

Çava?

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



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Christmas in Conakry

Sharon Beuhler, PCV Parent

(Sharon Beuhler, the stalwart pillar of Guinea Parent Support, recently returned from a visit to Guinea, where she had occasion to pass the Christmas holiday with the Peace Corps Volunteers there. Here is her account of that special experience.)

I've traveled to many places during the holidays, but Christmas in Conakry was unlike any other. I had a lot of trepidation about a trip to Africa alone, but seeing my son's smiling face and waving arms behind the officials at the airport was my best Christmas present ever. Arriving in Guinea on Christmas Eve was such an overload of sights and sounds, incessant car horns, people all over the streets for Saturday night festivities, dust and smoke filling the air, people selling mysterious things along the road; white balls were peeled oranges, many things were cooking on stoves along the street. What a relief to reach the hotel and soon walk three blocks to the Peace Corps compound, where we were greeted by 25 or more Volunteers who were spending standfast and/or the holidays there. The Christmas tree with decorations and blinking lights was delightful, not to mention the fireplace and mantle with Christmas stockings (clever Athena, a feeling of home). We shared some food, spaghetti as I remember, while there was lots of chatter about Christmas plans.

Christmas morning – hurry to the fireplace to collect stockings, if you put your name on

one, with presents from Santa in them! Cooking had begun days before, with a gingerbread house (Henry) ready to decorate, desserts made or planned, Christmas dinner planned...how busy everyone was.

Suddenly all cooking stopped. We were all invited to Jen and Steve Peterson's for brunch at 11 am. The ohs and ahs when the PCVs found bacon on the table, with eggs, waffles, muffins, fresh fruit, juices; oh so much good food.

After brunch, back to the PC house...what could I do? Just accept a shopping list and head to the Taouyah *marché* with Brian B, Brian C and Laura P. The Catholic church service was just ending with dozens of people pouring into the street near the *marché* in the most glorious assortment of beautifully colored Guinean dresses and scarves.

What an experience! My first *marché*,



The gingerbread house was beautifully decorated by Ellen and Sam.

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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squeezing around stalls and people, looking over the large assortment of fresh fruit and vegetables, then going down the narrow alley-way to find sugar, flour, potatoes. How I wanted a photo of myself in the *marché*, but vendors shouted us down ('no' is understood in any language).

Cooking was well underway by the time we returned from shopping; the Volunteers made all the side dishes and desserts to go with turkey and wild rice at Jen and Steve's house that evening:

- A green salad, six gallons or so – all washed and bleached, with two homemade dressings
- Ten gallons of garlic mashed potatoes, pasta and tuna salad
- Garlic bread (Mary and 'Bella, dedicated garlic peeling)
- Fruit salad, Baked dressing with apples

What a wonderful house Jen and Steve have for entertaining, and they were so generous to invite us all, perhaps forty of us: PCVs, staff and friends. It took two tables to hold all the desserts: frozen watermelon and citrus puree, so very many decorated cookies in Christmas shapes (Joyce made them for days), gingerbread cookies, thumbprint cookies, pumpkin cake, chocolate cake with coconut frosting, apple pie (fascinating construction of that pie with bottle of rum as the rolling pin), sugared lemon peel, dark

chocolate with lemon peel, homemade mints (well, it started as taffy-good mints). Where did the wine come from! Hungarian red? I did appreciate that wine even if it does not make it into The Wine Spectator.

*Refrain: (to tune of Jingle Bells):
Oooh, taxi brousse, taxi brousse
hope we don't break down.
If I get through this trip alive,
next time I'll bike to town.
(From original lyrics by Adam Watts)*

Games, darts, music and videos continued, for as late as anyone wanted to stay. What a joyous celebration, thank you everyone.



A "previously used gift" exchange: who wants those large men's sandals? No, there was no Celine Dion tape in that selection. And Brian B snagged the beautiful turquoise belt and wrap for his mom. Danielle and Adam won for "best dressed."

Memories of Guinea

Edward van Luinen (TEFL Kissidougou, '87–'89)

I joined Peace Corps because I wanted to become a diplomat, thinking it would give me useful and inexpensive experience overseas that would later help me qualify. But, as many realize now, Peace Corps leads people to different paths.

