

# Çava?



## The Newsletter of Friends of Guinea

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

### End of an Era in Peace Corps Guinea: El Hadj Thafsir Thiam Retires

*Ed. Note: PC Guinea's Deputy Director, El Hadj Tafsir Thiam, retired at the end of last year after 17 years of service to Peace Corps. No one who passed through Peace Corps Guinea during those years can forget his tireless devotion and loving protection of his volunteers. My own memories include the day all the volunteers in town for IST were supposed to attend a reception given by the Interior Minister at the Palais du Peuple. Thiam, as usual, went on ahead to make sure everything was ready. It happened to be the day the military mutiny of February 1995 broke out. Thiam radioed back to the office for us to stay where we were, and the sound of automatic weapons was clearly audible in the background.*

*Typically, his first thought had been for the volunteers and he only moved to a safer location after he was sure that we were safe.*

*Thiam's retirement party took place in January in Conakry. He will be leaving soon to start a new life in the United States. February's Peace Corps Guinea Newsletter included the following message of farewell from El Hadj Thiam to his colleagues. Çava? is grateful to Country Director Lisa Ellis and PC Guinea Liaison Nancy Fleisher for making their newsletter available to us.*

What you heard about me leaving Peace Corps Guinea is true, though I do not believe it myself. I feel already very lonely. I started working permanently for this wonderful Institution in December 1986 as the APCD/Admin. Mr. Jerry Pasela was the Country Representative; Mr. Sâa Millimono, the clerk and Mr. Naby Soumah, the driver.

I said "permanently" above because, while studying in the United States in the early 60's, I was employed as PC/Trainer every summer from 1964 to 1968. In those days, the Volunteers were trained in the States (State Side Training). These summer jobs took me



to Dartmouth College in New Hampshire; to Sainte Anne de la Pocatière, Quebec, Canada; to Baker, Louisiana; to Hilton Head, South Carolina; to Saint Croix, the Virgin Island; to Miami, Florida to name a few places.

But soon into my permanent position, Mr. Millimono left Peace Corps/Guinea. That year we had a total of five (5) Volunteers posted in the Fouta (Dalaba, Pita, Labé area).

The Ministries with which Peace Corps was supposed to work with did not seem to know much about the institution known as the "toughest job you'll ever love".

In the summer of 1987, we received the first "large" group of Volunteers. They were ten (10) TEFL teachers sent in response to a request for four hundred (400) volunteers submitted by the Ministry of

#### 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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# 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](mailto:info@friendsofguinea.org)

**website:** <http://friendsofguinea.org>

Education...

Today, among the staff we have almost half a dozen of Americans and more than thirty (30) local hires. We currently have 118 volunteers (76 PCVs and 42 Trainees). Peace Corps is my family; if somebody does not believe it, I will feel very bad. The family I will miss, the family I will never forget.

Peace Corps/Guinea management and Ambassador Barrie Walkley recommended me and my family to get the GREEN CARD. My wife and I received the Entry Visa in the States and then we will receive the Card upon our arrival.

I would like to take this opportunity to very respectfully express my profound gratitude to Ambassador Walkley for his unconditional support.

I owe a lot to our Country Director, Ms. Lisa Ellis, who did and is doing everything possible to help me with deep respect and consideration. I am very deeply touched and remain very thankful. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. George Greer who initiated and wrote a wonderful recommendation to help me receive the Green Card.

If I start listing the names of the great people with whom I worked during these seventeen years in PC/Guinea and at HQ, whom I will never forget, I will need a book. Nevertheless, I know that I must express my gratitude to Mr. Jerry Pasela for the reception he granted me when I started working in 1986; to Mr. John Reddy; to Mr. Jeff Page and to Ms. Kathy Tilford for their cooperation. Thank you also the present and past

CDUs at the HQ in DC. I love working with Volunteers and their counterparts; I will miss traveling up-country, especially nowadays when most of the roads are paved and most of the ferries are replaced by modern bridges.

