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



15 Mar. 2008 • No.23

Friends of Guinea Officer Elections

Brian Farenell (Beindou, Kissidougou '95-'97)
FOG Elections Coordinator
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Dear Friends of Guinea members,

Some of you may have election fatigue, but Friends of Guinea is holding elections that everyone can get excited about and candidates don't have to spend a dime!

Nominations will be accepted through Thursday March 13. Ballots will be emailed to all FOG members on March 14 and the voting period will conclude on March 20. New officers will start on shortly thereafter, though outgoing officers will remain available in the beginning to assist with the transition period.

Every year, the following positions for FOG's board are up for election: Membership Director, Communications Director, Advocacy Director, financial Officer, Projects Director, and Secretary. Any member is eligible to run for any position, but we particularly need volunteers to run for Communications Director and Secretary.

The Communications Director is responsible for any communications that might occur with outside organizations, such as other "Friends of" organizations. The communications director is also the point person for the Newsletter Coordinator, Web Administrator, and Blogmaster.

The Secretary is responsible for organizing quarterly board meetings and keeping their minutes. The Secretary is also the 'record keeper' of FOG's historical archives.

A full explanation of the duties of all the officers can be found at www.friendsofguinea.org. Click on *FOG Services* → *FOG Officers* → *Officer Duties*. If you have questions about or want to know more about any of these positions, if you are a member of FOG and would like to run for any of the positions on the board, or if you have any other questions that might not have been addressed above, please contact me.

Kibola Sougei Rocks Red Hook

Mackenzie Dabo (Saramoussaya and Conakry, '00-'04)
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This past January, I was lucky enough to coordinate an effort to introduce Guinean drumming, dancing and culture to all 600 students and staff at Linden Ave. Middle School where I teach. When we moved to New York's Mid-Hudson area three and a half years ago, my husband and I were very fortunate to meet another Guinean-American couple almost immediately. Pam and Mamadouba "Mimo" Camara became good friends and a vital link to Guinea for us.

Pam and Mimo have been teaching drumming and dancing in the area for over ten years. Mimo traveled the world with *Les Ballets Africains* (Guinea's National troupe) for about twenty years before he immigrated to the United States. Pam first visited Africa over 25 years ago to learn dance, and the couple now go to Guinea yearly. Pam and Mimo have their own performance



Mimo Camara leads a middle-school assembly in Red Hook, New York.

group, *Kibola Sougei*. *Kibola* is Mimo's village (near Kamsar) and *Sougei* is "sun" in Susu.

A grant through Arts in Education helped me to bring *Kibola Sougei* to my school for a full-school assembly and two-day residency in the physical education classes. With the help of a co-worker, I coordinated numerous school wide events to prepare students for the visit. There were unique messages from various teachers about their African experiences on the morning TV newscast, Guinea "fact-a-days" in Social Studies classes, African dance facts in gym class, and even a special "Principal's challenge" trivia quiz on Guinea. I was also able to take one day off from teaching math to my 120 seventh- and eighth-graders, to give them an idea of my Guinea experience.

The assembly was a hit! The students loved it, and many faculty and staff thanked me for bringing the group in. All 600 students were on their feet, clapping and dancing by the end of the hour-long assembly. Over the course of the two days following the assembly, every student saw Pam and Mimo for a full-period gym class where they learned a version of "Sinta," a dance that honors women.

After the event, the principal even proposed that we make this an annual or bi-annual event. The hope is to have students take part in the performance in years to come. In any case, I will continue to share my experiences in Guinea with every new batch of students that I teach.

Cheap Therapy: Calcium for New Year's

Alex Alper (Banfele, Kouroussa, '06-'07)
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Alex Alper was one of the Volunteers evacuated to Mali during the national strike early last year. She opted to finish her Peace Corps service in Cape Verde, and wrote a humorous and touching memoir of her experiences that can be found at www.worldviewmagazine.org under the title Evacuation Gel. In the essay that follows, she describes an experience many RPCVs know only too well, and her own triumphant response. Thanks, Alex, for sharing this with us.

