

## 3. ANGOLA

(9 to 16 December 2010)

### 3.1. The Angolan Border Post Beat (Linda; Angola; December 2010)

We spend 6 hours at the Ondjiva border post to Angola. Harry & Michnus carry the bureaucratic burden (and that story belongs to them) while Elsebie & I mind the bikes.

And, man, it's busy! Trucks, cars, real piki-pikis, bicycles, wheelchairs, wheelbarrows bounce around men, women and children with bundles, boxes and basins.

*At first it appears chaotic, but soon a clear pattern emerges.*

There's not a body without determination and a destination. They form stagnant queues and then brisk flows. It has a rhythm, a beat, energy. It's humming, with stops and starts, with hoots and shouts.

And it doesn't rest, despite the incredible heat, the choking dust and (I kid you not) the cropped whips of officials.

Women, many with children tucked to their backs, perch huge loads on their heads. Basins heavy with oranges, tomatoes, onions. Bundles bursting with clothes and cloth. 5kg Bags of sugar stacked 2 wide and 4 high. Mattresses, eight at a time, flop around heads.

Men carry the makings of a house right past us; item by item, alone and together, on heads and shoulders and in arms. Roof trusses, roof sheets, window frames, doors, and cement. And then the fridges, stoves, beds, headboards, tables and chairs. Over and over, again and again.

Disabled men, at least 8 of them, hand-pedal adapted wheelchair-bicycles backwards and forwards across the border. Tucked under their seats is a sponsored bag of goodies for dispatch to the other side. Their trade depends on their humble disposition and the generosity of the official gate keepers. On the other side they receive a small fee for this paperless and hassle-free delivery of goods. Its good business and many have employed youngsters to push them. And 'aha' often it's a different youngster! We speculate a second source of income from folk masquerading as pushers to slip through the border.

Business seems to flow predominantly from Namibia to oil-rich Angola. And sure enough, there is a thriving market just just on the other side.

It's wildly exciting. We applaud all these entrepreneurs! I wonder if I had access to a small loan what I would peddle across the border?

We are abruptly stopped from taking pictures. These few are sneaked in .....



The Angolan Border Post Beat



### 3.2. The House of Jose Carlos Santos Mendes (Linda, Angola; December 2010)

Michnus met Jose three years ago on a previous trip to Angola. His brother-in-law, Eric, writes very movingly about this experience (*see trip report linked to website*).

The generosity of Jose Carlos Santos Mendes shakes us. He gives 4 days of himself, his family and friends. First at his rambling guesthouse, with a strong biker bent, in Lubango. Then at his isolated beach hut in Baia de Pippas near Namibe.

#### Jose's life is full with an 'out of the ordinary' group of people.

We meet with pure pleasure his parents, wife, Angelino, Erik, Josef, Nando and many others. They all spill in and out of the central courtyard of his incomplete guesthouse with a bar on the one side and a band stage on the other.

His parents are second generation Portuguese and show with bursting pride family photos in their lounge and a generator, powered by a World War II motorcycle engine, in the garden. His wife, Amanda, is introduced with a wink as Brazilian, and is of Namibian and Swazi descent. They have very little English and we speak with our hands, our eyes and our smiles.

Erik is a young Brazilian and we all revert to him for those tricky words that need translation. He plans to rent the courtyard from Jose and turn it into a Brazilian themed restaurant and bar. He has imported a container of Brazilian meat which he sells in town everyday.

Jose, Josef and Nando, standing with Michnus in the photo below, have a band called "Falcons".

Josef, is Angolan, and the war has left him with 14 bullet wounds in his left side. He sings with a charming American twang. He plays the drums and a saw. He draws from the saw the most spine-chilling and heart-breaking sounds.

Nando does bookkeeping work for Jose, but truly rises in the evenings with a guitar in his hands. Nando's eyes are always smiling and he also has a very bad limp.

