

Çava?

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



15 August 2005 • No.16

Fundraising Underway for the 2005–06 Peace Corps Guinea Gender Conferences

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Once again Friends of Guinea is proud to be raising money for Peace Corps Guinea's Gender Conferences. This year they are going to be held in December, so we are under considerable pressure to raise almost \$10,000 in time! We know this is a very worthy cause – all volunteers have fond memories of the event, and we at FOG believe that these conferences are vital for the development of the nation.

I knew that during my second year of service, a seventh-grade girl named Damba Mansaré would accompany me to the Girls' Conference. She was a shy, heavy girl who worked hard in school and seemed interested in everything academic, from learning English to doing extra math problems. She was thrilled when she passed the sixth-grade exam at the top of her class to join us at the middle school. During the summer, she would come to my house with math problems (taken from older students' notebooks) for verification that she had done them right. Not only did she impress me with her aptitude for math, but she would ask me about vocabulary in English and how to better organize her small business of selling bananas, using math of course.

Slowly, I got to know about her family, and the dire poverty they lived in. Even for the average Guinean, they suffered. It was in her dirt floor house that, for the first time, I saw a severely malnourished infant, her little brother, with arms like twigs. Damba was probably 15, her mother's oldest child. There were countless shoeless, dirty toddlers around the house, children of various wives of her father and half-sisters

of Damba. Her mother seemed so exhausted I wanted to do anything I could to ease her, but I knew by looking at the skin-and-bones baby on her back that there was very little I could do. She had a beautiful smile and a kind disposition, which Damba had clearly inherited. How Damba remained hopeful and idealistic coming from such dire circumstances still baffles me.

I identified Damba's father, a kola nut salesman in the market, to ask if Damba could accompany me to this prestigious conference in Kankan. He seemed gruff and had scars on his face, but when I explained how intelligent and well behaved his daughter was at school, his eyes began to water with pride. "Of course she may go with you," he said.

Damba was one of the youngest participants in the Kankan conference that year and proved to be



A yoga class at the 2004 Girls' Conference in Boké

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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poised, alert, attentive, and active, even while wearing borrowed sports clothes to play basketball for the first time in her life. I saw her laugh and take on leadership roles. I saw her struggle to express herself fully in French, and succeed. I saw her clutch to herself a book she received as a gift for participating in the conference, as though she never would let it out of her sight. I witnessed the change in her eyes, a new excitement, a renewed passion for knowledge that I hope she still carries.

I could have finished my service believing that there was plenty of food in Guinea; that everyone could eat every day. Until I visited Damba's family, I didn't realize just how many families barely survived on a few boiled starches. My service was greatly affected by this family, as I'm sure I affected them. As for Damba, hopefully she now has some tools to stop the vicious cycle of poverty she knows so well.

I know there are countless other girls in Guinea in similar circumstances. By supporting this year's conference, you will really make a difference. In fact, your money will blow these girls' minds wide open! Can you imagine seeing a running shower for the first time in your life at a conference with Peace Corps? Being the first woman in your family to own a book? Participants are taught the facts about the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the dangers of early marriage and pregnancy, and female genital mutilation. The young people of Guinea deserve no less than information and education about their world and the world around them.

We have \$9,893.00 to raise for the conferences in Boké, Mamou, and Kankan to be held this December. Please donate before November 1 at: <http://www.friendsofguinea.org/conference2005-2006.shtml>.

Have Dog, Will Travel:

A Journey from the Sahel to the Sea

Jennifer Peterson (wife of Guinea CD Steve Peterson)
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I had forgotten the beauty of the color green. Green trees, green grass, green mold growing on the walls (not to mention all of our leather products, and our cheese). And big, beautiful, white puffy clouds in a clear blue sky. That's what we noticed first – and it was the dry season! After five years in Niger, in late February/early March of this year my husband Steve and I packed up our worldly possessions (which seem to accumulate as time passes), including our dog (a semi-Rhodesian Ridgeback) and our bird (a Senegalese parrot, from Labé!), and a few friends (one from Togo, and one from Dubreka), and headed west to Guinea. We stopped along the way to visit Peace Corps friends in Burkina Faso (missing FESPACO by a day!), and Mali, arriving at the border without any *ordre de mission* (mon dieu!), but with lots of patience, and plenty of time to sit and wait for the chef to be located, and to negotiate safe passage to Conakry. Fortunately we were met at the border by Peace Corps Guinea's best and brightest, Education APCD Mohammed Fofana, Kankan Regional Coordinator Binta Keita, and Driver Mamadou Baldé. With their assistance, we managed to negotiate our release (and the release of our vehicle), even without the dreaded *ordre de mission*.

