



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

A Letter from the editor: The Reflection and Progression Edition

Dear FOG Members,

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the reflection and projection issue of our quarterly newsletter. There is a new energy in Peace Corps Guinea with boots back on the ground again!

This edition features a message from Doug Teschner, Guinea's country director and Katie Boyle, a current response volunteer and returned evacuee, reflecting on the surreal experience of her return to Guinea.

We also have two photo contests! One for FOG and one for Peace Corps Guinea. What better way to express and share Guinea than a powerful or playful picture. Submit early and often, please!

FOG is also introducing a new section of the newsletter called FOG Focus to discuss a topic in a series. Our first topic is the sensitive but important subject of female genital mutilation (FGM). A reflection on past practices and a note of progress.

I hope this issue inspires your own reflections and projections. Enjoy!

Hannah Koepl
FOG Newsletter Editor

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**FOG's new
Facebook
Status!**

Join FOG's new
FB Group. We
have upgraded to
make it more
interactive!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/951775618251360/?ref=book>

FOG WEBSITE PHOTO CONTEST

DO YOU HAVE A FABULOUS PHOTO FROM GUINEA THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE FEATURED ON THE FRIENDS OF GUINEA WEBSITE HOMEPAGE? WE ARE LOOKING TO FRESHEN UP OUR WEBSITE WITH NEW SUBMISSIONS. SEE OUR WEBSITE FOR EXAMPLES (FRIENDSOFGUINEA.ORG). PLEASE SEND YOUR PHOTO AND A SHORT BLURB DESCRIBING THE PEOPLE, LOCATION, EVENT, ETC. TO HANNAH KOEPL NEWSLETTER@FRIENDSOFGUINEA.ORG BY APRIL 1ST.

**Happy
Birthday
Peace
Corps!**

**March 1st was
the agency's
55th anniversary!**



Message from Peace Corps Guinea Country

Director Doug Teschner

*To live only for some future goal is shallow.
It's the sides of the mountain that sustain
life, not the top.*

-- Robert M. Pirsig

Greetings from Conakry where the big news is that we have Volunteers back after 17 long months without! We rejoiced with the January 5 arrival of 8 Response Volunteers (5 working on school nutrition monitoring and evaluation with the World Food Program and 3 math/science teachers) plus 7 Mali evacuation transfers working in Health and Agroforestry. Five of the Response Volunteers were among the group that evacuated in July/August 2014, and we are thrilled to have them back.

Another of the Response Volunteers is a Guinea RPCV from the 1990s -- it is never too late to apply to come back to Guinea! We have more Response Volunteers coming in May and September and will be posting more positions in the future. Also we have a big group of 70 trainees coming in July.

Back in July/August 2014 when we evacuated due to Ebola, I asked each Volunteer to write a word or two about Guinea in English, French or local language, and many were very touching. We intentionally left those post-it notes up on the walls of our conference room, and I explained their significance to many visitors over the many intervening months. When the new PCVs arrived back, we had an emotional ceremony talking about the transition



from the evacuation past to a new future, and taking down the post-it notes was symbolic of this change. I asked the five Guinea evacuees to take down the post-it note each had written. Then I asked the other PCVs and staff to take down one that had meaning to them.

Many shared what they picked. I chose one labeled "Home" and said that, at the time of the evacuation, I had been in country less than 3 weeks, but Guinea was now my home. Our new US Ambassador Dennis Hankins was there, too. It is great to have PCVs back!

I hope you are following our official Peace Corps Guinea Facebook page (not to be confused with the one PCVs started www.facebook.com/PeaceCorpsGuinea). We are trying to post events every week. Also, please check out the separate article about our Photo Contest!

Good luck and keep in touch!

Doug Teschner

Peace Corps Guinea Photo Contest!

Please submit photos that (1) exemplify the PC experience, (2) show Volunteers in action, and/or (3) show interesting images of Guinea. Some of the winning photos will be mounted for display at the Dubreka training center or Peace Corps offices (and maybe the regional offices too!). Your images may also be used for the Peace Corps and Peace Corps Guinea media outlets, such as Facebook, website or our annual report. There is no specific number of winners – actually we think all the entries will be winners in the sense that they will add to the permanent record of PC in Guinea.

