

VILLAGERS



RUBEN '87.

*Special Report:
Lesotho and the Canadian Connection
By David F. Pelly*

Planning for Miracles

*Thanks to the United Nations
Environment Programme, Lesotho's
villagers will soon begin work on
devastated watershed areas*

In June 1987, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) sponsored its second conference of environment ministers from 50 African countries. The meeting was held in Nairobi and one of the items on the agenda was an update on UNEP's African Model Village initiative, created at the first such UNEP conference held in Cairo in 1985. The Model Village initiative will provide funding assistance for each African country that is willing to select three villages to act as models for environmental self-management. The goal is to create a continent-wide chain of problem-solving models: not only will individual African countries benefit from the international support of the United Nations, but each will contribute to its neighbours' understanding of their inter-related environmental problems.

Moeketsi Masilo attended the June UNEP conference as a representative

Villagers

of the Lesotho government. He is the Head of Conservation and Forestry in his country's Ministry of Agriculture. While his department's current responsibilities include environmental issues, he expressed his government's intention of establishing a separate Ministry of Environment within the next few years.

In October 1987, David Pelly had the opportunity to interview Mr. Masilo for Villagers in his office on the outskirts of Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. During the interview, Mr. Masilo explained that Lesotho has redefined a UNEP "village" to mean a watershed valley, a logical delineation in a country where the lives of its people are profoundly affected by the natural features of the mountains, valleys and watershed systems.

1. Could you begin by discussing your understanding of the UNEP African Model Village initiative?

At the first UNEP conference held in Cairo in 1985, the environmental ministers decided to develop model projects relating to problems of the environment. Lesotho subscribed to this aim.

We are looking at UNEP in relation to the problems we have in Lesotho, number one of which is soil erosion. As a young and developing country, we have to prioritize our environmental problems. A major thrust of our approach is afforestation, which not only helps deter soil erosion but also provides energy. Even though providing food to hungry people is a critical need, without the soil there is no food.

The objective, then, was for each country to select three villages for the program, which we would like to adapt to our established integrated-watershed approach.

2. Are you saying that rather than just dealing with a village in isolation, you are thinking of it as part of its environment, as a point in a larger watershed?

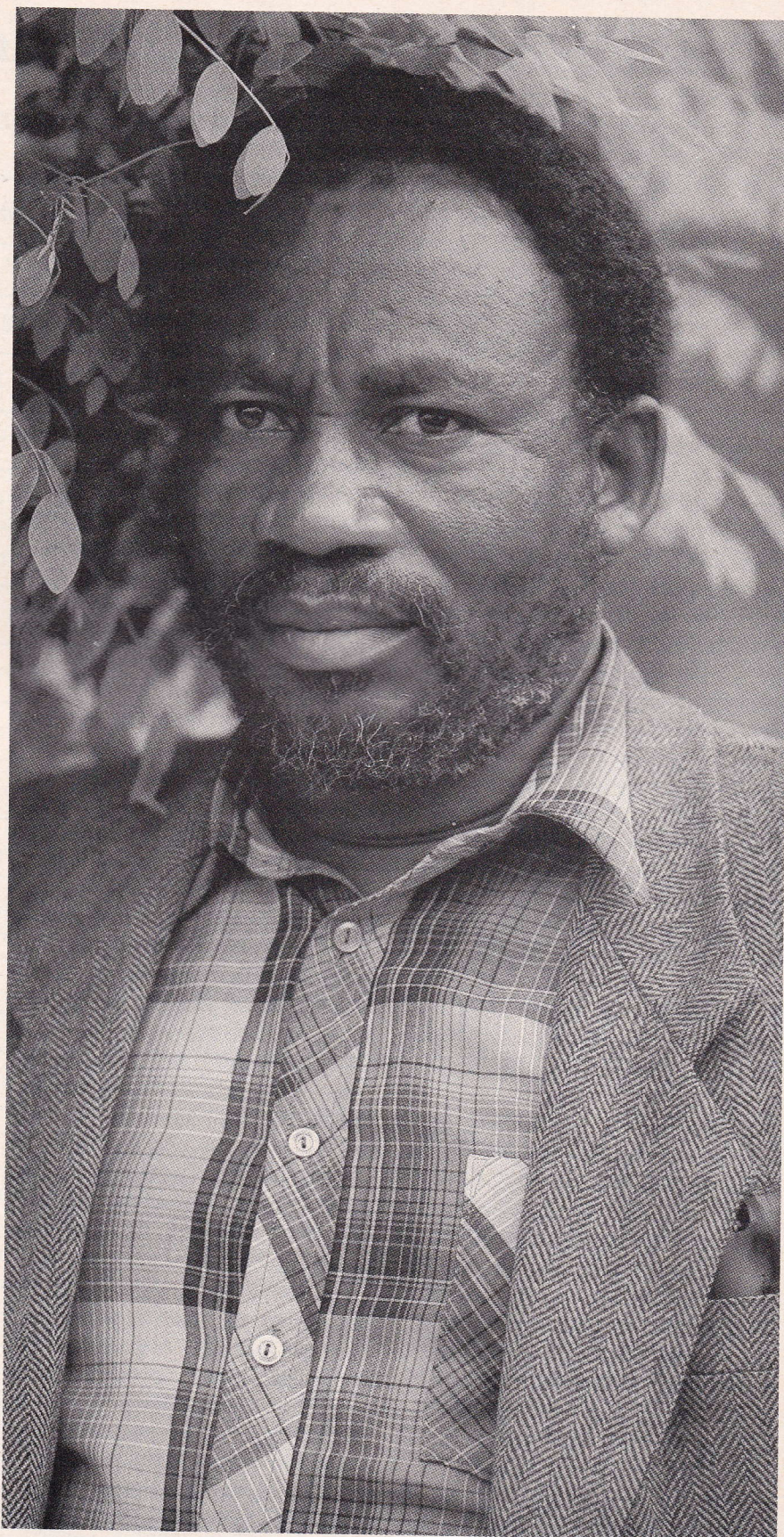
Yes, the whole country is already divided up into numerous small watershed areas, without regard for local political boundaries. So it was a matter of selecting three of these, with a central village, to present as our UNEP targets. That selection has been made and we are trying to develop an integrated plan for the three villages/watersheds which will serve as a model for other areas.

3. What are the names of the three UNEP "villages" in Lesotho?

They are all in the south of Lesotho, where the population density is relatively high, the soil erosion is more extreme, the climate is drier and the desertification is very bad. The villages are Hermon and Ha Lengolo, both in the Mafeteng District, and Mekaling in the Mphahlele District. In each case these centres have many smaller outlying sub-villages, so we are really dealing with three separate watershed areas. All three areas have mixed agricultural activity, both livestock and crops. When one of the UNEP consultants from Nairobi saw the devastation in the Mekaling valley, he nearly gave up. But then he said, "It'll take a miracle, but that's what we're here to do."

4. What was the process of selection, apart from the factors you have already indicated?

Because the Lesotho Ministry of Agriculture has been doing extensive work on developing solutions to soil erosion and dividing the country up into watershed areas, we are sensitive to the people in the rural areas. We were already



David F. Pelly

Moeketsi Masilo: An integrated approach

getting requests from some areas, including all three UNEP targets. So we know that the majority of the people there are aware of the problems and have at least started looking for solutions.

5. *What has happened so far?*

We have just received a report from the UNEP consultants who looked at the three village areas. We are studying it now.

6. *And where do you go from this consultants' report?*

We expect the plan to be similar in all three areas, because farming is done much the same way everywhere in Lesotho and in these three watersheds you see nothing but desolation. We hope to come up with an approach to encourage integrated development, addressing environmental problems as a whole. We must treat the watershed as a whole, not one part of it in isolation, as has happened before. We have changed our approach to conservation — in the past we were much too sectoral. Now we have come to realize we need an integrated approach.

7. *Can you describe exactly what work will be done in the watershed area?*

In general terms, yes, because the approach is very simple. We start at the top of the watershed, in the mountains. The planners go there and identify a ranging area for cattle and sheep. Then coming down we define an afforestation area, and below that cropland. In that way the erosion lower down is decreased. As a result, the structural measures required in the cropland areas are minimal.

We will then determine the capacity of the ranging area. In planning the afforestation area, as well as trying to impede erosion we determine the fuel needs for

the people there. We plan access routes to reduce the number of footpaths criss-crossing the hills everywhere [which lead to erosion through overuse and then act as streambeds during the rains]. We will suggest these approaches to the villagers and let them put the plan into action.

8. *How will the villagers be involved?*

First they must request the study, which the people in all three of our UNEP villages have done. Then, when it comes to the work, the villagers will provide the manpower while government provides the money and the plan. Those providing labour [no agricultural land is privately owned in Lesotho] will be compensated with agricultural materials like tools, equipment, seeds and so on.

We will also invite people from other watersheds to see what is happening around our UNEP villages. In this way other villages will see how conditions can be improved. Just as the UNEP approach will benefit from efforts we have already made in some watershed areas [including one neighbouring project funded by CIDA], future projects in nearby watersheds will learn from UNEP. In this way the UNEP villages will serve as models for future projects in Lesotho.

9. *What about the continental aspect of the UNEP initiative? Will the villages involved be useful models for other African countries?*

Definitely yes. Lesotho is not only part of UNEP but also of the Southern African Development Co-ordinating Conference [SADCC], in which each country has taken on a specific responsibility for environmental research. Ours is soil and water conservation, and land utilization. These three watershed projects will

serve as models for both UNEP and SADCC participants. If this works here, it will certainly work in other watersheds with erosion problems.

10. *What is the approximate schedule you foresee?*

We received the UNEP consultants' report in early October of 1987. We are hoping to have the fieldwork — the consultative process with the people and the delineation of ranging, afforestation and cropland areas — started by December 1987 [mid-summer]. We should then be ready to begin the physical work the following March or April. Implementation of the three UNEP village/watershed projects should take three to five years. But in fact it will remain our program for the future.

11. *When will the next UNEP conference of African environmental ministers be held and what will Lesotho have to contribute?*

It should be held in 1989, by which time we should be able to show some good progress in all three village/watersheds.



