

Johnny Gumb's Diary of His Return Visit to Mochudi in 2003

*Edited by Sandy Grant**

Background to Johnny Gumb's Diary of His Return Visit to Mochudi in 2003

In early 1965, Johnny Gumb, then aged 18, came on an interview with Naomi Mitchison in a national newspaper in which she explained that she had been given an ancient printing press which she was having shipped to Mochudi in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. She had earlier visited Mochudi for the installation of Kgosi Linchwe II of Bakgala-ba-Kgafela. When Johnny met Naomi, she told him more about the press and about Mochudi. She then put him in touch with Martin Ennals, General Secretary of the National Council of Civil Liberties, who had been instrumental in setting up a Community Centre there which was run by Sandy Grant. Ennals was able to pull strings so that Voluntary Service Overseas took Johnny on as one of their volunteers.

Johnny was remarkably well qualified to take on this job. He had been a keen printer since the age of 12, had worked on ancient hand presses, then on modern equipment and had then studied printing technology at the London College of Printing.

By a strange coincidence, Johnny's grandfather, Leopold Kessler, had travelled through Bechuanaland in 1892 on his way to Matabeleland and his diary can be found in the Botswana National Archives and Records Services.

In September 1965, Johnny arrived in Mochudi where Naomi's old press had finally arrived. He set it up and trained a small number of local young men to operate it. The press was at the time the only printing facility in the country and produced a wide range of work - stationery for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), wedding invitations, political fliers, orders of service for funerals, membership cards for the burial society and so on. As the business grew, Johnny added two more presses which he bought from second hand dealers in Johannesburg. At that time there was no electricity in Mochudi, so all the machines were hand (or foot) operated.

Johnny found life in Mochudi to be exciting and full of interest. Visitors to the Community Centre included a remarkable range of people, students, teachers, Chief Linchwe and his friends, people connected with the tribal administration and involved with the new government as well as overseas visitors for whom Mochudi was a convenient trip out from the capital.

Johnny's two-year stint in Mochudi left a deep and lasting impression on him. For many years after his return to London, he thought about making a return visit but felt that he would be disconnected from modern Botswana, and that Botswana would have little time for him. Eventually in 2003, knowing that this had been in his mind for some time, his wife persuaded him to make the journey, to see what had happened to the people and places that he had known. The diary is his record of that trip.

Botswana Diary, November 2003

Day 1, Nov 12th

Arrived late morning at Gaborone airport, on Botswana Airways flight from Johannesburg. Raining gently, going to get wet on walk from plane to terminal building. A very English worry, quite unnecessary -I had forgotten the unhurried pleasure of walking through *warm* rain.

Sandy Grant waiting for me, it was good to see each other. After 30 odd years I could not have missed him, older of course, but the same welcoming smile, the face that looks as though he knows so

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much. Which he does. Outside, Sandy's very unsmart truck, which he was keen to fill with parasite foliage from the trees in the car park, to feed their goats

Rain stopping, sun coming out. I'm already starting to feel comfortably at home. Drive round a mass of roundabouts and main roads on the way into Gabs [Gaborone]. People walking at the roadside not so different from my memories, but the traffic is of course from a different world.

Half way round a roundabout, the truck stalls and won't restart. Jump out and start to push, eventually a passerby helps, together we get the truck into a side road. I've only been here 10 minutes, but truly this is like I've never been away. In the 1960s we seemed to spend half our time pushing broken or bogged down vehicles.

We walk through a brief thunder storm into the city centre to a couple of Sandy's friends to ask about a mechanic, got a lift back to the truck, and waited for the mechanic to arrive. We spent perhaps a couple of hours waiting by the truck, talking and watching the world go by. So many questions to ask, so much of our lives to fill in, the answer to a question was never completed before the next question arose. I suddenly remembered my delicate English skin, in the hot sun, fresh from November London, without a thought for my carefully prepared sun creams and hat, all still packed away.

Eventually Sandy's wife, Elinah, arrived. A really charming woman, around 20 years younger than Sandy, full of good humour. Mechanics eventually turned up, worked on the engine for a while, got it going. More driving around Gabs, I am quite unable to get my bearings or remember any of the buildings. But despite that, there is a familiar feeling.

We bought beer and pies. All very convivial. Sandy and Elinah took me to my guest house, inspected it, lent me some cash, and were eventually persuaded to leave me there to my own devices. It seems excellent: central position, friendly staff, a good-sized room with everything I could need. Unpacked, made myself at home, got ready to take myself out for the evening.

I'm back in Botswana, after 36 years, the fantasy has become reality! What am I going to do with this prize? The only place that I remember in Gabs and can still find, is the President Hotel. It had a large easy-going bar on the ground floor, and a small smarter bar upstairs. Walking there through the dusk, I feel OK but a little conspicuous. One group of people greets me as I pass, others take no notice. I resolve to look straight ahead and purposeful, keep eye contact to a minimum.

The President's upstairs bar was dreadful: a crush of over excited people, the atmosphere crackling with booze, money, and sex. Two white men sitting at the bar, ready to draw me into their world. I backed out fast. After a long walk, I found my way to an area of shops and fast food places known as The African Mall. There was an Indian restaurant there where Elinah had earlier wanted to eat, so it seemed the place for my evening. Good food, pleasant atmosphere, gentle walk home to bed.