All entries should be submitted through the online PC Media Library by April 8 (although we may select some photos to use earlier and the Media Library welcomes good photos at any time!):

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/media/digital-library/upload/>.



Current Volunteers, RPCVs and staff are welcome to enter. By entering the contest you agree to the "Peace Corps Digital Library Project Material Submission Authorization and Agreement," which can be found on the Media Library submission page. Photos must be taken in Guinea and cannot come from any other Peace Corps post.

When you upload your image(s) be sure to fill out the Media Description (caption) section. After you write your caption be sure to put the text **PEACE CORPS GUINEA PHOTO CONTEST SUBMISSION**. If you do not put this, your entry will not be officially judged although we may still find a way to use the photos!

Be sure to check out the current Guinea photos in the Media Library at: <http://medialibrary.peacecorps.gov/p987578754> (Note: Peace Corps is presently converting the former digital library into this new Media Library, and we are told that not all of the former images have been transferred yet, but any new submissions will go straight to the Media Library).



The Return of the PCV:

A Reflection

By Katie Boyle RPCV 2012-2014 Nounkounkan

Dearest Friends of Guinea (and any friend of Guinea is a friend of mine),

Returning to Guinea has been surreal, if I had to choose one word, and a dream come true, if I was given an entire phrase to express my feelings. It was not until the final Brussels-Conakry plane ride that I realized that I had been absent from my village for almost as long as I had spent living there-1.5 years. Over the past year, working as a Peace Corps Response volunteer in Mali, just across the border from my Guinean home in the Siguiri prefecture, I often found myself reminiscing and feeling a strong pull to return to my village. As many of us experienced over the course of various evacuations, being forced to leave our sites without prior opportunity to prepare ourselves or end things in the way that we would have planned can be a highly stressful experience, possibly inducing feelings of regret, anxiety and sadness, even for months or years to come. All of these feelings manifested themselves in a focused drive to return to my home-and I am very grateful to have had that aspiration become a reality.

I have been extremely fortunate to have been placed in the Haute region, where I have the opportunity to visit my village every few weeks, when my work schedule allows. The first time that I traveled to my village, I was vacillating between many (mostly) benevolent emotions; excitement, happiness, anxiety, and even a bit of fear. Although I had kept consistent communication with my amazing host family and friends throughout my absence from Guinea, I feared that something had changed, that the place that felt like home in my mind and heart would no longer evoke the same feelings. Ever since the first time that my host Dad, Namoudou, called my family's house in the states at 3 am and asked "America???" I felt an immense comfort in being kept up to date with my family's well-being and events in the village. Still, I felt uneasy-and a bit of guilt for having to leave in such a rapid and distressing manner. I felt all of these emotions

building as I passed all of the familiar landmarks en route to my village, while chatting with the careful of men in Pulaar garb who were nice enough to pick me up along the way. When I saw the mango tree that serves as a centerpiece for my weekly market, all of the tensions absolved and I knew in a deep way that I had returned home. It really felt as if nothing had changed-there had been improvements in infrastructure, better phone service and a brand new health center, but the feelings were the same. It is a sentiment of profound peace to know that I still have a home here, in spite of an extended absence and unfortunate circumstances. I am sure that we all do, regardless of how long it has been since departing Guinea, or how limited contact with our communities has been. Friendship and shared learning can transcend vast amounts of time and distance. I have come to realize that this may be one of the most significant aspects of Peace Corps.

Since I have been back in Guinea, I have also had the opportunity to reflect on lessons learned during my time here. My first days in Conakry brought back very vivid memories of my very first few days in Guinea-the anxiety, anticipation, uncertainty, even distrust and uneasiness. Besides being familiar with the practices and culture of Guinea itself, what was different this time? I have no doubt that we have all learned very valuable lessons throughout our time in Guinea, regardless of how much of our service we were able to complete. I have had time to reflect as I settle back into Guinean life, as the standards constituting how big a "big spider" is, and how delicious a "delicious baked good" is begin to increase and decrease, respectively. I have compiled a few that have become recurrent in my thoughts since my return-and will continue to value in all contexts for a lifetime to come.