If it pleases God I will be flying to Washington DC on 22 February 2004. My address will be: c/o Moussé Thiam, 1234 Mass. Avenue # 704, Washington, DC 20005 Tel: (202) 737-7797. Email: [ththiam@yahoo.com](mailto:ththiam@yahoo.com). Please keep in touch. (signed) Elhadj

## Global Understanding at the Grass-Roots Level: Reflections on Peace Corps Day

*Cindy Diouf, RPCV Kankalabe '96-'98*

[ciadiouf@msn.com](mailto:ciadiouf@msn.com)

For one day every year, I get to relive what it was like to live in Guinea for 2 years. This one day usually takes place in early March for Peace Corps Day. It is an absolute thrill to find a captive audience willing to listen to my stories about Guinea, willing to try on my leppi complets and most of all, willing to open their minds and hearts to learning about Africa. Since I am currently teaching in a high school in eastern Iowa, I am in contact with students everyday. However, Peace Corps Day is the one day out of the year where I can truly captivate the imaginations of all students. From the photos and slides that I show to the stories of eating around the bowl, the students are transported to an exotic land of endless beauty.

Today's generation of students is only vaguely familiar with President John F. Kennedy and has little understanding his call to, "Ask not what your country



*Teacher and RPCV Cindy Hird Diouf celebrates Peace Corps Day with her students.*

can do for you but what you can do for your country". I recently met a fascinating older couple that had served as volunteers in Peru in the early sixties. In fact, they were members of the second group of volunteers that had ever signed up! They commented that they were indeed inspired by President Kennedy's call for service and that effectively that is why they choose to serve. When I asked them what they were doing for Peace Corps Day they mentioned that they didn't have plans. What a waste, I thought. After all, I was engrossed in their stories of Peace Corps training. Their preparations included hanging off cliffs and climbing ropes of all things! Can you imagine how excited students would be to hear their stories of service and view their 40-year-old slides of Peru?

We should all feel inspired to share our stories. Our lesson plans bring the content knowledge and curriculum to life. Students are tired of reading textbooks and memorizing facts and statistics. They have studied maps of Africa but few know anything about Guinea. Few can imagine eating dried cassava paste patties with dried okra sauce in a communal bowl on the floor. We no longer have John F. Kennedy to inspire the youth. That must become our mission as former Peace Corp Volunteers. We must share what we have seen and experienced.

It seems to me that more and more, we as a nation have become consumed by self-interest. We owe it to the kids of today to show that is not what this country is about. We must promote global understanding at the grass-roots level and inspire the next generation of volunteers to value the experience of helping others. There is nothing like the generosity and beauty of the Guinean people. Let's let the world know.

We can all agree that nothing compares to "the toughest job you'll ever love". Now is the time to put that belief into action by sharing our stories with the youth of our communities.

## **Promote World Peace and Friendship During Peace Corps Week: March 1–7, 2004**

To commemorate the 43rd anniversary of the founding of the Peace Corps, RPCVs will celebrate Peace Corps Week on March 1 through March 7, 2004.

RPCVs will be visiting classrooms, community organizations, and workplaces throughout the United States to share the knowledge and insights gained from their overseas experiences. As every RPCV knows, part of the Peace Corps' mission is to educate Americans back home about the people with whom they lived and worked. When RPCVs speak about their Peace Corps experiences, they enrich the lives of students, neighbors,

and colleagues. RPCVs also raise awareness of the Volunteers' ongoing global contributions and plant the seeds of community service.

Peace Corps Week is your opportunity to promote a better understanding of the people of your host country among the people of your current community. You can participate in a variety of ways: Perhaps you have photographs, artifacts, music, or folktales that you could share with students or other groups. Consider asking another RPCV to make the presentation with you. Two or more viewpoints will give your audience a broader perspective of the work of Peace Corps Volunteers and might make the experience more enjoyable for you. You might encourage your local newspaper to run a story about your experiences in the Peace Corps or to publish a letter to the editor about Peace Corps service. You might also want to participate in one of the events being organized by the Peace Corps recruiting offices.