Seven women and I in 1987 were the second group of the third wave of Volunteers to serve in the history of Guinea. After our three days in Chicago, we traveled to Thies, Senegal for our Pre-Service Training. Technical training was divided into two parts: one part theoretical and one part practical, where we would rotate teaching daytime classes to Senegalese students on their summer vacations. Evenings were engaged in lesson planning.

From afar, Guinea was our emerald city. By the time the Guinean cross-cultural instructor arrived, weeks into the training, I was starved for news of our future country of service. After a quick and rudimentary geography lesson, we picked our sites.

Equipped with our fledgling teaching experience and our built-in “Ph.D’s” in English fluency, we arrived in Conakry. For about a week, we met the local Peace Corps staff and shopped for our goods needed upcountry. Just before my caravan left for upcountry, news came that the Peace Corps Director was resigning his position. This couldn’t help but add a tinge of the ominous to the nature of upcoming service.

I was delighted to encounter the dramatic beauty of green, lush Guinea. After a bumpy ride, I arrived in Kissidougou for the initial requisite meeting with the Prefet. Over the next several months, I was to lodge at the guest quarters on his property, while I waited for my house to be “ready.” Finally, four months after arriving, I moved in to my concrete three-bedroom manse next to the school.

On to the assignment: Guinea did not have enough English teachers to cover classes for every high school in the country. The impact I planned on having was significantly muted by the fact that at the time, English did not appear on the national baccalaureat (bac) exam, necessary to pass high school. Hence

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>

I was teaching a subject that would not be tested. The Guinean bac was not accepted at that time throughout Francophone Africa as a valid credential. That was lesson number one in the fleeting phantom that is development. And I thought I would be “saving” the educational system.

My secondary assignment was, for two afternoons a week, to teach English classes to a wonderful group of eager local professionals. Getting up from siesta to teach them was easy. We laughed and laughed as they soared through the chapters in the book.

My host family offered me cultural, social, linguistic, and culinary oases over the two-year



PCV Edward Van Luinen in 1987 with his Malinké host family in Kissidougou.

period. I became a Godfather to son Mohammed, ate the evening meal with my friend Amara, a fellow teacher at the school; and conversed in front of the house. I paid for the sack of rice we consumed monthly, happy to enjoy the company of this great family and the aromatic rice and sauces. Engaging in weekly language lessons with Amara, I tried but never became fluent in Malinké.

I needed a project to fill the long summer vacation between school years, so a few of us enrolled at Conakry's main hospital in the Oral Rehydration Therapy program sponsored by the United Nations. Need trumped nausea witnessing the state of health care at the hospital. After a two-week training in dehydration detection techniques and nutrition, we were sent out for a month of work in new sites across the country. I landed in Téliimélé. Over the course of a month, I diagnosed and treated some fifty cases of dehydration.

I learned so much in Guinea, more than I ever gave. It is there where I began my career, as I am now a corporate training and organization development professional with twenty years experience. I owe this to the members of my adult English class in Kissidougou, wherever they are now.

Concert Benefits Girls' Conferences



Rosette Nguyen (Kanakalabé '94-'96) and her husband, Tom Roberson, held a Thanksgiving benefit concert in their home in Sacramento, California last November 19. Classical music was provided by Tom at the piano and two colleagues: Kristin Arnold (violin) and Tim Cone (cello). The trio played pieces by Mozart, Haydn and others; and a

Thanksgiving meal and drinks were provided by Rosette and Tom.

Forty-seven guests chose from four different beneficiary organizations chosen by the musicians and hosts: the Sacramento Area Animal Coalition; the Shalom School; the Sacramento Area Emergency Shelter for Women, Children, and Families Fund; and the Guinea Girls' Conferences. The event brought in \$3,528 – with the Guinea Girls' Conferences receiving the greatest number of both donors and dollars (\$1,030).

FOG Elects 2006 Officers

Brian Farenell (Beindou, '95-'97), Elections
fogelections2006@yahoo.com

It's election time again...and not just for our Canadian neighbors!

Every year, the following positions for Friends of Guinea's board are up for election: membership director, communications director, advocacy director, financial director, projects director and secretary.

We have candidates for a few of those positions but we really need volunteers for the positions of Membership Director, Advocacy Director, Communications Director, Projects Director.

