

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

## Odds and ends of Botswana experience

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Dear Peter:

This is not my regular newsletter that I plan to send in at the end of this month before heading off to Namibia. Instead, this is a collection of odd incidents and interesting mishaps I've had in Botswana that would not fit into the themes of the other newsletters already written. It seemed a shame to leave these little stories in my notebook when I spin these yarns to entertain friends and acquaintances here, so I've put down on paper what had become an oral history of my wife's and my adventures so far in Southern Africa.

1) Bobbie Jo and I recently applied for a residency permit here in Botswana. We hadn't intended to do so, but when we purchased the car that we will use during the ICWA fellowship, the motor vehicle registration officials required proof of citizenship. On the day we were to buy the car, we got the bad news. We then hurried to fill out the forms required to submit to the immigration officials, anxious to close the deal. There remained one last slip of paper, however, which had to be certified by a medical practitioner. It was a small, single-page medical report in which a doctor or nurse must certify that one hasn't any communicable diseases or unfavorable disabilities. What does the government worry about in potential citizens? According to the medical report, one must not exhibit signs of:

- "(a) being an idiot;
  - (b) being an imbecile;
  - (c) being a feeble-minded person;
  - (d) being an epileptic;
  - (e) having had a previous attack of insanity;
  - (f) suffering from constitutional psychopathic inferiority;
  - (g) suffering from chronic alcoholism."
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Casey Kelso is a fellow of the Institute studying the societies, economies and agricultural systems of Southern Africa.

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

The man who owned the car we wanted to buy was an American leaving Botswana after living here for six years. He knew the ropes. He took us to the nurse at the American embassy dispensary and asked her if she would sign off on our mental health. The woman carefully read the list of characteristics that would disqualify potential residents. Then she looked up at Bobbie Jo and I. "Oh, I don't know these people well enough to really judge," she said in a suspicious voice. Then, when she realized what she was implying about her visitors, the woman became flustered. "Umm, I mean you might be... Well, you might have a unknown history of..." She dropped her eyes to the form, her face red, to search the list for an excuse. "You all might be... epileptics."

After a few minutes of conversation, when we appeared to be capable of a normal, fairly rational discourse about the beautiful landscape of her native state of New Hampshire, she relented. Small talk can be very important in any culture.

2) I think the Botswana people are not used to having a modern efficient telephone system, far superior to anything else on the continent. Within the last decade, the "TeleComms" government parastatal has put in microwave relay towers and microprocessors that greatly improved the quality of service. There's an attitude lag, however, on the part of the citizens. I've noticed almost everybody, from a helpful airline clerk making our hotel reservation to a powerful government minister handling an important call, will punctuate their telephone conversation with a shout of "Hello?!" every few minutes. I think there's a national paranoia of being inadvertently cut off while talking on the phone.

I hadn't noticed this cultural hold-over from the old, poor days before Botswana boomed with diamond mines until a late night police car chase outside our apartment. Since we live next to a busy road, we often hear ambulances and other sirens wailing in the evening. On this night, though, we witnessed a silent police car with flashing blue lights chasing a motorist. Perhaps his siren wasn't working. As the police sped up to close the gap between the vehicles, I could hear an officer inside nervously clear his throat over the public address loudspeaker bolted to the patrol car roof. This kind of thing must not happen often.

"Hello?! Hello?!" the policeman shouted into the loudspeaker microphone as the pursuit swept past. "Hello!? Hello?!" No command was given to "Pull over!" or "Stop the car!" Long after the officers and their quarry passed our apartment balcony, I could still hear the faint reverberations of the cop calling to the suspect vehicle, though both were more than a half-mile away.

"Hallooo! Hallooo! Hallooooo?"

