

Çava?

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

15 August 2008 • No.25



Water Pump Project Completed



The water pump project that FOG contributed to in Kansan, Siguri (Haute Guinea) was completed in May 2008. PCV Kimberly Mason writes:

Yesterday, the inhabitants of Kansan drank potable water from their two newly installed pumps for the first time. A village that had gone unrecognized for far too many years will now have a decrease in water related maladies. The men and women are literally dancing with joy. I cannot thank FOG enough for your contribution. You have given clean water and a better quality of life to an entire community for years to come.

Photos: Above, one of the new pumps at work. Below, construction draws a crowd.



Interview: Death of Two Sons

Stephanie Chasteen (Wawaya, 1997-1999, FOG Secretary)

I served in Guinea in 1997 to 1999. One of FOG's first donation campaigns was to the widow of Amadou Diallo, whose tragic death touched many of us. I knew Jesse Thyne and Justin Bhansali, who died the year after I returned home. I remember the moment that I heard about their deaths, sitting in my rented apartment, through the BBC. Along with several other shocked RPCV's, I went to Jesse's memorial service in southern California. And so I had been yearning to see "*Death of Two Sons*" since I knew that it had been created, and when it was released on DVD through Amazon I anxiously awaited my pre-ordered copy. The movie did not disappoint. "*Death of Two Sons*" is a beautifully shot, thoughtful film about the deaths of PCV Jesse Thyne and Guinean ex-pat Amadou Diallo. After seeing it, I wanted to know more about how it came to be. Following is an interview between the film's director, Micah Shaffer and myself. Micah is an RPCV who served in Sangareah (Pita), Guinea, from 1999-2001.

FOG: Why did you make this film, and whom did you make it for?

Micah Schaffer: This film was done for the families who had lost their sons. We set out to personalize them and humanize them in a way that transcended the political issues surrounding them. Secondly, it was done to give Guineans a voice that they aren't normally afforded. The ultimate compliment we got came from Amadou's mother Kadiatou, who said that my colleagues and I were the first ones to ask the Guineans how they felt about Amadou's death.

What do you want viewer's of "Death of Two Sons" to walk away with after seeing the film?

"*Death of Two Sons*" is a film about the value of human life. About the interconnectedness of human life, and how all people are equally valuable, even if we don't treat them as such.

How well did you know Jesse and Justin, and did that play into your decision to make the film?

Jesse and Justin died just four months after I'd arrived. I met them each three or four times. Although I didn't know Jesse well, he was such an enthusiastic volunteer that it was impossible to miss or ignore him. The Guineans really responded to how open and curious he was. Both he and Justin were just phenomenal spirits, and their deaths really impacted me. I very much felt that I could have been the one to lose my life that day. The event opened my eyes to the vulnerability of human life, and to the dangers that Guineans (and we



Photo: Jesse Thyne in his village, Diountou (Labe).

volunteers) faced every time we traveled.

Can you tell us about the making of this film? What was it like to travel back to Guinea with a film crew and talk to people about what had happened?

I had a fantastic crew. Alrick Brown, also an RPCV, was my producer and sound guru. Our skills in French, and the fact that I had lived in the Fouta

and spoke Pulaar, are really what made this film possible. I don't think that people would have trusted us if I hadn't been a volunteer. The generosity of our Guinean hosts was remarkable. We were allowed to film in the mosque in Diountou ... provided that we pray with them first. This made for a nice tribute to Jesse, who prayed with the community when he lived there.

For the most part, Guinean officials were very helpful and eager to participate in this story. Ironically, the biggest hurdle we faced was from Washington's Peace Corps bureaucracy, which gave Peace Corps Guinea strict orders to not participate in our filming process. So we were in the rather bizarre position of trying to memorialize their volunteers without including any active employees of Peace Corps.

Now that the film is done, I think everyone sees that we emphasized all that is best about being a volunteer. The human commitment of people like Jesse and Justin is what makes Peace Corps happen.

One major theme of the film is how Guinea and the US are very different in terms of their acceptance of foreigners or immigrants.

The hospitality of Guineans in general is just amazing (as those of you who have been there know). The welcome extended to me as a volunteer was most strongly expressed when Jesse Thyne and Justin Bhansali were killed. Guineans who had never met

either of them nonetheless came to me to share their sincere condolences. They were moved by the fact that these two American boys had died far from home, in the midst of becoming men and trying to do something good. Given that most rural Guinean families lose at least one child in infancy, the fact that they were so generous in their feelings for Jesse and Justin had a big effect on me.

Another major theme is the difference between the two countries and how the criminal justice system meted out punishment to the "perpetrators" of both crimes.