If there is no practical need to voice a complaint, correct a benign misperception or otherwise diminish someone's joy, refrain from doing so. There is no useful objective in explaining to your host grandmother what her t-shirt picturing a windmill with the caption "Blow Me" is actually implying.

Just as one cannot will mangoes to turn from green to yellow at an expedited rate, the behavior of someone else cannot be aggressively willed to change. Acceptance, patience and even abandonment of the cause are approaches superior to stress and anger.

Most babies who shriek with fear at the sight of my white skin will come around eventually and willingly sit on my lap-but some never will, and that is okay.

Soyez magnanime! As Oprah, or "Prah" as I like to call her says, "Forgiveness means giving up the hope that the past can still be different." Holding a grudge for something someone in one's community has done will only inhibit one's own experience, and accomplishes nothing. Holding a grudge does not even burn calories.

All is nuanced- there may be parts of a person, a city or a culture that feel deeply upsetting or even unacceptable to you but that does not diminish the wonderful qualities that they may also have. I am absolutely not on board with eating avocado that has been sprinkled with sugar, but I love many people that do it anyways.

"One can only do small things with great love"- one of my anciennes wrote this on the inside of the front door of my hut and truer words have never been written with a colored Sharpie. Upon return to my village, many people (some of whom I, embarrassingly, have little recollection of) have expressed their gratitude for very small things that I have done for them; paying 5 mille for a neighbor's transport fare, attending a woman's child's baptism, helping to water a garden. And it is also the small things that I remember the

most, I will never forget the time that my host mom traveled to the next village to buy potatoes to cook for me on my birthday, or the time when one of my taxi patrons demanded that the driver stop playing his Pulaar music at a ridiculous volume when I (very conveniently) complained of a headache.

As Madonna once said "Life is a mystery, everyone must stand alone." Even though I was in a village full of highly supportive and protective people, and had the support of Peace Corps staff and other volunteers, feeling responsible for ones self-even feeling alone at times, is a real character builder.

Take things personally as seldom as possible. Especially if that thing is being called fat, or "bele bele ba" by someone who literally describes every person as being fat.

There is such a thing as too much self-reflection. Letting things go is a virtue. As I realized when I opened my first yogurt since returning that was engulfed with mold, you win some you lose some. Writing off all yogurts due to one bad experience will only deprive me of delicious yogurt encounters to come.

Whether or not you would call your time spent here happy, fulfilling or even worthwhile, Guinea will have an impact on all of us throughout our lives. I hope that every one of us can find peace in our memories of our former, present or future home. Alu ni ke, huh!

See photos from Katie on the next page!





Pictures from Katie: One of her new siblings taking a very literal bucket bath (*left*), la fleuve Niger during dry season (*center*), her host home buying chickens for her return fête (*right*).

FOG FOCUS: A Newsletter series

A Note of Progress: Arrests for FGM

On January 13th in Kankan, 5 women were tried for committing multiple procedures of female genital mutilation on 14 young girls in the sous-prefecture of Gbérédou Baranama

Three were found guilty, the excisor and two accomplices. The excisor received a two-year prison sentence and a fine of 200,000 GF. The two accomplices received a year prison sentence and 100,000 GF. The other two women were released because due to lack of evidence.

These charges were pursued by l'Association des Amis de la Solidarité Sociale et Du Développement (ASD) along with a long-term campaign and collaboration between the Guinean government and UNICEF.

“Guinée: Une exciseuse écope de 2 ans de prison avec sursis.” *le224.com*

Country Director, Peace Corps, Guinea

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Friends of Guinea is a non-profit organization made up of former 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.



Do you want to contribute a piece to the next newsletter? Contact FOG
Communications Assistant Hannah Koepl at
newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

**Friends of guinea.
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