Angelino is Portuguese and has 3 beautiful children. Her husband is Angolan and works as a plumber in Luanda. She rents an apartment from Jose so that her children can go to the Portuguese school in Lubango as they await placement at a very good school in Luanda. She has a feisty spirit and seems to carry a secret. She slips in and out of her kitchen with tasty Portuguese eats. We chat and chat and chat, swop recipes and addresses, and I believe we will stay in touch.

The sweetest little Angolan girl, who belongs to the washer-lady, is spellbound by her red and white Xmas dress. A lady from the Ukraine rents a room at the far corner of the guesthouse and we watch her sweep her veranda every morning.

Jose, himself, is a third generation Angolan of Portuguese descent. His family did not manage to escape, by air or by land, when the Portuguese evacuated in 1975. They survive many horrors in the 27 years of war thereafter. His grandfather is shot down in front of him by MPLA. He and his father are both imprisoned and tortured by UNITA. He fights in the war against UNITA who is aggressively supported by the South African Defense Force.

A 'Leba Pass' story chills us. Leba Pass, pictured below, is between Lubango and Namibe and we ride it four times as we shuttle between Jose's guesthouse and his beach hut. His cousin and young family, and a number of other families are gunned down by a South African helicopter gunship in the pass. These families are returning from a day at the beach at Namibe and are concertinaed in the pass by a breakdown. The event is blamed on incorrect intelligence information but survivors claim women and children were clearly visible in and around their cars.

Today Jose Carlos Santos Mendes is a very proud Angolan and the devoted host of four South Africans.



Leba Pass and it's chilling story



Jose Carlos' 'Biker Guesthouse' in the making



Michnus with the 'Falcons'. The 2 Joses' are in the middle and Nando is on their right.



At night the Falcons entertain. Here Jose Carlos plays the guitar while Jose 2's daughter sings.



Here Jose 2 plays the drums and sings



Here Jose 2 'plays' the saw like a eery violin!

### 3.3. Angola and its Surprises (Harry, Angola, December 2010)

It was with some trepidation that I approached Angola, the former enemy.

I left bewildered and moved by its complexities.

Angola has the potential to be the wealthiest nation on the African continent. It has reserves of oil, diamonds, and copper (amongst others) however this does not seem to find its way to the masses.

When the Portuguese left Angola in the mid 70's (in one of the biggest air evacuations of modern times) they literally drained the country overnight of skills. Compounding this was the power vacuum they left behind amongst the various factions vying for control (MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA) which eventually degenerated into a civil war that lasted 3 decades. Only now does a relative peace seem to prevail albeit possibly on a superficial level.

Things work; barely. The border post was a case in point. It took 6 hours of bureaucratic bungling (even though we had a visa) to get through.

#### **Some of the images that will remain with me:**

The chicken-eating border official who seemed to be on an eternal lunch break dismissively shooing me out of her office (with a wave of an oily, podgy hand and mutterings in Portuguese). I lingered outside her door like a naughty school child making my presence felt as subtly as one could. All this to gain access to her land of birth as a tourist.

The police at the border post who would not allow one to sit on the benches under a big tree to escape the oppressive heat.

The lack of roads and fuel in a country blessed with oil reserves.

The bloated extra fuel bladders which strained in the heat. We needed these in case there was no fuel available.

The USD 120 p/n “hotel” we treated ourselves to after the border crossing that was a surreal mixture of Faulty towers, Bagdad café and an end-of-the-line Chinese discount emporium store. Every conceivable Chinese creation could be found crammed into this establishment; Dragons at the entrance, a court yard resplendent with prancing horses, eagles, Venetian statues, elephants and their genitals, a lone cowboy on a horse. The list goes on. The rooms were equally resplendent with all the modern trappings one would expect from an establishment of this caliber; air cons, TV, paper slippers etc. If only it had electricity it would have been a welcomed oasis.....

The roads that vacillated from tar highways to non-existent tracks. As we wound our way along some of these crippled arterials I thought of Linda's aunt in Toronto who is a ballet teacher. If she could only see the pirouetting of vehicles along this road all trying to avoid the pot holes and each other; a rather somber form of ballet with steel dancers.