In both Guinean and American societies, there is a persisting devaluation of the lives of people who are different or less powerful. The disparities illustrated between the two judicial processes in this film reflect the differential assigning of value to different lives.

In the Diallo case, as often happens in the American legal system, certain points were repeated until they became more important...than the simple fact that an innocent young man had been killed. (The extra features on the "Death of Two Sons" DVD deal more extensively with this).

In the case of the reckless driver responsible for Jesse and Justin's death, I don't think there's much doubt that the prosecution was much more aggressive due to the fact that the two dead boys were American. The simple illustration is that both these courts valued the lives of white Americans more highly than they did the life of black Africans.



Photo: Amadou Diallo in NY.

The Diallo shooting brought some superficial changes in New York City (such as the disbanding of the "Street Crimes Unit," member of which shot Diallo). But the fact remains that police in the U.S. are almost

never held accountable for killing an innocent person (who is almost

invariably black or Latino).-

The way that we value (or devalue) other peoples' lives is well illustrated by our news media, which describes atrocities and tragedies around the world, ending with the phrase "no Americans were killed."

You also make the point that there is a dichotomy in power between the US and Guinea which related to how the two deaths were punished.

I think Amadou's uncle Alpha Oumar Diallo sums the power dichotomy well in the film: "Imagine if Guinean



*Producer/RPCV
Alrick Brown,
Amadou's
mother Kadiatou
Diallo, and
Director/Guinea
RPCV Micah
Schaffer at the
film's opening.*

police officers killed an American by shooting at him 41 times. Would the American government remain silent?" Hard to conjure that.

Tell us something that you found during the making of this film that particularly touched you.

I was extremely moved by Amadou's cousin and roommate Abdourahamane Diallo, and what he went through seeing Amadou killed.

The way that he was ill treated by NYC police went further than most people realize. Abdourahamane and another cousin of his were taken to the police station and questioned all night long, without being told that Amadou had been killed by police officers. Cops ransacked the young men's room. Police were essentially digging for dirt on Amadou to help deflect the case away from the officers who shot him.

Unfortunately, this full story didn't make it into our film, but we have an extended extra feature on our DVD that deals with it.

Have you made or been involved with any films since this one?

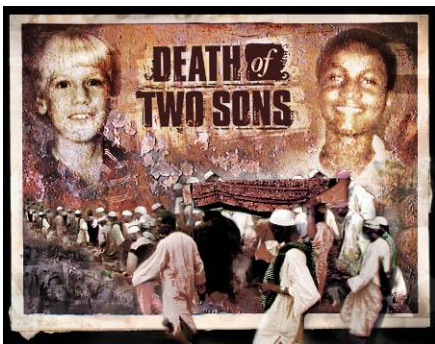
As RPCV's who experienced the diverse humanity of Africa, Alrick and I are always looking for positive stories about the continent. Most recently, I worked as a co-producer on the film "Iron Ladies of Liberia," which tells one of the most positive stories to come out of Africa in years. "Iron Ladies of Liberia" follows Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Africa's first female president, through her first year in office.

You can purchase "Death of Two Sons" at the official website, <http://www.deathoftwosons.com>, or on Amazon.

Please check the site for upcoming promotions for FOG members. On the website you will also find more information about the film, including instructions on how to book a screening or speaking engagement with the filmmakers. And please encourage your local library

and educational institutions to purchase a copy.

The film is also available for rent at Netflix!



Communications Report

Brian Farenell, Communications Director (Beindou, '95-'97)

Earlier this summer, Friends of Guinea made a \$250 donation in support of the Guinéenews website. Guineenews.org, a not-for-profit collection of journalists and correspondents, is the most comprehensive independent news site on the Internet devoted exclusively to Guinea. In addition to news reports, many exclusive, it includes chat rooms, forums and press reviews.

One of the stories Guinéenews has covered is cocaine smuggling that's increasingly plaguing West Africa.

The executive director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Antonio Maria Costa ran a piece in *The Washington Post* which reported that last month alone, "more than 600 kilos [of cocaine] were seized in a plane with fake Red Cross markings at the airport in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and at the international airport in Bissau, [Guinea-Bissau] several hundred boxes were unloaded from a jet."

Earlier this year, a ship ferrying a huge load of cocaine was seized off the coast of Conakry.

The sub-region's weak or failed states with ineffective or corrupt public institutions make it an ideal transit point for cocaine trafficking from Latin America to Europe.

Executive Director Costa noted that poverty is the other major obstacle to combating the cartels. "These countries are the worst performers on the human development index - their populations at the bottom of the 'bottom billion.' Unemployed and desperate youths are vulnerable to being recruited as foot soldiers for criminal groups," he wrote. International help is critical to fighting this plague, he added.