Day 2, Nov 13th

Breakfast over, time to get started contacting people. I started with Douglas Moeketsi, who had been a close friend, working at Radio Botswana in its very early days. Phoned his house, forwarded to mobile number, pleased to hear from me and said he would be round in 10 minutes. Same bloke I remembered. Sat in his car while he zoomed round Gabs on various missions. He is a consultant, organizing documents and permits for foreigners. Met his son, an accountant, his nephew, who was a school student in Mochudi and remembered me, and the secretary who I remembered as a grumpy girl in the Radio Botswana office, and is now a grumpy elderly lady. Douglas was impressed that she exchanged greetings and gave me the time of day.

To Douglas' house to greet Jean, who now runs a kindergarten. Big house, children's stuff all over the place. Decided I should accompany Douglas on an overnight trip to Rustenburg leaving this afternoon,

to visit his aunt. Phoned and left message for Sandy to let him know, packed a quick bag back at the guest house, and off. Things are starting to move quickly.

Tlokweng border was, in the 1960s, a gate in a high wire fence, perhaps a couple of Botswana policemen, a bit of no man's land, then the same at the South African side. Now we have something a bit like a motorway service area, clean brick buildings, drink vending machines, lots of uniformed staff, computers, forms to fill in. Douglas is well known here, lots of banter. Huge trucks going north, through Botswana to Namibia, Zimbabwe and beyond.

Drove through to Zeerust, where we stopped to eat. Sleepy old Zeerust I remembered so well. A typical South African country *dorp*, strongly Afrikaner, I had been there many times in the 1960s -to the dentist, to have a car fixed, on my way to Johannesburg. In those days it was strict apartheid. Now, Douglas and I sat together in a Wimpy bar and relaxed. Still unusual for black and white to be together in this sort of place, we were tolerated by the Afrikaner waitress and manager, but they didn't seem very pleased about us. Douglas reminded me that when he and Jean were planning their wedding in 1966, they had asked me to be one of their six 'best men'. In the event, the ceremony was held at their parents' home town of Mafeking, where apartheid had made my involvement impossible.

Long drive to Rustenburg. Douglas's aunt lived in a corrugated iron and timber shack in a shanty town on the outskirts. A cheerful old lady, delighted to see Douglas, and happy that he had brought his white friend to her house. Small children keen to shake my hand. The aunt was needed in Mochudi to arrange a transfer of family land to Douglas, so we agreed a meeting place to pick her up early the following morning.

On now to the other side of the tracks, to Jean's cousin, where we were to spend the night. Jean's cousin, Dudu, is an economist who had worked as a trader on the Pretoria stock exchange, and her husband is a gynecologist. Both black, they live in splendor in what was once an exclusive white suburb. All opulence, children with all the right gear on, this must be the new face of South Africa which the tourist board would want me to see. Red wine, a big meal, a comfortable guest suite, I was soon asleep.

Day 3, Nov 14th

Picked up Aunt, travelling as all African women do, with a bundle and a blanket. I drove, which caused mirth at the toll booth, where Douglas told the staff 'you see, in Botswana, we employ white men as our drivers!

At Zeerust we stopped for shopping -the Rand/Pula exchange rate makes South Africa good value for Batswana.

Back in Gabs for midday, starting to notice the heat. After a pizza lunch, went to the National Museum, which is strong on stuffed animals and tableaux of early Kalahari inhabitants, and has a very pleasant central garden.

Then spent time having a long walk around Gaborone. Still finding it very hard to recognize more than a few basic buildings from the past. I was fascinated by the government houses which were new when I arrived in 1965 and were strictly graded according to the rank of the civil servants who lived in them. From the top (Superscale) down to type 2, they were mostly white, from there down through 3, 4, and 'low cost' they would have been mostly black occupants. Now, these symbols of status have become a hotchpotch of residential and all sorts of other things: dentist's surgery, hairdresser's salon, photographer's studio, church, acupuncturist, solicitor's offices and so on. Some have been joined together, a couple I saw had small shops built into the garden wall, selling drinks and food to passersby. The big smart houses all had electric gates and alarmed razor wire.

Both in the streets and in the shops, fewer whites than I had expected. Still plenty of unpaved or

untarred areas between streets and groups of houses, where people set up stalls under the trees. Streets are mostly clean and tidy, I came across a group of uniformed ladies picking up litter. The atmosphere is very pleasant, but I am still only just coming to terms with the fact that when I was last here it was hard to move without bumping into friends and acquaintances, and now I am really a stranger.

A brief but heavy rain storm, then dusk, which of course comes very quickly. As I walked out to find an evening meal, there were swarms of flying insects round all the lights. At the foot of each lamp post, there was a group of frogs feasting on the fallen insects. By the time I had eaten and walked back, both insects and frogs were gone.