Our first stop: Siguiri, to visit SED (small enterprise development) PCV Amanda Barnett, and to meet and greet relevant local officials. Amanda is an



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>



energetic volunteer from Tulsa, OK, and an excellent host. She gave us a tour of town (including a stop at a wonderful restaurant on a hill overlooking town), and filled us in on some of the interesting issues facing mine workers in Siguiri. Amanda lives in a lovely compound with a Guinean family (and several Senegalese parrots!), and works with an international NGO. She said she loves her job and her site (she actually had turned down an assignment to Niger, but we didn't hold that against her.), and mentioned that during her father's recent visit, he thought Siguiri looked like Saigon. I have never been to Asia, but I

must admit, compared to Niamey, Siguiri looked lush and green.

Our next stop was the bustling metropolis of Kankan. Here we met additional local officials, and two third-year PCVs – Wayne Kleck and Elizabeth Arlotti. Wayne has been assigned to the World Food Program, and Elizabeth provides support to a local NGO called APROFIG. Elizabeth was evacuated from Peace Corps/Turkmenistan, but seems to have adjusted well to Guinea, and is doing great work to support girls' education and teacher training. Wayne transferred to Kankan from the *Bas Côte*, and claims that the gunshots he hears at night don't bother him (perhaps because he is from West Texas). Kankan is not a village; crime (and punishment) are real issues with which they have had to contend. Nevertheless, they both said they feel safer in Kankan than in a similar location in the US, and they have enjoyed their Peace Corps experience. Elizabeth and Wayne are both members of the G6 training group, and are preparing to COS in July and August. In Kankan Steve and I were made honorary members of the Camara family by the prefet's assistant. Just call me Djenabou Camara, if you please.

In Kankan we also met other volunteers, including Lyndsey from Boulder CO, who is a health volunteer. She helped organize the Boys' Conference this year, and has received Peace Corps Partnership funds to finish a health clinic in her village, and to repair the clinic's HF radio. She appreciates the clear goals and objectives of Peace Corps Guinea's health program, and keeps busy weighing babies, distributing ORS and giving weekly health lessons to local mothers. In April Lyndsey used her hard earned vacation pay to visit Sierra Leone by boat! I look forward to hearing about her trials and travels during her next visit to Conakry (or mine to Kankan!).

From Kankan we continued to Dabola, stopping to visit Education PCVs Michael Milligan in Cissela, Julie Berglund in Bissikrima and Brian Buehler in Kouroukoro, before finding a hotel and sleeping soundly in Dabola. On our way to Mamou, we visited SED PCV Robin Franko in Saramoussaya and Education PCV Joseph Monical in Dounet. Finally, on the last day of our grand voyage, we passed through Sougueta (my old stomping grounds, where we visited Education PCV Anne Peairs), Kindia (where we ate lunch but missed PCV Jordan Kimball), and Mambiya (to visit Health PCV Betsy Blum).

In retrospect, Guinea hasn't changed all that much since Steve and I lived in Labé almost 10 years ago, working on the Guinea Natural Resource Management program for Chemonics. The countryside is stunning, the kids are adorable, and the infrastructure is caught somewhere between 1880 and 1956. Peace Corps enjoys incredible support among government officials (for which much thanks goes to former Guinea volunteers, as well as host country staff including El Hadji Thiam), and even greater support with community leaders and families. Conakry itself is



much the same – limited electricity, horrible telephones (even with all the new cell phone companies), a sporadic water supply and nasty traffic. However, I must admit that I am enjoying living in Conakry much more than I imagined – at high tide and during a full moon, the ocean is a jewel of sparkling brilliance and dancing light. The live music and the musicians are “formidable” (if you get a chance, look for BaCissoko’s amazing CD on calabashmusic.com), and the ocean plays its own music outside my bedroom window every night. I can walk to the market in Taouya and find everything I need to make great Mexican and Indian food, or chicken and peanut sauce (*maafé tigga*). I can’t wait to get back up to Labé to visit old friends, several of whom have already made the trip to Conakry to visit us. Guinea continues to amaze and impress even the most cynical and crusty world traveler, and to defy development paradigms and sometimes to defy all logic (and seemingly the laws of gravity and entropy), by continuing on her very own, very special path to the future.