To keep informed on this and other news developments, please bookmark Fog's blog at:

friendsofguinea.blogspot.com

If you read French, also check out Guinéenews' website at guineenews.org

Peace Corps Guinea News

25 new education PCTs arrived in Guinea on July 10. By the end of September, they will be sworn in as PCVs and sent to towns and villages across Guinea to teach English, Math, Chemistry and Physics. Dan Evans took over from Steve Petersen as Country Director in July as well. Welcome to Guinea and good luck!

Financial Report

Shad Engkilterra, Financial Officer (Banko '98-'00)

As of the end of June we had cash assets totaling \$9281.19. We also had one outstanding debt in the form of a \$250 promise donated to Guinéenews.

[Editor's note: FOG is always open to suggestions of worthy projects that could use our help. Contact Claire Lea at projects@friendsofguinea.org]

FOG Guinea Parent Support (GPS) coordinator and RPCV parent Sharon Buehler suffered a stroke in June. Sharon has been a tireless FOG volunteer since her son, Brian, was a PCV over four years ago. She has quietly kept new parents connected, offered them advice, and been the voice for parents and friends of PCVs within the FOG board. Sharon visited Guinea for a two-week stay over Christmas 2005, spending the holiday in Conakry, hiking in the Fouta, and relaxing at her son's site. We can't thank Sharon enough for her help with the GPS. Sharon is currently staying with family in LA where she is continuing her physical therapy and recovery. We all wish her a speedy recuperation. If anyone would like to send Sharon a message, please forward it to FOG secretary Stephanie Chasteen at info@friendsofguinea.org and she will compile them to give to Sharon.



New Documentary Film Discount

Annie Eastman, Associate Producer



The documentary film, "Iron Ladies of Liberia," as seen on PBS and BBC, is now available on DVD. Get \$5 off and help raise money for FOG when you purchase a copy at:

<http://www.neoflix.com/cart/JUS15/JUS1531IRO01&coupon=49494900> (code will expire 10/15/2008).

Educators, this is a great way to teach about democracy, Africa, and courage!

In November 2005, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became Africa's first elected female president. A former finance minister known as the "Iron Lady," Sirleaf quickly appointed a team of strong women around her, including the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Commerce, and the Chief of Police. Iron Ladies of Liberia follows these women over the course of their turbulent first year in office – a year which will determine the future of their country.

Iron Ladies of Liberia is a unique look behind the scenes at the rebirth of a nation and democracy in action, under the steady hand of women determined to make history and move their country forward.

[Note: Guinea RPCV Micah Shaffer co-produced this film.]

What is... ÇaVa?

Ca Va 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. We welcome submissions!



Edited by: Mackenzie Dabo
Email: newsletter@friendsofguinea.org

Who are we?

FOG is run by a small group of volunteers. Consider joining our ranks!



Email us @friendsofguinea.org
(eg., "projects@friendsofguinea.org")

Stephanie Chasteen . .	secretary
Mackenzie Dabo	newsletter
Rita Gerlach	newsletter2
Brian Clappier	membership
Shad Engilterra	finances
Claire Lea	projects
Brian Farenell	communications
Nathan Shepherd . . .	web
Urska Manners	listserv
Lance Constien	registry
Sharon Buehler	gps (parents)

Friends of 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>



You may also join the NPCA at www.rpcv.org

Girls Conference 2008

Jen Daum (Timbi Madina, '06-'08) and Camilo Forero (Boke, '06-'08)



After a one-year hiatus following last year's evacuation, the Basse Cote and Fouta Girls Conference took place in Mamou on August 3-7, 2008. Twenty-one girls and their respective volunteers came from as far as Boke and Mali-ville to participate in the 10th annual conference.

The three-day conference included sessions on Female Genital Cutting (led by NGO Tostan-Guinea), environmental protection, public speaking, and various other health issues presented by volunteers. The final day, the girls had the opportunity to ask questions to a panel including professional women from Mamou and Peace Corps' own Odette Leno. The participants were also able to visit Mamou's health center, staffed almost entirely by women, where they were given a tour and heard the health workers discuss the important role that education played in their lives.



After a lively session on women's rights in Guinea, the girls created skits, stories, and poems to express what they learned. They chose to present on the hazards of skin bleaching, the consequences of unprotected sex, and the dangers of Female Genital Cutting.

To celebrate the end of the conference, volunteers and girls enjoyed a meal of *riz gras* followed by a night of dancing!

Of the conference, Kadiatou Sidibe of Boke wrote, "This conference changed my way of thinking...I enjoyed meeting many new people and learning new information." Aissatou Diallo of Timbi Madina added, "I loved everything because during every session I

learned something essential, but I preferred the session on women's rights because I learned more than I knew before about women's choices in Guinea ... The conference allowed us to develop our minds through what we learned."