Last year, more than 7,000 RPCVs visited elementary schools, secondary schools, and colleges and universities throughout the United States. More than half a million students welcomed RPCVs into their classrooms nationwide. RPCVs also gave presentations to community groups, at their workplace, and in places of worship. Through the sharing of their overseas experiences, RPCVs continue to build bridges across cultures—bridges to friendship, cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and, ultimately, peace.

Whether you choose to bring your Peace Corps experience to a local school or take part in one of the activities mentioned above, participation is key in helping Peace Corps achieve its third goal. Sign up to participate today! Online registration is available on the Peace Corps Week website ([www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/peacecorpsday](http://www.peacecorps.gov/rpcv/peacecorpsday)). All respondents will receive a free presentation kit. The presentation kit includes souvenirs for your audience and materials to help you prepare for and promote the week.

Visit the Peace Corps website for more information. If you have any questions, contact the Peace Corps Week Coordinator at [pcday@peacecorps.gov](mailto:pcday@peacecorps.gov) or call 800.424.8580 (press 2, then ext. 1961).

## **Fallen PCVs Remembered**

*Ed. Note: Guinea RPCVs who knew Justin Bhansali and Jesse Thyne, or who heard of their untimely deaths in a road accident in Guinea in 2000, may be interested to know that a project is underway to create a permanent memorial to them and other fallen PCVs. Although still in its earliest stages, we hope that this initiative will meet with success in all of its objectives. More information is available on the Web, as you will see below.*

On May 12, 1997, Chelsea Mack's brother Jeremiah died in a car accident on a dusty road in Niger



very far away from home. He was a Peace Corps volunteer doing masonry work, driving to a job site in a friend's village.

Since then, she and her mother Donna have struggled to make sense of his death, struggled to move forward. They established a scholarship in his name at his high school, but still they wanted to do something more.

Later, they learned how many other volunteers have died during their time in the Peace Corps and how many families there are like them. At the time, fallen volunteers were collectively honored by only a simple plaque hanging on a wall in the D.C. office of the Peace Corps. It was their belief that these special, unique and very giving individuals deserved to be remembered in a way befitting their contributions to their families, friends, and to the strangers they reached out to in so many far corners of the world.

Last spring they began work on a project. Their mission is to:

- Celebrate the lives and service of fallen Peace Corps volunteers through the creation of an Internet Memorial. They hope to eventually include stories and pictures of every volunteer whose family members or friends would like to share them.
- Create a network of support for the families and friends of fallen PCVs. They would like to aid willing families in connecting with each other.
- Ultimately raise funds to establish a permanent, physical memorial honoring each Peace Corps volunteer who has died while in service.

Chelsea and Donna Mack invite you to visit their site, <http://www.fpcv.org>, and share it with others. They welcome your help in building the site, contacting families of volunteers you may have known, and any general comments or advice you may have.

Chelsea says, "We are beginning a journey, just as they did. We hope you will join us."

## FOG Helps Asylum Applicant

Laura Rowley is an associate at Foley Hoag LLP, a large Boston law firm. For the most part, she works on cases for large corporate clients, but her firm is committed to public service and encourages its members to take "pro bono" work, representing needy clients free of charge. In August 2003, she took on a new client: a woman from Guinea seeking political asylum in the United States based upon an abusive, forced marriage, and fear that she could not protect her baby daughter from female genital mutilation in Guinea. Her client's native language was Fulani, though she also spoke Wolof and French. After a few sessions with her client in French, it became apparent that she would feel more comfortable and be better able to express herself if she

could use her native language, Fulani. Thus, she began a long search for a Fulani translator. After meeting several dead ends, she came across the website for Friends of Guinea.