The membership and projects directors are the most critical of these three positions that we need filled. The membership director is responsible for maintaining accurate and up to date membership records. This position is crucial to Friends of Guinea since membership dues are our primary source of revenue. The projects director is responsible for coordinating project funding requests that come from Peace Corps volunteers in the field.

The advocacy director follows issues relating to the Peace Corps, to Guinea and to international development and keeps the membership informed of key concerns.

The communications director is responsible for any communications that might occur with outside organizations, such as other "Friends of" organizations. The communications director is also the point person for the newsletter coordinator and webmaster.

If you would like more information on the responsibilities of the membership director, please contact our current director, Stephanie Chasteen, at

membership@friendsofguinea.org.

If you want more details on what the projects director, please contact our present director, Claire Lea, at projects@friendsofguinea.org.

If you have questions about or want to know more about advocacy or communications, please contact me at communications@friendsofguinea.org as I have served in both positions.

Nominations will be accepted through Friday February 24. Elections will be during the week of February 22-28. And new officers will start on March 1, though outgoing officers will remain available in the beginning to assist with the transition period.

If you would like to volunteer for one of these positions or have any other questions that might not have been addressed above, please contact me at communications@friendsofguinea.org.

Projects Report

Claire Lea (Banian, '02-'04), Projects
projects@friendsofguinea.org

The months of November and December were dedicated to wrapping up the fundraising efforts for the Girls' Conferences, which were held in mid-December. I was also wrapping up the calendar sales, which were a huge success! Thanks to everyone who donated and/or bought a calendar.

Fundraising for the 2005-2006 Girls' Conference was completed on November 11, allowing time for PCPP (Peace Corps Partnership Program) to send the money to Guinea. Total raised was \$7,607.80. (This figure includes the \$658.60 raised through the calendar sales, and \$127.25 from the Guinean fabric auction.) \$7,300 was sent to PCPP on Nov. 11. The best news is that we have a good bit of money left to start fundraising for next year's Gender Conferences!

A small donation was made to Partage Quebec-Guinée, an organization in Canada that ships books to schools in Guinea; and we made contact with Mark Lynd, president of the California-based nonprofit School-to-School International (STS). They partner with PQG in setting up classroom pen-pal exchanges between the US and Guinea and getting books to classrooms. Their website is at www.sts-international.org. You can find out more about

Partage Quebec-Guinée at www.pgg.qc.ca.

We also received a \$100 donation for Aicha magazine, which is currently managed by APROFIG, a Guinean NGO that promotes girls' education and runs a private, all-girls' school in Kankan. A third-year PCV is working with this organization.

Thanks to all FOG members who got involved this year with fundraising efforts – we couldn't have done it without you!

GPS Report

Sharon Beuhler (PCV Parent), GPS
gps@friendsofguinea.org

The Guinea Parent Support group for G11 is successfully launched and a number of parents and friends are communicating regularly. The group leader is Alice Massey and she is very active in sharing information and answering questions.

We have family and friends registered in the free listserv for 24 PCTs of the 37 in G11, and many of the 70 parents and friends are active participants. New members are very welcome, just email gps@friendsofguinea.org.

For everyone's information, setting up the GPS was again a difficult process, but I do not see a way yet for improvement. Thanks for the pct1, perhaps that will take off; although I did not get any responses from them when I asked in advance for them to sign up their family and friends.

Paul Johnson was very helpful, to the extent that he was able. He recognized that the sign up sheets done at Staging were difficult to read, and he clarified names for me, and even gave me a PCT's email, when all else failed to identify that person's family email address. Steve Peterson, Guinea Country Director, took a photo of G11 and sent it to those whose email addresses were given by the PCTs. We are continuing to circulate it within the GPS.

Membership Report

Stephanie Chasteen, (Baguinet '97-'99),
Membership
membership@friendsofguinea.org

NPCA can be a little slow...For those of you who pay your dues in FOG via the NPCA, we just wanted to let you know that the NPCA has a tendency to drag its heels... it can take up to 3 months before we are notified that

a member has submitted their dues to the NPCA. To avoid delays, you may want to renew directly via FOG, at <http://friendsofguinea.org/membership.shtml>.