3) I have been trying to gauge the level of hostility amongst the Botswana people against ex-patriate workers who hold some important positions of responsibility in this economy. I had heard resentment was growing at foreigners and even read a headline newspaper story in which President Quett Masire asked his people to be kinder to "the guest workers here from Europe." Yet I had never felt much anger personally directed at me. So when I became friendly with a husband and wife pair who worked at the University of Botswana, I put my question to them. Now, Ben Raseroka is a charming man with a dry wit. Kay is elegantly intelligent. Both were university-educated in South Africa, where they met and fell in love. Both were articulate about how those born in this country can resent European outsiders who appear to live like royalty, while many locals are less well off.

"Yes, I remember one time when a Botswana couple was leaving a party at our house with this ex-patriate couple," Kay said, her eyes gazing off into the distance as she remembered a particular incident. "This was a few years ago. Everyone had a good time together at this small dinner get-together and, after more than a few nightcaps, the evening was now ending. When they walked to the cars, the Botswana woman couldn't stop herself from speaking out when she saw the white couple had a new Mercedes. 'How do you people get so much money to keep swapping for a new car every year?' she blurted out. I understood her feeling. A Mercedes! Ben and I had to struggle along with our same car for years."

Shortly thereafter, Bobbie Jo and I walked with the two Botswana academics to their car to ride together to a restaurant for lunch. "Oh, we aren't taking your car, Ben?" asked Kay anxiously as we left. He grinned and shot back a mischievous look at his wife. "No dear, we'll take your car." I understood her embarrassment when we got out into the university parking lot. A new metallic blue Mercedes Benz stood waiting. "Well, I... I think I deserve a car like this now, at this stage in my life," Kay said sheepishly. I agreed with her, but still felt amused by this instance of a successful professional suddenly aware she resembled the target of her youthful indignation.

4) Another car incident also shows how Botswana is changing. We were driving a rental car back to the city at night, against the advice of every ex-patriate who has ever driven a vehicle in Africa. "It's suicidal to drive in the dark, with stray livestock and antelope always crossing the road," they had told me. Nevertheless, we had talked too long at a rural farm and now we had a 130-mile drive back to our hotel. Once, we had to brake quickly for an elephant that loomed huge in our headlights. A little later we came within a gasp of hitting a cow that had wandered out onto the pavement. With a reflexive twist of the steering wheel, our car skidded past the heifer's nose, leaving the smell of burned rubber in the air.

So Bobbie Jo and I were a bit shaken when we finally drove up to a pair of lanterns set on oil drums blocking the road just outside a small village, still 60 miles from our destination. As I slowed down to a crawl, a uniformed police officer wearing yellow reflectors on his shirt sleeves spun his arms back and forth like a windmill. I continued to cautiously inch the car forward. The arms, which were the only part of him I could see, began to pin-wheel in agitation. I stopped the car with a lurch.

"Why didn't you stop when I signaled? Where is your license? What nationality are you? Where is the car registration?" He began this barrage of questions once I rolled down my window. At the passenger window across from me, his companion officer began a similar inquiry with Bobbie Jo. "Why are you driving so late at night? Where are you coming from? Where are you going? How can you prove that this is your car? It isn't? How can you prove what you say is true, that this is a rental? What do you have for my Christmas box?" That last question was offered in a lighter, conciliatory tone of voice. I can recognize an invitation to bribe a mile away after living in West Africa for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer. I fumbled for papers and license and answered their other questions while I anxiously thought about my response to their final demand.

Now, I wasn't worried about the amount. Botswana is reputedly the least corrupt of any country in Africa. I can attest that most people I've met here are civic-minded, most police officers officious but scrupulous, and most low-level bank clerks and government bureaucrats unmotivated but honest enough. So if the cops are starting to take bribes, they wouldn't be bold enough to ask for more than 10 or 15 pula. Nor was I worried about the car. Hell, we almost died twice in head-on collisions with an elephant and a cow. Maybe these officers were doing me a favor if they went to the extreme of impounding my suspicious rental car. And I wasn't even anxious about the broader philosophical issue involved if I gave in to giving out a bribe: Would I be encouraging dishonesty and graft among those sworn to uphold the law? No, I wasn't thinking about any of the above. The very first thing I thought about was how I would mark it down in my monthly expense report. Would the institute honor an expense for "mandatory law enforcement Christmas present?" What if I didn't have a receipt?

