



Newsletter of the Friends of Ghana

The Talking Drum

Volume 13, Number 3

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RPCVs from Early 1980s Gather for Reunion

Submitted by Barbara O'Brien (Bekwai, 81-83) and Chris Udry (Tamale, 81-83)

Into the sweltering heat of the steamy swampland of Beaufort, South Carolina, 62 Ghana RPCVs from the 1980-84 service cohort descended like locusts in August 2008. We arrived from such far-flung locales as Nairobi and New Jersey; Chicago and Cairo; Florida and France; Colorado and Chile; Norway and New York. We traveled by planes, trains, cars, and Greyhound buses. Our host, Bruce Doneff, and chief organizer, Aaron King, welcomed us with open arms. Shouts of glee and chants of akwaaba sounded as we embraced each other after a twenty-five year absence. "Why did we wait so long?" Debby Prigal wrote in the Remembrance Book she helped compile. The Reunion Committee worked tirelessly for months to track us down, form a database, choose a location, organize activities, arrange accommodations, prepare food, create a Remembrance Book and purchase mementos. We thank the committee members: Elizabeth Sullivan Doone, Bruce Doneff, Aaron King, Stephanie Mills Shultz, Debby Prigal, Don Richesin, Paul Robertz and Ron Yamamoto, along with their ever-patient and supportive families. And to think that it all started when a Friends of Ghana article captured Aaron's fancy!

The three-day weekend began with a Friday night reception at Beaufort's The Gallery, which held a special exhibit in our honor. On Saturday, we feasted on ribs, chicken, fufu and kenke washed down with beer, akpeteshie (aka 'kill-me-quick') and lots of water. We swam, watched dolphins frolic, kayaked, danced, laughed, gazed at old photos, and talked the nights away. Our stories retold, our memories amplified and lost ones remembered, we poured libations of gratitude for being together once again. We fondly spoke of those who have passed: Mark Cox, Joe Davis, Dale Hurd, Diane Kaeffler and Al Raby. We exchanged photographs of our progeny and loved ones; we described our accomplishments humbly. Among us are teachers, conservationists, engineers, social services workers, a commodity trader, librarians, medical providers, a jazz musician, a postal supervisor, a carpenter, USAID workers, food experts, a weather forecaster, a wedding chapel planner, lawyers, pastors, a technical architect, a mathematic modeler, an astronomer and consultants of all types: semi-conductor, software, IT, finance, web programming, management and security. There's a Peace Corps recruiter in our fold too.

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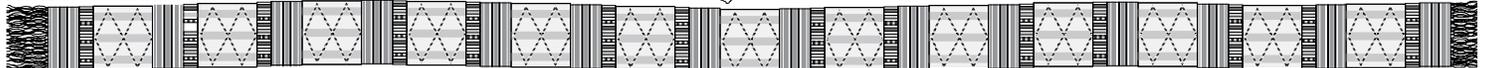
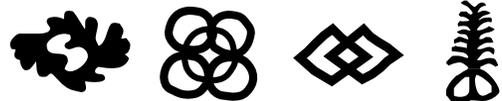
Emboldened by our PC experiences, many of us have lived and traveled around the world.

All of us have been inexorably changed by our years in Ghana circa 1980-84. Despite the lack of food, commodities, water, electricity, petrol, or decent roads and the presence of political unrest, coups, rampant brush fires, and economic upheaval, we worked side-by-side with our Ghanaian counterparts and had the time of our lives. To paraphrase our host, 'if it didn't come out of the ground or fall from a tree, we didn't have it.' We kept on teaching, organizing, building, and creating. We kept on laughing, crying, learning and growing. In the survey responses, many remarked that living through these lean times helped us endure difficulties we faced later in our lives. As the song goes, "what a long strange trip it's been." On Sunday, our twenty-fifth anniversary reunion closed with promises of gathering for Ghana Peace Corps' 50th anniversary celebration in 2011. After hearing reports of Ghana's successes, we chose Accra as the destination. Ye behyia bio. ★



Friends of Ghana Leaders, past and present, were in attendance at the 1980-1984 Ghana RPCV Reunion. L-R: Treasurer, Debby Prigal; President, Frank Yates; former President, Susan Caster; Database Guru, Ron Yamamoto.

Editor's Note: In the next newsletter, look for an article by Aaron King on how he and other committee members organized the reunion. This may be of interest to other Ghana RPCV groups wishing to do the same.



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Message from FOG President Frank Yates

Greetings to fellow Friends of Ghana members. I just returned from Beaufort, South Carolina, where a large group of RPCVs who served in the early 1980s gathered for a reunion. The reunion was organized by Aaron King, Bruce Doneff, Debby Prigal, Ron Yamamoto, and a few others. Bruce was the host in Beaufort. Please see the article about the reunion elsewhere in this newsletter.