David F. Pelly

Involving the villagers

Lesotho: Rendezvous of Hope

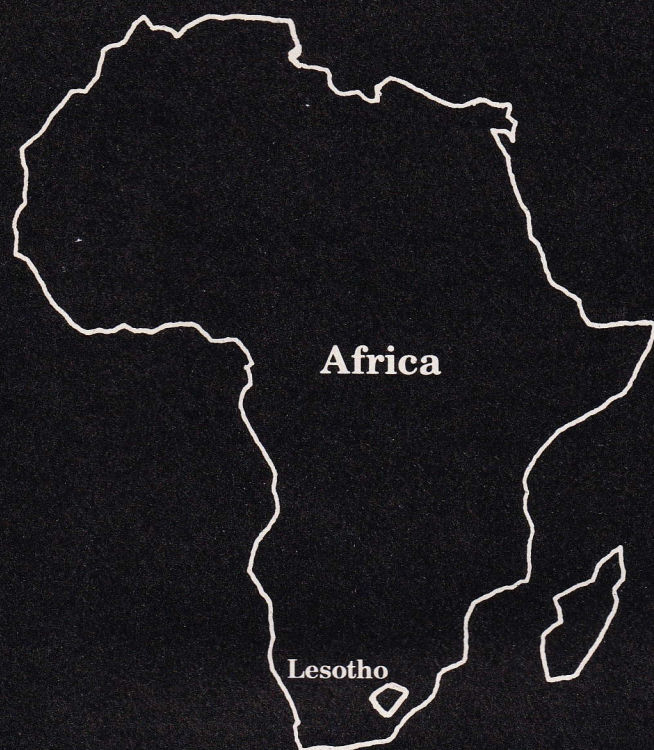
*From missionaries to twinning,
Canada's link to the kingdom of Lesotho
goes back 60 years*

Few Canadians have even heard of Lesotho. Yet our link with this tiny kingdom in southern Africa goes back to the 1920s when the first Canadian missionaries ventured into its remote highlands. Today Lesotho, a native-ruled monarchy surrounded on all sides by South Africa, is per capita one of the largest recipients of official Canadian development dollars in the world.

In recent years, the link between Canada and Lesotho has filtered down to a more direct, person-to-person level. Twinning groups in Montreal and the Ottawa Valley, a high school in Waterloo, Ontario and the Girl Guides of Alberta have all established mutually beneficial relationships with communities in Lesotho. During six weeks in Africa, I visited villages in the central Maluti Mountains, the Quthing Valley of southern Lesotho and the Butha-Buthe district in the north. I met the Canadian twinning's African partners and learned what I could about their lives.

For this, my first trip to Africa, I carried few preconceptions in my luggage. The insights I gained and now share in the following articles about this unforgettable country are a gift from its people, to whom I offer a heartfelt thank you.

David F. Pelly



It's a Long, Long Way to Auray

*High above the Mantsonyane Valley
lies a misty mountain village with
big plans for its future*

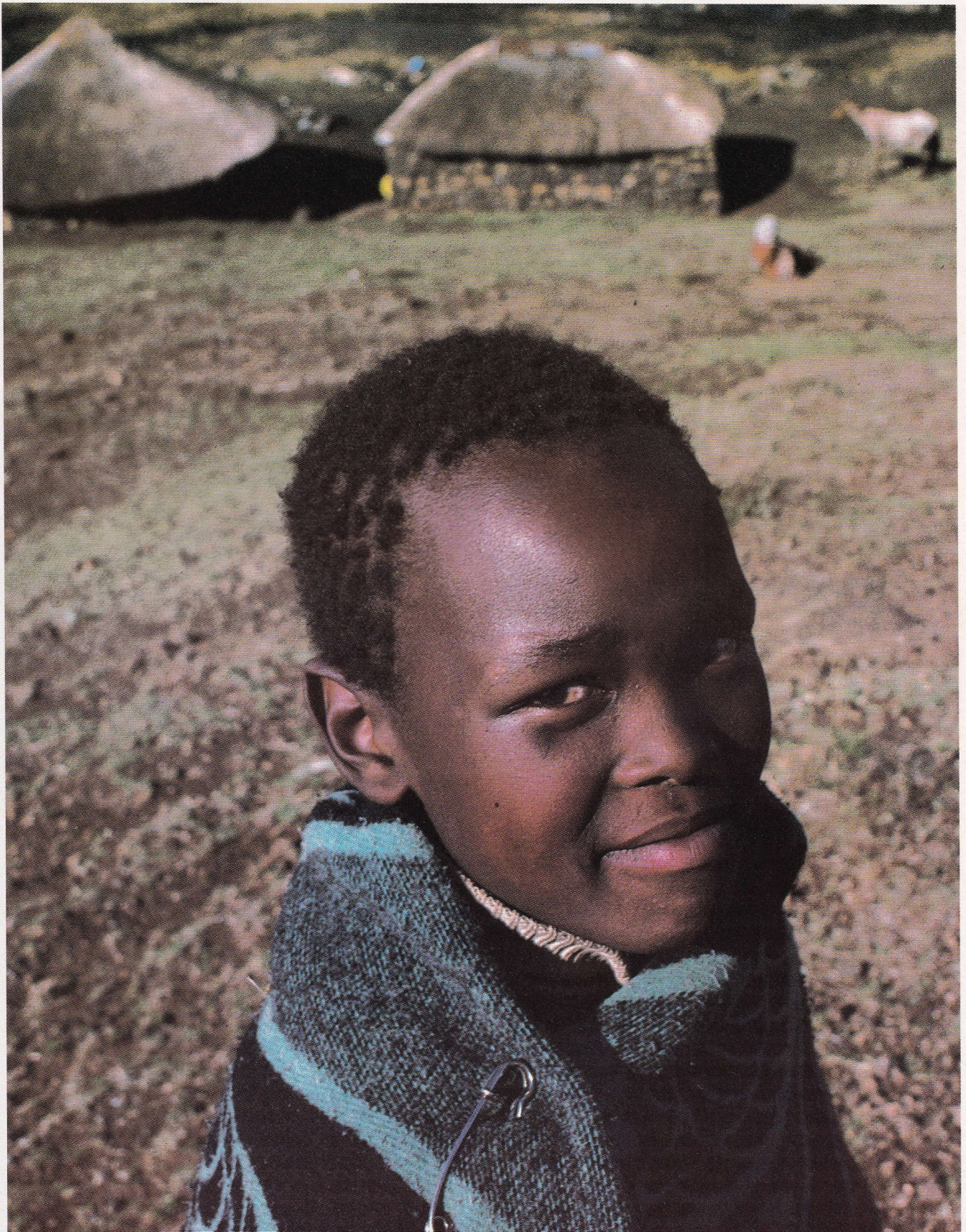
It was cold and damp when I arrived at Auray Mission in the Maluti Mountains of Lesotho. Our route from Maseru, the capital, to Auray was three and a half hours of winding mountain road. Father Augustin Bane, my host, handled his four-wheel-drive Jeep with the confidence and agility of a racing car driver. The mountains that filled my view throughout the drive looked soft: no jagged peaks, just gentle, treeless slopes and rounded tops — an exaggerated version of the hills of Scotland.

Mist clung to the mountaintops all around the cluster of dull stone buildings. Even in the Mantsonyane Valley below the air looked heavy. The downpour of the preceding days was welcome, however. "There will be no need to pray for rain this year," Father Bane told me as we puddle-jumped across the yard. It was the last Saturday of September, early spring in Lesotho, planting season. For the last four years there had been seasonal drought. This year promised success — if only the rains would come again, later, during the growing season.

Basotho men and women scurried about the mission compound in defiance of the cold, their colourful blankets wrapped tightly around their shoulders with

the wind whipping at the trailing corners. The peach trees were just breaking into bloom. The last patches of snow to survive the spring rains dotted the hillside behind the mission. Against all odds, the air was one of happiness and well-being. Even the cows looked healthier and better fed than most we had seen along the way. So this is Auray, I thought, and began to feel at home in a continent I had never before visited.

Auray is located at the geographical centre of Lesotho, about 100 kilometres from the South African border in any direction. The snow on the ground on the day of my arrival was my first clue that Lesotho is not the Africa we North Americans typically imagine. This land-locked kingdom has no jungles, no massive wild beasts, no deserts, virtually no malaria and not a banana tree in sight. Lesotho is a tiny enclave about the size of Vancouver Island within the Republic of South Africa, yet the country has always been politically independent of its goliath neighbour. It stands out as a haven of racial equality, an island of reason in a sea of apartheid. The King, Moshoeshoe II, and most of the government are black. Asked to describe his countrymen, one Masotho (the singular form of Basotho, the dominant tribe in Lesotho) said: "If you



David F. Pelly

Lesotho: Tiny landlocked kingdom politically independent of its goliath neighbour, South Africa

Villagers

took a black South African to Canada to study or work, he would want to stay there. No Masotho would — we always want to come home. We are very proud of Lesotho.”

Such pride stems from their history. The Basotho's roots trace back to the tribal grouping of the Bantu, who moved south from central Africa to occupy the entire northeast corner of what is now South Africa. Gradually the warring Zulu tribes, and later the Boers, forced the ancestors of the Basotho into the area now known as Lesotho, formerly called Basutoland. In 1868, the *Motlotlehi* (paramount chief) sought British Protectorate status from Queen Victoria. Since that time the country he thereby founded has remained strongly autonomous, resisting annexation efforts by South Africa and finally achieving its independence from Britain in 1966.

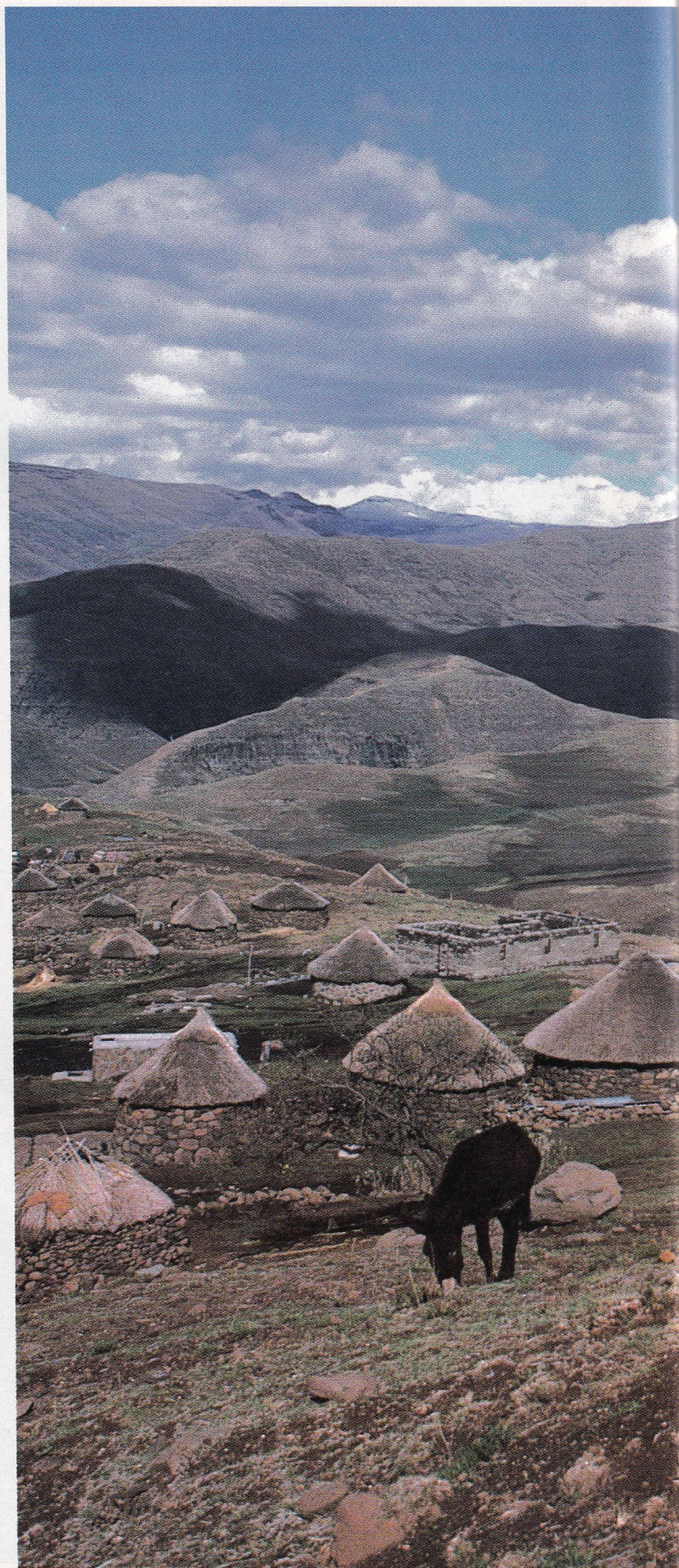
Today, as in the past, life in Lesotho is based on an agricultural economy. It is one of the least developed nations in the world and its currency is tied to the South African rand. Lesotho's economic ties to its neighbour go even deeper — South Africa is its only trading partner, supplying all the country's manufactured goods and a large portion of its produce. Subsistence farming in Lesotho provides wheat, corn, sorghum, cabbage, potatoes and a few other vegetables, while 70 percent of the population of 1.5 million people own livestock.

