

Çava?

The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea
Advocacy, Information, and Networking for Guinea and Peace Corps Guinea



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Girls' Conferences: A Guinean Success Story

Woody Colahan (Maci, '93-'96)
Newsletter Editor
newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

The ninth annual Guinea Girls' Conferences took place between last December 8 and December 13 (including three simultaneous four-day conferences in different regions of Guinea plus one day of travel before and after the conferences). All three conferences included sessions on health, professional opportunities, gender roles and environmental protection. Attendees dramatized novels, participated in sports and crafts, and worked with computers. These conferences were a huge success, and included participation by 76 Guinean girls, 51 Guinean women and men, and 73 PCVs.

At the Boké conference, each of the four days was given a separate theme: "Professional Women," "Women's Rights," "Excision," and "Health and the Environment." Working sessions were shortened in order to include movies, sport and crafts and the end of each day. Optional activities were offered after dinner each night. The conference was attended by "a fantastic group of enthusiastic girls from all over the *Bass-Côte* region," according to organizers. The conference took place at the CESTAS conference center, and girls attending stayed at the *préfet's* villa.

Despite the hospitality of the *préfet*, arranging accommodations for the Boké conference was problematic, and consideration is being given to moving the *Bass-Côte* conference next year to Kindia, where a greater variety of facilities is available.

The *Moyenne-Guinée* conference was moved from Labé to Mamou this year, on the recommendation of last year's organizers. Volunteers and participants were housed together at ENATEF, where there was more time for interaction and no transportation problems. Sessions included "Public Speaking," "Women and Islam," and "HIV/AIDS." Organizers reported that conference attendees were generally more serious, better prepared and more cooperative than the year before, possibly because greater care was taken in selecting girls for the conference and orienting them toward a successful experience.

The Kankan conference featured sessions on various topics, and included a visit to the regional library. The participants also created and performed a dramatic theater piece based on a novel they studied. Kankan organizers reported that the conference ran smoothly, and the girls especially enjoyed physical activities such as *kung fu*, yoga and basketball.

As in previous years, written feedback about the conferences was unanimous in its praise. Ousmane



Kankan conference participants visit the regional library.

What is... ÇaVa?

ÇaVa is the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea and seeks to maintain contact and community among members as well as inform them of the official activities of the organization.

Edited by: Woody Colahan

Email: newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

Diallo, the conference safety and security officer, said: "These conferences are vital for young ladies in particular and the country in general, because they say that in Africa raising the awareness of a woman is equal to raising the awareness of the whole nation." One conference participant, Aissatou Barry, said glowingly that "Girls' Conference was marvelous. I learned a lot and also reinforced things I already knew. The volunteers were very nice and attentive to us. Overall I am very happy to have participated and I feel like I will have the determination to stand in front of my peers and tell them what I have learned." PCV Brian Beuhler commented that: "Over the course of the Girls' Conferences, I've seen the incredible impact that they have on these young women. It made an incredible difference in my invitee in February 2005. I see the same realizations taking hold in my girl, Rokia Diawara, this year. She was attentive and participated a lot over a range of sessions, and I look forward to helping her share her experience with our village. The Girls' Conference is without a doubt one of the most effective tools for behavior change in Peace Corps Guinea. It is also a cherished tradition! Thanks for helping it to continue."

One volunteer reported that the girl she sponsored to the conference gained the confidence for the first time to confide in another that she had never completely healed after her excision, carried out seven years previously. It was to her American friend that she turned first, who counseled her to tell her family. This PCV later learned that the girl had confided in her parents, who were finally seeking the long-delayed help she needed.

PCV Chris Kirchgasler commented on how the conferences facilitated networking among the participants: "On the last full day of the Conference, the girls sat down with their volunteers to create a plan of action to accomplish once they arrive in the village. Two girls from neighboring villages sat down together and started planning how to begin talking to their community members about the dangers of female genital mutilation. One girl is bold and dynamic, but does not know the community well. The other girl is from the village and is well versed in village politics, but is a little timid. Thanks to the conference, these two girls met each other and were able to form a partnership, beneficial to both."