I have also been busy updating the website. I have posted links to a lot of Ghanaian music available on Apple's iTunes Music Store. You will find eight albums of traditional music and two additional songs, ten albums of highlife music and two additional songs, and 14 albums of hiplife music. I was able to play several of the highlife songs at the reunion for the enjoyment of the attendees. The link is:
http://www.friendsofghana.org/Friends_of_Ghana/Music.html.

I have also been exploring YouTube for videos related to Ghana. I found a few that I wanted to share with you. First is a video produced by the Government of Ghana back in July, 2007 when they revalued the Cedi. Ten thousand old cedis were converted to one New Ghana Cedi. The transition took place from July, 2007 to December, 2007. The link is:
http://www.friendsofghana.org/Friends_of_Ghana/Blog/Entries/2007/7/1_Ghana_Currency_Changed.html.

I also found a series of four videos produced by Elizabeth Pierce several years ago, but posted only recently. Elizabeth was a Semester Abroad student at the University of Ghana at Legon. While her experiences do not compare directly with Peace Corps experience, there are several elements in her videos that we can relate to. The link is:
http://www.friendsofghana.org/Friends_of_Ghana/Blog/Entries/2008/7/31_Semester_Abroad_at_University_of_Ghana.html.

I have been communicating frequently with a recently returned PCV, Mary Jayne Cassidy to find ways to revise the website, which now has a new address: www.friendsofghana.org. Please contact me with your ideas for how to make the website more relevant and useful to you in keeping in contact with what is happening in Ghana. As always, we are looking for pictures and articles from you on Ghana-related activities and trips. Send them in.

Frank M. Yates

Friends of Ghana Privacy Policy

Submitted by President Frank Yates

Annually, the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) provides

Friends of Ghana (FoGh) access to the NPCA Database for the purpose of sharing the names and contact information of FoGh members. This exchange of data is essential for maintaining a complete, up-to-date database. The information shared include, but is not limited to: full name; country of service; dates of service; home mailing address; email address; phone number; and spouse/partner name. This information is not sold or transferred to any third party by FoGh and has been and will be used strictly for communication purposes with our members.

FoGh will use the shared information received from NPCA and our members for 1) Recruitment and retention of members to FoGh and NPCA; 2) Helping Ghana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) to organize reunions of their Peace Corps groups; and 3) Assisting requestors to find Ghana RPCVs by sharing the requestor contact information with the Ghana RPCV (allowing the Ghana RPCV to decide whether to make contact with the requestor).

Friends of Ghana Newsletter

FoGh may be asked to provide the information in our database to NPCA. The use, by NPCA, of the information contained in our database will be governed by the same policy as FoGh. Members of FoGh have the opportunity to decline to have their data shared with NPCA. If you do not wish to have your data shared with NPCA, please email Ron Yamamoto at rkyamamoto@aol.com, or write Ron at 742 Arce Street, Watsonville, CA 95076 to opt out. ★

FOG Treasurer's Report

Submitted by Debby Prigal, Treasurer

Beginning Balance on 1/1/08	\$4,681
INCOME	
Membership Dues	\$607
Total Credits	\$607
OPERATING EXPENSES	
NPCA Affiliation Fee	(\$100)
Spring 2008 Newsletter	(\$159)
Summer 2008 Newsletter	(\$203)
PC Partnership Donation	(\$442)
Total Expenses	(\$905)
Closing Balance as of 6/30/08	\$4,383

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Fall 2008

Remembering Mohammed Baba "Babs" Abubakari

Submitted by Ken Autrey

The Ghanaian community in Atlanta was saddened by the recent death of Mohammed "Babs" Abubakari, the husband of Friends of Ghana Past President, Susan Caster. Babs passed away after a battle with cancer in early July 2008. Services and burial were held on July 12. He is also survived by his daughter Alima and son Sidik.



A graduate of Georgia Tech, Babs was a civil engineer with the Georgia Department of Transportation in the Office of Consultant Design. Born in Ghana and very active in the Atlanta Ghanaian community, he loved the game of soccer. He played recreational soccer and coached many teams in Roswell, Georgia. He won a state championship with his boys' team and also coached several girls' teams. Babs' coaching philosophy was to provide a positive soccer environment for young players, instill in them a passion for the game, push them to be competitive, and treat them with respect. Donations in memory of Babs Abubakari may be made to Sissala Fund and mailed to Susan Caster at 310 Bloomfield Court, Roswell, GA 30075. All donations will directly support Sissala villages in Ghana where Abubakari grew up. ★

Implementing a New ICT Policy in Ghanaian Schools

Submitted by Maureen Hurtgen, PCV in Wamfie, Ghana

After nearly two years in a secondary school classroom, I have come to the conclusion that teaching ICT in Ghana often depends more on creativity than it does technical expertise. Granted, those two things work best in tandem. But if forced to choose between the two, I would choose a bright idea over a shiny new gadget every day of the week.