Day 4, Nov 15th

Time to move on, to Oodi (Sandy's home) and Mochudi. Walked to the rail and bus station area, can just about make out a road or two that I remember, but nice old trading stores near station, and the old hotel, all gone. Now supermarkets, furniture shops and so on. Large crowds everywhere, footbridge over the railway to bus station. Wide variety of big/small and ancient/modern buses, going to every village and town in the country, and beyond to Harare and Joburg. This is all new to me; in the '60s almost all public transport was the railway, and the roads were all sand and gravel. Now the trains are under used, and the roads are tarmac.

Eventually found the right bus for Oodi: 20 people plus children and baggage, crammed into a Toyota minibus. Very cheap, very uncomfortable, good music. The Gaborone urban sprawl goes on for a long way, and has dreadful names: Block 7, Phase 3, Extension 6 ... and of course Broadhurst, which sounds like Surrey (in England) but isn't.

Oodi wasn't a village I had known well, so being lost there was no surprise. Eventually Elinah and son came to fetch me from my wanderings around the bus stop. A very nice house, with quirky combination of old and new bits to it, and a dramatic garden in and around large round rocks, with a *rondavel* (round thatched hut) at one end. A magnificent view from the *stoep* (verandah).

We had a cold lunch, and I showed Sandy my stack of photographs from 1965/7. As I had hoped, this was the first of many occasions when my old photos caused great delight and interest. Youngsters then, who were still recognizable and had grown into all sorts, good and bad. Old folks well remembered and long gone, and views of the village of Mochudi as it had been, and as I was soon to see, not a lot like today.

We set out in Sandy's repaired truck. What had been a sand road, is now a four-lane dual carriageway as far as the small village of Morwa. The final five or six miles to Mochudi are good tarmac main road. Morwa looked good, many modern houses leading into Pilane, where the old garage is still standing, sad and small, the new road having bypassed it. Rampa's garage at Pilane had been a place of great importance: cool drinks, puncture repairs, hand pumped petrol, lots of wonderful talk. A modern garage is now at the road junction, with plenty of traffic and people in all directions. Pilane station is much as it was, though of course not with the importance it once had.

Driving from Pilane into Mochudi, I am going through some turmoil. There are buildings, some of them quite large, on both sides of the road that used to be open country. A school, two or three government departments, shops, a motel of sorts, a funeral parlour. I am confused by places which should be familiar but are strange to me, and I know that around every corner, this is going to get worse. Phaphane, which was the District Administration centre looks a bit decrepit. The police buildings and vet department are still in use, but the old District Commissioner's office and house are empty. It seems the District Commissioner's office was purely a colonial institution, now replaced by a Magistrate's Court and a string of government departments.

We arrive at Mochudi proper. Change has been enormous, but the change is progress. I can

recognize the post office, the secondary school, the Community Center. There are tarmac roads in several directions, numerous large modern shops, a telecommunications tower, even a bureau de change. I knew it would no longer be the dusty tribal village of my memory, but this is all a bit stunning. We walk around the Community Centre and find the rondavel where I had lived. It still looks in pretty good condition, has acquired a satellite dish and a security grill, and a family of chickens are pecking around it. I could quite happily see myself living in it again.

There is a generally busy, cheerful feel around the place, despite the strangeness of the built environment, I think I could still feel at home here. We drive up through the heart of the village, many new roads which confuse my sense of direction, still some of the old-style thatched houses, but not many. The *Kgotla*, cattle *kraal* and tribal offices are still much as I remember them. On up to the museum which Sandy opened some years after I left, in an old school building in a beautiful hill top position. A lot to see in the museum: old photographs and letters, pivotal moments in the history of Mochudi and the Bakgatla tribal area, domestic and agricultural artifacts. Sandy had done me proud with a newly completed display of my old Mochudi Press. I'll need to come back and spend more time here later. At the museum I met Hardy Kachere, their Zimbabwean assistant, and Kwapeng Modikwe, from the Daily News.

From the museum, down to Ish Matlhaku's bar with Hardy and Modikwe. Drinking outside the bar, joined by others, more excitement and mirth with my old photos. The Botswana football team were playing Lesotho on the bar TV. Match over, game won, qualifying for a place in the 2004 African Cup, huge rejoicing. Chief Linchwe arrived and joined us. Starting to feel almost like vintage Mochudi -beer, good humoured company, warmth, big change is that an electric fridge now means the beer is actually cold. Meeting Linchwe again was impressive. When I was last here he was a young Chief, recently married, with a patchy reputation. He lived fast, and how long he could last seemed a fair question then. He has lasted very well. Filled out, but still looking good for his age, he has an important and respected position in the House of Chiefs, and whatever people think privately, they all show him public respect. He arranged that we should meet again the next day.

Drove back to Oodi, relaxed and ate supper on Sandy's stoep. Then out for the evening with Elinah and her elder son, to sample the local bars. At each one we picked up a small group of their friends. There was good music, people dancing under the stars, I was very happy. Spent the night at Sandy and Elinah's, too tired to worry about the mass of insects flying around my room.