Innovations in this year's conferences included the library visit in Kankan, which is sure to be repeated in the future, and an informal evening session on long-term goal-planning that came out of the Boké conference. "Though it was an optional session, all the girls showed up and actively participated in it," said the Boké organizers. "For most of the girls, this was the first time anyone had ever asked them about their future plans." Organizers hope to see this idea given more emphasis in future conferences.

PCVs face many obstacles in organizing the conferences, including poor communications in Guinea and, this year especially, a short fund-raising cycle. Friends of Guinea thanks everyone who helped us to donate nearly \$8,000 to the conferences last year, and hopes to begin fundraising for the next set of conferences soon...so please donate generously to a project that touches the lives of so many young women in such a profound way.



Three-legged races at the Kankan conference.

On the Road in Guinea

Sharon Beuhler, PCV Parent
Guinea Parent Support Coordinator
gps@friendsofguinea.org

(In our last issue, Sharon shared the experience of Christmas in Conakry with her PCV son. Here she tells of traveling with her son in Guinea.)

After spending Christmas in Conakry with my son, Brian, and a few dozen terrific Peace Corps volunteers and staff, it was time to see the country. Travel anywhere is a challenge, even within Conakry where it is like a dodge-'em game; no wonder the taxis are missing side mirrors.

It takes a long time to leave Conakry by road, since it is on a peninsula. One sign of improvement is a long, wide red dirt strip of road which looks like it may be paved eventually. Then through the checkpoint;



Negotiating a taxi for Mom.



Burning hut, setting the mango tree on fire

since it was our turn to break down, at least it was at the checkpoint where we could buy gasoline (in bottles) or motor oil (also in bottles). It was a difficult decision, whether to remain in the hot car, or get out and try to dodge the dozens of vendors.

We have all seen photos of the cars and trucks overloaded with bundles and packages and passengers. It made me wonder if Dr. Seuss had visited Guinea; was that the idea for *Ten Apples Up On Top* (I actually counted 10 Guineans on top) or *Cat in the Hat* where an ever increasing number of small cats came out of his hat – how could so many people get into/onto one taxi!

Driving northeast from Conakry to Mamou, then north to Pita, and across country trails (some could not be called roads) to Douki, it seemed like such a land of contrasts: lush areas just past the checkpoint with date palms, mangoes, bananas, and papayas; manioc drying on the edge of the asphalt road; then the hills with small garden patches nearing Kindia; to areas of scrub brush and free range cattle.

What am I saying... everything is free range, from kids to cattle, goats and chickens! And so many *vultures*, sitting on roof edges in small towns that have meat markets, picking at fresh hides left in the street, and flying/nesting in the canyons where we were hiking at Douki.

After leaving the low areas and starting east from Coyah into the hills toward Kindia, there were so very many fires. In one place the flames were on both sides of the road, up to the edge of the asphalt. In answer to our questions, we were told that many people burn their fields at this time of year, getting ready for spring planting. These fires often get out of control, and the practice is to let them burn.

Coming back through Mamou, we stopped to buy Guinean cloth – a huge *marché* there with acres of booths with cloth. It would be easy to get lost in all the winding paths through the small stalls, and even difficult to find the way out!

As we drove east, one village would look so prosperous, such as Timbo with its many concrete

Friends of Guinea

**Advocacy, Information, and Networking
for Guinea and Peace Corps Guinea**

Friends of Guinea is a non-profit organization made up of former and currently serving Guinea Peace Corps Volunteers, Guineans inside and outside of Guinea, and others interested in promoting the cause of Guinean development in the world at large. We are a country-of-service affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association. Dues are \$15 annually for individuals, and \$23 for families.

email: info@friendsofguinea.org

website: <http://friendsofguinea.org>

houses, and the next would be so poor with mud huts in disrepair and weedy garden plots – as always, a land of contrast.

On the main east/west highway our speed varied from slow crawl through ruts and red dust to over 90 kph. Clever PCV girls wear head coverings in taxis.