The next few years could prove to be quite exciting for Guinea and for Guineans, possibly painful, but surely nothing at all like what we expect. The impact of Guinean migration to the US, and the impact

of newly returning American Guineans (Guinean Americans?), could prove interesting. I hope all you FOG members are doing your part to reciprocate the hospitality we received as Peace Corps volunteers, for those poor unsuspecting Guinean immigrants who have no idea that in America strangers will not feed you, will not offer you their very best bed, will not walk with you to help you find whatever it is you are looking for. As you all know, a Peace Corps Volunteer’s work is never done (returned or not!), so we thank you in advance for your efforts to keep the peace back home, and to forge new friendships with everyone struggling to make the American dream their own. *Jam tun!*

“Africa’s Next Failed State” International Crisis Group Reports on Guinea

Guinea risks becoming Africa’s next failed state, unless its government and the international community focus hard on reform, according to a new report.

Stopping Guinea’s Slide, released June 14 by the International Crisis Group, examines a country on the edge of collapse. As rivals intrigue over succession to the ailing and dictatorial President, Lansana Conté, the economy is faltering, the government has nearly ceased to provide services, and there have been isolated uprisings across the country. There are also a number of external threats.

“The political class is preoccupied with Conté’s failing health, but the steps the country must take in the next months are the same whether the President recovers or not”, says Mike McGovern, Crisis Group’s West Africa Project Director. “All players must push forward the agreed reform program without reference to personalities”.

The package of political and economic reforms recently agreed by the government requires the people of Guinea to assume a new level of responsibility for their own governance. The emphasis should be placed on institutions and checks on power.

These reforms – including the revision of the electoral lists, the opening of the airwaves, a guarantee of freedom of movement and association for opposition parties and the creation of an independent electoral commission – are needed and needed now. They should be implemented before municipal elections are held in autumn and before presidential elections are held in the case of a vacancy.

Facing stiff opposition from the vested interests that have calcified around the presidency, the reform process will necessarily be painful, slow and imperfect. It is unlikely to work if the military does not see its interest in it, so issues of salaries and career progression must be addressed. It will also require a new attitude from the opposition, which will have to make a leap of faith and participate in the electoral process even though progress is sure to come in fits and starts.



July 2005 stagiaires at staging in Philadelphia, about to leave for Conakry. Bonnie Jiang, center (holding the white folder), has shared her experiences in a weblog at www.river_wave.blogspot.com.

Security forces and government officials may be subject to new rules but their day-to-day operations are still guided too often by habits formed under 47 years of authoritarianism. Rather than opting out at the first sign of repression, opposition parties must keep pushing forward, demanding that the government make good on its promises. The media and civil society have important roles to play in this push.

"If these reforms succeed, the looming succession battle can be resolved in a consensual manner, and Guinea could turn a corner in the following twelve to 24 months", says Nancy Soderberg, Crisis Group vice president and acting director of the Africa Program. "If not, the succession could very well be bloody, and the colossal mismanagement of the last 21 years is likely to continue".

The International Crisis Group is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization working to prevent and resolve conflicts around the world. Its first report on Guinea, issued in December 2003, was entitled *Guinea: Uncertainties at the End of an Era*. These and other ICG reports are available free of charge online at www.crisisgroup.org.

