

Çava?

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



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Confronting Cultural Differences

Barbara Merritt, PCV Parent
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[Ed. Note:] Rev. Barbara Merritt is the minister of a Unitarian Universalist church in Worcester, Massachusetts. Here she shares one part of her experience as a PCV parent.

One of the last things my husband said to our oldest son as he departed for two years in the Peace Corps was, “Pay attention to your new Mommy and Daddy.”

He was referring to the United States government in its supervisory capacity of providing guidance to Peace Corps volunteers. While my son has appropriately insisted on less and less of a role for his mother and father as he approached the age of 21, the Peace Corps has no qualms about reasserting enormous authority over almost every aspect of the volunteer’s life. They tell you how to dress: in Guinea, even though it is on the equator with temperatures normally hovering over 100°, all teachers are to wear long pants and collared shirts. They tell you what to eat: Rob had to sign a piece of paper stating he would not be a vegetarian. And they have very strict codes of ethical conduct: as an onsite representative of the United States each volunteer is expected to conduct themselves with decorum and sensitivity.

As his “former” mother, I approved of a new and disciplined lifestyle for my son. But already I am finding fault with the new “parental” unit. Upon

his arrival in Guinea, Robert was sent to live with a family where the husband has several wives and an indeterminate number of children.

While I was intellectually aware that in Muslim West Africa polygamy is a normal practice, I was completely unprepared for my emotional and heartfelt objection to my son living in such a home. My visceral intolerance to this practice of multiple wives is especially disconcerting for a Unitarian



Barbara’s son Robert Merritt serves in Kanfarandé, in northeast Guinea. He writes: “The monkeys have returned to my village; they appear to be less afraid of me than they are of the local population, since I am not compelled to shoot and eat them.”

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.

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minister who has prided herself in remaining open to a wide diversity of cultural and religious traditions. My feminist self is in open combat with the part of my psyche that is committed to inclusivity and forbearance.

To make matters even more confusing, this man (with many wives) has not only graciously welcomed my son into his home with open arms, he has also been more than willing to provide him with wonderful vegetarian food. So now I'm really caught on the horns of a dilemma. I could not be more grateful to a family who welcomes a stranger into their midst and treats him with kindness and respect. And, I still flinch at the thought of the old, patriarchal structure of polygamy. While I might prefer to judge, dismiss and distance myself from families whose living arrangements do not jibe with my values, in the final analysis, I am virtually forced to admit the dignity and worth of this particular family. They are people who know how to extend genuine hospitality to a foreigner. They are people who probably face many of the same joys and challenges that people in my own culture do. They worry about their children. They need to manage scarce resources. They have real talents, and obvious flaws. Their family and friends get sick. The government doesn't deliver what it promises. They hope for a future of peace and prosperity. They pray to God to extend mercy and compassion on their human struggles. We hold much in common. We are not alone when it comes to facing tragedy, illness or death. We are not alone when it comes to celebrating what is good and true and beautiful in the creation. We can help one

another. We can be supportive of one another. We can laugh and sing together, and break bread.

It might be that our cultural, theological, and political differences are less consequential than we thought. What ultimately matters will probably have more to do with our willingness to help one another. And all children of God are in need of help.

Guinea TEFL RPCVs Celebrate 20th-year Reunion

Edward Van Luinen (Kissidougou, '87-'89)
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RPCV Edward Van Luinen was an attendee at a recent reunion of '87-'89 Guinea TEFL volunteers. He offers the following recap:

Over Memorial Day weekend 2006, five Guinea '87-'89 TEFL RPCVs gathered from across the country for their 20th year reunion titled "Reconnecting, Learning and Relaxing" at the Coolfont Resort and Spa in Berkeley Springs, WV. A wonderful weekend of reminiscing, food and fun was planned at this lush, idyllic setting in eastern West Virginia.

