

Çava?

The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea

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



15 February 2009 • No.26

FOG Funds Four Projects

Claire Lea, FOG Project Director

FOG provided some classroom technology to a private school in Conakry. This school, in the Petit Simbaya neighborhood, was started by the Amazonian Initiative, and is a bi-lingual school that instructs in both English and French. The students are a mix of Guinean, Sierra Leonian, and Liberian. FOG provided a new LCD projector and a gently used laptop (procured by Mackenzie Dabo) to help computer instruction. The total cost of the donation was \$846. Mackenzie brought the items to Conakry during the Christmas holiday. School



L to R: Desmond Swaray (Principal), Mohamed Kaba (School Prefect,) Bella Barrie (Head Girl), Mackenzie Dabo (FOG), and Pastor James Koundoun, (Director) with the donated LCD projector and laptop computer.

director James Koundouno writes that thanks to the donation: "...the school is relieved from the stress of queuing in a line for school documents to be processed on the computer at the cyber cafes. Every Friday, we have what we call in the school the Literary and Debating Society program where the children participate in different school programs and for this time round, the laptop computer and projector are used to show some school literature documentaries that are on DVD/VCD plates; also other documentaries are shown through the help of this computer. We usually do a computer course without any computer in the classrooms. For now we are

using the one computer and projector to do some basic practical tutoring on computer through the PowerPoint program and it is shown on the wall where everybody sees whatever the teacher is discussing/teaching. This has motivated students in the computer classes, and they are very happy to participate and never want to miss any computer practicals...we want to once more say we are very happy for the donations and this will go down in the history of the school."

FOG also helped fund two current volunteer projects. The first is a project that will repair a primary school roof. PCV Samantha Levin, a Public Health Volunteer, is coordinating this project. FOG donated \$400 and THIS PROJECT STILL NEEDS YOUR HELP! You can donate directly to PCPP through their website, or call 800.424.8580 ext. 2170. Here's a link to more info on Samantha's project: <http://tinyurl.com/c6r6st>

The second project aims at the development of an eco-tourism site in the Fouta. PCV Catherine (Katy) Murtaugh, a Small Enterprise Development Volunteer, is coordinating this project FOG donated \$1000 to this project and we are waiting for feedback.



*G-16 PCVs
Tiffany
Gibert, Levi
Gable,
Jarrod
Wood, and
Hunter
Dreidame
with the
DVDs FOG
sent to the
Conakry
volunteer
house.*

Finally, we gave the Volunteers in Guinea 14 new DVDs to update the collection in the Conakry house, per request of the PCVs, at a total cost of \$206.

There is one CURRENT VOLUNTEER PROJECT on PC Partnership Program THAT NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT. Link directly at: <http://tinyurl.com/c7jody>

Guinean news update

Brian Farenell, FOG Communications Director

The big news in Guinea in recent months was the death of the longtime head of state Gen. Lansana Conté and the military coup that immediately followed. A group of junior officers calling itself the National Council for Democracy and Development (known by its French acronym CNDD) seized power the day after Conté's death. There initially appeared to be some resistance by members of the former government and by senior military officers but that eventually evaporated and the CNDD consolidated its control.



Moussa Dadis Camara, CNDD President

As expected, Guinea was suspended by the African Union until a return of what it called 'constitutional order.' Most donor nations have demanded the same.

The junta has been busy during its nearly six weeks of power. Most notably, it's promised a hard line

stance against corruption and ordered a suspension of all mining activities, pending a review of contracts between mining companies and the government.

January was a tough month in Guinea in the public health realm. A wave of destructive worms devastated Liberia and crossed the border into the Forest Region of Guinea. Yomou was identified as one of the prefectures affected. Although there hasn't been much information about how the ravenous worms affected Guinea, the UN reported that in Liberia, "the worms left wells contaminated with their feces, fields empty of crops and markets lacking food."

Additionally, the World Health Organization reported another outbreak of yellow fever in Guinea, this time in Faranah. International NGOs launched a vaccination campaign in late January.