Day 5, Nov 16th

On the way out of Oodi, stopped to visit the weavers' co-operative. They produce bags, garments, hangings, which by any standards are good. To keep going they desperately need a wider market. On to Mochudi, where Maocha Ralefala, our cook/cleaner from the old Community Center, is waiting for me. Apart from her job working for Sandy and me in the '60s, Maocha had been good company, and had been our guide and interpreter in all manner of places and situations; she had been a big part of our lives in Mochudi. Big emotional reunion. Now in her middle 60s, she had dressed up to greet me, trials of life and the climate had certainly aged her. But still recognizable, and still the same outbursts of laughter. I met her two daughters and granddaughter; another daughter, the success of the family, had tragically died five years ago. When I knew her, she had just one son -now apparently estranged from the rest of the family.

With her umbrella to protect us from the sun, we embarked on what were to be several long, slow walks through Mochudi, visiting and greeting friends, aunts, cousins, important personages, often with the introduction: 'this is Johnny Gumb, he has come, after 36 years, all the way from London, to visit *me*'.

Generally, I found meeting Mochudi people, some I had known before and some I had not, to be as much fun and as fascinating as I could have hoped for. The general look of the village however, for me was

sad. I remembered warm ochre walls and houses, built of mud brick and thatch. Progress has dictated grey concrete breeze blocks, and corrugated iron or tiled roofs. I had a romantic westerner's memory, which of course is quite unfair on today's inhabitants. They are pleased to be able to show that they now have electricity, piped water, tarmac roads, and no longer need to mix the mud and cow dung for their walls and collect thatching grass from many miles away. Maocha took the point, and gamely tried to find me as many old houses as she could.

A lift up to the Kgotla, then walked on up to the museum, met Sandy, down to Ish Matlhaku's bar, on to Tshire's house. Tshire is Chief Linchwe's sister, a real bundle of fun, living in the royal house that I remember as Linchwe's step mother's home. From there back to the bar, to spend more time with Linchwe. Eventually caught a bus back to Gabs. Back to the Indian restaurant for a peaceful end to a hectic weekend.

Day 6, Nov 17th

Various messages for me at guest house, then a phone call from Dorcas Magang inviting me to lunch at Phakalane. This is big stuff. I had known Dorcas and David Magang when they were students in London in the late '60s. People now mentioned his name in hushed tones. He had established a successful law practice, held various ministerial posts, been successful in business. He and his two sons had now established a huge golf estate and country club at Phakalane, about six miles outside Gaborone. As Douglas and Jean Moeketsi put it, 'The Magangs own half of our capital city'.

The guest house staff were wildly impressed, organized a taxi, checked my outfit, saw to it that I was presentable. The man at the Phakalane security gate had my name and waved us through. A magnificent collection of lounges, bars, terraces, restaurant areas, an ornamental lake with flamingoes. Golf links stretching into the distance, with various villas being built around the perimeter. First David, then Dorcas, then the two sons arrived, who both insisted on calling me Mr Gumb. Charming young men had taken A levels in England, then business degrees at Birmingham. A daughter is currently at Westminster University. We had a good lunch, remembering old times in London -they had found me in their photograph album the night before. Very focused on the empire they are building, which they are right to be proud of, and very aware that success on that scale is certain to arouse suspicion and envy.

David dropped me back at the guest house in his Mercedes, which rather upset my credibility with the ragged crowd of Zimbabweans who hung around the street where I lived. They are blamed for all the (not very much) crime in Botswana, so presumably I would now be robbed. I never was.

Had a restful afternoon, ready for the evening: 'Fox' Ditsheko. Fox had been a young clerk in the District Commissioner's office during my time in Mochudi. On hearing I was in the country, he was determined we should relive old times together. Try as I might, I am finding it very hard to remember him at all, though he is adamant that we were good friends. Sandy assures me he is a splendid bloke, so here we go.

Picked me up from the guest house, I just about recognized his face, which of course I greeted warmly. First to his house, to introduce his wife (had studied hospital management in Scotland), son (had studied I'm not sure what in Bolton) and daughter. Then out to very nice Portuguese restaurant, where we had a really good evening together. Fox has had a fascinating career in government service, had worked in Seretse Khama's private office, traveled extensively across Africa, Europe and the Americas, and is now working on the organization of next year's general election. Had a lot of interesting things to say about Robert Mugabe, and about Seretse's time as president and the legacy he has left.

Despite my poor memory, we clearly had known each other well. Fox reminded me of people and incidents I had not thought of for a very long time. He was the first of several people keen to take me to visit Game City, a huge new shopping complex on the outskirts of Gaborone, a fascinating draw for locals,

who found it hard to accept that it was the last place I would want to spend time visiting.

Day 7, Nov 18th

Caught the usual packed minibus to Mochudi, found my way to Maocha's house, where we had a small but emotional exchange of presents. She had a woven fruit basket 'for my wife', and I had a bag of sweets (which she had constantly begged for in the old days) with a decent amount of money tucked into it. We did one of our long walks through the village, eventually climbing up to the museum. The sun was hot, and Maocha is not young, so a long cool drink and a rest there, during which I spent more time looking through the collections, was very welcome for both of us.

Eventually back down to Maocha's house, to be greeted by her granddaughter; about thirteen years old, beautiful spoken English, enquiring, polite, composed, quite unshy and delightful. I hope against so many odds she manages to stay that way.