I decided not to chance it. "Well, officer," I said in the heartiest voice I could muster. "I have a firm handshake for a man who has done his job well, staying up late at night just to let one last car get through the blockade. Good job! Good night!" After pumping his hand like a Chamber of Commerce president, I eased my foot off the brake and rolled the car slowly forward. The other guard lifted the pole from the oil drums. In the rear-view mirror I watched two silhouettes standing and staring at our

taillights. No bullets, no problems. I accelerated, thinking to myself that I preferred a run-in with the cows than the cops.

5) When I was still young and single and quite ignorant about the exigencies of love, I used to say that I would never marry a woman until I went backpacking with her. In that way, I told everyone who would listen, I would be sure to pick a wife who wouldn't be prissy and afraid of bugs. Well, I don't know how it happened, but Bobbie Jo slipped through before the backpacking-for-a-week test could be administered.

In the government-owned, single-room flat where we now live, every flat surface is teeming with cockroaches. Originally built more than a decade ago to house members of parliament when the national assembly was in session, this block of apartments has slowly declined into decrepitude. None of the politicians will ever stay here again. The screens are off, the windows are broken, the ceilings are topographical maps showing the brown-stain circles of recent leaks in the roof. But it's home. And it's cheap. I accept it. Bobbie Jo, on the other hand, has undergone a personality change after being subjected to this wildlife preserve for insects. She swears that, when I'm not present in the room, the roaches form the words "Get Out Now!" on the stained tile floor. Regular cucarachas like those in Southern California might have been easier for her to accept, but here in Southern Africa there are also flying "tree cockroaches" that can attain five inches in length.

"Yahhh! I just killed two with one blow!" she often yelps from the kitchen. "Come look!" For the rougher stuff, like the spiders the size that no poisonous creature should ever be allowed to attain, she calls for me. "Honey, come kill it now, or I'm on the next plane out of here," she says. I can try to explain to her the spider's niche in ecology, or the scruples of a man who would be a Buddhist, but it doesn't ever work. If the bug isn't too energetic, I can sometimes catch the critter in a glass and carry him outside. Most often, though, I have to use a shoe. To show my resentment at being forced to destroy a tiny but troublesome life, I usually use her shoe.

One night, I got my revenge. After idly playing with the red waxy covering from an imported Gouda cheese we bought on a whim for that night's dessert, I got an idea. The heat of my hand made the wax pliable, so I molded myself a six-legged creature of fearsome size. I gave him two enormous pinchers on front, to add an urgency and danger to his form. Then I casually leaned over Bobbie Jo, who sat reading a book in an armchair, and deftly placed the horrible little avenger-of-slaughtered-comrades near her elbow. After waiting several minutes while she sat absorbed in her book, I grew impatient for the fun to begin.

"What's that?" I asked dramatically, pointing for emphasis at the arm of the chair. "Oh, it's that novel I just bought," she replied distractedly without looking up.

"No, I mean that pincher bug right next to you," I cried, putting more feeling into my performance. That did it. Bobbie Jo jumped across the room, breathing heavily. When she regained her voice, Bobbie issued her usual death sentence from her perch atop the kitchen stool. "Kill it quickly, honey! Please!"

I stepped near the armchair, paused to look solemnly back at her, then smashed my hand down. Bobbie Jo shrieked in surprise at the loud slap, then looked at me in disgust for using my bare hand to crush the beast. I turned to her with the sticky red glop clinging to my fingers. Sniffing my palm, I tentatively nibbled at the smashed horror. "Not too bad," I said. "Tastes like chicken." My cackled at her stunned look finally gave away the practical joke.