Remembering Sidy Condé

Duncan Cohen (Yembering; Labé, '01-'04)

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(Ed. Note: On July 31 Peace Corps Guinea IT specialist Sidy Ousmane Condé passed away in a tragic swimming accident. CD Steve Peterson and other Peace Corps staff presented condolences to the family on Aug. 1 and assisted with the burial services on Aug. 2, offering money, rice and oil as a small gesture of support. Peace Corps Africa Region Director Henry McKoy also sent a letter of condolence to the family. Duncan Cohen offered the following tribute to Sidy, who is desperately missed by all who knew him. Sidy is survived by his wife, Miriam Sylla, and one-year-old daughter Lisa Aissatou (named after former Guinea CD Lisa Ellis).

Upon hearing the news of Sidy's passing last week, I was filled with profound sadness. Sidy was an amazing person who lived his life fully every day. One of the things I loved most about Sidy was his calm and happy disposition, no matter how busy the work day might be. Sometimes, the Conakry office would be tense as a result of a conference going on or a new group of volunteers arriving, but Sidy was always there to greet me with a smile and a helping hand. No matter how much stress he was under, he would always manage to fit me into his busy schedule.

Sidy and I became friends through a computer project that I began in my village, Yembering, in 2003. He would spend many hours helping me reprogram donated laptops, and every time I was given another used computer, Sidy and I would sit down and try to

figure out how to fix it. Invariably, Sidy would say, "Duncan, don't worry. Leave it with me and I'll send it to you in Labé." I always felt bad for leaving the computers with him, because as everyone knows, Sidy always had a long list of people he had to help every day (the work of an IT specialist is never done!). Nevertheless, Sidy's incredible skill with technology enabled him to fix a handful of the old computers and as a result dozens of my students were able to have access to this technology for the first time in their lives (perhaps even paving the way for those young students to have a successful career in IT like Sidy).

I want to end on a positive note, because to not do so would be an injustice to such a great man. Sidy is one of those rare individuals who epitomized the best of both Africa and the West. He somehow managed to understand and embrace the good qualities of both and was an infectious positive influence on everyone who had the good fortune to know him. He had recently married a great woman, built an amazing career for himself, and had given back to the world in so many ways. Sidy lived a full and honorable life and will be greatly missed. I offer my most sincere condolences to his wife and family, and to the rest of the Peace Corps family he has throughout the world.



During my last days in Guinea, I went out with Sidy and his wife Miriam. We chatted and laughed about how nice it was to have had the chance to work together.

Concern Over Defense Recruitment Initiative

Jenn Denno (Sandenia, '02-'04), Advocacy Director
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Concern is brewing in the Peace Corps community over the Congress' passage of the National Call to Service Act some three years ago. As Alan Cooperman wrote in his August 2nd article for *The Washington Post*, "The U.S. military, struggling to fill its voluntary ranks, is offering to allow recruits to meet part of their military obligations by serving in the Peace Corps, which has resisted any ties to the Defense Department or U.S. intelligence agencies since its

founding in 1961.” The first recruits will be eligible to apply to Peace Corps in 2007. Members of the Peace Corps community are worried that any relationship between the two bodies could put PCVs at unnecessary risk.

In a letter to the National Peace Corps Association, Peace Corps Director Gaddi Vasquez clarified how the NCS program works. After completing three months of basic training, a recruit is required to spend 15 months on active duty, and then two years on active reserve or in the National Guard. After that a period of eight years is required in the “Individual Ready Reserve,” which means that he or she is no longer an active member of the military, receives no pay or compensation from the military, and can hold a normal job or go to school. However, IRR members can be called back to serve under extraordinary circumstances, such as a war. The innovation of the National Call to Service Act is that a volunteer may satisfy the IRR component of his or her service by serving in the Peace Corps, Americorps or another designated service program. Such an individual could still be called up for active service “in case of national emergency.”

Director Vasquez has stated that recruits have no guarantee of being accepted into the Peace Corps. They will not receive any preferential treatment, and the Peace Corps is not changing its admission standards, he said.

Many former and current PCVs, who have worked hard to gain the trust of their communities, have expressed concern over the possible perception of a link with the military. Volunteers are routinely accused of being spies already, despite Peace Corps’ best efforts to insulate itself institutionally from the intelligence community and the military. Many worry that host communities and countries will no longer accept volunteers if they are aware that some PCVs are actually finishing up their obligations to the military. Others are afraid that the safety of PCVs will be compromised when their neighbors learn that they may have ties to the military. Concern has also been expressed about the motivation of those who might join as a way of reducing the amount of time that they are obligated to the military.