Before catching the bus back to Gabs, I met 'Super' Pilane, who had taken over the press in Mochudi when I left in 1967. Missing a few teeth, now running a taxi service, still had a hint of the 'duck and dive' about him.

Due at Douglas and Jean's house for supper. Walked there through the darkening Gaborone streets, good big hot meal, finished off with ice cream with whisky poured over it! Various family and friends also in and out during the course of the evening, it was good to talk through with Douglas and Jean some of the people and places I had seen since we last met -only four days ago, but so much packed in it seemed much longer. I am starting to feel a bit knackered.

Day 8, Nov 19th

I feel the need to get about a little more freely, so have arranged to rent a car. Bank, dry cleaning, film processing, shopped for a little food, tried and failed to buy a decent map. Modikwe (the Daily News reporter I had met in Mochudi) phoned, to ask me to come for an interview. Drove to meet him at the government Media Centre, which houses press, radio and TV. A gleaming modern complex, everyone so friendly and approachable. Even the gate keeper at the entrance wanted to talk to me about the ups and downs of Tony Blair as Prime Minister.

The interview was enjoyable and followed by a lengthy session with a Daily News photographer. Later, Modikwe talked to me about his earlier job, as a member of the press team on overseas visits with the Presidential party. He had an extraordinary story -had arrived on one occasion at Heathrow separated from the rest of the official party, took the tube into central London, fell asleep and didn't get off till Mile End. Walking the streets there, unable to orientate himself and without English money, a helpful old lady sorted him out and insisted on giving him £20. Batswana can be very endearing people, and I could imagine that happening.

With my new-found independent transport, I decided to spend a day or two on my own. I drove out to Molepolole, larger than Mochudi and further to the West. The country side looked very good, having recently had quite a bit of rain. Goats and donkeys all over the place, plenty of cattle but they still look very thin (the recent rain had broken a long period of drought). Molepolole was not a place I had known well before, but it had a busy and prosperous feel to it.

Eventually I found my way to Kopong, a sleepy 'traditional' village, with a lot more mud and thatch than I had seen till now, and then to 'Arne's Horse Safari'. This was a possible place to stay a night, which I had read about. A small weaving and tea shirt silk screening workshop, staffed partly by disabled people, a kraal of horses for visitors to ride, and three stone built cottages to rent. Set on the side of a hill, this is a peaceful, beautiful place, with a heart stopping view across the plains. I needed to calm down

and this was the place for it. No food was provided, so one of the staff came with me back to Kopong and helped me to buy food and drink. I settled down outside my cottage to an evening of cold baked beans, pilchards, some of the local sour porridge, and a few cans of beer. Heaven. I was joined for a while by Arne, a Swedish carpenter who owned and had built the place, and together we watched the sun set, and then distant lightning dancing across the sky.

Day 9, Nov 20th

Arne brought me breakfast and lent me a map. I said my goodbyes to the delightful staff and set off to drive to Kanye. Through the village of Thamaga, this route had in the '60s been isolated sand tracks, but as with so much of Botswana, is now easy to drive tarmac roads. Not quite so romantic, but it does mean a visitor can see a lot of the country in very little time, and for the local Batswana, it has of course opened up so many more possibilities of employment and opportunity. Beautiful birds in many places, also baboons on the road here and there.

From Kanye to Lobatse, where I tried to contact my old friend Julian Nganunu, who now works at the High Court. Back up to Gaborone, where there are messages to phone Modikwe at the Daily News, and Margaret Taylor. Margaret was a VSO teacher who I had known here in 1965/6, and I had no idea that after marriage to a South African, she had returned here in 1969, and never left. We arranged to meet the following week.

Later that day I had been invited to visit two of the staff from my guest house, at their place in Broadhurst. This is a not very exciting part of Gabs, and it was worth being reminded that ordinary people in ordinary jobs do not live here in much comfort. A crumbling and crowded building, with rooms and communal kitchens and washing areas, perhaps built 30 years ago. Their room was a shabby and congested jumble, including a galvanized aluminum tub to wash in. This is of course where they live only while they work in Gaborone. What they consider to be home, is a village many hundreds of miles to the north.

Day 10, Nov 21st

Back to Mochudi, where Maocha is waiting to go with me up to Artesia, a village in the north of the Kgatleng District. We hope to visit there 'Lady Gas' alias Mohumagadi Gasetwane Pilane to give her full title. She is the widow of Linchwe's father and had been an important part of life in Mochudi during my stay there; she had given me a farewell party in her house on my last night in 1967.

Artesia is dusty and windy, but the houses are in good condition and there are plenty of people about. Sadly, we will not see Lady Gas; she has been taken to hospital in Johannesburg, with a cancer. (She died a month later.) Having done the rounds of Maocha's Artesia relatives, we settled into a friendly bar and relaxed for a while. Back down the road to the village of Pilane, to visit one of Maocha's Herero friends. The Hereros migrated to Botswana from Namibia in the early 20th century, and the women still wear distinctive clothes which they copied from the early German missionaries. As we left, Maocha amazed me by mentioning that her friend was from 'German South West'. It ceased to be a German colony in 1918, but it seems old names die hard.