6) A few weeks ago, few of my American friends would have recognized me after I lost 18 pounds from a severe case of salmonella food poisoning. I wore dark purple rings around my eyes, which had the vacant, miserable stare of someone who has suffered a great deal of pain. I can only blame myself: I made an overly adventurous decision to eat strips of dried meat as a culinary cross-cultural experience. For five days, my fever soared past 103 degrees, leaving me weak and delirious. Later, my sickness left me puzzled over a cultural misunderstanding.

My unintended adventure in illness began when Bobbie Jo and I rented a car for a trip out to a rural farm. Since we'd been depending on lifts for most of our time in Botswana, we gladly picked up a woman hitchhiker waving her arm dispiritedly in the heat. The Motswana (the singular term for a Botswana citizen) sat in the back seat and, as I drove along, pulled out a two-foot long piece of dried meat from her bag.

She began tearing off small strips with her teeth, showing great relish for the solid piece of mummified steak. When she saw me watching in the rear-view mirror, she offered me the full two-foot strip of dried sinew and gristle. I sniffed the meat while watching the road ahead. It didn't smell bad. I tried to nibble off the end, but it was like trying to eat my pair of leather loafers. I finally grabbed one end and began ripping the dried meat with my right canine tooth, getting a tear started. The road ahead rolled toward me unobserved at this point, for this was a challenge I had to take on. After a minute of frantic gnashing and jerking, I got a small piece of the beef before I handed the jerky back. It tasted like my loafer would taste: As if someone had worn this piece of meat on the bottom of their sweaty foot for several years.

It should have been a warning to me. I'd tried eating the stuff and found it unpalatable. But I began ruminating on the historical nature of what's called "biltong" in Botswana. Dried meat was the natural food of our earliest ancestors, as well as the aborigines of Australia and the Basarawa bushmen of the Kalahari. In the wild west of the United States, salted or jerked beef was the sustenance early settlers survived on. How could I turn up my nose at a vital food stuff that humankind has depended upon for thousands of years?

A few days later, driving the same distance from the farm back to the capital city, I found a meat shop in the village of Lobatse that sold me TWO pieces of biltong. Lobatse is the home of Botswana's meat commission, with a huge abattoir that sends hundreds of thousands of tons of meat to the European market. This had to be the best you could buy. As we drove off I happily gnawed on what had been terribly tough meat to begin with, before being hung outside raw for the blazing sun to dry and for rigormortis to stiffen into an edible plywood flesh.

"Do you want some, honey?" I said, with a false tone of optimism. My wife is a notoriously finicky eater, which infuriated me back in the United States. I am the cook in the family, making most dinners for the two of us. When I was still courting her, she would never touch the curried Indian dishes or the garlic-soaked pasta I made to impress her. I now prepare meals without even pepper to please her palate. The Botswana-produced biltong, I figured, would not be to her liking. "Are you serious?" she replied, true to character. "That's the most disgusting thing I've ever seen." She has a fetching way of wrinkling her nose in revulsion that she again demonstrated for me.

That evening, when we arrived home, I already felt a terrible rumbling in my stomach. I passed it off to hunger and gave myself an extra helping of bland rice and unspiced vegetables. The chills and stomach cramps began about 4 a.m., with the same evil violence as a demonic possession. I was rocking back and forth in agony, on my knees in a fetal position beside the bed, when Bobbie Jo turned on the bedroom light. "What did you eat that I didn't eat?" she asked rhetorically, gazing toward the ceiling with ill-concealed delight at being vindicated for being picky about food. "Oh yes, now I remember! That gross stuff. The biltong."

I spent the night crawling to the bathroom, until I finally gave up and lay down on the cool tiles in front of the toilet. I was in a predicament when the attacks of nausea and diarrhea hit simultaneously. As my fever soared past 103 and neared 104 degrees Fahrenheit, Bobbie Jo lost her sense of self-righteousness and began to look worried. Much later she told me she paced the floor in the other room, terrified, before she

would calmly walk back into the room with cold compresses and water. By 8 a.m., after I'd lost nine-tenths of my bodily liquids, I remembered we had to return the rental car that morning or pay for an extra day. And since I held the American Express card as the institute fellow, I had to be there to sign off on the bill.

