

The Leicester Bwana in Botswana 25 Aug 03

Since my last comments about the ancestors, I have been persuaded not to stop on the road between Gweta and Nata again. Last month the newspapers reported that a dead body was found with his legs crushed in the bush about 200 metres from the road. I will add that the headlines in the same newspaper last week (The Midweek Sun) read "Horny women prisoners have sex with carrots". Other tales of ancestors are just too spooky, and the sincerity with which people recount them has made my decision.

Yesterday, a group of us went to an orphanage to spend some time with kids of all ages up to 18, all of whom are orphaned because of HIV / AIDS and all of whom were sponsored by someone in the developed world. The facilities were very good and the kids were well looked after by "mamas" as the supervisors were called. I introduced the game of spinning round 10 times and trying to run in a straight line (the sort of games they play on an 18 - 30 holiday, apparently). The kids enjoyed playing the game, but everyone (myself in particular) had more fun watching the mamas try to play. Rusty Lee was a big black woman who was a TV chef and had a continual and contagious laugh. These mamas bore a very close resemblance to her.

Manxotai (pronounced "Man(tsk)otai") is a village in the middle of nowhere. The Field Officer (Ednah) scares me to death. She is a big woman, shows no emotion, and regularly says things like "Please do it Rrreeek or I will beat you." I don't want to take any risks so invariably do what she wants. This is actually a good sign as prior to my arrival, she was doing little or no work, and is now pushing me.

I was with her last week in Manxotai where there has been an outbreak of Mumps which has been spread mainly because people sleep in large numbers in their huts to keep warm. I'm doing everything possible to get the local clinic to visit the village and give some treatment. The people who are sexually active (aged 14 and upwards as a rule of thumb) are at increased risk because their immune systems are weaker if they are HIV positive. It is a real potential killer of many. The village has less than a thousand people and if a significant number of people die as a result, the village will face many problems in the future. To get folk to realise the potential impact creates an added problem as "tomorrow is another day" here.

As I was leaving the village, Ednah decided to tell me that she was 6 months pregnant. The father is her boyfriend from school (she is now 27), he lives in Gabs and she sees him 3 or 4 times a year. She asked if she could call the baby after me if it was a boy which is about the only emotion she has shown towards me (but it speaks volumes in my mind). She has a 9 year old son who is looked after by Ednah's mother who lives about 150 kms away. The son doesn't recognise Ednah as his mother, only an aunt or a friend. This set up is similar for a lot of people here.

Another Field Officer, Sandra (who is very switched on), told me that she is getting married. I was unaware that she had a boyfriend and she explained that she will be getting married in April to a guy she met on the bus 2 months ago. Sandra is 24, has a 4

year old boy (same arrangement as Ednah) and has Leukaemia. The father of her child died last year of cancer. Her husband to be is a 39 year old lawyer (called Justice!) living in Francistown.

On an aside, I have met a soldier called Destroy, aswell as Pinkie Peters, Brown Chuga, Precious Willie, Kennedy Diamond, Dolly Clement and Springfig. Many others that you just wouldn't believe. (I haven't seen Constable B. Somebody at the refugee camp to ask his first name yet).

There is a national knockout competition for village choirs and two of the villages in my area have qualified to the regional finals. I saw them practicing and the singing was very emotive and moving. They love a good singsong here and are very good at it. They also like to dance and I've seen a few traditional dances which are equally as absorbing.

Whilst listening to the choir singing, it dawned on me that I am currently a desert dweller. I am conscious that these people are quite happy living as they are, and that I am forcing many of the developed world's culture onto them to stop the spread of HIV / AIDS, although I accept that this is essential. There are many related issues which is why I am coming back to Botswana. I had a meeting yesterday with the big boss, the conclusion being that I will come back to write my book and to continue with some of the work and some of the projects that I have created.

I go back to Denmark for a month on Nov 2 and will be in the UK in December. I come back here in January for 3 - 6 months, with the option to reduce or extend at any time. I don't have to make a decision for the period following this, so I haven't. (Tina the teacher, I will elaborate in a separate email)

I mentioned some that I want to continue some of the projects that I have started. These are all businesses run by Field Officers, passionates (local people who volunteer their help) and people that are open about their HIV positive status. The projects are making leather key fobs, badge making, vegetable gardens (all for selling), positive living clubs (offering support and morale for HIV positive people) and soya restaurants.

The profits go towards helping cover the costs of transport so that HIV positive people can have the regular monthly check ups they need, and to get the drugs they need. The food leftover from the soya restaurant will feed the increasing number of orphans in each village, and profits will go towards the cost of school uniforms so that they can get an education. I've made it sound simple, but it's got its complications, most of which are unimaginable! The main factor to have allowed me to get these projects started (and to consider a few others in their infancy) is the donations that I have received. On behalf of those that will directly benefit, I send a massive THANK YOU and a very big African smile.

Currently, I am knackered and have flu (I forgot my blanket last week and "Ah! There is much cold during the night"). I'm going to have a bath and an early night. It's starting to get hot now during the days and will continue to do so until I leave. Maybe I'll come

back with a bit of colour, especially on my head which is now clean shaven! I got my hair cut (in a tent on the side of the road) by a guy call Snooty who reassured me that he was the best person in Francistown at cutting “lekowa’s” (white man’s) hair. He scalped the back and sides but left a clump on top. I asked him to cut it but he told me he couldn’t do that bit. The rest is history.

I hope life is good with you. If I owe you a reply to an email, please bear with me.

Sharp and Go Siame

Rick