For more news on Guinea, visit FOG's blog at: www.friendsofguinea.blogspot.com



Some of the ladies who attended Cathy's birthday celebration.

Lessons From Guinea

Cathy Porter, PCV Parent

Our Air France, Paris to Guinea flight, was making our final approach. We could see the lights of Conakry, Guinea and then all the city lights went out, the city disappeared below us. Lesson # 1 in Guinea: always travel with headlights, flashlights and/or candles.

Our daughter, Amy (SED, G-11), met us at the airport baggage area. Our luggage, mainly food requests from the States, made it safely to Conakry. We stayed at a hotel near the Peace Corps headquarters. Our hotel room did not have towels and the front desk couldn't locate any, so we just used the pillow sheets to dry off with. We realized that improvising would be required for the duration of our visit. Lesson #2 in Guinea: learn to adapt and work with what you have.

Amy's village of Timbi Madina was seven hours from Conakry in a private car. Peace Corps helped us schedule a driver and an SUV. Our SUV broke down about 5 minutes after we left PC headquarters. A very young teenage mechanic took out a car part, hailed town a taxi; brought back a new car part and we were on our way 2 hours later. Fortunately this was our only car trouble for the duration of our trip. Lesson # 3 in Guinea: patience is a very important virtue.

In Timbi Madina, we ate at the "best" rice bar in town. The atmosphere was very dark with plastic ribbon strips hanging from the doorway, but the large blue plastic bowls held a lot of rice. In Timbi Madina we shopped at the daily market and the weekly market. French bread was sold out of real wheelbarrows. Cooking oils were sold in small plastic bags. At the weekly market the fish row attracted the most flies.



Amy and Cathy at the rice bar.

I celebrated my birthday a few weeks after I returned to Madison, Wisconsin. My friends wanted to throw a birthday party for me. I asked that in lieu of gifts, we celebrate my birthday with a get together and donate any money that would have been spent on gifts. My friends raised \$300 for FOG. We are very excited that the money will be used to help sponsor the 11th annual Girls Conference. Lesson # 4: everything in life is relative, especially in regards to wants and needs.

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!



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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

A letter from Boulliwel, Guinea

Andrew Haile, Boulliwel (Mamou) '07-'09
October 2008

THESE ARE NOT THE VIEWS OF PEACE CORPS, NOR OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. THESE ARE SOLELY THE BIASED, REDUCTIONIST VIEWS OF ONE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER.

Since the beginning of September, I've been doing a public health survey in three villages near the town of Boulliwel, Guinea, where I live. These villages' names perhaps tell us something about their accessibility (or lack thereof): Bhawo Fello (which means "Behind Mountain" in Pular), Aind Fello ("Side of Mountain"), and Hor Fello ("On top of Mountain"). The Guinean Highlands are certainly beautiful, and offer pretty views and a relatively cooler climate compared to the rest of Guinea, yet...many Highland areas are hard to get to.

Needless to say, over the several weeks I was doing the survey, my bike and I bonded heartily over kilometer after kilometer of rocky grades, muddy puddles, and cows that refuse to leave the middle of the path until you throw things: sticks, rocks, bike helmets, etc. I came back from one muddy ride in the bush to a group of kids who started chanting, "*Boubacar woni baleejo, Boubacar woni baleejo!*" Boubacar's turned black. (Boubacar is the nickname Guineans have bestowed on me.) I guess I was pretty dirty.

But I'm getting off topic: the health survey. I want to tell you a story of the time I went to Aind Fello and met a guy named Abdoul Karim.

Aind Fello is a sleepy little village of mud huts and rice farmers. We picked it for the survey pretty much randomly; I certainly hadn't been there before. Thus, the "Aind Fello" day of the survey, I woke up, ate breakfast, asked my mentor Monsieur Diallo for directions, grabbed my bike, and rode off down the road without really knowing what I was getting myself into. This happens a lot here. Me not knowing what I'm getting myself into, I mean.