Ten days into my journey, I was sitting atop the mountain (2666 metres above sea level) behind the mission, attempting to absorb the rhythm of the village below. Like other mountain villages in Lesotho, Auray was established when families followed herders as they searched deeper and deeper in the highlands for new grazing pastures. At first the fresh grass meant healthy animals, which quickly multiplied and required even more pasture. So deeper the herders went. Today, the road ends at Auray and several smaller villages lie beyond, connected only by footpaths and donkey trails.

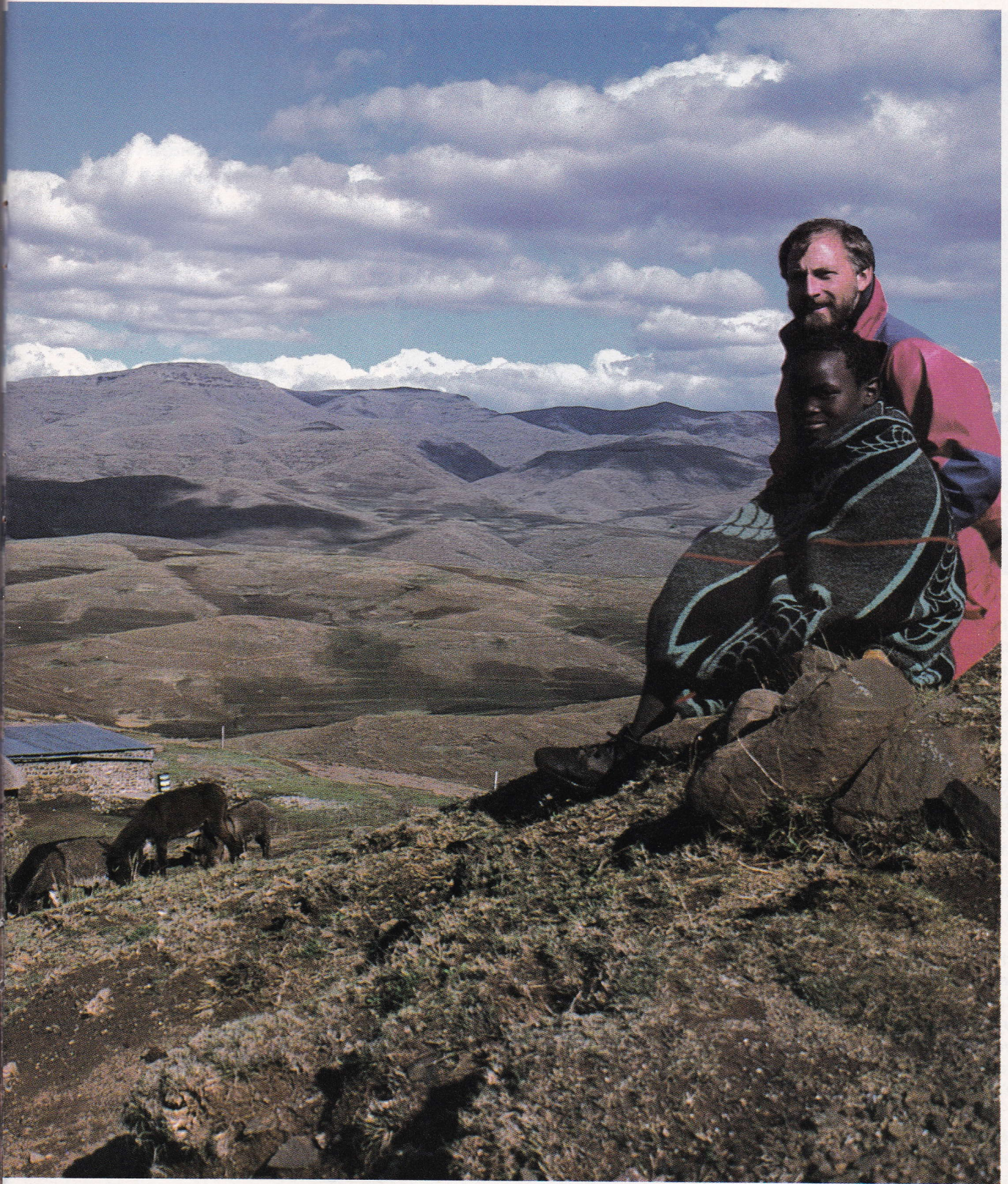
Every one of these villages has more sheep and cattle than the hills around it can support. The green fields of the last century are gone and overgrazing has taken its toll on the hillsides above Auray. Erosion is evident everywhere. When the rains fell early in my stay, torrents streamed down the hillsides carrying valuable topsoil with the rushing water. Much of the mountain face is brown and supports only dry, stunted growth. Fields of tilled earth appear here and there promising at least the possibility of a crop — if the rains return.

Seated beside me on the mountain was Nthethe, a young Masotho who hoped to be an Oblate priest. The last of the snow was gone, melted by the returned warmth of the sun. Nthethe and I had climbed under the deep blue sky up the steep incline, past herd-boys

Villagers



Writer Pelly and a friend



from Auray: A silence broken only by musical sheep bells and the voices of herd-boys



<

Even on the bitterest days,
men journey several kilometres
to buy grain for their families
at the Co-op

tending their sheep and cattle, past stone huts with thatched roofs, past farmers and oxen plowing their rain-soaked fields. Below us was a scene of beauty and tranquility, and within us was that special feeling one derives only from standing on top of the world with a panorama of valleys all around. We absorbed it in a silence broken only by the musical clanging of sheep bells drifting up from all sides, and by the happy voices of herd-boys calling back and forth around the mountain.

The daily cycle of life for the village's inhabitants revolves around the cows, always under the watchful eye of a herd-boy who leads them up into the hills each morning and back into their *lesakas* (stone-walled enclosures) in the village at sunset. There is a long tradition in Lesotho of placing great value on livestock, particularly cows. Cattle are a sign of wealth, the equivalent to a bank account in Canada. They are slaughtered only on special occasions for a major feast. When a man wishes to marry, he must pay his wife's parents a *lobola* (dowry) of 20 head of cattle, or the equivalent in sheep (one cow equals seven sheep).

In his celebrated volume *The Heart of the Hunter*, Laurens van der Post states: "Cattle were never mere cattle to tribal man, but creatures full of rare and ancient spirit. As he listened to them lowing, he heard again the accents of his ancestors. When they were born he regarded the colour of their coats closely because it

showed some meaning, some degree of favour or disfavour on the part of the great spirit over all."

These beliefs have not changed much in Lesotho. A herd-boy still has precise adjectives for each possible combination of colour in a cow. There they do not fence the cattle in as Canadian farmers do; instead, the cattle are fenced out from gardens and the herd-boys do the rest, tending to their charges all day long. In each village, the chief dictates which mountainside the herd-boys will drive their sheep and cattle to in the morning. It is the young boys' job to ensure that the animals don't eat the struggling crops in fields cut into the steep slopes. The cycle continues, day after day.

As I looked down into the valley past the grazing cattle, I could make out the patterned blankets that shield the villagers from the biting spring air. They move about on foot in an unhurried fashion — gathering fuel for a cooking fire, visiting neighbours, fetching water, stopping at the Co-op for the day's grain or rice — almost always with a smile on their faces. They think nothing of walking miles through the hills. Occasionally a donkey trots alongside bearing a sack of corn meal. The lucky few have a horse to ride. No one, save those living at the mission, has a vehicle. Children arrive on foot for school, some of them coming six or seven kilometres through the hills. As all these people move about, every chance encounter in the village or on a mountain trail is marked by a three-part musical

>
*The Thabo Co-op:
 A lifeline for Maluti's villagers —
 but there isn't always enough
 food to go around*



exchange of friendly greetings. Life at Auray seemed happy and simple, if not bounteous — very different from anything I had known in my own culture.

It is a small gathering. Not one you would call luxurious, but certainly comfortable. The setting is an old stone seminary in Montreal, part way up Mont Royal and commanding a view of the city lights. The building feels removed from its surroundings, just as the members of Montreal-Maluti are hardly from the mainstream of Quebec society. Jeff Lewis — film director with the National Film Board. Bea McGuire — freelance writer for *Gourmet* magazine, among others. Ted Johnson — corporate lawyer for Power Corporation and once a member of former Prime Minister Trudeau's staff. Andrée Pelletier — actress and script writer, daughter of statesman Gérard Pelletier. Stephen Hlophe — professor of sociology at Concordia University and the group's link with southern Africa, his home.

There are others in attendance, some ready for action, some there to be convinced, some just exploring. In all, about 20 people have assembled for the inaugural meeting of Montreal-Maluti, an organization attempting to twin with the villagers of Auray and the surrounding area.

There is a selection of wines on the table and an array of good cheese. The small crowd circulates with ease,

accustomed to convivial chat. They examine a wall-map of Lesotho and photographs of the villages in the Maluti mountains, collectively grasping for a comprehension of this new twinning phenomenon.

After an unstructured hour, Jeff Lewis quietly steps forward. "I've been asked to make some opening remarks," he begins. "The villagers in Auray could probably get aid more efficiently from another source. But the sense of connection with a group that's not a health or food bureaucracy is, we hope, what we can offer." He explains the process of twinning to the newcomers and reaffirms it to the core of old members. "I don't know how we're going to do it. We're learning as we go along. But everything we do *has* to come with a long-term commitment."