As we approached Brian's village, the highway was in great condition! Only the very brave continue on toward Kankan, as the highway becomes nearly impassable.

'Home' at last, to a wonderful reception by all in the village. But that is another story.

The "Refugee All-Stars" Sing Their Story

Claire Lea (Banian, '02-'04)

clear_lea@yahoo.com

"The Refugee All-Stars," a feature-length documentary film, won the Grand Jury Prize at the American Film Institute Festival in 2005. It follows the story of six men who fled the civil war in Sierra Leone. It follows their experiences in refugee camps, where they decided to turn their personal tragedy into a musical calling, and their eventual return to war-ravaged

Freetown.

In February, I had the opportunity to screen this film at a local festival in Columbia, MO. As a music fan, I was looking forward to another "Buena Vista Social Club" type film, and my expectations were surpassed. Not only was it just as good as "Buena Vista," but the stories of the musicians hit so close to home as a Guinea RPCV, with footage of the Guinean countryside, and stories of heartbreak, horror, and (somehow) humor stemming from the brutal Sierra Leonian civil war.

"Living Like a Refugee" is the double album that was produced in the making of the film. Some of the songs, mostly in English and/or Krio, define the refugee experience in the UNHCR camps, while others speak of daily life, love, and hardship.

I met the directors of the film, and they were really moved by their experience in the refugee camps in Guinea. They've put together a screening of the film for Friends of Sierra Leone, and would be willing to do so for us if there is enough interest in a particular city. For now, the film is unavailable for purchase.

The double album, however is for sale on their website for \$20, and all the proceeds go



directly to the now-repatriated musicians in Freetown. For West African music buffs, it's a good addition to the collection, and includes a couple of songs in Malinké. More information, including a link to buy the group's album, is available at www.refugeeallstars.org. The film has also been profiled on NPR's *Weekend Edition* (Saturday, December 3), and audioclips are available on the program website.

Peace Corps Encore Taps Rich Vein of Experience, Skill

Ellwood Colahan (Maci, 93-96)

Newsletter Editor

newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

More than 200,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers since 1961. Among them are Jerr Boschee and Chris Klose, both of whom served in Northern India from 1968 to 1970. Boschee taught

English as a Second Language in the state of Harvana and Klose worked in village level food production in the Punjab. Decades later, acting out of a shared lifelong passion for service, they founded Peace Corps Encore.

Peace Corps Encore is a non-profit organization devoted to the mission of re-deploying former Peace Corps Volunteers and staff members to the field for short-term assignments in their areas of professional expertise. These individuals collectively represent an extraordinary resource of skills and experience: During their Peace Corps service they have become familiar with the most complex sets of issues facing developing countries; and in the years following their service they have become doctors, lawyers, engineers, entrepreneurs, social workers, and experts in dozens of other fields. Social needs continue to expand, and dedicated people with specific expertise are always in short supply. These men and women still want to make a difference – and are looking for practical ways of doing so.

Boschee and Klose believe that “Once a Peace Corps Volunteer, always a Peace Corps Volunteer.” They now develop and manage social impact projects throughout the world. They seek former Peace Corps members who are ready to serve on short-term assignments, from three weeks to three months, in projects directly impacting problems such as poverty, hunger, AIDS, and many others.

Although they are still trying to change the world, they are no fuzzy-headed idealists. Along with cross-cultural sensitivity and the celebration of individual differences, their values also include measurable goals and independent evaluation of success and failure, with transparent disclosure of all results.

Although not formally affiliated with either the Peace Corps or the NPCA, Peace Corps Encore made its debut in 2004 at the NPCA Annual Meeting. Since then they have signed up more than 900 potential volunteers, and won substantial grants from the UPS Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. They were profiled favorably last November in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. “The world needs us more now than ever,” say Boschee and Klose, and of course they will always be right. They invite anyone interested in serving, donating, or requesting a volunteer to visit their website (www.peacecorpsencore.org) or email them at info@peacecorpsencore.org.