It was eight p.m. on New Year's Eve. All across America my friends were debating whether to drive or take a taxi, to bring beer or champagne, to go with the strapless bra or none at all. Even elsewhere in Guinea, volunteers were gathered at regional capitols, pouring cheap vodka mixed with Fosters Clark into plastic bags and setting up iPods to transport them briefly back to those same taxis and liquor stores. I was sitting on a rice sack bed in a hut. Drumbeats echoed from around a fire in some local official's yard. It was the beginning of the cold season, and a big wind gusted through the gap

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>

between the mud wall and straw roof, dimming the candle and rustling the mosquito net.

Every now and then, one of the termites I battled daily would scurry across the floor in an effort to "take the fight" from the wall to the wooden furniture. The sinking feeling was beginning to overtake me. Starting as an acute sadness in my stomach, it would spread a numbing weight into my arms and a foggy numbness into my brain. In other circumstances, I could treat this feeling with exercise, socializing, a drink or a movie. But in a hut at night—the night of New Years Eve—it threatened to render me inert, lying on my bed, staring at the ceiling and yearning for sleepiness.

It wasn't that I had this feeling often: Rounding month eight at site, I had several projects underway; my Malinke finally allowed me to crack intelligible jokes ("Did you bring me a gift?"—"Yes, it died on the road"); and a couple of friendships seemed liable to progress past the "take-me-to-America" stage. So boundless existential angst had me in bed by eight only a couple times a month. But tonight promised to be bad. I had stayed at site to attend a meeting that probably would not advance my project or maybe even take place. If it did, after two hours of waiting for the important people to show, we would fastidiously grill each other as to presence of evil in our homes, work, and families. When we had established that there was none, (there was never any) we would entreat God to prevent it, and adjourn. As I pictured how this would play out, vivid images of my volunteer friends — getting down to our

recycled top 40 playlist until the generator died — installed themselves around the hut, and stirred my budding self-pity.

Moreover, all my trusty weapons were out of commission. My beloved DiscMan, which provided hours of Shakira-inspired dance sessions, was broken. My usually sizeable stash of smooched, stale and/or doused-in-shampoo chocolate from America was depleted. And Maimouna, my closest friend in the village, (not coincidentally the only French-speaking female) had just transferred to a teaching post in another town.

I got to thinking about the debate I had been having since arriving at site. Besides a few sincere village friendships and some promising development work, I was more bored and lonely than I had ever been in my life. Eighty-five kilometers down a rough road from the nearest volunteer, I would go four weeks at a time with no English, sarcasm, philosophizing or salad. Sure, I wanted to make a difference, but could I hack the loneliness for two years?

“Alex,” I said, careful not to address myself too often in public, “the pursuit of good and important things is not necessarily pleasant. Let site be hard and productive, and travel can provide you with fun and leisure. You can have both, but you have to compartmentalize.”

Easier said than done. When the sinking feeling had set in, it was nearly impossible to slog off to a farmer’s field to extol the virtues of composting. I had read somewhere that your IQ decreases when you are sad. Watching my Malinke suffer in tandem with my moods, I began to seriously question the feasibility of my solution: “Maybe it is unnatural to compartmentalize happiness and effectiveness. Certainly one does not beget the other, but happiness could be a pre-requisite for productivity.” If this were true, then in order to help my village, I was staying miserable, which prevented me from helping my village. Awesome.

I rolled over in my bed on New Years Eve and felt I was confirming this view. The weathered copy of War and Peace lay next to me but I knew I wasn’t going to read any more. The drumming had started up again close-by and you could hear the kids shrieking at the breaks, but I knew I wouldn’t go. At this rate, would I even go to the meeting? Would I possibly complete a project? It was almost nine. I was still awake and sick of feeling doomed. I grabbed my short wave radio and found a faint salsa station. Hooking it into the wire that snaked eight feet up to the crest of my hut, I began to dance.