Lewis has trouble getting the group to focus on plotting a course. "The question," he repeats, "is not what do we want to do, but how do we organize to do it." Time and again the discussion digresses to "Should we buy a truck for Auray Co-op?" or "What does Auray Secondary School need?" Somehow, in the shuffle, at least part of the original purpose is forgotten — Lewis's "sense of connection."

The problem is not unique to this fledgling twinning group. Lesotho is far away, and the mental image of the twinned village is fuzzy at best. How can one feel a connection to a group of people who have yet to

Continued on page 40

Villagers



The villagers move about the valley on foot, shielded from the biting spring air by colourful blankets

Continued from page 29

become real? As a general rule the solution is for a member of the twinning group to visit the African village as early as possible in the process. Then the problems and the people become tangible.

But Montreal-Maluti has an advantage over most twinning groups. Its core membership includes Stephen Hlophe, who lived in Lesotho before coming to Canada more than 20 years ago. He is a passionate man who cares deeply about the land he left behind for a better life in Canada. He may even feel a twinge of guilt, but his efforts are genuine.

Long after the partygoers have filed out of the old seminary into June's warm night air — some content at having associated with a do-good cause, others frustrated at the lack of real progress — Hlophe and I are still talking.

"Montreal-Maluti is not only going to work, it's already working. We have made contact with the vil-

lagers. We are writing back and forth. There is a sense of commitment amongst our core people. Montreal-Maluti isn't just a group of people here — it's all of us, here and there." Hlophe understands the importance of people-to-people efforts. "The normal pattern ends up with benevolent aid — and benevolent aid doesn't work in the long term. We want to focus on the people themselves."

Hlophe believes that this sense of connection offers as much benefit to the Canadian donors as it does to the Basotho recipients. To date the connection has been expressed principally through the ongoing exchange of correspondence between Montreal and Auray, and with boxes of used clothing despatched from Montreal to their twin in the Maluti Mountains.

"That is beautiful," spoken slowly, with feeling, is Stephen Hlophe's favourite phrase. He applies it to people, to things, to ideas, to food, to accomplishments and to the twinning movement he is so much a

part of in Montreal. His determination, more than any other single factor, is the key to Montreal-Maluti's survival.

The people of the Mantsonyane Valley have always managed to survive on very little. Their subsistence crops — usually wheat, possibly corn — provide some food and perhaps a little cash income. But for most of the year, the villagers around Auray depend on the Thabo Consumers' Co-operative for their supplies, almost all of which are imported from South Africa. Co-op manager Cyprianus Maphalla says there are 754 members spread around numerous villages in the area. Since each family averages six or seven members, that means nearly 5,000 people are served by the Co-op at the end of the road from Maseru.

Even on the coldest, wettest days, men come into the Co-op to buy grain for their families. As Maphalla and I stood talking, sheltered from the rain, a man and his son loaded an 80-kilogram sack of corn meal onto their donkey. Chilled to the bone, they were from Takane — "not far from here," according to Maphalla, "only six kilometres."

When the sun came out a few days later, the yard was full of horses, donkeys, men, women and children. Fortunately a hired truck had arrived that morning from Maseru with a fresh load of supplies. One old man, Tefo, travelled 25 kilometres from the village of Khohlopho with his two donkeys, arriving shortly after mid-day. His beasts of burden were so weak he had to split the 80-kilogram sack in half so that they could manage the load. Tefo enjoyed a laugh or two with the helpers while loading up his donkeys, picked up his half-eaten loaf of bread and headed home again, bound to arrive long after dark. His family was waiting.

The Co-op is the lifeline for a lot of people, but it isn't entirely reliable — there isn't always enough on the shelves to go around. "If we had a big truck," said Maphalla, "it would be making at least three trips a week for sacks of meal, mixed groceries and building materials. That would satisfy the need." As it is now, the Co-op must hire or borrow a truck when it can, which is not often enough. In a document sent to the twinning group in Montreal, the Co-op members put forward the difficulty of their situation: "We think if we could get a big and strong truck for transport, this could give us a good high jump which could lead us to the better service of the desperate people of Mantsonyane area."

To shop at the Co-op, of course, requires money. The people derive a small income from sheep's wool (Lesotho is the world's largest exporter of mohair) and even less from cash crops, but almost every family has someone away in the Republic of South Africa working

in the mines. I repeatedly heard the expression "working in the mines" in reference to brothers, fathers, sons and husbands. As there is virtually no industry in Lesotho, more than 100,000 Basotho men must leave their villages to earn a living. They go for a year at a time, on contract, and work seven days a week hard labour.

There is hope that this can change in time, although the transition will take years if not generations. A recurring theme in my discussions with students at Auray was "I don't want to work in the mines." Many younger brothers and sisters have an older brother working in South Africa to thank for paying their school fees. Auray Secondary School charges 360 rand (about CDN\$250) a year for tuition, books and uniforms. That high cost and the ambition to avoid working in the mines by being educated for the jobs available in Lesotho provide a strong incentive for the students to work hard. But secondary school only offers three years of study: for a secure future, the students know they need the full five years provided by high school.

Until recently, there wasn't even a secondary school in the Mantsonyane Valley. Beyond the primary levels, students had to board away from home at schools where places were scarce for outsiders. Bernard Makhetha knows exactly how hard it used to be to get an education in Lesotho. As a boy he worked as a shepherd because his parents needed him, and at night he studied to keep up with his peers. When he finally completed high school, he returned to the Mantsonyane Valley as a primary teacher. Now in his thirties, he is one of eight teachers on the staff of the newly-established Auray Secondary School, which occupies borrowed rooms at the mission.

"All these teachers are from the Maluti," said Makhetha, waving a hand around the staff room built of cold cement blocks and furnished with a few tables and some rough shelves stacked with well-thumbed books. "We did our primary education here in the highlands. But our post-primary education we did elsewhere. This was difficult in many ways," he added matter-of-factly. "It was difficult financially, being away from parents, the long journeys on horseback, adjusting to life in town."

Understanding the need for a secondary school in Auray, the villagers decided in 1983 to start their own. According to Father Jalbert, an Oblate priest from Quebec who was then the resident missionary, "The initiative came from the community. They gathered what they could from their own pockets." Today Makhetha and his fellow teachers are determined to gain accreditation as a full high school with five forms. A new building is nearly complete, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA),



*Determined villagers
like Constancia Maseli
have carried their dreams
as far as they can on their own.
What the people of Auray
need now is the backing
of their Montreal twin*

with two hostels planned to house about 200 boarders. Together with an anticipated 200 to 300 day students from the local area, this represents a substantial step forward from no school at all just five years ago.

The students themselves are the most grateful for the existence of the secondary school. Their enthusiasm for education is in sharp contrast to the apathy of many high-school students in North America. "We will be able to get more knowledge, enabling us to help ourselves better," said Shadrach Kholoane, who plans to finish high school and then train to be a mechanic. "And we won't waste our parents' money to travel far away to school." Another student, Gregory Phoka, said: "I want to finish high school, then go to the National Teachers Training Centre. My older brother did not go to school because my parents did not have the money. Now he is just over 30 and working in the mines in South Africa. He says he is working hard so that I can go to school and not have to work like that."

Ernestina Makhele is a mature student in her late twenties trying to make up the education she missed as a teenager when there was no secondary school available in the area. Her husband works in South Africa to support her. She spoke with determination: "I want to get a job after this education, as a nurse, so I can help support my family. Then my husband will not have to go to the mines." The hospital in the valley, administered by the Anglican Church, offers Ernestina a goal that now seems within reach.

Paul Letsatsi told a similar story. "My older brother was a shepherd when he was a boy and now he works in the mines of South Africa. With an education I will be able to work in Lesotho. I am lucky." Paul plans to come back after teachers' college to teach "in the highlands where teachers are really needed."

Teachers, nurses, agriculturalists, lawyers, pilots, doctors, soldiers, mechanics — they were all there in

that room. And yet five years ago such dreams were nearly impossible for a young person in Auray.

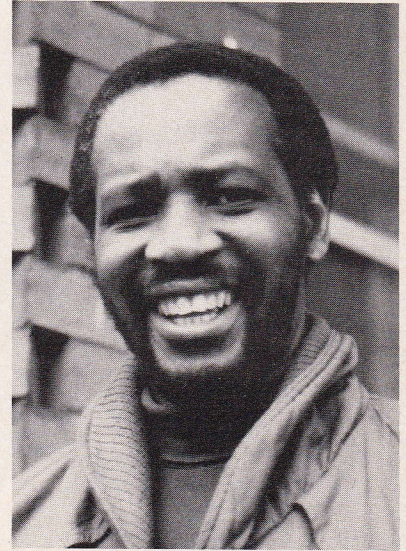
When I asked the group of students what Canadians could do to help establish Auray's high school, the response was immediate and unanimous: "We need more teachers." But there are other needs as well: desks, bookcases and blackboards; housing for teachers; equipment for science experiments; typewriters on which students can practise the skills that will guarantee them a job in the city; garden tools; sports equipment. There is also an urgent need for scholarships. Every year in Auray, four or five students drop out for lack of funds.

Constancia Maseli may be one of them when the school year begins again in 1988. She is 17 and does not smile easily. "My mother was struck by lightning and died in 1974, and my father died eight years later when I was twelve. I have two older brothers nearby here, both shepherds. I would like to finish high school, but it is a problem to find the money."

Constancia managed to get through primary school by boarding with one of the teachers, for whom she did household chores — babysitting, cleaning and cooking. In return, the teacher paid the school fees and provided clothing, room and board. Constancia's brothers grew up in similar circumstances, boarding with the different families for whom they worked as shepherds.

Last year Constancia's guardian said she could no longer handle her school fees as she had her own children to pay for. When the school year began in late January, Constancia watched her contemporaries beginning secondary school without her. She cried — she had wanted so much to go to school, to be a nurse. To realize her dream she knew she had to finish five years of high school before starting specialized nurse's training.

*"Montreal-Maluti isn't just people here —
it's all of us, here and there,"
says Stephen Hlophe, who wants to link
his Canadian twinning organization
with the African country
he left 20 years ago*



One month later her brother offered to pay her fees for one year only. To do this he would not receive the usual shepherd's annual pay: ten sheep of his own, the only way he can hope to achieve some measure of independence.

Constancia began classes in late February, a month behind her peers. In the March tests she stood 39th out of 83 in Form I. By the June tests, at mid-session, she had risen to 6th. "Constancia is an excellent student," said her teacher. "She works very hard." And that's despite not knowing where the money will come from to pay for next year. Or *if* it will come at all.

The villagers of Auray have taken responsibility for improving the quality of their lives. They have carried their secondary school as far as they can, just as they have carried their Co-op. What they need now is outside help to advance even further. Although the future may appear uncertain, like Constancia they will continue to move forward.