My innards felt queasy but calm while returning the rental car, but then came the long walk back home. I unwisely decided that Bobbie Jo should go a different direction to buy juice, fruit, or anything else to rehydrate me. We parted ways on the roadside outside the Hertz office when a taxi van pulled up. Bobbie clambered into the back and waved goodbye from the van window. "You'll be alright?" she asked, looking like she doubted she'd ever see me again. "Yup, yup! Fine, fine! I'll see you back at the ranch," I replied, waving the taxi van on. As it sped off, dagger-stabs of stomach pain made me collapse into a crouch along the road.

Most of the peace-loving people of Botswana steered clear of me during that staggering journey home, for I must have looked bizarre. Not a single taxi van that I tried to flag down would stop. Clutching my stomach, I could lurch along for 100 feet before kneeling again along the asphalt roadway. I could have been mistaken for an exceptionally devout Muslim who pressed his forehead to the ground every few minutes, except that I muttered stifled groans instead of prayers of supplication. Prayers would have been more fitting, in retrospect. After more than an hour of this tight-lipped and anguished trudging, I made it four kilometers--just a half-kilometer from where we lived--before my stomach called a halt. Unfortunately, I sagged to the ground outside a secondary school that was letting out its boisterous students for the noontime break. Directly in front of the gate, the young Batswana (now that's the plural word for Botswana citizens) gathered around me as I retched bright yellow bile on their driveway. The pool of evil-smelling vomit looked like radiator fluid spilling from a very broken-down car. The children began to laugh. And from across the street, I could hear the booming mirth of the security guard at a housing construction site. I never saw any of them. I kept my head down: I had more important things to do. When I finally glanced up, I saw a teacher herding the kids in their school uniforms away. When our eyes met, he also laughed before turning back and walking inside.

Now at that point I looked even worse, with whatever had been left in my stomach smeared in my long blond beard. I took off my shoe and pulled off my sock to mop my face, because I lacked a handkerchief. That started another round of wild laughter from the remaining ring of youth. I stumbled on past them, wearing only one shoe and carrying my soiled sock and the other shoe in my hands. I didn't care why they found me funny, I just wanted to collapse in the privacy of my residence.

Four days of delirium later, I finally began to ask myself why the Batswana found my predicament so humorous. And why wouldn't anyone offer me assistance? Was I considered just a drunk on the street or was there more to it? Perhaps those school kids--and the adults like the taxi drivers, the security guard and the teacher--felt unable to deal with such an extraordinary, disconcerting situation. Their laughter was a response to their anxiety; inappropriate but impulsive. Probably none of them would ever again see the spectacle of an ex-patriate, a member of Botswana society's elite, drop to his knees before them and barf his guts out. White people must walk past these students to the luxury supermarkets or drive past them in air-conditioned cars, but they have never had appeared weak, miserable and desperate. I hope my public humiliation showed those kids that whites are real humans who suffer and get sick like they do, not two-dimensional images that step out from another dimension of glossy magazine ads and movie posters into the real world.

7) During those first weeks in Botswana, Bobbie Jo and I registered at the Botswana Press Agency as journalists to receive official permission to ask questions of people in this country. The government's Chief Press Officer, Moreri Gabakgore, gave us some succinct advice about Botswana culture that has proven invaluable. Had I heeded all his advice, in hindsight, I could have avoided a particularly unpleasant confrontation.

"Look a Botswana person only in the face," Gabakgore had cautioned. "Don't ever look him up and down, taking in his whole body. That's an insult." When interviewing a person, he also told us, start talking first and talk for awhile. "Say anything," Gabakgore said. "Even an amusing little story about something that has happened to you. Then you ask your questions. If you haven't said but one word, a Botswana man here will not want to talk. He won't feel comfortable." And before entering a village for the first time, get some background before walking in. "If you know a little information first, that will make a man want to add to your understanding of his village. If you walk straight in, they won't accept you. A better way is to find the elders, the headman, or the principal of the school to help you."