Those RPCVs in attendance included: Zlie Moriniere (N'Zerekore), Anne Irving (Kankan), Miki Johnson (Faranah), Sim Seo (Kindia) and Edward Van Luinen (Kissidougou). Another TEFLer, Jill Shumann (Mamou), and husband and fellow Guinea RPCV, Richard, planned to attend but for good reasons became the proud parents of a baby girl that same weekend.

On Saturday, we welcomed the one-and-only Tafsir Thiam, former APCD, and Blessing Asuquo, Guinea RPCV, for a lunch, followed by each of their presentations to the group. Tafsir prepared a lovely speech, in French, covering the history of Peace Corps Guinea, his role, and his current status living in the U.S. He kindly made copies for everyone as a memento. Blessing then spoke of her dynamic Peace Corps experience as an Agro-Forestry Volunteer in the Fouta. We were thrilled to have Tafsir and Blessing join us for the afternoon and provide wonderful context and up-to-date information on Guinea and Peace Corps' work there.

Another highlight of the weekend was watching the multi-media presentation Zlie Moriniere created for us. She showcased each Volunteer in pictures, songs and written memories and then provided each of us with a copy of the

presentation. To be sure, it was a warm and fuzzy moment.

Time at the reunion was also spent catching up during happy hours and meals, hiking, spa treatments, and looking at our pictures from Guinea and current ones of partners, families and pets. An interesting phenomenon when talking about our experiences twenty years ago was that each of us remembered different things that others had forgotten. Over our restaurant steak dinner on Sunday evening, clad in our reunion weekend tee-shirts, we all shared the impact that Peace Corps had on us. We came to the consensus that, yes, it is still the toughest job you'll ever love.

On Monday morning we disbanded to points afar, exhilarated in the affirmation that our Peace Corps Guinea experience has afforded us lifelong friendships.

GPS Report

*Sharon Beuhler, PCV Parent
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The Guinea Parent Support group for G12 is well established, with an active and communicative group of sixty-five parents and friends of twenty-two volunteers. We had a very good response to the new brochures for GPS. The twenty-nine PCTs are training at Forecariah as I write this, and have just completed their site visits.

Membership Report

*Emily Ramshur (Koubia '00-'02)
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Here's a Friends of Guinea fact: Only eight newly COSed volunteers have joined FOG since August 2005! Yep, that's right. Of our 170 members, only eight are fresh RPCVs! Pretty shabby representation, non?

To all of you PCVs still in Guinea nearing COS, please join FOG and continue to show your support to this wonderful country! We know, we know... it's not as *cool* as being in Guinea, on the ground, with dirty fingernails and giardia, but it's the next best thing!

Remember, the first year of membership is totally free! (If you decide to renew after one year,

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>

it's only \$15 annually.) You'll get the quarterly *CaVa?* newsletter full of Guinea-related news and stories. More importantly, you'll be a part of a network of people who love Guinea and want to support projects on the ground. This is a fantastic way to continue to show your "Guinea love" even after you return to the US! Please join FOG today.

If you decide to join FOG, please tell a friend about us, too. The more the merrier!

On jaraama buoi!

Support Friends of Guinea...For Free!

Whenever you purchase an item from *Amazon.com*, you have an opportunity to support Friends of Guinea for free. Just go to our website (www.friendsofguinea.org), and click on the link to Amazon you will find there. Friends of Guinea will receive a small commission on any purchase that you make, and it doesn't cost you anything! Why not do all of your gift shopping this fall through FOG's Amazon link? It adds up.

Online Photos and Blogs from Guinea

Ever wonder if Guinea was really as beautiful as you remember it? Here's one way to find out. Country Director Steve Peterson regularly posts online his photos from tournées upcountry to visit PCVs. Recent posts suggest that he might be accepting submissions from others as well. Go to www.snapfish.com, and sign in with the email address guineapcvs@yahoo.com and the password *lansana*. You'll see that not much has changed, at least visually.

Some Volunteers maintain their own blogs, as a way to keep in touch with family and friends. You can share their experiences too. Two blogs that we like to check in with occasionally are www.intakeandoutput.blogspot.com and www.river.wave.blogspot.com. Tell us if you know about any others. Meanwhile, here are some photos from Steve's *Snapfish* account.