More information about Peace Corps Encore is also available on Friends of Guinea’s website, under “Information for...Returned Volunteers.”



Universal Giving Facilitates International Philanthropy

Ellwood Colahan (Maci, 93–96)

Newsletter Editor

newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

Alison Laing served as a Health PCV in Burkina Faso from 2001 to 2003. She says: “I had such an amazing experience in Burkina that when I came back here to the Bay Area, I wanted to continue doing work in a similar field, helping to promote and increase the number of people getting involved in our international community.”

Today, Alison works with an organization called UniversalGiving (formerly GivingGlobal). Founded in 2002, UniversalGiving describes itself as a “social entrepreneurship nonprofit” that helps donors and volunteers “find the right opportunity, in the right country, right now.” Universal Giving maintains a website (www.universalgiving.org) with a comprehensive profile of each of its NGO partners, where individuals can search for international organizations, projects and volunteer opportunities according to their specific interests (such as “Children and Youth” or “Education”) and a specific country or geographic area. Potential donors and volunteers can then connect directly with the NGO of their choice.

Universal Giving describes its vision as the creation of “a thriving philanthropic network whose direct impact uplifts world communities.” Their plans call for increasing the number of global participants by ten percent each year. Says Laing, “We are looking to expand our network of nonprofits to internationally based organizations. Previously, we have been focused on U.S. based groups working abroad. We are excited to broaden this network to incorporate internationally based groups and partners working in the field. However, it is very important to us that we identify the top level organizations to ensure that we offer the most quality and trusted information. We believe that working together with organizations like Friends of Guinea who are the experts in this area, is a great way to do just that.”

Universal Giving boasts that 100 percent of donations it receives go directly to its NGO partners. Laing calls it “the only organization that doesn’t take a cut on the donation, promotes both giving and volunteering, and provides a quality model ensuring top performing NGOs.”

UniversalGiving also provides a customized service for corporations, UniversalGiving Corporate,

which facilitates international volunteering and giving programs. The service is customized as well for investment banks and high-net worth clients interested in strategic philanthropy.

Centre d'Informatique Carrie Mitchell

Carrie Mitchell (Boké, '02-'04)
carrie.mitchell@alumni.duke.edu

There is a new computer learning center in Conakry! As of November 2005, young people can learn basic computer skills in Matoto at the "Centre d'Informatique Carrie Mitchell." (I told them not to name it after me, but who listens?) I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you a bit about the center's origins and vision.

As I was finishing my Peace Corps service in 2004, many friends from home asked if there was any way that they could contribute to my projects. At the same time, my mother told me about a Seattle non-profit called InterConnection (www.interconnectioncomputers.com), which recycles or refurbishes used computers. Started by RPCV Paraguay Charles Brennick, InterConnection sells refurbished computers at low cost to organizations or individuals interested in making technology accessible in developing countries. InterConnection also develops web sites for non-profits around the world.

With these ideas in mind, I began to scheme with my sincere and entrepreneurial collaborator Amadou Sow about the possibility of getting computers to Guinea. We envisioned a place where interested students could learn basic computer skills (Microsoft Word, Excel, and typing, for example). Once trained, these students would be responsible for training others. Our initial vision was to open a non-profit computer learning center in Boké, where access to technology is difficult. Given the challenges of starting there, however, we decided first to establish a center in Conakry with the intention of opening a second center in Boké in the future.

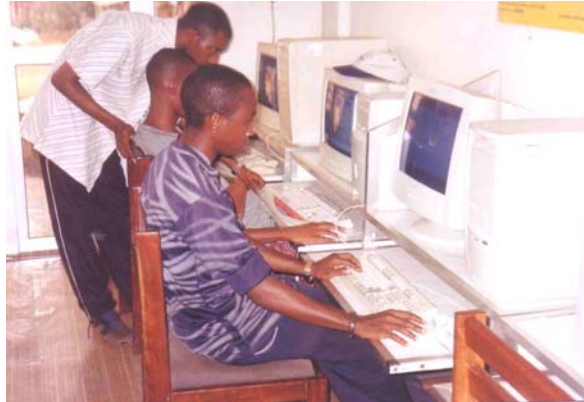
Although the refurbished computers themselves were inexpensive, the real challenge was transporting the machines around the world. Just when I was discouraged by shipping costs, a well-connected family friend convinced Air France to offer our cargo a significantly reduced rate. They helpfully arranged the