Best of all, the press officer said, is to find someone to announce your presence at a public meeting. "You'll have no trouble then, if you can be introduced there. We're a young country and the people can be... ahh... backward. Especially here in the south where the South Africans have been active. If you ask questions, people will expect you will pay them money. South Africans were the ones asking questions and buying information, so an explanation of your presence sets everyone at ease."

I had forgotten that last bit of advice when Bobbie Jo and I hitchhiked out to the oldest, most disreputable shanty town on the outskirts of Gaborone to attend a Sunday afternoon political

rally. Old Naledi had been a squatter camp for workers migrating from neighboring countries to work in Gaborone, until the mayor acknowledged the terrible health hazards and put in sewer lines, public water taps and electricity. Even after the renovations, though, most people consider Old Naledi a dangerous part of town where hoodlums live in squalor. The man who gave us a lift in his car asked us three times, to be sure, that we wanted to get out. "They call this place the Beirut of Botswana," he warned us.

The rally sponsored by the ruling Botswana Democratic Party was supposed to start in an hour, giving us plenty of time to visit a bar we spotted while walking through the heavily-rutted garbage-strewn dirt streets of the slum. Our entrance into the bar was a scene out of a Wild West movie. No, nobody was wearing chaps or cowboy hats. But everybody stopped talking, stopped smoking, stopped sipping their beers all at once to watch us walk in. In total silence I asked for two coca-colas, before curious eyes shifted elsewhere. Bobbie Jo and I sat uneasily on bar stools next to a lone man, who started up a conversation with us with an alarming remark. "I would get out of this area before nightfall," he said. "It's very violent here. That's why I'm drinking alone. I came to visit some friends living here, while all these other people--all of them!--are criminals." Our drinking companion didn't help us break the ice with the locals.

A pickup drove unsteadily past the bar while the driver, a one-man show, shouted unintelligible things into the microphone of a bullhorn mounted on top. When the high-decibel summons grew faint as he drove slowly off, I figured the rally was starting. We walked out of the bar and through the trash heaps, in the direction of another amplified voice. When we arrived at a small clearing in the shade of a big tree, a woman was alternately singing and shouting encouragement into another public address system aimed at an audience of 25 small children. After we waited two hours past the official meeting time, the crowd had not grown appreciably larger or older. Several pickups suddenly rumbled into the clearing with party supporters trucked in for the occasion, all dressed in black and red. I didn't conclude the ruling party is unpopular, but that Old Naledi hosts Zimbabweans, Zambians and Malawians who don't care about local politics.

Bobbie Jo and I felt swamped by the sea of Setswana language pouring out of the amplified loudspeakers. Once, when many eyes fixed on us in unison, I had the uneasy sense of being talked about by the microphone woman who kept pitching to the slow-gathering mob in a sing-song chant. "What does she say?" I whispered to another party member sitting nearby. "Oh, she says people can gather here to ask questions and the party will try to answer," the woman said. "But she says the party doesn't know everything. They can't answer all questions. Sometimes we don't know the answer, like 'Why are the white people sitting here?' That's what she says."

At that point, I should have asked to be introduced to the assembly. It would have made everyone feel comfortable, like Gabakgore said. Instead, I got up and walked to the back of the crowd in hopes of finding someone who could translate the proceedings for me. I approached one man in a brown two-piece suit. I never got a chance to ask for his help. "Good afternoon," I began with a big, foolish, howdy-do smile.

"Don't say anything to me!" he shouted. "You can't talk to me! You don't know me! You can't say 'Good Afternoon' to me." I was confused by his unprovoked animosity. I began again, without the smile, but got no further than before. "I'm sorry for you! Sorry! But I don't have to talk to you!" he shrieked. He was very frightened and, in a panic, looked like he would attack me if I stuck around. I carefully stepped back as he continued to cry out: "Get away! You can't talk to me! Sorry for you, so sorry!" I turned to others standing near, who also shrank away from me.