Others, however, note the fact that there never has been any restriction on PCVs serving while on IRR status, although in the past such individuals applied to Peace Corps without any incentive from the military.

In fact, since individuals on IRR status usually are employed in the civilian sector, those who apply to the Peace Corps will be facing a dramatic salary cut. RPCVs who have also served in the military have argued strongly against instituting a ban on IRR members serving as PCVs where none has previously existed, arguing that military service is an honorable form of service in its own right and should not bar an individual from eligibility for Peace Corps service.

Director Vasquez sees no reason why the NCS program should effect the organization in any way.

Ironically, some have noted that the publicity due to this very debate that may cause host countries to infer a linkage between Peace Corps and the US military.

2006 International Calendar

It is time now to place your orders for the 2006 edition of the famous International Calendar, produced by RPCVs of Madison, Wisconsin. More than just another annual time marker with pretty pictures, the International Calendar is also designed as a teaching aid, introducing varied life styles, terrain, foods, occupations, and crafts from around the world. The project began in 1987 as a way to share Peace Corps experiences with home communities and to raise money for grassroots projects in the countries where volunteers have served. The calendar always features countries in which the Peace Corps is currently active or has been hosted in the past. The pictures are windows into our memories and introduce you to the people who welcomed us so warmly into their communities. Plus, nearly every day lists important festivals, birthdays, and holidays from around the world.

These calendars make terrific holiday gifts. Order one for \$15.00 or two or more for \$12.00 each. Place your order today with Claire Lea at projects@friendsofguinea.org. Friends of Guinea uses the income from calendar sales to support projects such as the Gender Conferences as well as our normal operating expenses such as printing and postage, and web hosting fees. Of course, Friends of Guinea has no paid staff ... We are all still volunteers!

Secretary's Report

Betty Walker (RPCV Parent), Secretary
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On July 29th, I was in Washington, DC for National Peace Corps Association's Annual Meeting and Group Leaders Forum. About 35 people were in attendance including Jenn Denno from FOG Advocacy. The discussions ranged from electing a new Group Leader Coordinator, to the health of the NPCA and its affiliates, to accessing info, to the website itself, and to domestic and international programs that NPCA sponsors.

It was definitely eye-opening! The NPCA struggles just as FOG does with the problems of membership. A consultant gave lots of great ideas to help in that area ... and, not surprisingly, FOG was already on its way to doing some of these things. During the afternoon session of the Group Leaders Forum many affiliates shared ideas on fundraising, and we discussed globalgiving.org, which is a site set up to receive donations for NPCA affiliate projects in their country of service. Both Friends of Tanzania and Friends of Liberia use mailings as a way of raising considerable funds towards their in-country projects.

As a parent of a recently returned volunteer, my perspective was different. I think given a specific project, most people will donate ... especially parents. But beyond that most Americans with a sense of commitment to improving the world would become a part of NPCA if asked. We are in this together and it will take us all to raise the consciousness of our nation and the world. One small step at a time.

Advocacy Report

Jenn Denno (Sandenia, '02-'04), Advocacy Director
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eBay Fabric Auction

Great things are happening here at Friends of Guinea! We are currently working to put together an auction of beautiful Guinean fabric on eBay. Start your holiday shopping early and support FOG! The cloth is on its way, so keep a look out for the auction. The tentative dates are Sunday, September 18 to Saturday, September 24. Point your browser to www.friendsofguinea.org/clothauction.shtml, as a link to the auction. FOG members will receive an email reminder before the auction.

Getting Peace Corps Back in Sierra Leone

FOG has been asked to lend its support to Friends of Sierra Leone in their tireless efforts to get Volunteers back into Sierra Leone, and the only hurdle at the moment seems to be funding. Please tell me if this is an issue on which you would like FOG to take a stand. Drop me an email if you think that we should support FOSL's efforts (or if you think we should not), and perhaps we can get involved. Remember, a stable Sierra Leone is not only a treasure for its people, but a necessity for the region. Your feedback would be appreciated.