I danced slowly as if by compulsion. The doom was still palpable and everything seemed to suggest that I belonged on the bed, inert. But my steps elongated, the music grew richer, sweat beaded on my skin and suddenly I was dancing with real joy. Shakira would

have been mortified. As the second hand clicked past 11:59, I slumped exhausted onto my bed and toasted the New Year by devouring an extra chocolate chew calcium supplement. Tucking in the mosquito net, triumphant, I thought, “This is adulthood.” With the simplest tools—a radio and some calcium—I had fashioned a makeshift happiness, one that would (hopefully) sustain me in the pursuit of an elusive, rewarding goal. Sure, for the long haul real happiness might be necessary for achievement. But realizing you can marshal contentment on your own—that you can choose it in the face of seemingly fated wallowing—was transcendent.

Certainly more so than drinking vodka and Fosters Clark out of plastic bags. And it meant no hangover for the meeting I would attend the next day.

News from Conakry

Ellwood Colahan (Maci, Pita ‘93–’96)
newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

Word has reached us that Country Director Steve Peterson is reaching the end of his time in Conakry. Reached for confirmation, Steve admitted that, “On 5 August I’ll have finished my maximum time with Peace Corps, and we’ll be moving on; whether it be here in Guinea, another country, or back in the US is not yet known.” We will be sorry to Steve go. I first met Steve in Conakry in 1996, when his wife Jennifer worked as an agroforestry expert for USAID contractor Chemonix. Steve and Jen’s home was always open to PCVs. As Friends of Guinea GPS Coordinator Sharon Buehler said, “Those of us who know Steve are very appreciative of his support for our volunteers.”

Steve has had the unenviable job of shepherding Peace Corps Guinea through one of its greatest crises to date: the national strike and ensuing evacuation in early 2007. It is to his credit not only that all volunteers were evacuated from the country without mishap, but that within months the program was successfully re-established. Beginning with an initial group of hard-core Guineaphiles who chose the chance of returning over early termination or re-assignment to another country, Peace Corps welcomed a new trainee group in December and expects another in July. Says Steve, “We, staff and PCVs alike, are very happy we avoided ‘closing’ the program.”

We are glad too, Steve. All of us who have been a part of Peace Corps Guinea are grateful for your firm hand on the tiller as it sailed some of its roughest waters. We hope your remaining months in-country are fruitful ones, and that your next endeavor is just as successful.

On another note, Steve assures us it is not true that the Kankan PCV house was moved to edge of town because its previous location was deemed unsafe during the strike-related violence last year. “The office and

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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PCV house (which are 200 meters apart on the same road, in one of the safer neighborhoods) in Kankan remain unchanged since before the trouble last year; though we did move it from downtown in '06, that was due not only to wanting a more secure location, but also because the hotels in Kankan had gotten run down to a point there was no viable option for folks while in Kankan."

Teacher's Workshop Seeks Input

Ian M. Geisler, G12 Volunteer
iangeisler@gmail.com

In 2006, then PCV Sarah Royall launched the Teacher's Workshop with great success. Given Peace Corps' evacuation from and subsequent return to Guinea, the project was almost forgotten until a group of PCVs decided to get it started again. The idea was to bring Guinean teachers together with PCVs in education to exchange ideas on how to better teach their students. The greater idea is to have the project be as hands off as possible from Peace Corps and that, one day, a local organization would take over and formalize teacher trainings in Guinea.

We are happy to say that the project is fully funded and we are not seeking funds at this time. Instead, we ask that anyone in FOG with educational experience who has ideas on how to improve the workshop, on sessions that we could run, or materials (online or otherwise) that could be beneficial, please share them with us. You can email me at the address above, or telephone me at (224) 64.05.27.92.

Haute Aspirations

Ben Hafele (Sanguiana '99-'01)
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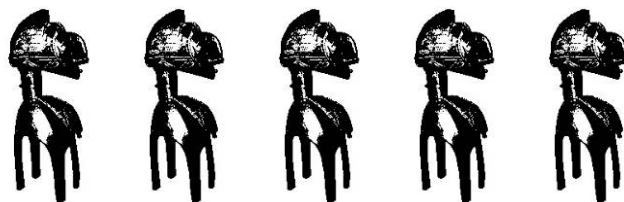
Haute (www.hautenet.org) is a new not-for-profit corporation that empowers entrepreneurs in Africa, with the aim of creating jobs for the unemployed and the underemployed.