With such determination, the long-term economic picture could get better. As more and more students finish their education and get jobs within Lesotho, the economic base of the community will solidify and move closer to home. Farming practices, particularly grazing, will probably improve with greater knowledge and less dependence on livestock. And as economic stability grows, the Co-op will flourish, enabling it to better serve its members' needs. The name of the Co-op, Thabo, means "happiness" — that in itself speaks for the villagers' optimism.

As I left Auray to follow the long, winding road through the mountains back down to Maseru, the sun was shining. It seemed a fitting end to a visit begun in dull grey drizzle. I carried with me a sense of hope. The people smiled broadly as they waved goodbye that morning. Canada, they were thinking, cares about us.

The summer has passed. After its initial flush of enthusiasm, Montreal-Maluti is struggling. What is our purpose? Why Lesotho? How do we proceed? To the founding members of Montreal-Maluti, the questions and problems seem confusing, disheartening and surely unique to their situation. The reality from an outsider's perspective is that, like most twinning groups, Montreal-Maluti is working through a necessary process of definition. They are dealing with a new concept which is still abstract.

The core group convenes for a quiet lunch-time meeting in a living room overlooking a suburban park, a departure from the more public meeting in June. We can continue, we must continue, they decide. There are people in the Maluti mountains of Lesotho whose expectations we have raised. The papers of incorporation are signed — it was easy, really. The struggle to establish is over.

The group decides to throw a big party with lots of Quebecois dancing and music, but this expression of their own good fortune will be balanced by an underlying theme of deprivation in Lesotho. In this way they hope to increase the level of awareness of a select group of friends and raise some money for one of their projects. Finally, focused objectives are set in the minds of those present. For now, the boxes of used clothing will continue arriving at Auray Mission. In time there may be money enough to buy a truck for the Thabo Co-op. The new high school will probably get some help with purchasing desks and blackboards. And maybe somebody in Montreal-Maluti knows a teacher who could spend a year in the Maluti mountains of Lesotho. Just as important, the appeal from the villagers in Auray — young and old — for a connection with Canada will now be realized. With that Montreal-Maluti gives their greatest gift: hope.

David F. Pelly



David F. Pelly

Wherever Tessa Oettle goes, she is greeted as an old friend

Gardens of Plenty

*Against the ravages of drought,
volunteer Tessa Oettle works to find
fertile ground in the minds of
Quthing Valley villagers*

Tessa Oettle sat on the ground with a group of Basotho women gathered around. Her thick, strong fingers worked the rich basaltic earth of the community garden. As she spoke haltingly but efficiently in her audience's native tongue, the women watched her intently. They respected her effort and ability in a language so different from English, and admired her knowledge of the soil she fingered as she spoke. Tessa's kind but firm manner, her aura of being at ease, had won their hearts.

It was the same at every community garden we visited throughout the Quthing Valley in southern Lesotho. There are 21 such gardens (including eight attached to village schools), with many more villages on the waiting list. Each community has received fencing, an irrigation system, tools, a cold frame and a program of extension services led by Tessa. Wherever we went, she was greeted with the special warmth reserved for an old friend. Within minutes of our

arrival, the community garden group (usually all women) would gather at their plots to discuss their problems and show Tessa the progress they had made. As we left to visit the next project, she often received a couple of fresh eggs or a similar token of gratitude.

Tessa is in her early thirties and came from South Africa two years ago to work for Plenty, a Canadian-funded voluntary organization that has been active in Lesotho since 1979. The community gardens in the Quthing Valley form just one small cog in the organization's global wheel. Plenty's other projects in Lesotho focus on afforestation, village water supply, agricultural assistance, soy production and processing, and fruit tree cultivation. Funding for these projects originates with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and is channelled through Plenty Canada's head office near Lanark, Ontario. There, in a partially renovated building made of

logs set well back in the woods, executive director Larry McDermott organizes fundraising campaigns, approves project proposals and oversees the recruiting and orientation of Canadian volunteers.

Five expatriates from Canada and South Africa and 80 Basotho staff administer Plenty's ambitious program in the remote Quthing Valley. Every morning begins with a flurry of activity as Land Cruisers head out to projects scattered around the 116 villages in the area. Over the past eight years, Plenty has had a positive impact on many of the 11,000 people who live in the valley. One of them is Mapeete Masilo, an older woman in the village of Ha Mokoae who sat outside her small thatched-roof hut and spoke to me through an interpreter: "When I was young, we had sufficient livestock and crops. But many animals died, starting around 1933 [a year of severe drought in the area]. Then life became miserable. Since Plenty came and these projects began, our lives have improved."

An example of Plenty's success in the field is their village water supply project, which began five years ago and has so far provided 27 villages in the Quthing Valley (total population 4,338) with clean water systems. "Before Plenty came, I was taking water from small wells where sometimes it was dirty and often it was a long walk away," said Mateboho Masilo, another elder of the same village. "Now we have clean water right here in the village so there is not so much disease." Similar comments praising what Plenty has accomplished were forthcoming from villagers everywhere in the valley.

Although Plenty is there to reach out into the community, it is not the hand actually sowing the seeds. Plenty supplies materials and skilled labour, while the villagers are required to provide volunteer labour to help improve their own living conditions. One co-director of Plenty's projects in Lesotho is Motsoafi Kamohi, who was born in the Quthing Valley. The other co-director is Noel Oettle, Tessa's husband, who has given a lot of thought to this far-sighted approach. Noel speaks with a strong sense of confidence in his personal values, clear humanitarian ideals which he applies daily to his role as a field-worker in the development process: "There is a long-range goal of creating a local Basotho organization in the Quthing Valley. Then the community would truly be controlling its development, assisted by Plenty on a technical and educational level. If, for example, a community garden group succeeds, then a self-reliant group has been created."

The ideals espoused by Noel are manifested in Tessa's special way of working with the community garden groups. She doesn't arrive, dispense knowledge, hand out a few seeds and then move on — instead she involves the village women more directly

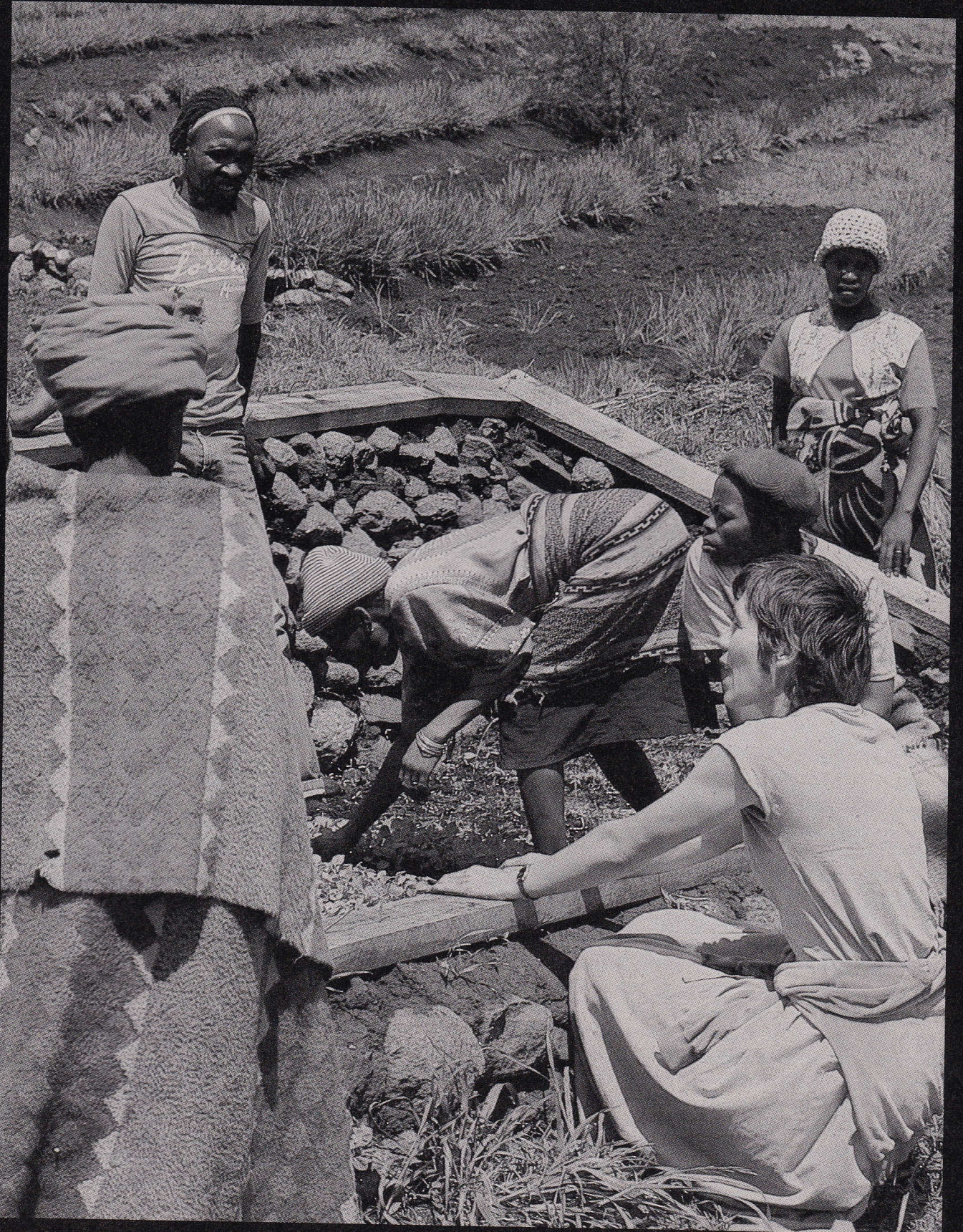
in the process. "It isn't enough that you want to have a garden," she said to one newly-formed group at Moriting. "We must ask *why* you want a garden. Because if you understand what is required, your garden will grow well in the future." Tessa worked with the group, encouraging the villagers to make the decisions for *their* garden. She wasn't there simply to impose her techniques on them, she also listened to their suggestions. Often the villagers would try their way first, then come to Tessa for advice on how to improve it. When she wanted to make a point, she would plant a certain way, or thin a patch of carrots just so, hoping that in time the advantages of a particular method would become apparent.

But Tessa's gift to the people of the Quthing Valley is much more than a new expertise in gardening and a healthy supply of vegetables in their diet. Through her, many learn that they can band together, take on a project and become self-supporting. "We are receiving many requests from villages wishing to establish community gardens, since the work that has been done already is recognized throughout the valley as a successful contribution to improving village life," said Tessa. "At first it was tempting to just give out the tools and establish community gardens everywhere — that's good for the ego. But it's much more important to create a committee so that the villagers can develop their own plans and help implement them. That way they'll have a sense of ownership of the gardens, as well as an understanding to carry into the future."