The incident disturbed me for a long time afterward, for no one in Botswana had ever reacted so negatively to me. By chance, while leafing through my journal, I re-discovered the advice that Gabakgore had given us many weeks earlier. He was right. For some of the less sophisticated people, a white skin denotes a South African spy. Without a formal introduction at the meeting, held in Setswana for a crowd who didn't know English and so had few dealings with whites, no one knew otherwise.

8) The role Peace Corps volunteers play in Botswana is strange. Or perhaps I have unreasonable expectations that all Peace Corps jobs would resemble my own experience as a gardening instructor in a rural African village. After talking with a few volunteers, I still have mixed feelings about their role here.

"I admit it can be bizarre compared to the normal Peace Corps experience they advertise in the United States," said Susan, a 28-year-old secondary school teacher just finishing her two-year stint. While volunteers in Botswana do experience the stress and culture shock of living in a foreign country, they have the additional frustration of never knowing the traditional culture that makes an exotic land special. Like many of the 200 or more Peace Corps volunteers here, Susan initially found out she had not been provided accommodation near her assigned school. Instead, the Botswana government put her up at the downtown President Hotel at a cost of 185 pula a night (US\$92) and a 50-pula-a-day (US\$25) meal allowance. This set-up made meaningful cross-cultural exchange difficult. For 12 weeks she stayed in room 243, trying to practice her local language skills with the doorman. "Dumela, rra!" she would call out in the traditional greeting to the uniformed man. "Dumela, Room Two-Four-Three!" he would answer. The hotel bill for Susan's "volunteer" service came to US\$20,000, but that was minuscule compared to other volunteers. The fellow American teacher who helped her make the

difficult adjustment had been at the President for five months. He showed her the best restaurants around town. "We were envious of the other volunteers who lived at the Gaborone Sun Hotel," Susan related. "They had a pool and even a casino to gamble in." She left Botswana last month, regretting that she never seemed to click with the local culture. No wonder.

Peace Corps volunteers are supposed to live at the same economic level as their local counterparts and therefore receive a small stipend to live on. While most of the Botswana teachers drive new cars paid for by government loans, the volunteers walk, take buses or hitchhike to work. Volunteers say their Botswana co-workers think they're weird for appearing to be so poor, because no ex-patriate has ever lacked for money. Often the volunteers are accused of faking poverty, or else derided for being so stupid to work for a pittance. Either way, it isn't a harmonious cross-cultural exchange. Other volunteers manage textile factories or fly to South Africa to make marketing pitches for locally-made pumps. By themselves. They aren't training anyone to take over their positions, just like teaching positions have been left vacant during two decades of Peace Corps presence in Botswana. There's always another volunteer coming.

9) Bobbie Jo and I attended a very formal, very Western wedding reception for a just-married Botswana couple. The meat was prepared differently, but the sit-down meal wasn't too much different than what you would find in the United States. The music sounded like New Orleans jazz, which the small band played with gusto on tubas, trumpets and drums while marching around the guests seated beneath a huge canopy. Near the head table sat more important relatives, like Botswana's Vice-President Peter Mmusi, surrounded by bodyguards and a bevy of his dolled-up nieces.

I noticed a drunken man dressed in rags, wandering around with a beer in his hand. I spotted another mendicant sitting proudly with Mmusi's female relatives. He began pontificating about something with sloppy gestures that splashed wine from his glass. When they disdainfully moved away, he reached across the table and drained their glasses with satisfaction. Our friend who had brought us to the reception explained that Botswana tradition insists that all the people of the village, even the poorest, should be allowed into a wedding feast. The more people at the party, even drunks and beggars, the more prestige accrued. "The worst punishment an African can receive is to throw a wedding party or funeral reception and have no one come," the friend said. "Then you know your true standing in the community, despite your wealth."

Those are the stories that are fit to print. The others I'll tell you when you come visit sometime in the next two years.

Sincerely,



Received in Hanover 1/24/92