I rode up the main road a few kilometers and stopped at a clearing where M. Diallo said I had to leave my bike and walk down the mountain to get to the village. I was pleased to meet some villagers at the clearing who were from Aind Fello. One of them, Abdoul Karim, was hiking down to the village and offered to show me the way. So I stashed my bike in the bushes and followed him down the mountain path.

In chatting with Abdoul Karim, I quickly learned a few things about him: He was a subsistence farmer who had grown up in Aind Fello; he had a wife and a couple of young children at home; he liked hunting (clearly a true statement: he was carrying an old rifle with him just in case he saw something worth shooting); and he hadn't had much education: a couple of years at an *Ecole Franco-Arabe*, one of the numerous Saudi-financed schools where kids supposedly learn French *and* Arabic and where the curriculum combines both secular and religious teaching. He didn't speak French, however, and

thus we conversed in Pular, the tribal language of the region. He was kind, polite, and seemed eager to help.



We hiked down to the village and went first to meet the local authorities. Abdoul Karim introduced me, told them what I had come for (which, surprisingly, he had understood after my meandering, mistake-filled explanation in Pular), and then we all sat and exchanged pleasantries. I could tell already that Abdoul Karim had taken a liking to me and was going to be an asset in accomplishing the survey. I had taken a liking to him as well.

The *chef du secteur* (the local chief or mayor) explained that most of the people of Aind Fello were at their fields right now, and thus to do my door-to-door question asking I needed to wait until *Fanaa*, the 2 p.m. prayer. So we ended up sitting around for a while. This happens a lot here. Sitting around doing nothing, I mean.

So we sat around, chatting about the weather and the harvest (my basic Pular didn't allow me much conversational profundity), killing time before the farmers got back. There was a lull in the conversation, and I decided to stare at an avocado tree until somebody spoke up again. This time it was Abdoul Karim.

"And bin Laden," he said nonchalantly, as if he was asking about my wife or kids. He didn't say anything more, but it was as if he added, "What do you think about him?"

I took my eyes off the avocado tree and stared at him, surprised.

"The terrorist?" I asked, needing clarification.

"Yeah, Osama bin Laden," he said, and others in the circle nodded knowingly. "He doesn't like Americans, does he?"

"Nope, he sure doesn't," I said, still a little stunned by this conversational twist. "He's not a good man." I would have used stronger language, but my limited Pular vocabulary wouldn't let me.

"He's the one who wrecked your towers, isn't he," another man chimed in. This wasn't really a question, but more of comment – perhaps a proof of bin Laden's distaste for Americans.

"Yeah, I know," I said. "I remember." I didn't really know what else to say so I just repeated what I said about him being bad.

"You haven't caught him yet, have you?" asked another man.

"No, not yet," I said. "How do you guys know about bin Laden?" I asked. These were, after all, a group of illiterate peasant farmers.

Abdoul Karim piped up again. "We saw a video of his once in Boulliwel." Nods from others.

"In Boulliwel?! Really?" I asked, incredulously. This was the first time I'd heard of anything like this since I'd been in Guinea.

"Yeah, in Boulliwel," Abdoul Karim said.

I continued asking questions, curious and somewhat disturbed. What was an Osama bin Laden video doing way out here in Guinea? People here aren't terrorists – most are just friendly, simple African villagers. Besides, Muslims here practice a moderate, "JV" Islam, anyway: women wear tank tops and breast-feed in public! Boulliwel has a nightclub and a bar! I know more about Islam than most practicing Muslims here. The idea of terrorist Wahhabism infiltrating my village just didn't compute for me.

So I asked them to elaborate, which they did: They had seen a video and heard various messages of propaganda, yet at the same time they agreed that bin Laden was a "bad man," and that terrorism was bad. Abdoul Karim was one of the most outspoken denouncers of bin Laden's violent ways and tended to nod and grunt vociferously when others said similar things. We continued in this vein of conversation for a while, until we had all sort of agreed bin Laden was bad, and there was nothing left to say, really. There was a pause for a little while and then somebody changed the topic. On the whole, it was a weird, out-of-place kind of conversation.