Like other expatriate volunteers who eventually move on to the next project or return home, Tessa will not always be there to assist the villagers of the Quthing Valley. To take her place, she has developed a skilled staff of Basotho extension workers who will continue helping established community gardens and enabling new ones to start up. They too have been imbued with Tessa's sense of the social dynamic in development work. In the long term, the villagers will be left on their own once a support network has been established that brings together all the valley's garden groups on a regular basis to share problems and solutions. Then they will really be independent of the foreign-aid process — the ultimate success in any development project.

Plenty stands apart from other development projects in Lesotho. It is not so much an organization as a collection of individuals engaged in independent projects while sharing common resources. Its strength lies in its approach to people, exemplified by the image of Tessa seated on the ground surrounded by Basotho women, her efforts finding fertile ground in the soil of the village and in the minds of its villagers.

David F. Pelly



Within minutes of Tessa's arrival, the gardeners gather to discuss their problems

Crossing the Bridge

*For Janine Dudding, taking a
giant leap into Africa was the
only way to get to the other side
of the twinning dilemma*

Janine Dudding stood at the foot of the mountain, looking up at the Quthing Valley just hours after arriving in Lesotho. The Canadian woman dressed in a bright red Eskimo parka decorated with embroidered dog-sleds was gazing like a child at a new world as far removed from her own country as any on earth. She was making the journey from the Ottawa Valley to meet her Basotho "twins" as a representative of Valley to Valley, a rural-based twinning group. This early-morning stop along the way was her first glimpse of the valley she and a small but growing band of colleagues at home had focused their thoughts on for over a year. "I think this trip will lead to a metamorphosis for our twinning group," Janine said to me as she turned from the expansive view.

The monumental size of the step she had taken to arrive at this spot was only beginning to sink in. And yet, the process of discovery she had embarked upon is a necessary step in any twinning relationship. Without direct person-to-person contact, there is an ill-defined component in the process of building a bridge

between a "village" in Canada and a "village" in Africa. Janine's group had struggled with this from the beginning, as have other Canadian twinning groups. Now that she had walked across that bridge to reach the other side, Janine had a growing sense that the cloud of uncertainty was lifting.

Originally formed as a support group around Plenty Canada, a voluntary organization which sponsors projects around the world, the Ottawa Valley twinning group had outgrown that restrictive definition. While they wanted to maintain the link with Plenty, they were eager for more direct contact with their twin in the Quthing Valley. The partnership began at the Valley to Valley inception dinner, a grand affair held at a Perth, Ontario community centre. A veritable army of volunteers provided a five-course dinner of authentic Basotho dishes for 500 people, including Lesotho's High Commissioner to Canada, His Excellency Bereng Sekhonyana. The Ottawa Valley twinning group had learned several of Lesotho's national songs in Basotho, which they sang in honour of their guests. Canadian Native



David F. Pelly

Taking it all in: Janine Dudding's trip to Lesotho could provide a turning point for the Ottawa Valley twinning group

artist Cecil Youngfox's poster "The Wampum Pledge," symbolizing the twinning of the two communities, was unveiled. The success of the dinner left the Ottawa group anxious to pursue other ways to make the partnership more real. Someone, they decided, should go to the Quthing Valley as their representative so that they could meet face to face.

Plenty's executive director Larry McDermott was sympathetic to the suggestion that Plenty assist with Janine's trip to Lesotho. Noel Oettle, Plenty's co-director

on the ground in the Quthing Valley, was equally enthusiastic about what this added dimension to the development process could accomplish: "Plenty, out of necessity, performs a largely technical role," he explained. "This leaves a void in the development process which can appropriately be filled, at least partially, by twinning. Twinning is mostly about social development, which makes it complementary to the technically oriented development process in the field."



The partnership comes alive: The word for twins, mafahla, now has new significance

But twinning is also about a sense of partnership which can't necessarily be put into words. However, in the case of the Ottawa and Quthing valleys, the phrase "twinning" to describe the relationship between Canadian and African villagers could not have been more appropriate. In Lesotho, twins are considered one person. Asked how many children they have, the Basotho parents of eight children might respond, "Seven and the fourth one is twins." All rites of passage — baptism, first communion and traditional ceremonies like the initiation of boys into manhood — must be taken together.

When a twin dies, the living twin must enter the grave first then climb out to make room for the deceased, who will not be brought to the grave until after the living twin has left the gravesite. It is also traditional that after a funeral a cow is slaughtered for a feast attended by all the villagers. But if the deceased is a twin, the cow is spared because the Basotho believe that part of the deceased is still living in his twin, so

there is no need for mourning. The lore surrounding twins extends into everyday life. If twins plant pumpkin seeds, their plants are sure to flourish and grow bigger than other people's. And if you get a stiff neck in Lesotho, all that's needed to cure it is a twin to twist it straight.

The significance attributed to twins, or *mafahla*, boded well for Janine's trip. During her 12-day stay in the Quthing Valley, she visited several of Plenty's projects and spoke with villagers about the newly-established link between their community and hers. She talked with village chiefs and met with community garden groups. She also visited several village schools to make contact with the next generation, the future of the valley.

As we climbed the hill toward the school at the village of Ha Mokoae, the sound of children singing drifted down as if by magic from an unseen source. Rising before us over the crest of the hill was a moving sight. Outside the door of their school, a group of children

swayed back and forth in unison, singing heartily, their notes reaching out like a hand of welcome for Janine. Somewhat hesitant, perhaps unsure of her role, Janine was ushered into the rough cement classroom. More than a hundred children crowded the room to capacity, some seated on wooden benches, most on the floor.

The scene reminded me of television images of the Queen visiting remote parts of the Commonwealth, sitting demurely in front of a gathering of children. But this "queen" — in her blue jeans, hiking boots and T-shirt — was different, clearly fascinated by the natural rhythm and harmony of the performance in her honour. Janine's uncertainty was replaced by a look of easy pleasure as she realized that the children viewed her as a special audience of one. It was typical of the reception Janine received wherever she went in the Quthing Valley —and probably any "twinner" from Canada could expect the same on a first trip across the bridge to Africa.

Once the welcoming ceremony was over, Janine sat down with the teachers to discuss the mechanics of twinning, a process she would repeat in her meetings with other community groups in the valley. As they explored ways to expand the human-contact element, the villagers realized that Janine represented more than just another source of money for development projects: "A fundamental thing I learned is not to talk about the possibility of funding at the beginning," Janine said after returning to Canada. "Instead, you should try to establish the basis of friendship and support in a moral sense first. The idea of getting to know each other, the cultural exchange, is more important. I found that the villagers were not thinking mostly about the money they might get unless I brought it up. Just the contact was important to them."

Once Janine felt that she and the villagers had come to an initial understanding of what their relationship would be, it was time to identify a specific project in the Quthing Valley which her group at home could focus upon. Janine met with the newly-formed community garden group at Moriting which had asked Plenty for assistance. Seated on the ground beside the chosen site, the women described their plans and goals to Janine. Then they too sang and danced. This time Janine joined in and a basis of friendship developed without any mention of financial aid.

The women of Moriting knew that Janine came from an area of the Ottawa Valley where almost everyone has a garden — and that was enough for them. "We will write to you and tell you how our garden is doing," they said to her, pleased that someone was interested. Janine went away thinking that maybe the Ottawa Valley group could raise money to buy material for a fence around the garden to protect it from

free-ranging livestock. For now, that will become purpose enough for the twinners.

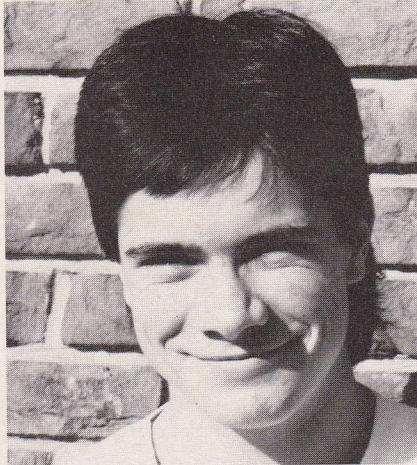
But the mechanism of twinning and its impact in the field are deceptively complex. Twinners on both sides of the equation must operate on both a practical and a philosophical level at the same time. Everyone, it seems, needs a concrete project to focus their ideas. But in order to achieve real satisfaction, people need more than a fundraising project: they need an element of human contact. The latter can be achieved through the exchange of letters, cassettes, videos and gifts, and by visits such as Janine's.

When Janine returned home to the Ottawa Valley, she was able to say with confidence that her trip would make her group stronger: "They are really looking forward to digging in now. It's boosted morale. We will grow from here and get a bigger base of support." One of the concrete steps accomplished during Janine's visit was the creation of a Quthing Valley twinning committee. Villagers the length and breadth of the valley came forward asking if they could join the committee, which will act as the direct liaison between Janine's Ottawa Valley group and the village groups in the Quthing Valley.

Janine realized while she was there that her group's efforts could not simply be channelled through the already overloaded Plenty field workers. The relationship between a village-based voluntary organization and a twinning group is a difficult one, especially during the early stages. The field workers have the potential of becoming yet another barrier to making contact on a person-to-person level. Yet, as the Ottawa Valley group has discovered, the voluntary organization can also be a very effective channel for their efforts. "We want to be autonomous, distinct from Plenty. We need to deal as directly as possible with the villagers and bypass the need for Plenty to do our work — their hands are full," Janine explained. "We will sign a contract with Plenty whereby they'll administer the funds for a project we support, like the community garden at Moriting. And we will get financial reports back from them as it progresses." What will remain independent of Plenty is the social dimension of the relationship.

Janine's trip to the Quthing Valley has had a maturing effect on the Valley to Valley twinning group. Not only did she do her best to explain the twinning concept to the villagers she met and help establish a twinning committee in the Quthing Valley. Not only did she identify some specific projects for her group to focus on. More profoundly than all that, her mere presence brought the twinning phenomenon alive for the villagers. Now, for the people of the Quthing Valley, the word *mafahla* has added significance.

David F. Pelly



Ted Hiscock:
He told me he really appreciates the education he's getting — that made me realize I have little appreciation for the limitless educational possibilities here.



Carolyn Bannayan:
Hey, guess what, I have black hair too — so tell me what you look like, 'cause I like African guys. You know, I like a guy in my school, but I can still be your pen pal too. O.K.



Paul Monaghan:
I wrote, complaining all about things here, but when he wrote back he was so optimistic, talking about what they have — little things like their school, their garden — he was so happy. It made me think — here I am complaining when we have so much. He has so little but he's optimistic. It kind of opened my eyes.

Between Two Worlds

*Kids from a grown-up country and
kids from a growing-up country
know how to say it with love*

In an effort to involve young Canadians in international development, the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) coordinates a program that twins high schools in Canada and in developing nations. Among the first to participate in the Youth For Development program was St. David's Catholic Secondary School in Waterloo, Ontario, which was twinned with Assumption High School in Teyateyaneng, Lesotho, in 1985. Since then five other twins have been matched among schools in Canada and Lesotho.