The burnt out carcasses of tanks and other war hardware left in the bush as grim reminders.

The countless amputees, hapless victims from land mines from the conflicts.

The generosity of spirit of the people who have lived through what is close to the bottom of the barrel as one can reach.

The 2 José's were an embodiment of this spirit that we experienced time and again.

One a major in the special forces of the Angolan army who lost his cousin, her child and husband in an ambush by South African helicopter gun ships in Leba pass after spending a day at the beach. The same Jose was shot in the leg by SA forces. He still bears the scars today. The same Jose who also saw his grandfather being killed by the MPLA during the civil war. The same Jose who could not escape the civil war with his family as the roads were blocked. The same Jose who was imprisoned with his father during the civil war as a perceived supporter of Unita.

The same Jose who welcomed us with open arms and treated us as family.

The other Jose who is riddled with wounds from the conflict. This Jose was the lead vocal in the band they had formed; the Falcons. He had a Satchmo timber to his voice, often winging it when the songs were in English, barely audible. But who cared. These were friends.

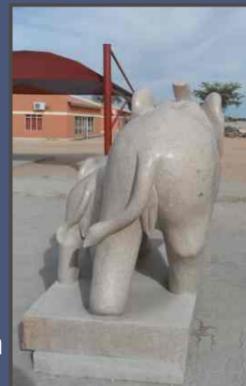
The incredible beauty of the country that can range from high mountain to tropical forests to barren dessert to sea all within 100km. Etude (the theme from the movie “the killing fields” for me paradoxically best sums up the landscape if one was to attach a musical score to it).

The petrol station attendant who saw his father shot in front of him by Unita.

One could go on and on. But it would still not do justice to this country and its tremendous, resilient inhabitants.

Their generosity of spirit and fortitude not only envelops one it permeates deep down.

May they go from strength to strength.



Attention to detail!



And inside our hotel room we find ...



How many lives were lost in this troop carrier.



Missiles near Namibe still pointing in the general direction of SA.



Friday afternoon downtown Southern Angola.



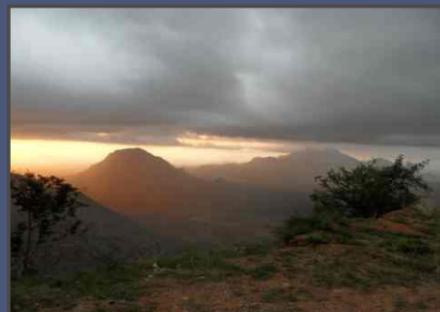
An oil rich country yet queues for fuel.



The women treated the bikes with derision.



The men did not. Note the panga.



The scenery changes dramatically within 100km.



The local elder gives consent for us to sleep in the bush.



No reprise from the heat, even for pigs.



3.4. Some More Photos from Angola

A shy pretty little girl.



Michnus and Harry share Polony and Beer at Garage.



Elsebie and Linda stretch at Garage.



Harry gets beer now!



Michnus takes a photo of Linda buying land at Baia dos Pipas with Harry coming back to take a look.



I'm breaking my 18h00 drinking curfew again and again and again.



Our overnight stay at the beachhut by motorbike light.



A real piki piki brigade in a small Angolan town comes out to meet us.



A small boy offers an alive chicken for sale to a passing truck driver.



His offer is refused.



Here I am being out-performed by an Angolan on his little piki-piki.



A lot of lovely 'deco' at the coastal village of Namibe.



A memorial to the Dorslandtrekkers in Humpata, a small village between Namibe and Lubango.



The route taken by the Dorslandtrekkers.



A settlement adjacent to the memorial.

Michnus helps repair a punctured tyre. We don't have a car jack but we do have a repair kit.



A typical Angolan roadside settlement.



Roadside stalls. It's so hot!



Harry wants beer now!

Harry and I at the foot of the Christ Statue overlooking Lubango.



Looking down at the city of Lubango from the Christ Statue.



It's almost Christmas time.