Otherwise, if you've paid via the NPCA but keep getting our renewal notices, please just let us know so we don't drop you from our mailing list! *On jaaraama!*

Projects Seek Funding

Mandiana Library Project

PCV R. Priester of South Carolina has submitted a funding request to Peace Corps Partnership Program for \$4,647, of which \$3,422 remains to be found. Community participation is \$7,574, or 62% of total project cost. The funding request is to buy construction materials for the completion of a public library in Mandiana. The initiation of the library project dates back to 2002. The community has already received a gift of 5,000 books, along with money for library furniture. Plans have been made to train a local schoolteacher as a librarian, and to form a committee to work toward future improvements such as electric installation and continued resource acquisition. If you are interested in donating to this project, visit the following page on the Peace Corps website: <http://peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=resources.donors.projdetail&projdesc=675-113®ion=africa>.

Sarammoussaya Radio Project

Volunteer B. Starring of New York is the coordinator of a project to have a high-frequency communication radio installed in the health center at Sarammoussaya. This will help the health center's doctor to coordinate the delivery of medications and vaccines without having to leave the village for extended periods on a regular basis, leaving the health center understaffed every time he does so. \$1,000 has been requested for this project, all of which remains to be found. Funds will pay for the radio as well as a solar-electric system to power it, and for their professional installation. The community will pay to equip and furnish a secure office to house the system. Community participation is \$350, or 26% of total project costs. If you are interested in

donating to this project, visit the following page on the Peace Corps website: <http://peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=resources.donors.projdetail&projdesc=675-114®ion=africa>.

Girls' Academic Lock-In

PCV W. Cochran of Ohio is sponsoring an application to fund a seven-week academic immersion program for twenty female middle- and high-school students, designed to help them prepare for school examinations by living and studying together in a closed compound. Girls will attend classes and devote their time to studying outside of class in the morning and evening, relieved of their normal obligation to spend all of their free time doing housework, working in the fields, and caring for younger siblings; obligations that are rarely imposed upon male students. Project funds will compensate the girls' teachers and meet logistical expenses related to their housing and transportation. \$1,021 has been requested for this project, of which \$901 has yet to be found. Community participation in the form of lodging, furnishing, and classroom supplies is \$376.00, or 27% of total project costs. If you are interested in donating to this project, visit the following page on the Peace Corps website:

<http://peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=resources.donors.projdetail&projdesc=675-116®ion=africa>.

Guinea Tournée Photo Albums Online

Peace Corps Guinea Country Director Steve Peterson has started posting online photos from his tournées upcountry to visit PCVs. Go to www.snapfish.com, and sign in with the email address guineapcvs@yahoo.com and the password *lansana*.

Email Newsletter Available

If you prefer not to have this paper version of *ÇaVa?* cluttering up your mailbox, or if you don't want your membership in Friends of Guinea to promote deforestation, or if you just want to save us the price of a stamp, you may

elect to receive this newsletter by email. The email version is formatted in HTML, and includes a link to a .pdf version of the paper newsletter that is posted on the Web and contains all the formatting of the original. Or you can receive both the paper and electronic version, and have the best of both worlds. Email membership@friendsofguinea.org and let us know of your preference, and we'll make a note of it.

Le Griot Nous Dit...

Dustin Sharp (N'Zerekore '96-'98) has joined Human Rights Watch as a researcher for Francophone West Africa. **Woody Colahan** (Maci '93-'96) and his wife Era are expecting a baby in early August

Free personal Classifieds in CaVa?!

All members in good standing of Friends of Guinea are entitled to one free personal advertisement per year in *CaVa?*, the quarterly newsletter of Friends of Guinea. These advertisements are limited to 21 words and 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:

Happy Birthday to Brian B, your second in Guinea! Thank you to all our PCVs for your service in Guinea. Sharon B.

Thanks for the free money!

Once again, the holiday season helped raise a decent amount of money for FOG – \$90 in the last quarter alone! Many people route their purchases of books, DVD's, and electronics through the links to Amazon on our website (www.friendsofguinea.org). We get about 60 cents for every book or DVD, and thanks to whoever bought the Weber gas grill (\$18 commission) and 10-piece cookware set (\$6 commission). It really adds up!



The 37 members of G11, photographed by Steve Peterson in Mamou soon after their arrival in Guinea last January.

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