Canadian students organize fundraising campaigns to finance projects that benefit their less fortunate

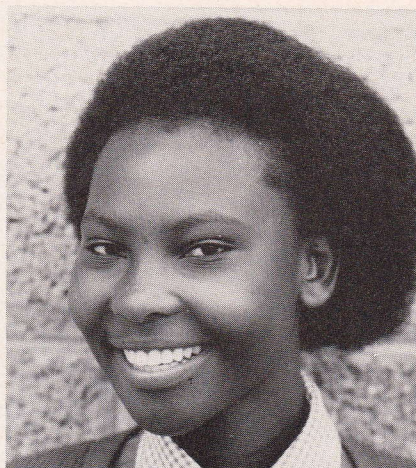
Villagers

counterparts overseas. But even more important is the awareness that results from the cross-cultural communication generated between the twinned schools. Students exchange photographs and letters, including information about themselves, their schools and their countries. One school in Lesotho even recorded a student concert and sent a copy of the tape to their Canadian twin — a simple gift treasured by its young recipients.

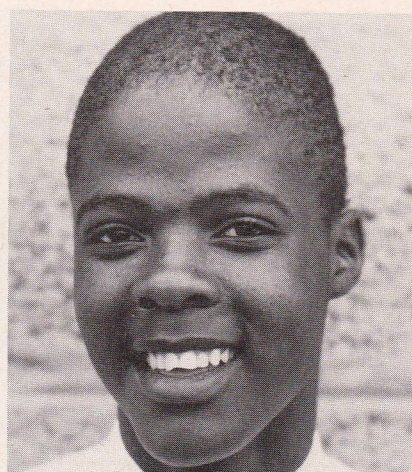
In the words of Mrs. Letela, headmistress of Assumption High School: "This twinning gives the students an idea of what a similar school does in a



*Pheelo David Mafatlane:
I think they are very rich since they ride motorcycles around the city just for fun, and none of us even has a motorcycle. I like to write — I might learn something which I didn't know before.*



*Itumeleng Ntoi:
I told him I was the beauty queen of Teyateyaneng!*



*Thabo Bernard Tsiamé:
In my village there are many pantsulas but I think you won't know what a pantsula is. Pantsula is a person who knows a lot about dancing, and I am one of those guys.*

different culture. It's an invaluable experience. And it also helps them academically — forcing them to write sensible letters in English and teaching them the geography of Canada. But most important, we are very grateful and happy to have such friends."

The seeds for the program were sown in 1985 when a Canadian WUSC-sponsored volunteer who taught at Assumption High School in Lesotho proposed that a Canadian school raise money to buy his Basotho students some good garden tools. Because subsistence farming forms an important part of almost every family's daily life, agriculture is a standard element of the curriculum — if the school can afford the tools. In 1986, the students of St. David's Secondary School in Waterloo sent a cheque to Lesotho for \$600. The tools it bought — rakes, spades, forks and scythes — are still in daily use, and will be for some time to come. The Basotho students call them their "Canadian tools."

But the relationship between the two schools didn't end there. With the cheque came over 200 letters from St. David's students, addressed simply to "Dear Friend." The letters were read aloud in class and then picked out by individual students for reply. Now the ties of several Canada-Lesotho pen pals have endured through a number of exchanges back and forth.

At first some of the questions the students asked one another seemed funny, but soon the realization dawned of how little each actually knew of the other's country. "Do you know what snow is?" wrote many of the Canadian students, unaware that much of Lesotho is higher than 2000 metres above sea level, and that its mountains are snow-covered for much of the winter.

One student in Lesotho, when asked by her Canadian pen pal if she ever went to movies, wrote back "What are movies?" She later discovered that movies in Canada were what she called "the films." All in all, it has been a lesson in both basic information *and* the art of cross-cultural communication.

To date there have been hundreds of letters written back and forth between Assumption High School and St. David's. But no pair has exchanged as many as Annah Ndetta Ngosa and Cynthia Fay. Their correspondence has moved beyond the sphere of an inter-school program to make them lasting friends.

Said Annah, "I enjoy it because I want to know about all the world, not only Lesotho. Canada is far from Lesotho so I don't know it. Writing letters with Cynthia in Canada I might learn about it even if I don't arrive there. St. David's and Assumption are friends now. They showed us this by sending things like tools, maple leaf pins, a tape, pictures and their letters. They like to help us. We are a growing-up country and they are a grown-up country that can help us. They show love to us."

When Cynthia heard Annah's message read aloud to her, she was almost speechless. After a silence, she said quietly, "I couldn't come up with anything to match her words." But it was clear that, through the WUSC program, Cynthia now feels the same special bond with her friend Annah and Lesotho.

David F. Pelly

For more information on the Youth For Development program, contact: World University Service of Canada, P.O. Box 3000, Station C, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1Y 4M8

Guiding the Way

*A partnership is blossoming between
the Girl Guides of Alberta and their
sister Guides in the rural Lesotho
village of Morifi*

I must have been quite the sight when I appeared at the stone hut of Miss Ernestine Jobo. I had travelled for several hours on crowded buses from the capital, Maseru, and then had to walk for another hour beyond the reach of public transport to visit the Girl Guide leader in the village of Morifi. So remote is Morifi that the news of my impending arrival sent from Maseru weeks before had not yet reached her. When she emerged from her home to face a strange, bearded white man dressed head to toe in Tilley Endurables, her shock was evident. But ten minutes later we were seated together on a bench leaning against the outside wall of her house, eating bowls of boiled red beans. She was embarrassed by the limits of her hospitality; I was touched by the warmth of her reception.

In addition to being a teacher at St. Alphonse Primary School, Miss Jobo is in charge of the Butha-Buthe district's 16 Girl Guide companies. Guiding itself was introduced to Lesotho in 1925 under the auspices of the South African Girl Guides, who co-ordinated the

Lesotho Guide organization until 1961. Since its independence in 1966, Lesotho has had its own Chief Commissioner headquartered in Maseru. Community service projects have been the bulwark of the country's Guiding activities, producing an excellent record of public service.

Six years ago the Girl Guides from St. Alphonse went on a field trip to a nearby town. They toured a fish-breeding operation and came home eager to start a similar project in Morifi. The Guides' reputation for doing development work is the pride of their village, and it inspired Chief Morena-boea-ratoa of Pholonamane, the local area including Morifi and nearby villages, to designate five acres for their new project. The carefully chosen land contains two artesian springs which, according to village elders, flow even in times of drought.

The Girl Guides and their mothers went to work in 1983, digging wells at each of the springs. Although it took them a month of daily labour after school, it was,



David F. Pelly

Guiding leader Miss Ernestine Jobo, with Butha-Buthe in the distance: On the road to self-sufficiency

according to one mother, a very happy time for them. However, once the wells were dug and lined with stones, the project stagnated. Having come as far as they could on the basis of free labour, the Guides needed money to continue the project.

The assistance they needed would eventually come from the Girl Guides of Canada. At the Commonwealth Chief Commissioners' Conference held in Toronto in 1984, Guide representatives from developing nations presented proposals for projects in their countries which the Canadian Girl Guides could support financially. At the same time, these projects would establish relationships with their sister Guides overseas that would make both partners better global citizens.

Several provincial Guide organizations soon became twinned with African countries. As it turned out, the Alberta Provincial Commissioner, Rosalyn Schmidt, had been taught as a girl by a nun who spent time as a teacher in Lesotho. "Sister Frances wrote such pictur-

esque letters about the people, their lifestyles and the geography that Lesotho stuck out in my mind," says Schmidt. Then she met the Lesotho Chief Guide Commissioner at the conference in 1984, and Lesotho seemed an obvious choice to become the Alberta Guides' twin.

Once the groundwork had been laid in 1985, the Alberta Guides went to work on cookie campaigns and car washes to raise \$2,500, one-quarter of the total cost of the fish-breeding project. The remaining funding will come from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which matches the contribution of the provincial Guides on a three-to-one basis. What the Alberta Guides are doing in the long term is fostering a link that will endure between their province and Lesotho: says Schmidt, "The province is divided into 12 areas, and each area has put together packets of letters, postcards and posters. We mail one packet each month to Lesotho."

Already there are plans to make the twinning more

Villagers

real for the Alberta Guides, and the Lesotho Guides have been invited to send two girls to an international Guide conference, Echo Valley '88, to be held in Saskatchewan in August. The trip will be co-funded by CIDA and the Canadian Girl Guides head office, although the Alberta Guides will host their twins in their own province after the conference. "What we are after is actual contact, which is far more meaningful than the exchange of money," explains Schmidt.

Early in the morning of my second day, a smartly uniformed Miss Jobo arrived at my lodgings to fetch me for a visit to the project site in Morifi. As we walked the several kilometres back towards the village, she chatted about her Guides and her duties as senior Guider of the district. There are 300 girls involved in Guiding in Butha-Buthe and Miss Jobo visits all 16 companies regularly — usually on foot. A walk of four or five hours through the hills to attend a Guiding weekend is a matter of course for her. The girls are similarly resilient. All the Guides in the area would happily make the journey to Morifi for work-camp weekends once this new project gets going, she said.

All around us road repairs and newly planted trees provided evidence of the Guides' previous volunteer work. The fields of soft red earth stretched out on either side of our path to the mountains in the distance. One flat-topped mountain stood out from the rest: Butha-Buthe, where the founder of the Basotho nation, Moshoeshe I, established his stronghold and subdued the warring tribes who threatened the nation. Far below us, deep in the valley of the Caledon River which forms the boundary between Lesotho and South Africa's Orange Free State, the fields looked relatively lush. The earth was black, a different colour altogether from the fields beside us in which the crops were already well advanced. Over the years the topsoil from the hills and sloping fields beside the villages has been carried down into the valley by heavy spring rains. Soon, if more trees are not planted to prevent such erosion, the elevated fields will no longer be capable of producing healthy crops.

As our walk continued past herd-boys trying to prevent their ranging cattle from feeding on the sprouting wheat, the conversation turned to the project itself. The villagers were all very pleased that this long-discussed scheme could finally begin, said Miss Jobo, and the Guides themselves were eager to start work. There would probably be quite a few people waiting for us, she warned me, as word of my visit had spread through Pholonamane. When we arrived at the project site, more than 50 villagers were gathered beside the wells — Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, other youths, their parents, village elders and even Chief Morena-boea-ratoa.

Sitting under the hot sun on the dry ground beside the pond, they discussed the project for two hours in a

language foreign to me but with sentiment that I could easily understand. Matoma Sebilo, Chief of Morifi and a member of the project committee, summed up everyone's thoughts for me through an interpreter: "We have waited a long time for this project, so we are really happy to know it will now succeed. It will be good for the young people to teach them skills and keep them busy, and it will provide food and water for the village. We thank you in Canada so much."