Thanks again to all members of Friends of Guinea for your generous support, the Kankan Girls Conference is scheduled for early October and you will receive information about it in a future edition of *ÇaVa?*. Onjaarama bui and inuwali ñe!

[Photos: Top Left, PCVs with conference attendees. Below Left, Panel of professional women. Above, a PCV assists during a health presentation. Below, participants get a tour of the ENATEF Forestry School. Photos from past conferences can be seen on the FOG website at:

<http://friendsofguinea.org/conference2005-2006.shtml> or http://friendsofguinea.org/conference_photos.shtml]

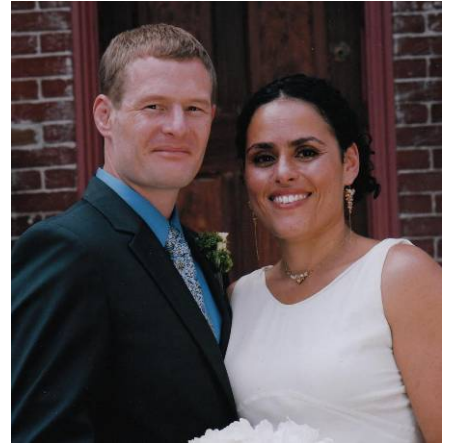


News from Guinea

In Mid-May, President Lansana Conte fired his Prime Mister and replaced him with a close ally. Not long after, members of the Guinean Military went on a "strike" to demand back pay and to ask that the defense Minister be fired. Their demands were met after talks during a week of unrest in Conakry. By mid-June, the Police Officers were on strike also asking for back pay, and the military and striking police clashed in the capital city. Rumors swirled of other impending strikes (lawyers, teachers, etc.) along with all sorts of conspiracy theories about the PM and President, yet things seem to be calm again now. Within the past few weeks the value of the US dollar has increased slightly against the Guinean Franc, with the current official exchange rate hovering around \$1 = 4,600 GF. The price of staples in Guinea has remained essentially the same over the past three months, although prices in Guinea remain some of the highest in the sub-region. More information on these and other topics can be found at: friendsofguinea.blogspot.com

Le Griot Nous Dit...

● On July 26th, 2008 at the Four Mile House in Denver, Colorado, Micah Schaffer (PCV Sangareah, Pita, Guinea) was wed to Marianna de Senna Brown. In attendance were their families, as well a number of former Peace Corps Volunteers, including: William Hibbitts ('99-'01, Bintimodia, Guinea), Robert Disney ('98-'00, Le Miro, Guinea), Tokey Boswell ('99-'01, Frigiagbe, Guinea), Alrick Brown ('00-'02, Cote d'Ivoire), and George Brown (Marianna's father, Brazil '72-'74). Micah and Marianna both hail from Denver, where they attended Denver East High School. They officially met in 2001 at New York University, where Marianna was completing a Masters' Degree in International Education. Marianna currently works as a Program Manager for the David Rockefeller Fund, which focuses on philanthropy in criminal justice reform, arts education, and environmental issues. Micah and Marianna live in New York, where Micah is finishing his Master of Fine Arts degree in Film Production at NYU.



● Woody Colahan (Maci, Pita, '93-'96) reports that, in May, his wife Era passed her citizenship exam with flying colors and he successfully defended his masters' thesis in music theory. Congratulations to all!

FOG Advocacy Position Open

Do you keep up on events in Guinea? Do you have a passion for campaigning for causes? Are you self-motivated? Do you have lots of creative ideas? Would you like to volunteer for FOG? Friends of Guinea is looking for someone just like you to fill the vacant Advocacy Chair. Duties include: Writing a quarterly report on current events, politics, and prices in Guinea for the Friends of Guinea *ÇaVa?* Newsletter, reading the monthly Advocacy notice from the National Peace Corps Association and keeping members informed of important notices, and any other activities that you are compelled to perform. Minimum of approximately 1-2 hours per month. For more information contact info@friendsofguinea.org.



RPCV Mentoring: Don't Be a Fish Out of Water

Do you ever feel like a fish out of water or remember what it was like?

- If you are just coming home from Peace Corps, tap into the experience of someone who knows what you are going through, or can help with career advice.
- Or if you've been back a while, help someone with the transition back to the U.S.

Friends of Guinea personally matches mentors and mentees who sign up. Time is taken to insure a good match. Many Guinea RPCVs are currently serving as mentors to newly COSed volunteers; two new matches were just made! Go to www.rpcvmentoring.org to learn more and register.

ÇaVa?

3605 Reedsport Ct, Sacramento CA 95826



Visit us at: <http://friendsofguinea.org>