After dropping Maocha back home in Mochudi, on the way out of the village I decided to stop and climb Phapane hill. This is a classic '*kopje*' a more or less conical rocky hill, that rises from the surrounding eroded plain. It lies just outside Mochudi, and I remembered climbing it in a dust storm at midnight on independence night, September 30th 1966 to help light one of a series of beacons. Now, the effort of the climb, the sun slanting through the clouds, the huge panoramic view from the top, all combined to leave me quite emotional. I sat on the rocks at the top and watched the shadows lengthen, thinking what an extraordinary corner of the world this was, that could still have such a powerful pull on me after half a life time of absence.

Driving on to Oodi, I had to force myself to keep my eyes on the road rather than on the sunset. Over supper with Sandy and Elinah, we swapped news and anecdotes about the various people I had met since I was last with them -there seem to be very few people in this part of Botswana who they do not know, either directly or by reputation. Staying the night with them, as I am going with Sandy in the morning to a big Mochudi funeral.

Day 11, Nov 22nd

A very early start, as funerals here, due to the heat later in the day, start around 7 in the morning. The funeral was of David Molefi, a prominent local gentleman. I didn't remember him, but I had known his wife Connie, who had been Mochudi's telephone operator when I lived here. It was raining off and on, which had turned the ground muddy. We stood with the crowd outside the family *lelapa* (homestead), which was already full of mourners, during a succession of speeches, interspersed with prayers and hymns. As more people continued to arrive, vehicles and ladies' smart shoes slithered in the mud. I had not thought ahead and felt conspicuously under dressed. Hundreds of people, some smart from the capital, just one or two other whites.

From the house, a very long procession of assorted cars and trucks followed the hearse (a lavish white six wheeled Mercedes) to the graveyard. Sandy and I were driven by Seth Rampa, one of the sons of Rampa owner of the garage at Pilane who I had known well. One of my popular old photos was of his father, taken before he had been born, so that at least one found a good home. Seth had done well, he is a pharmacist in Gaborone.

At the graveyard, the immediate family sat under an awning, and there was a small choir for the hymns. We were joined by Chief Linchwe, wearing crocodile shoes and carrying an umbrella with a carved dog's head handle, very affable. After the burial, back to the family house for food and drink and pay respects. Huge numbers are being fed, women in one yard, men in another. Funeral (also wedding?) food was a large plate of samp (a sour porridge), cabbage, and mashed/bashed/shredded beef which is a local favourite. It all tasted rather better than it sounds. Sandy left early, after we had been talking to the local BDP [Botswana Democratic Party] (ruling party) member of parliament, about the general election which is expected in 2004.

I asked him to take me into the family house, partly to pay my respects to the widow, but mostly because I knew Chief Linchwe's wife would be in there -I hadn't yet greeted her and was worried that I might fail to recognize her. I needn't have worried, she jumped up to greet me and pulled me outside to talk. When Linchwe married, about half way through my time in Mochudi, she had quickly become a bright part of the local social life, and I had last met her in London, around 1970, when Linchwe was appointed Botswana's ambassador to Washington. She seemed to have worn well, and we arranged to meet again later in the week.

I sat on the porch talking to Linchwe and others. We were brought drinks, which seemed very much like homemade ginger beer. It is well known that as a chief, Linchwe has had many ups and downs, and must have annoyed many people in his time; but nobody moved in or out of the house without giving him a very respectful greeting.

From the funeral house, up to the museum, to see if Elinah was still there. She had been told to expect a visiting group, of all things, policemen from Sierre Leone. They were attending a conference in Gaborone, and this was to be their trip outside the capital. Apparently, this is not unusual, the government will only help finance the museum to a tiny extent but thinks nothing of expecting its staff to wait around all through a weekend to entertain their visitors. They had failed to arrive, so on her way through the village Elinah dropped me at the house of one of the teachers who I had known well in the 60s.

When I last saw Morekwe, she had been a young primary school teacher, expecting her first child.

Now nearly 60 and a widow, she had four children and a couple of grandchildren. She had a son who had become a preacher and was now working the bible belt of the southern USA. Rightly proud of the way education had progressed in Mochudi, Morekwe took me to see the school of which she was deputy head, and later to visit the Teachers' Centre, where I was encouraged to say a few words to a group of young teachers on a course she was running. It didn't matter too much what I said to them, but anyway they seemed pleased.

With Morekwe to visit Henry Motlhatlhedhi and his family. I had known him as a primary school headmaster, now sadly has had a stroke, but managing reasonably well. He like so many people I met, had had an interesting career. He had been appointed as a school inspector, and sent on a training course at Newcastle University, with happy memories of the Geordie accent, and Newcastle Brown Ale. Later, as a senior inspector, he was sent on another course at the University of Michigan. People whose best hope of experience in my time had been a spell in apartheid South Africa, now had a wide international perspective.

Then for more fun with the old photos, on to the home of another of the old teaching fraternity, M.G. Ditshwene - always known as 'MG'. She had heard a week ago from Douglas Moeketsi that I was in the country and ticked me off for not visiting sooner. I remembered her as tall, lean, and with unusually high cheek bones, and there she was, just the same.