Soon the men started coming back from the fields. I was about to start my door-to-door interviews when the sky, which had been threatening all morning, opened up on us. Abdoul Karim grabbed my bag for me and told me to follow him, and we scurried to shelter on his porch. We both agreed to wait there for a while until the rain subsided; yet 45 minutes later it didn't look like it would subside anytime soon. My gracious host asked me if I wanted to lie down until the rain stopped and I, being a fan of naps anytime, anywhere, gratefully accepted.

Abdoul Karim opened the door to his house and ushered me in, when – WHAM! – the first thing I noticed was:

Osama bin Laden's bearded face staring at me.

It jarred me. On the wall across from the door were two large posters, each bearing sizable pictures of the terrorist in question. Arranged around each of these photos were more pictures of bin Laden, pictures of airplanes and the twin towers, and Arabic script that I, unfortunately, haven't yet learned to read.

I just stared, not really knowing what to do. Abdoul Karim, however, didn't seem fazed – he just pointed at the posters and said, nonchalantly, "There's bin Laden."

No kidding.

Completely ignorant of my emotional and intellectual perturbation, Abdoul Karim took my arm and led me to his room to lie down. After asking me if I needed anything else, he closed the door and left me staring at the ceiling, perplexed.

Here was this Guinean farmer, virtually uneducated, living in an isolated village in the Highland bush. What in the world was he doing with two huge posters of Osama bin Laden hanging on the wall of his living room? Was he a terrorist-in-training? Did he have any idea what al-Qaeda was all about? Or was he just ignorant, and somebody gave him some posters of bin Laden, so he put them up in his house? As I said before, none of this computed with my previous experience of Islam in Guinea, which had all seemed pretty harmless, if foreign. Yet pictures of American skyscrapers exploding were another thing entirely.

Abdoul Karim's story has no flashy ending. I napped for a while, the rain stopped, and with my host's willing help, I went door to door and asked my questions about vaccinations and potable water. Abdoul Karim continued to be gracious and supportive, in the fine tradition of African hospitality. He even lent me his family's only umbrella to take with me on the trek back up to the road. I finished the survey, hiked out, grabbed my bike, rode back to Boulliwel, ate my dinner of rice and sauce with M. Diallo and his family, and crashed. I haven't seen Abdoul Karim since, and haven't yet gone back to Aind Fello to do my health sensitization. Yet the whole encounter has raised some provocative questions that I can't seem to ignore.

This was my first brush with what my government would call our great enemy in the much-heralded "War on Terror." The way the Bush administration tells the story, we are in an ideological struggle: freedom versus oppression, democracy versus totalitarianism, "Muslim" extremism versus "Christian" influence in economics and politics. The battleground, I imagine they would say, is in the hearts and minds of people like Abdoul Karim.

George Bush and Osama bin Laden have squared off – for better or for worse – each in competition over Abdoul Karim's worldview.

In a way, then, Abdoul Karim has been met, head on, by each side's ideological salvo. Bin Laden has spread his tapes and his teaching throughout the Muslim world, seeking to win converts to his violent, extremist dogma. Bush, on the other hand, has dispatched me – a 23-year-old WASP filled with high notions of justice and peacemaking – to live in Abdoul Karim's community and learn his language.

These two forces clashed that rainy day in Aind Fello, and now I am forced to ask the question: Who

won? Or who is winning? And what is the bigger picture, anyway?

Over the next year and four months of service, I hope to continue building relationships with folks like Abdoul Karim. I hope to bring public health messages in a spirit of compassion that will help villagers maintain healthier living habits and protect themselves and their children from preventable diseases like malaria and tuberculosis. I recognize that any trainings or teachings I do must be reinforced by kindness and openness on a personal, relational level: I must show these folks that I care about them.

If, at the end of my service, Abdoul Karim is still attracted to the idea of violence against Americans, I will have done a very poor job as a Peace Corps volunteer. Osama bin Laden may have enticing propaganda backed up with religious justification, yet he is still just a face on a TV screen or a poster. America, on the other hand, has hiked with Abdoul Karim, slept in his bed, and eaten with him out of the same bowl. To Abdoul Karim, America has a *real* face (and it needs a shave before it goes home for Christmas).