logistics of flying twenty desktop computers to Guinea, where Amadou Sow and business partner Abdoulaye Bah dealt with the challenges of customs and bureaucracy. They set up the center in Matoto, facing the Coca Cola/Bonagui production facility.

We would like to invite interested PCVs currently in Guinea to see this as an opportunity. The Centre d'Informatique daily welcomes scores of enrolled students, and they are a captive audience if anyone is inclined to develop health education or other messages as posters for the center's walls. If this possibility intrigues you, please do not hesitate to contact Amadou

Sow at 57.37.91 or amadoubokesow@yahoo.fr. He also welcomes anyone interested to visit the center, requesting that you call ahead to get specific directions.

Many thanks to Peace Corps Guinea, Air France, and many friends at home for helping make this vision a reality!



Peace Corps stories and essays wanted for the travel anthology "Americans Do Their Business Abroad: The Peace Corps Latrine Reader," edited by Steve McNutt and Jake Fawson. Think: humorous yet harrowing tales of self-deprecation and disaster. Above all, think funny. Proceeds to charity. Deadline: September 15, 2006. Complete guidelines at: www.peacecorpsreader.blogspot.com. E-mail submissions to: stevemcnutt@earthlink.net or jfawson@gmail.com.

Webpage Report

Nathan Shepherd (Dinguiraye '02-'03)
Webmaster
web@friendsofguinea.org

So, you've been admiring Erik Zimmerman's or Stephanie Weber's photos on the FOG webpage? Why not share your own creative talent with the FOG community? Send us your photos of Guinea, of its citizens, or of its past or present PCVs (limit 10 images) along with your mailing address. Your photos will enter the FOG archive, and those we choose to include in the website in the next year will be enlarged and mailed back to you as a thank you.

Another way we can improve the website is by expanding the FOG recipe page. Please send us recipes

for toh, fish sauce, soup sauce, spinach leaf sauce (maafé haako buroburo), Toucouleur dishes (such as corn couscous with leaf sauce/sour milk), any of the hundreds of varieties of street food, and/or any other Guinean recipes not already included on that page; along with your mailing address. If we publish your recipe on the page, we will send you an appropriate thank you item (to be determined...maybe Maggi?).

Send all submissions to web@friendsofguinea.org. FOG makes every effort to ensure you receive credit for your submissions should we decide to use them.

Membership Report

Emily A. Ramshur (Koubia, '00-'02)
Membership Director
membership@friendsofguinea.org

On jaraama! My name is Emily Ramshur and I am an RPCV from Koubia, 2000-2002. I am pleased to have recently joined Friends of Guinea as Director of Membership. We currently have 216 members, including both Americans and Guineans. I would like to take a moment to encourage COSing volunteers to JOIN our membership community. The organization can help to bridge your experiences in Guinea and the US. PLUS, as a "fresh off the boat" RPCV, your membership is free! Furthermore, if each COSing volunteer could encourage 1 or 2 friends or family members to do the same (their membership would be only \$15), we could really grow our ranks and offer even more support to projects in Guinea! Please join FOG and encourage others to do so – it feels great to be part of a network of people who love and want to support la belle Guinée!

Communications Report

Brian Farenell (Beindou, '95-'97)
Communications Director
communications@friendsofguinea.org

I am pleased to announce the launch of Friends of Guinea's new blog. The blog will be used primarily to publish news stories from and about Guinea derived from various sources around the Internet. It will contain internal news about FOG and from FOG members as well as information from the National Peace Corps Association and the Peace Corps itself. We may also publish short fiction and non-fiction writing as well. Basically, we will post anything that might be of interest to FOG members. Please check it out at:
www.friendsofguinea.blogspot.com.