Day 12, Sunday Nov 23rd

A quiet domestic morning, readying myself for a lunch date with Julian Nganunu. As a law student, Julian had been a good friend in London, around 1967/9. He was part of the group that included David and Dorcas Magang and a number of others, who as the relatively small educated elite of the time, had all risen to various positions of prominence. Julian is now Chief Justice of the High Court.

Drove out to his house, which, naturally, is in the exclusive suburb of Phakalane. Julian was not yet back from visiting his elderly mother, so I spent a little time with his wife, who is Swedish. They have designed and built a large impressive house, full of art and beautiful things. A large garden with pool, barbecue area, all very nice. His wife was a little gloomy on the subject of security - apparently all their neighbours have been broken into, so she is expecting to be next. She also has a high-powered job, as head of the new Ministry of Technology and Communications. I did not find her an easy person to spend time with.

Julian was his old cheerful self, very unstuffy and easy to be with. Wife was not feeling too well, so decided just the two of us would go out to lunch - which of course meant the Phakalane Golf Club. When I had lunched there the previous Monday with the Magangs it had been almost empty; now the weekend, the car park was packed. But I am with an important person, so parking and table space was no problem.

We had a delightful lunch on the terrace: hot and cold buffet would have been ample, but we followed that with a full plate of barbecued lamb and turned down the sweet course. The diners were a great mixture of Batswana and South Africans, black and white, several large family parties, all serenaded by a white South African singing selections from 1970s and 80s pop music. There was much table hopping, various people came to greet Julian. In due course all the Magangs came to see us and went on to greet and welcome many of the diners. They really work well as a family unit and put their all into what they are doing.

I gathered from Julian that he had been instrumental in appointing Sandy to the Independent Electoral Commission, which is supervising next year's general election. Everybody in public life knows Sandy as the awkward squad; he makes public issues of things which those in positions of power would often prefer to keep quiet, he reminds them that they are often fallible. To his great credit, Julian recognizes this and had decided it was just what the Electoral Commission needed.

At one stage in his career during the 1970s, Julian had been moved from the Attorney General's

department to the team which negotiated the terms of the country's diamond rights with De Beers. A huge proportion of the wealth of Botswana now comes from this source. It was good to be with someone who so clearly enjoyed his job. He asked to be remembered to two others of the group of Londoners who had been part of our late '60s life.

After coffee back home with the Swedish wife, I went into Gabs as arranged to meet Morekwe, at the home of her daughter, also a teacher. None of us had ever been to Gaborone Dam, which is the city's water supply, and local beauty spot. Not as easy to find as we had expected, we ended up bumping along the wrong track and talking our way into the Gaborone Yacht Club. A very delightful place, with a bar and restaurant overlooking the water and boats. We lingered there over cold drinks, and wondered whether we could manage to do the whole thing again if I left it another 36 years.

Day 13, Nov 24th

Did a bit of shopping in the morning, then drove over to Mochudi to collect Maocha, for the last of our expeditions. We drove the 30 odd miles to 'the River Villages'. This is a string of six small villages along the Madikwe river, which is the border with South Africa. Apart from the small kraals and occasional houses along the road, we passed a number of poultry farms, some active and some derelict, which the government has encouraged people to develop.

The main village is Sikwane, where we saw the remains of the Chand family's house and store; I had known several members of this Indian trading family, who were sociable members of the district's life. In 1990, a South African commando unit under the horrific Eugene de Kok, crossed the border around midnight, came to their home, killed both the night watchman and the entire Chand family and then blew them up. This was during the last desperate years of apartheid, when raids across the border by South African security forces occurred in a number of places. There had also been a car bomb, killing one man, in the centre of Mochudi.

In Sikwane and its surrounding villages, we visited the houses of a number of Maocha's family and friends, all of whom greeted and received us in the usual good-natured way. These are out of the way, small places, but the tarmac road now goes all the way to the furthest village. The familiar mixture of made-some-money modern houses, and older traditional thatched roofs.

We eventually settled for refreshment in a bar, where amongst others I talked to a local opposition politician, who seemed confident of success in the forthcoming elections, and told me the now familiar stories of the effect on Botswana of the Zimbabweans fleeing Mugabe and crowding into this country.

A young man showed us the way down to a particularly beautiful spot on the Madikwe river, which was sultry and tropical, with dragonflies, birds, small fishes. Our guide turned out to be a devoted Arsenal fan, keen to talk about all the team's details, which sadly, I knew nothing about.

Back to Mochudi, where I gave Maocha's family some parting presents and said fond farewells. Exchanged addresses, but I don't think they are letter writing types.

On to Oodi for supper with Sandy and Elinah. They had brought the projector home from the museum, so we could look at some of Sandy's old slides of Mochudi in the '60s. Heavy rain for a while, followed by more when I got back to Gaborone.

Day 14, Nov 25th

Douglas arrived first thing in the morning, with a handful of copies of the Daily News, with my interview published. This is a government owned newspaper which has always been distributed free -right back to when I first knew it as a duplicated news sheet in the 1960s. Douglas seems to take it upon himself to deliver bundles of the paper to all and sundry during his morning drive round the capital.