I wish the picture were simple and relational like this. I wish that, after 9/11, President Bush and his advisors had met and decided to send out the best, brightest Americans to all Muslim countries to build schools, hospitals, and soccer fields, to learn Arabic (or Pashtun, or Farsi, or Pular), build relationships, and get to work at the difficult business of reconciliation and peacemaking. I wish they had quadrupled the size and budget of the Peace Corps and sent out recruiters to all corners of our country to encourage young people to sign up. I wish they had looked at the big picture and decided to tackle the root causes of Muslim extremism – namely poverty and ignorance due to the lack of a balanced education. I wish they had responded to horrific violence with a message of love and forgiveness.

Sadly, this was not our country's response. Two wars, hundreds of billions of dollars, and hundreds of thousands of dead Afghans, Americans, and Iraqis later, we are still battling these same ideological forces and the world seems more dangerous than ever.

You would think, at the very least, we would have expanded and fully supported the Peace Corps, right? Again, sadly, this was not our country's response. This fiscal year the budget for Peace Corps, an agency employing close to 8,000 American volunteers and countless host country nationals, serving in 74 countries all over the world in areas such as agro-forestry, education, and health, is \$343 million. This may sound like a lot at first, yet when you compare it to our nation's defense budget of over *\$500 billion*, it's pennies. According to the National Priorities Project, *one day* in Iraq costs \$341 million. One volunteer claims that the military spends more on coffee for its servicemen than on all of Peace Corps (I just hope it's good coffee, after all).

Here in Guinea, we've started to feel the crunch. Already, three of our top Guinean administrators have left the Peace Corps to work for mining companies elsewhere in country. These were highly qualified, experienced program coordinators, all of whom had studied in the U.S. and then came back to help their country develop. Yet the offer of significantly higher salaries working in the private sector was too much to turn down, and now we are left scrambling to fill the gaping holes they've left behind. Every meeting we have together with the administration, we hear talk of budget cuts, of lack of funding, of "sorrys" and "we just have to deal." Which we will. Yet it seems a sad reflection of our country's priorities to think that they could take just one multi-million dollar smart bomb, and *not buy it*, and have enough funds to greatly reinforce every Peace Corps office's capacity and expand into several new countries who have asked for volunteers but have been told to wait.

But that's enough of that ramble. This is surely, as I said in the beginning, a biased, nearsighted view of the situation, and certainly not intended to offend anyone. Yet these are realities that are hard to ignore, as a salaried employee of the U.S. government right now. I think we all look forward to the pending change in administration with hope and expectancy for a foreign policy that is more humble, thoughtful, and compassionate.

Happy Coup Year

Mackenzie Dabo, FOG Newsletter Editor

My husband (a Guinean national) and I arrived in Guinea early on the morning of Sunday, December 21, 2008, after a three-year absence. With us for the first time were our daughter, age two and a half, and my cousin, a recent college graduate taking advantage of his free time to travel. We spent a day relaxing in our rented house, and another introducing everyone to family and friends, driving from Kaloum to Sonfonio to see where they work and study. We arrived home that second evening just shy of 10 PM with a very tired little girl; I retired to bed with her.

The house had no power that evening, so after a few hours of hot, restless half-sleep my husband came into our dark room. I was awake, and he told me that the owner of the house, who was staying in the annex out back with his family, had returned home with news of President Conte's death. Anxious, we couldn't sleep—thoughts of whether it was true or not and what would happen consumed us. We had been living in Conakry during the December 2002 scare (and subsequent riots) when it was reported that the president had died, and had following the recent reports (and recantations) of his death. We *knew* this time it was for real, but we didn't know *how* we knew this. At 2:30 in the morning, the owner's family started to talk outside

our window. My husband translated the Susu, and we pieced it together with the French and Pulaar—it had been officially announced on Radio Television Guinée (RTG) that the President had indeed died. We were up, and went to the living room where three younger brothers were sleeping. Waking them, we turned on the radio and suffered minutes of a sad old Kandia Kouyate ballad. Finally, the statement came—the Prime Minister and then the President of the National Assembly speaking—his excellence had passed at 6:45 pm—there were to be 40 days of national mourning—the constitution would be respected—there would be new elections within 60 days—a transition government would be named—"we call on all Guineans to remain calm."