"I sent an email to some contacts listed on the website, and right away received some responses," said Rowley." In particular, Stephanie Chasteen and Jody Sites were very responsive, kind and helpful. They showed me the online FOG Registry (<http://friendsofguinea.org/registry.shtml>), which is searchable by city. I found those in the Boston area and emailed everyone on that list. Again, several people responded and Nancy Devine provided the key referral! She put me in touch with a friend of hers who, as it turns out, works just a few blocks from my office." The friend's husband was fluent in Fulani and he agreed to help. "He was a wonderful translator and our client has now had her asylum interview. We have to wait several months before learning whether she will win asylum, but I know that her chances are improved because she was able to use her native language when telling her story in the interview. I'm extremely grateful to everyone at Friends of Guinea who responded to my request for assistance in finding a translator."

If anyone reading this speaks Fulani or any other language, and would be interested in serving as a translator in another asylum case, Rowley assures us there is a great need. "The time commitment is not significant, and you would be doing a tremendous service to someone in need." Interested persons in the Boston area may contact the Political Asylum/Immigration Representation Project ("PAIR Project") at [mail@pairproject.org](mailto:mail@pairproject.org) or (617) 742-9296. The PAIR Project keeps a list of potential translators and will contact potential translators when a need arises. Finally, if anyone is interested in learning more about asylum cases in general, and more specifically claims based upon



*Marilyn Pearson, Guinea Parent Support Coordinator, recently traveled to Guinea to visit her daughter Jenni, who is a volunteer. She sent us this photo of a River Niger crossing on the way from Siguiri to Kankan.*

gender-based human rights abuses such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation, Rowley highly recommends the book "Do They Hear You When You Cry" by Fauziya Kassindja and Layli Miller Bashir. Kassindja is the first woman to be granted asylum in the United States based upon her fear of and opposition to female genital mutilation, and the book is an account of this experience.

## Communications Report

*Brian Farenell, RPCV Beindou '95-'97*  
[communications@friendsofguinea.org](mailto:communications@friendsofguinea.org)

I'm Brian Farenell, the new communications director. I was advocacy director from FOG's launch until the end of 2003. But I wanted a new challenge and to give someone with fresh ideas to get a crack at doing different things with advocacy. I've been involved with FOG since the very early day. To see it grow from little more than a seed in the head of a few idealistic people like Stephanie and Woody into a dynamic group sponsoring conferences, sending out newsletters and generally being a venue for people interested in the Peace Corps and Guinea to share ideas, information and news.

I served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1995-97 in Beindou Centre, a tiny village (and sous-prefecture) less than 10 miles from Kissidougou. I had a great experience there and I'm pleased to still be in contact with my best friends from Beindou 6 1/2 years later.

From the outset, I've strongly believed that, in addition to the well-being of volunteers on the ground, Guinea and Guineans should be an important part of FOG's objectives. I didn't want us to merely be a cheerleader for the institution of the Peace Corps and leave it at that. I wanted FOG to be very Guinea-specific, if you will. And it has become so.

## Advocacy Report

*Emily Byram, RPCV Kondianakoro, '98-'00*  
[advocacy@friendsofguinea.org](mailto:advocacy@friendsofguinea.org)

My name is Emily Byram, and I am Friends of Guinea's new Advocacy Director. I currently live in Washington, DC, and lobby on environmental issues for the National Audubon Society. I became involved with Audubon specifically because of their population program, which seeks to increase funding for international family planning programs overseas, which includes grants to groups that many of us may have worked with on the ground in Guinea. As a Health and Community Development Volunteer in Kondianakoro, Mandiana from 1998 to 2000, I became very aware of

the need for such programs, and came to DC to help influence Congress to support them.

I joined Peace Corps as part of the Masters Internationalist Program through Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, and upon completion of service I received my Masters degree in International Health and Epidemiology. My village was located just a few kilometers from the Mali border, and I found it much easier to get to Bamako than to Conakry, or even the regional capital of Kankan. It was a trek to get to Kondianakoro, but was well worth it. The people were so friendly, and their isolation had well preserved the culture, with drumming, dancing and masked devils a daily sight.