Up in Mali Ville, a balafon player takes his place in the marché.



Down in Pita, the weavers are always working.



The mosque in Mali Ville.



Some of the cars you see seem older than the country itself.



On a hot day in Boké, even a cow would rather hitch a ride.



In spite of everything, there is always something to smile about in Guinea!

Brouwal Tappé Library Project

Urska Manners (Sigui, '00-'02)

Listserv Administrator

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Hi, everyone. We want to let you know about a PCV who is raising funds for a project in Guinea. PCV Slawa Rokicki is seeking funds for a library and community sensibilization center at the Brouwal Tappe Middle School (Pita Prefecture).

The project was initiated by the school's principal and is supported by community leaders and students. The goals are to ease overcrowded classrooms by splitting classes and allowing library time for students to work on independent projects. It is hoped that reduced classroom size will improve the quality of education and that the projects will help develop students' critical thinking skills. The facility will also be used to conduct community

sensibilizations on HIV/AIDS and other topics for student groups and the community throughout the year.

To donate via FOG, please visit www.friendsofguinea.org/donate.shtml and donate to our General Fund (please indicate "Brouwal Library" on your donation).

Partage Quebec-Guinée

Dana Schneider (Kinieran, '02-'04)

Projects Director

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Partage Quebec-Guinée is a small Canadian NGO that collects books and other educational supplies to distribute to schools and libraries in Guinea. They have let us know that they will be sending another shipment to Guinea (for Kissidougou, Forekariah, and Kerouane) this fall and would be happy to send library/educational supplies (books, desks, chairs, etc.) to volunteers who would like them for their villages.

PCVs generally need to find the cost of transport to/from the place where the materials are delivered. Anyone interested should contact Claude Lescan at pqg@simmm.qc.ca.

Email Newsletter Available

If you prefer not to have this paper version of *ÇaVa?* cluttering up your mailbox, or if you don't want your membership in Friends of Guinea to promote deforestation, or if you just want to save us the price of a stamp, you may elect to receive this newsletter by email. The email version is formatted in HTML, and includes a link to a .pdf version of the paper newsletter that is posted on the Web and contains all the formatting of the original. Or you can receive both the paper and electronic version, and have the best of both worlds. Email membership@friendsofguinea.org and let us know of your preference, and we'll make a note of it.

Free personal Classifieds in CaVa?!

All members in good standing of Friends of Guinea are entitled to one free personal advertisement per year in *ÇaVa?*, the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea. These

advertisements are limited to 21 words and are intended primarily as a way for families and friends to send messages of support and encouragement to volunteers serving in Guinea, although they might equally be used to broadcast other messages. Take advantage of this free service by emailing your message of 21 words or less to the Newsletter Editor at newsletter@friendsofguinea.org. Please note that this service is available only to current members of Friends of Guinea, so please submit your advertisement under the name in which your membership is listed so that we may verify your status.

Le Griot Nous Dit...

Woody Colahan (Maci, '93-'96) and his wife Era announced the birth of Alexander Prawira Dirja Colahan on July 30. "We had scheduled a

housewarming party for that Sunday, thinking that we still had time, though not much. Alex had other ideas. On the bright side, we didn't need to do any shopping for a few weeks, as we had already laid in food and drink for 85 people." Word is that Alex has settled in well, running the household with an iron fist.

Woody also recently had dinner with former Peace Corps Guinea chauffeur **Nabih Soumah** and his wife Genevieve, who live in Denver with their eight children. Nabih will be familiar to many Guinea RPCVs, having been employed by Peace Corps from 1984 to 2002. "C'est Tafsir Thiam qui m'a fait savoir que Woody était à Denver. Je m'en souviens très bien. Moi je suis là depuis quatre ans avec mon premier fils, et la famille vient de nous rejoindre ici il y a quelque mois. Nous sommes tous des américains comme ça. Je viens de payer une belle maison, et nous sommes bien installé maintenant."



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