Please contact me at communications@friendsofguinea.org if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas.

GPS Report

Sharon Beuhler (PCV Parent), GPS Coordinator
gps@friendsofguinea.org

With all the additions and deletions from the January '06 Guinea Parent Support listserv, we still have 64 members for 27 of the 35-plus PCVs. Now why do I say "plus," you may wonder. The 35 PCVs sworn in on April 4th probably did not include Ashley who was rejoining; and certainly did not include Devan who was working in Guinea and joined Peace Corps from there.

Congratulations to Ashley for her perseverance in returning, and kudos to Devan on his determination. We offer our congratulations and best wishes to all of the G11 group who have begun their service at their sites.

Not to wonder, the next group is gathering. We are expecting 24 teachers in G12 which includes at least two "Jennifers"!

Tennessee B&B Free (Almost) to RPCVs

Get free lodging at the Chinquapin Hill B&B in Ramer, Tennessee!

Owner Willard Summers will only charge \$20 to RPCVs (which is slightly less than what they pay to put you up, so it really is free). Contact them on the Web at www.bedandbreakfastwesttennessee.com, by email at polin-m@yandex.ru, or by telephone at 731-645-5860. In addition, they are searching for RPCV's who can serve as translators for international guests, which may be done via phone from your home. You would be paid when they use your services. Please contact Willard if you are interested.

Immigration Interpreters Wanted

Eric Brewer is a recruiter with Lionbridge Interpretation Services. He works with the U.S. Department of Justice to find interpreters for Immigration Court cases nationwide, in all languages. Some of his priority languages at this time are from Guinea (such as Susu and Malinke). The only

qualification required of candidates, other than language skills, is that they be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. However, on a case by case basis, individuals granted asylum may also qualify. Experience in legal interpreting is not necessary, as Lionbridge gives free training to all candidates. If you know of anyone interested in becoming an interpreter, Eric would greatly appreciate your help. He may be reached at: Lionbridge Interpretation Services, 1101 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005; or by telephone toll-free at 800.423.6756.

Le Griot Nous Dit...

Jon Goldin-Dubois ('94-'96) has been named Executive Vice-President of Common Cause. Says Jon, "I am very excited about the prospect of playing a key role in strengthening an organization that I care so much about and that has such an important role to play in engaging citizens to build a better democracy and in holding power accountable. In these extraordinary times, when the Common Cause agenda is front and center on the national agenda, a strong Common Cause is needed more than ever. I am looking forward to this challenge."

Jon is currently splitting his time between Denver and Washington, D.C. He and **Denise Goldin-Dubois** ('94-'96) plan to move the family to Washington sometime in July. While they are happy to see Jon taking on a position of such visibility, their friends in Denver will miss them both.

Stephanie Chasteen ('97-'99) received her Ph.D in Physics last December from UC Santa Cruz. Dr. Steph now holds a postdoctoral position at the Exploratorium Museum of Science, Art and Human Perception in San Francisco, doing professional development for science teachers and acting as a scientific advisor in the museum. "Best job EVER," she says. "Come by and see me!" You can reach her at stephaniec@exploratorium.edu.

Current Projects in Guinea:

RPCV Adam Dowling (Matakaou/Labe), is working on a project in collaboration with Sharing Resources Worldwide (www.sharingresourcesworldwide.org) to send six eye-care specialists to match, fit and distribute donated eyeglasses in Tougué, Guinea. The team, including Dowling and his mother, a registered nurse, will be going to Guinea this summer. Fundraising for the project is currently underway and donations can be made through the FOG website.

Partage Québec-Guinée (PQG), a charitable organization which sends books and other educational supplies to Guinea, is very interested in collaborating with Guinea PCVs on projects and can supply books for schools and libraries. Computers, chairs, desks, tables, fabric, and toys for pre- and elementary-school students are often (though not always) available as well. More information about PQG is on the FOG website and interested volunteers can contact Claude Lescan at pqg@simm.qc.ca.



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