NPCA Advocacy Day

I had the opportunity in July to volunteer for the NPCA's Advocacy Day. I joined several RPCVs from countries around the world in lobbying both the House and the Senate on a variety of issues. We requested that Congress commit seriously to President Bush's call to double the number of volunteers in the field by 2007. We also thanked our congressmen and women for preventing the abolishment of the Perkins Loan program, which currently allows PCVs partial forgiveness of their college loans. Lastly, we encouraged our representatives to support the Rural America Preservation Act. Oxfam America, together with the NPCA, has started a campaign that would cap American domestic farm subsidies at \$250,000. This act would not only help small, local, domestic farmers, but it would ease the burden on millions of farmers in the developing world who compete with cheap American and European grains. For more information on how you can get involved, please go to

www.oxfamamerica.org/agriculture or email campaign@rpcv.org.

NPCA Annual General Meeting

I had the pleasure of attending this year's NPCA Annual General Meeting and Group Leaders Forum with FOG secretary Betty Walker. The meetings provided a wonderful medium to discuss with other NPCA affiliate groups issues that affect us all. We brainstormed about fundraising techniques, membership, and communication with the Peace Corps. Our own Betty Walker made the helpful point that affiliate groups are attractive to many people, not just RPCVs, and we need to keep these other members—and potential members—in mind when we undertake new activities and look to expand.

Have other advocacy issues in mind? Something you would like to discuss? Please contact me at advocacy@friendsofguinea.org. I look forward to hearing from you.

GPS Report

Sharon Beuhler (PCV Parent), Guinea Parent Support Coordinator
gps@friendsofguinea.org

Happy Birthday to our Volunteers in Guinea. If you receive birthday cards from strangers, happy surprise! A parent from *stage* G9 (Thanks, Roxanne) suggested the Birthday Club. A parent from each recent *stage* is sending email birthday reminders to parents and friends in the Guinea Parent Support listserv for each Stage. We have the list for G8 and G9, but only a few names for G7 and G10. If someone wants to do so, you can email the name and birthday month/day – either the whole list or names you know – to gps@friendsofguinea.org. You are all our family in Guinea.

Le Griot Nous Dit...

Claire Lea brings us this news from the G4 group: **Brad Lyon** (Koundara) has been accepted to Johns Hopkins school of International Relations. He will be studying in Italy for a semester starting in September, fulfilling his lifelong dream of finding his Italian roots. And **Jenni Pearson** (Siguiri) has been accepted to George Washington University, where she will be studying something fascinating (and got a big scholarship). Congratulations to Brad and Jenni! **Josie Brenton** and **Sarah Prudente** are roommates in the DC area, bringing a bit of Boké *pagaille* to our nations capital. Watch out, Bush twins, these girls may get crazy! **Nikki Shull** (Boké) has closed the deal on a house in the Denver area...She is perhaps the only G4 homeowner besides **Joan Groves** (Friguiagbe), who may be getting married this fall.

Congratulations to **Jill Mariani** ('93-'96) on the birth of her second boy, Ajay Ashish Parikh. Ajay

was born just before 3:00 in the morning, a little less than an hour and a half after Jill woke up, thinking that her Chinese dinner wasn't sitting well. Surprise!

Free Classifieds in ÇaVa?!

All members in good standing of Friends of Guinea are entitled to one free personal advertisement per year in ÇaVa?, the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea. These advertisements are limited to 21 words are intended primarily as a way for families and friends to send messages of support and encouragement to volunteers serving in Guinea, although they might equally be used to broadcast other messages. We encourage you to take advantage of this free service by emailing your message of 21 words or less to the Newsletter Editor at newsletter@friendsofguinea.org.

Please note that this service is available only to current members of Friends of Guinea, so please submit your advertisement under the name in which your membership is listed so that we may verify your status.

Classified:

Congratulations and thanks to all July '04 volunteers for giving part of your lives in service. From a proud '04 parent.

Searching: Maimouna (Bah) Sangare, medical doctor of Conakry and Dinguiraye, age approx 60. Thanks, Gaby (McKannay) Miller, RPCV Guinea '65, gabymiller@sbcglobal.net

ÇaVa?

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