As the irrepressible water from the two artesian springs trickled past her, Miss Jobo outlined the Girl Guides' plan in detail. The entire area will be fenced in to protect it from grazing livestock. Two ponds will be dug, one below the other, along the natural flow of the springs' run-off. The area around the ponds within the enclosure will be seeded, with the exception of some vegetable gardens and an orchard of peach trees. A gravity-fed water pipe direct from the source will lead to a tap just outside the compound, so that villagers can count on a reliable supply of drinking water even if they have to walk a mile or two to fetch it. Finally, a Guides centre will be erected for meetings, training sessions, administration of the project, community gatherings and concerts.

When the ponds are ready, they will be stocked with fish provided by the Ministry of Agriculture as well as ducks, whose droppings will serve as additional food for the fish. The Guides will care for the compound and the fish, maintaining the records and overseeing the marketing. When the fish have bred and developed, they will be harvested with nets and sold to the villagers. "The market is right here," I was assured by Miss Jobo and several others. When the fish are to be pulled, word will go around and the villagers will come to pick out their fresh fish. Such a simple communication network is almost beyond the North American imagination, but in these rural villages (where there are no telephones or electrical power sources) it works well — witness the turnout for my visit to the project.

It was clear that the villagers were ready to go. But before the ponds can be enlarged, the approval of the Lesotho government's Rural Development Department must be obtained, and the matter of the water supply has caused some delay. Even though the elders maintain that the springs have been flowing without interruption for as long as they can remember, government policy requires that the yield of the springs be measured before the project can be approved. Unfortunately, the measurements taken for the current year were rendered invalid by unusually heavy rains in the fall.

According to Mohale Khabo, the water survey engineer for the district (who totally astonished me by asking if Gretzky was still Canada's best hockey player!), the government normally collects data over a

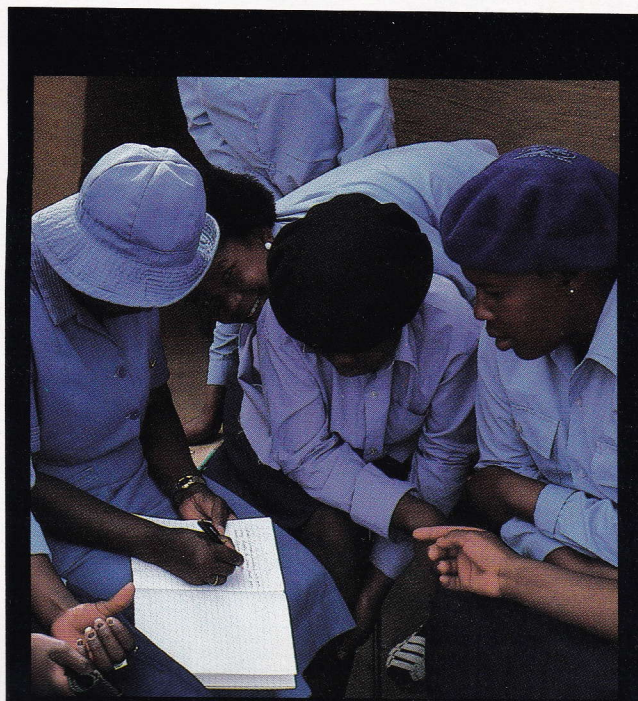
period of a year before beginning a well project. But he allowed that, given the confidence of the people of Morifi, his department would proceed with drawing up the plans for the Guide project at the same time as new measurements are being taken. Then it will be up to the project committee to purchase materials and hire skilled labour, to be paid for with the funds raised by the Alberta Girl Guides. The unskilled labour — young and old — will be coordinated locally by the Girl Guides of St. Alphonse School.

For the Girl Guides on both sides of the world, the fish-breeding project is only the beginning of what will hopefully become a more personal relationship. When the ad hoc ceremony by the pond had ended and the assembled villagers dispersed homeward on foot in all directions, the Guides walked up with me to Miss Jobo's house. There we sat in a cluster and talked further about the project and their plans. The African girls asked questions about Canada and contemplated how they could thank their sisters in Alberta. They wondered if maybe the Alberta Guides would be interested in seeing a traditional Basotho hat, or would want a Lesotho flag. Hoping that some Guides in Alberta would like to become their pen pals, they composed a letter to their newly-twinning friends (see sidebar).

During that hour spent in the shade beside Miss Jobo's house, the Guides in Morifi made the initial contact in their hearts with the Guides in Canada. I could see them questing for knowledge and for a human link with a distant land that they knew very little about. It was a moving process to observe, but what I will never forget was the gesture of friendship towards myself and the Girl Guides in Alberta that had taken place earlier while we were all still congregated at the pond.

Miss Jobo stood to say a few final words, proudly displaying the tiny maple leaf pin on her uniform I had given her that morning. She explained to her Guides that they were embarking on a project in partnership with Canada and that each one of them, in recognition of their work at the fish pond, would receive a similar pin from their sister Guides in Alberta. The delight at such a simple gesture showed on every young face looking up at her. Then the Guides rose to sing youth-songs of welcome: welcome to me, welcome to their twins in Canada, and welcome to all Canadians who seemed to care so much.

The songs, a cappella in perfect three-part harmony, rang out over the fields to the mountains beyond. In their voices were notes of confidence, joy, sincerity and hope — all bound together as beautiful music, a recording of which is on its way from the Girl Guides of Butha-Buthe to the Girl Guides of Alberta. As the rest of the villagers joined in, the African Guides ended their concert with Lesotho's national anthem,



Dear friends of Guides:

We are very happy to know that you have organized yourselves to help us with our fish pond here. We, as Guides and our brother Scouts and all the youths living in Pholonamane, thank you very much and we would like to correspond with you and exchange visits.

Canadian Guides, do you sing? Here we have a special choir called the Moving Stars after the stars and planets in the sky. You will hear us in the tape recording. What else would you like to know about Pholonamane and Lesotho? We would like to know about the occupations in Canada.

Do you have fields as we have here in our country? What crops do you grow? Are there some Basotho there in Canada?

Our brother Scouts would like to know if the youths in Canada are doing carpentry. We want to see in your photos the Guides and Scouts in their development works. Please write back to us.

We heartily welcomed the visit of David Pelly in our place, so we thank you very much with everything and everybody you sent to us.

The Guides of Butha-Buthe

singing not for themselves alone, nor for me; they were singing to Canada and that, I thought, is surely what village twinning is all about.

David F. Pelly

Villagers



David F. Pelly

A special affection: Canadians are always welcome in Lesotho

Villagers

A Two-Way Street Begins

*Taking the cue from the Basotho:
Giving aid is one matter, joining
hands in friendship quite another*

I had never been to Africa before and had no idea what to expect. After spending two days and two nights on planes and in airports, the thought of arriving in a strange country — normally an exciting prospect for me — held little appeal. But when I stepped out of the customs hall, there before me was a tall, black priest holding up a small piece of cardboard with my name written across it, calling out to me like a welcome banner. It was a display of hospitality that would prove typical of the people of Lesotho.

The Roman Catholic priests of the Oblate Order took this Protestant stranger into their midst, feeding me, advising me and, best of all, befriending me. The Oblates, I quickly discovered, are at the roots of Canada's long-standing involvement in Lesotho. It is now over 60 years since the first of an unbroken chain of French-Canadian missionaries came to Lesotho. They worked mainly in remote mountain villages, helping the villagers to build better lives. Today 90 percent of the Basotho are Christian, fully half of them Catholics. As one old man who lived high up in the mountains said to me, "The Oblates did so much for us — they really built this country."

The openness of the Basotho toward strangers reminded me of the Inuit in northern Canada, where I have travelled extensively. That experience in a cross-cultural setting proved invaluable in Lesotho, where I discovered striking social, cultural and even physical similarities between the Basotho and the Inuit. In both cultures, babies are carried on the back in a cleverly designed traditional garment. Cheekbones are high, foreheads broad. Traditional houses are round. Food, even when scarce, is always shared. Both peoples display a remarkably optimistic approach to daily hardship. The warmth of the Basotho echoed that of my friends the Inuit, and I quickly felt comfortable in the remotest surroundings.

Lesotho is a land of gently sloping mountains, the kind that beckon a hiker to attempt every summit. Beyond them lie miles of empty semi-wilderness, used only by the wandering herd-boys and their sheep during the summer months. It is a country of surprises. I was astonished to find snow on the ground the day I arrived in the mountains, and equally surprised to find myself wearing shorts and a T-shirt just a few weeks later: winter had given way to summer in



A country with a future: Little material wealth but lots of will and determination

the space of a month. The weather itself is a phenomenon of extremes. During my first week in Lesotho, the country was hit by a storm of such severity that a report of it made news in Canada. Not only were several people killed or injured, but thousands of animals, hundreds of houses and fields, tens of thousands of fruit saplings and many miles of road were destroyed.

Travelling through Lesotho is an awakening to new social, cultural and economic realities. It is not a developed nation by western standards, but neither is it a place where scenes of deprivation and horror await you at every turn. Though far from materially rich, the Basotho seem to have enough will and determination to meet any challenge, making Lesotho a country with a future.

When I think back to those weeks in the mountains, one day stands out in my memory. Tessa Oettle and Mamaliehe Makhera, two of the Plenty field workers in the Quthing Valley, took me to visit the primary school at the village of Sekokoaneng. We walked for several kilometres along a mountain trail under clear blue skies, a trek 160 children from the seven surrounding villages make every day to attend the remote primary school. It is *their* school, for they raised the money to build it. The walls were mud and sticks, put together by the villagers, but the roof of corrugated tin, the door and the window frames had to be purchased. So the students choreographed a concert which they performed around the area with a musical appeal, "We need money for a school." Although our visit was unexpected, soon after we arrived the stu-

dents were performing their songs for our benefit — 160 children crammed into the one-room school no bigger than a living room. We hated to leave.

The spirit and determination of those students and others like them will keep Lesotho alive in my heart for years to come. Everywhere I went among the Basotho that same spirit prevailed, a combination of open temperament and a positive perception of Canadians. "Wherever you go in Lesotho, people will think of Canadians as friends," a native teacher told me. "It started with the Oblates, who did so much for this country. And Canada has been a good friend ever since."

Everyone I met in Lesotho — the students at Auray, the Girl Guides in Butha-Buthe, the teachers, the priests, the villagers everywhere — made my trip a personal voyage of discovery. I learned firsthand the value of human caring to those who are removed from the wealth of the developed nations. The simple fact that I was there meant so much to the villagers I met, underscoring the immense value of the social dimension twinning can add to the development process. It is relatively easy for Canadians to give aid money to a development project in Lesotho. What is more difficult, and in my view equally important, is to join hands in friendship and offer each other a social link to our respective societies. Canadians might well take their cue from the students at Sekokoaneng who, after finishing their impromptu concert — an unforgettable gift in itself — gave each of us a bowl of *papa*, the corn meal basis of Lesotho's diet, which they had taken from their own lunch. *David F. Pelly*