Confirmed. Not knowing what this would mean for us and the rest of our trip, we finally retired at 3:30 AM after RTG closed for the night and we had listened to both Radio France International and the BBC Network Africa's analysis.

In the morning, the state radio had changed its tune from the slow, sad ballads of the night before. Now a military march played in a loop, stopping only when a taped announcement said that a new political party, the CNDD, had taken over power and formal protests were forbidden. We stayed in, but sent out family members, who reported long lines for gas and money exchange, and many businesses (although not all) running as usual. We called the US, and had my father read us the BBC article. It made things seem much worse than we thought as we sat in the middle of it. People were out and about; there was no excessive military presence. As far as we could tell, there was only one military checkpoint in the city, at the Pont 8 Novembre at the entrance to Kaloum ("en ville"). As the sun set, we ate dinner and sat outside in the courtyard listening to rounds of automatic gunfire every now and again. My cousin seemed concerned, but when we had lived in Hamdallaye five years ago, we would often hear gunfire at night. Just after sunset, the radio announced the names of a 30-person committee, almost all military, which made up the CNDD. They promised a functioning government soon. When the power came on at 9, we turned in to get a good night sleep with the fan.



New President Moussa Dadis Camara.

By the next evening, after another day spent inside our house's court, the CNDD had named Moussa Dadis Camara (the same military captain who had announced the take-over the day before) as President. The "couvre-feu"

continued, except on Christmas day (even the power was on all day!).

Over the next week, support for “Dadis” grew. We did notice an increased military presence in Conakry, but we still decided to travel to Mamou on Sunday, six days after Conte’s death. There were new roadblocks on the Route National 1 towards Mamou (all of which, of course, demanded a bribe to pass), but not nearly as many as when I was a PCV. (Having counted once, it topped out at 17 roadblocks on the 125-mile journey). Even in the three days we spent on our trip up-country, we saw four new roadblocks and a huge increase in military weaponry and personnel at “trente-six”, the roadblock entrance to the city, upon our return. For the first time ever, I was asked to show my World Health Organization vaccination card at two roadblocks. Back in Conakry, the lone military helicopter was always circling, but life was pretty much back to normal. Shops that had closed were now re-opened, and we felt comfortable walking and traveling in the city. In fact, we were sad to leave when the time came.

As I write this, it’s been about a month since the coup. Although Guinea has been ousted from both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS or *CEDEO*) and the African Union, and the US has stopped all non-humanitarian aid, support in Guinea for Dadis is still high. A government has been named, and people in Conakry are seeing changes. There has been a crackdown on corruption (14 people have been called in to answer charges and explain where millions of state dollars went), there’s been a public clean up of city streets, and arrests of many people fabricating and selling fake medication. The CNDD has promised elections in the final trimester of 2009, and, like all Guineans, we hope the next transition is as smooth as this one was.

Peace Corps Connect

On January 20, 2009, the United States celebrated the inauguration of President Barack Obama. In anticipation of President Obama’s commitment to support the Peace Corps, we are also excited to announce the launch of Peace Corps Connect <http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org> (powered by NPCA). This new website will feature a wealth of information on countries, people, events, congressional initiatives, and many additional areas affecting the Peace Corps Community.

The website also is home to Connected Peace Corps, <http://community.peacecorpsconnect.org/> a unique social networking site on which members of the Peace Corps Community (returned, current, and prospective volunteers, friends and family of volunteers, plus academics, international development practitioners, and others who share Peace Corps values), can link up and share data and experiences, work together in groups, and support projects and initiatives around the world.