Haute started operations in 2007 by providing training to eighteen small business owners in Kankan. The training was carried out over a period of three weeks and covered fundamental business topics such as marketing, accounting, and cost management. Participants had had between one and thirty-seven employees and represented a variety of business categories, including construction, soap-making, welding, fruit preserves confection, hair braiding, IT/internet, sculpting, and embroidery. The training was delivered by a leading Guinean training company and paid for by donations from individuals and businesses in the United States.

Haute has high aspirations for the future. In 2008, it aims to train an additional one hundred entrepreneurs in Guinea. By the end of 2009, Haute hopes to expand its training operations to three additional countries in Africa and launch operations in microfinance. It is currently seeking individuals with expertise in fundraising, grant writing, public relations, and web design. More importantly, it is looking for people with a passion for effective economic development, who share its vision of a self-sufficient Africa.



A Haute training in progress in Kankan.

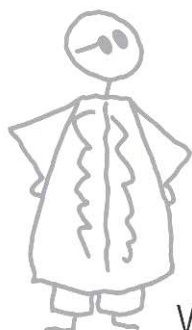




The thirty-five Trainees of G15 completed their training and became official PCVs on 8 February. They are working in the areas of Agro/Forestry, Small Enterprise Development, and Health Education. The Guinea Parent Support group for G15 at one time had over 100 participants, slightly reduced now because student friends are relying on blogs for continuing news. Many volunteers now have cell phones, web sites and blogs, as well as photo sites. Congratulations to our new PCVs in Guinea.

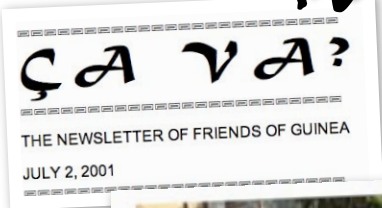
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Thank you Woody!



Guinea Erupts in Protest

Woody Colahan (Maci, '93-'96), Newsletter Editor
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End of an Era in Peace Corps Guinea: El Hadj Thafsir Thiam Retires



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

2002 Girls' Conference A Great Success



Remembering Sidv Condé

Rights Groups Blast Guinea

FOG Officers Recalled; Schwarzenegger Not to Run

This is the 26th issue of *Ca Va*, and the last one that will be edited by our dedicated and delightful newsletter editor, Woody Colahan (Maci, '93-'96). Woody created the voice of FOG over 6 years ago, publishing our first newsletter in July of 2001. Since then he's kept us all up to date on the breaking news in Guinea ("Guinea's Only Private Newspaper Silenced," "Guinea Holds Controversial Referendum"), FOG's activities ("FOG Helps Asylum Applicant," "FOG Delivers Books to PQG,") the latest news from PC Guinea ("PC Back in Guinea... Maybe," "Steve Peterson Takes Over in Conakry as new CD,") and a plethora of other tidbits, even RPCV gossip!

He's been an integrally positive part of FOG. He cheerfully reminds the rest of us sluggish officers to send him our reports for the newsletter. He solicited great articles from our members, including travel stories from parents or memories of PC Guinea in the 1960's. Woody's humor has been infused throughout *Ca Va*, such as when the annual officers' elections rolled around and he announced that the FOG officers had been recalled (see picture to the right). His love for Guinea and sharp analysis of the issues facing the country have been apparent in the thoughtful articles he's written about the state of affairs in Guinea -- articles for which he researched and digested the foreign news, and often didn't even give himself a byline. He even continued his excellent work even after the birth of his son.



It is hard to underestimate the impact that a good newsletter has on an organization. *Ca Va* keeps us all informed about Guinea, FOG, and Peace Corps and lets us communicate with one another. This publication is the face of FOG, and *Ca Va* has become a face to be proud of. The man behind it deserves our accolades and thanks. For myself, I can say that it has been an extreme pleasure to work with Woody since we started FOG in 2000, along with several other RPCV's. Thank you for all you've done for FOG, Woody, you will be missed! And a big warm welcome to Mackenzie (Pfeifer) Dabo who will be filling his big shoes!

- Stephanie Chasteen (Waway, '97-'99)