I am looking forward to working with FOG, because it will give me an opportunity to help raise awareness about issues affecting Guinea, volunteers there, and Peace Corps in general. I intend to post a biweekly advocacy bulletin, focusing on Peace Corps funding, and other PC issues, as well as Africa-specific development issues, using ADNA as my main source of information. Their monthly meetings are held here in DC, and I will try to participate in as many of these meetings as possible. In addition, I'll send alerts if urgent issues come up, with contact info for legislators. I encourage anyone to bring issues of interest to my attention, so that I can share them with the group. I welcome any suggestions.

## Membership Report

*Stephanie Chasteen, RPCV Baguinet '97-'99*  
[membership@friendsofguinea.org](mailto:membership@friendsofguinea.org)

I've stepped down after four years as Friends of Guinea's webmaster. Cherif Diallo, who did a super job as our Projects Director last quarter, has rallied to the task and will be handling the web stuff from now on. Now I'm working as Membership Director, the ultimate organizational task, which suits my fussy personality quite well!

If you have any questions about your membership, please drop me a line at [membership@friendsofguinea.org](mailto:membership@friendsofguinea.org).

## 2004 Calendars Still Available

The famous International Calendar, designed and produced by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison, Wisconsin, is now on sale for a discounted price! All proceeds go to Friends of Guinea to help support and fund current Peace Corps Volunteer projects and initiatives in Guinea. These are high quality

wall calendars, featuring photos taken by PCVs around the world, along with proverbs, international holidays, and interesting facets of various cultures. Photographs featured in this year's calendar (previous years too) can be viewed at [www.rpcvmadison.org](http://www.rpcvmadison.org). Our favorite is the one of the Thai Buddhist temple monks (May) although the Malagasy landscape (August) runs a close second. Or you may prefer the photo from Afghanistan, of two women in black chadors, surrounded by a flock of white birds (January).



Calendars now cost only \$8 each, or \$6 each when you order 3 or more. Order now while supplies last! To order by credit card, go to <http://www.friendsofguinea.org/calendars.shtml>. To order by check, make your check payable to "Friends of Guinea" and mail it to Friends of Guinea, c/o Anne Redmond, 18 Waterville Lane, Ctr. Barnstead, NH 03225.

## Le Griot Nous Dit...

**Mike Dickerson** (RPCV 97-99) went up and joined the Foreign Service. He's been in Tbilisi, Georgia, for almost a year. He says things are going well at work and he's having a good time, though he's been robbed twice. He says: "I spent New Years with some friends,

and then we went bowling at the only bowling alley in Tbilisi. It was interesting. I also spent a lot of time at Supras. The Supra is a huge Georgian meal with lots of toasting with wine. There is a very rigid order to the toasts, and they are all in Georgian which makes them pretty much incomprehensible to me."

**Aiyar Ravi Kumar** wrote us from India to locate the address or email address of an old friend of his who is from Conakry but has been living in Paris. His name is **Barry Bademba** and he used to work for Photo Couleur Service on the Rue Vielle du Temple. Anyone who may be able to help is requested to reply to [sudha\\_h@hotmail.com](mailto:sudha_h@hotmail.com).

**Edward van Luinen** (RPCV Kissidougou, '87-'89) asks that anyone from 1986 or 1987 contact him at [guinearpcvs1987@yahoo.com](mailto:guinearpcvs1987@yahoo.com).

**George Greer**, former CD of Guinea, writes: "At this moment I'm in Lagos, Nigeria, on an unusually long 6-week work trip to Senegal, Nigeria and DRC. I'm working with an organization called BASICS (look it up on the web for more information). It is a USAID child survival project and I'm working on malaria. It's fun but too much travel this year. I think I will manage to get the travel under control when we move into a new 5 year contract for the project (from BASICS II to BASICS III). We live in Takoma Park, MD and love the place, but all of us dearly miss Africa and if it weren't time for the kids to be back in the US to spend some formative years in school here, we would be off to somewhere or another."

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