My date this morning is with Margaret Taylor. She lives in Gabane, which is a village about 20 minutes from Gaborone. I eventually found her house, which is part of an 'estate' of houses which her husband and she have developed and are let to a variety of foreigners. Her house is an English country cottage in the tropics. Stone built, thatched roof, beautiful gardens, folding garden chairs as seen at home. Margaret is still a very English sort of rose, lined by the sun and the years, but otherwise still fresh out of her Dorset boarding school. It was really fun to see her again. She has three grown sons. Her husband Frank, who I barely remembered, was out finishing various chores.

We talked for several hours about the people we had known, and how our lives had developed since we last met. We had exactly the sort of cold lunch I would have expected in an English country cottage.

I spent some time during the afternoon trying to photograph parts of Gaborone. I liked the atmosphere around the bus and train stations, with all the stalls selling food, clothes, and endless mobile phones. Bought a potted plant to take this evening to my last supper at Douglas and Jean's house. They have really been very kind to me.

Day 15, Nov 26th

Drove for the last time into Mochudi, to visit the chief's wife, Nono, but these days, now Mma Seingwaeng. We sat and talked on the terrace of her house, and I found her a little strange. She seems to have become obsessed with the present and resisted all opportunities to talk about the past or about herself, which was odd because she had been such a lively part of Mochudi social life as I remembered it. Even my photos of her wedding were only of slight interest.

Having said that, she talked at great length about her current project, which is a scheme to help elderly and infirm women in the village, who apparently are often neglected. She has gathered a number of retired teachers to help her, and they have organized a vegetable garden, day care, sewing classes. Would I like to come and have a look at their project? Of course.

We drove off to collect the key, which turned out to be kept by MG Ditshwene, who's house by now I could find. She climbed in as well, and we drove out of Mochudi, along the sort of deep rutted sand roads I had almost forgotten, and for which my hired VW was not really designed. The project really looked very ambitious. They have a large garden growing a variety of vegetables, supervised by a man with a catapult to keep the monkeys away. Alongside the garden are two portacabins for the day care and classes, with a further area set aside for future development. The catapult man further weighed down my car for the journey back.

We went to Tshire's house (Tshire and Nono are sisters-in-law) for a drink and a chat. Tshire could chat for Botswana, and probably half of Africa. Lots of old stories were trotted out, about Linchwe going to his school in England as a teenager, about Tshire's part in the opposition victory in Mochudi during the country's first elections, about the initiation group that she and MG had been members of as young girls.

Tshire is a trained nurse and looks after her mother who has been an invalid for many years. This is to be my last night in the country, and I have decided to go back to Arne's place, where I had enjoyed such a peaceful evening a week ago. I collected the last odd bits of food from the fridge in my Gaborone room, bought some chocolate and beer, and slowly drove out to Kopong.

It was a good place to reflect on the past fortnight and to generally calm down. This really is a gem of a place; the Swede and two Batswana who run it are welcoming and helpful, and even though I was again the only visitor in this isolated place and nothing much happens there, they were happy to leave me to the solitude that I wanted. With no electricity, this is the closest I have been able get on this trip to the nights out in the bush, which are an old, magical memory. It was a brilliant star lit night.

Day 16, Nov 27th

From Kopong I drove back along an old-style dirt road to Morwa, to join the usual Mochudi - Gaborone road. From there to Oodi, to talk over the last few days with Sandy, who will take me to the airport in the afternoon.

Before that, he was keen to show me a favourite spot of his, beyond the village of Modipane. We clambered over rocky outcrops to an old dam, which still held some water, and then to a strange isolated graveyard, containing the graves of an Afrikaner woman and four of her children, who had all died very young. Nobody seemed to know who these people had been, or what had happened to the father. On the hillside, large rock rabbits were scampering around.

After lunch, into Gaborone, where I had yet to check out of my guest house. While Sandy went on some errands, I started to pack. This was interrupted by the arrival of Shirley Boakgomo. She was a well-remembered friend from long ago, part of the circle of young government employees. Radio Botswana personnel, IVS [International Voluntary Service] and other volunteers who had made up the 'social scene' of Gaborone that as a Mochudi resident, I had flitted in and out of. Her brother had been in the district administration in Mochudi, so she had also been a frequent visitor there. It would have been a shame to leave and not have seen her again. Sandy reappeared, Gloria of the guest house staff came to help me pack, Shirley couldn't stop talking, it was pandemonium in my room.

Sandy needed to go to Gaborone's one and only garden centre, Shirley needed to go to the bank. She drove me there, and then on to meet Sandy, and on the way picked up a puncture. Found someone with a pump for her tyre, found Sandy, rushed back to the guest house to collect my hire car. Then followed Sandy out to the airport (unbelievably hard to find -no road signs at all), where Elinah and son were waiting in the car park to say good bye.

So that was it. My head was buzzing with everything that had happened, was still happening. We sat and talked in the terminal over a couple of beers, watched a plane come and go, did some people watching. As in all the best Hollywood films, I walked out to my plane and departed in a glorious orange sunset. What else can I say?