from the ages of 5 to 11. While the primary goal of the party is bring a smile to the faces of the visiting children, a secondary objective is to teach our boys that it is good to do something for those who are less fortunate. Our students are heavily involved in cooking the food, wrapping presents, setting up the venue, supervising activities, making decorations, and all the other chores involved in hosting a large group of people. It is something they really enjoy, notwithstanding the big plate of food they get in the deal. This year we received a lot of support from people in this area. Etsha Coop donated about P4000 worth of food for the party, Maun Printers gave us materials for decorations and painting faces worth P1100, Sepopa Swamp Stop donated P1000 and Shakawe Lodge P350. Pam Shelton sent us 100 very beautiful books and P50, Mrs. Wright gave us P225 worth of food from her shop and Ann Botha popped out P200. In addition to this, the Maun community came up with several boxes of used toys. All in all it was a successful event thanks to the efforts of all concerned.



New donors crop up fairly often. I often suggest people visit us to see what we are doing since, from past experience, they often leave with a smile on their face and something to think about. Mike Bullock, someone I have known since I arrived in Maun in 1986, was in the area with his daughter and spent the night with us. Suitably impressed with the work we're doing he returned to his office and transferred P3000 to the Trust account. At P3000 per

night you are welcome to stay for a month, Mike! Another visitor, Agnes Nairn, who was touring Botswana, gave us £100 after touring the School. And, not for the first time, Roger and Janet Harpt sent us \$325. As you can imagine, they are relatives of mine. To all of you, a big thank you.

In the last Newsletter I reported on the P50,000 we received from First National Bank but not the serious moral dilemma I was put in by Oratile Moremong when the money arrived. Oratile is our contact person at the Bank. She and I have always had a very friendly relationship (but not too friendly) and our email correspondence is quite light-hearted. When I wrote and asked her for our annual P50,000 instalment I purposely wrote P500,000 as a joke. FNB has a very well-developed electronically generated sms service which informs you of any transactions so you can imagine what was going through my mind when, soon after sending the email, I got a message that our account had been credited with P500,000. For just a second, even a nano second, all that my mother taught me about honesty went out of my head. But I recovered and grudgingly phoned her to apologise for what I had written and pointing out the mistake. As it turned out, her instruction to make 2 transfers, the difference being only one zero, had gotten mixed up, and she thanked me for informing her. We both had a good laugh over that. For a few seconds there we were rich.

When the School opened in 2000, we did so with 8 tents bought by UNICEF. And while substantial developments have been made, including 2 dormitories, some boys are still sleeping in tents. That isn't as bad as you may think since more of the boys **could** be in the dorms but prefer to sleep in the tent. They say it makes them feel like soldiers. Anyways, being 8 years old, the dorm tents were finding it more and more difficult to keep the rain out. The father of one of my good friends, Lorien Gimpel, happens to be the owner of Canvas and Tent in South Africa. I wrote to her and she agreed to see what she could do. Toby Bernstein, Lorien's father, was very sympathetic and agreed to send us 2 tents, one of which was so big that we could have held a circus in it. And being bigger it could accommodate more beds, which means more boys, and in the end the whole thing does turn into a circus! The bigger the hook, the bigger the fish. The bigger the tent, the bigger the circus. As the rainy season was just around the corner we were very grateful to Toby for his assistance.

And last, but not least, for reasons unknown to me, one of my closest friends is Alan Egner. We spend much of our time together humorously slinging insults at each other. I think it has something to do with allowing me to unload pent up stress. He's a loveable guy, with wit to match, who needs to be credited with sending me 4 air filters for our truck. Good job Al.

And in Conclusion . . .

There's a saying that all good things come to an end. The corollary to this is that all bad things usually come to an end, and 2007 did finally end. But not before I ran over 2 donkeys and rearranged the front end of my car on my way to a much-needed holiday in Tanzania. In Botswana a sekororo is a car which isn't in good condition, and there are more than enough of them. On my way to catch the flight out of Maun on the evening of the 20th of December, I encountered a car with headlights pointing in all different directions, one of them straight into my eyeballs. As it passed and before I could put on my high beams . . . boom . . . a painful reminder that the year wasn't over. As it turned out however, it was the last minor disaster.

As for the holiday, I did something I have never done before and flew into a lodge. It was located on the Indian Ocean near Pangani, Tanzania. I had been invited to join Alan and Jenny Egner, their 2 kids, and Jenny's mother, Janet Hermans on their Christmas vacation. I didn't have as much time as they did, but a week of fun is better than nothing, right? And did we have fun! During the day Al and I were trying to drown each other on the reef and in the evening we were fighting over the best sofa for reading a book. After that I knew why he was my friend: he's weaker than me. To all of you, thanks for putting up with me and my poor bridge skills. I couldn't have spent my holiday with nicer people.

Good-bye 2007.

Steven Harpt
Director.

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