Reflections on Guinea

Claes Schamberg

As I step off the plane, I am intoxicated with the mere idea of home. Knowing the possibility of a million indulgences, I come to the realization that somehow I am lucky enough to be afforded these over-rated luxuries. An even more important realization: that the most humble and giving people I had just met and came to know very closely, despite many language barriers and a small timeframe, are not so lucky.

My own studio, my own bathroom (with running water), my own light fixtures (with constant electricity) and even my own bed are just a few of the things that more often than not, I take for granted. Never mind the soccer balls, the clothes on my back (or the ones you can buy in any store in any city anywhere in the U.S.) or the sweet taste of havarti cheese covered in strawberry jam in the morning. For as important as these factors are in my life, they are just minor on the grand scale of things. Especially when compared to the lifestyle of the average Guinean.

After intimately spending two weeks with a family and seeing tens of thousands who have lived their entire lives without these amenities, I cannot explain to any one person my gratitude for my good luck. Never have I felt more appreciative of my own life, and at the same time melancholy for the lives of others. To know that the only real difference between these people and myself is simple fortune. I was born here, and they - there.

There is a lot to be said about a people from a society that survives off little and still manages to keep its spirit strong and determined. The Guineans resilient pride and perseverance are of notable character, and it seems to me that it is their sense of humor and great contentment that has given them the ability to persevere.

I have no regret in having taken a trip to this once foreign country; especially knowing the character and genuineness of the people I’ve met.



Claes is a painter who spent two weeks in Guinea with a Guinean friend and his family. Above, one of his paintings.

Raise Your Voice for MorePeaceCorps

Jonathan Pearson (Micronesia 87 - 89), Advocacy Coordinator, National Peace Corps Association

National Day of Action – Tuesday, March 3rd

As budget constraints threaten to diminish Peace Corps presence around the world, a MorePeaceCorps National Day of Action is planned to demonstrate to Congress that increased funding is needed for a bigger, better and bolder Peace Corps. We need YOU to participate on Tuesday, March 3rd. That's the day when MorePeaceCorps campaign volunteers will be walking the halls of Congress urging support for increased Peace Corps funding. Your phone calls, emails and faxes will help support these volunteers by showing citizen support for the Peace Corps. Visit www.morepeacecorps.org for details as the Day of Action approaches. Contact jonathan@rpcv.org if you can be a volunteer leader in this effort.

News From PC Guinea

Daniel Evans, PC Guinea Country Director, reports: "We just swore in G17, an extension group with 6 Agfo, 12 SED and 11 Health volunteers. That brings our numbers to 86. The next group, G18, will be an education group and they'll arrive in July. We are expecting 17 new trainees, which will put us over the 100 mark." Congrats new PCVs! *At right, G-17.*



Peace Corps Week

This year, PC Week will be celebrated February 23 to March 2. Plan to speak to a school, civic, or social group about your experience in Guinea. Need ideas? Visit the FOG website at <http://www.friendsofguinea.org/pcday.shtml> or the official PC website at www.peacecorps.gov/thirdgoal.

Help FOG with the Spring Membership Drive!

Do you keep in touch with your fellow Guinea-RPCVs, volunteer parents, or other friends of Guinea? If you do, then FOG is putting out a request for your support! This spring, we seek to dramatically expand our membership numbers, and in turn, build our organization's ability to **fund more projects in country**.

The strategy is simple: (1) if each of our members can recruit just one more person to join FOG, our organization will double in size; (2) if we can sign up **all** the former volunteers and families who may still love Guinea, but have let their \$15 FOG membership lapse, our numbers will skyrocket.

So what can you do? First, get a hold of our Membership Coordinator, Brian Clappier at bjclappier@gmail.com. Second, let us know if you want to be a "Stage Membership Drive Leader," and we'll guide you through our former members list (we have the names!) so you can email or call the members of your *stage* to get them back on our rolls. Third, get in contact with any other friends, family, and fellow RPCVs and convince them that FOG needs their support. For only \$15, we can all directly support the work of volunteers in country, and Guinea as a whole.

So don't just sit there! Contact Brian at bjclappier@gmail.com if you want to help us out with the Spring Membership Drive!

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