This year's education reforms mandate that ICT is now a core subject for all first-year students in Ghanaian secondary schools. In fact, it is required even at the basic level. It is a forward-thinking policy that will help Ghana to compete more effectively in the international marketplace. It is also impossible to implement fairly, given the current state of schools.

My own school, located in Wamfie, Brong Ahafo, (a large town on a main trade route) is one of the more fortunate. We have a renovated classroom block to serve as a computer lab, and we have ten computers to share among our 600 students. On most days, we have electricity from the national grid. I am confident that we will make it through the first-year ICT syllabus with real understanding.

Other schools have a tougher task. Without electricity, without a single computer, and without a qualified master, their students

will still write the same terminal exams and compete for entrance in the same universities and employment in the same jobs. Or they won't compete at all and will simply fall through the cracks.

Sometimes it seems as though the country as a whole moves ahead while leaving some of its students further and further behind. It is therefore with a lump in my throat that I support the new ICT policy. After all, if the government waits for all schools to be on a level playing field before implementing a new policy, education will stagnate indefinitely. The inequality itself may spur some schools to advocate for themselves more compellingly, some district assemblies to allocate more funding to education, and some students to crack the books and earn admission to institutions with better resources.

The inequality is also an opportunity and a challenge to teachers. Other Peace Corps volunteers have taught proper typing technique using cardboard keyboards, or simulated the Internet in their classrooms by using offline web content they downloaded from a café on the weekend. After hearing their stories, I am always more impressed with my colleagues' ingenuity than I am depressed by their lack of resources. Their students will surely benefit as much from the perseverance and unorthodox thinking of their teachers as they will from the concrete skills of their lessons.

This is Year One of a troubled and imperfect policy in a troubled and imperfect educational system. And yet I am already firmly convinced that students' futures look a little brighter for the change.

Now if only we could buy a few more computers! ★

Update from Jamie Lloyd and the Ghana Youth Photography Project

Submitted by Jamie Lloyd

Editor's Note: The Summer 2006 Talking Drum contained articles on Jamie Lloyd and her Ghanaian Youth Photography Project. She recently returned to Ghana, taking with her 6 American teenagers, to work with young photographers in Accra. Here is a recent message from her, followed by an excerpt from her blog. Jamie's blog, which includes photos, is found at www.firstexposures.blogspot.com. Contributions to the project, payable to "SF Camerawork" may be sent to Jamie at Ghana Youth Photography Project, 2342 Shattuck Ave. #808, Berkeley, CA 94704.

Hello again. Thanks again to all those who helped to get the San Francisco kids to Ghana. Your support means so much to me and so much more to them. You helped make a significant impact in their lives! Here's a recent blog entry from Ghana:

I'm now alone in Accra. It's been 48 hours since Erik and the students left and I'm now slowly making my way back into reality here. I got on a public trotro for the first time in weeks. My seat was unusually high, and I kept hitting my head on the roof and the seat was not bolted to the floor so we kept rocking back and forth every time the driver hit the brakes.

I went to Nima yesterday. It was my first trip there since the students left. The Nima kids seemed down. They were not their usual happy playful selves. I knew this trip would impact both groups but the impact was much deeper than I ever expected. In these past three weeks the San Francisco students bonded with the Nima kids as much if not more than I have in 3 years.

3 Lloyd: Page 4, Column 1

Lloyd: (Cont. from Page 3, Column 2)

The potential for these strong friendships was evident to me on the first day. I was expecting the Nima kids to be very shy but they were actually outgoing and curious to find out about the Americans. I smiled as I watched Ajara and Naomi holding hands, Yaw asking Erik question after question, and many of the young boys chasing after Marcio. That first day in Nima exceeded my expectations ten fold. It was the highlight of my trip, a day I will never forget.

The experience overall had it's ups and downs as one would expect. Ghana is not for everyone so the SF students did a great job coping with the heat, pollution and power outages. Erik & Vivian also did a great job helping with the planning and logistics. One of our biggest challenges was getting the kids out of bed in the morning. We quickly learned that they would get out of bed for the internet. So we scheduled internet time in the morning before heading off on our daily activities.

This trip has been more than 2 years in the making, and I can't believe it's over now. I'm excited to get back to SF to start looking at the photos and get the editing process started for our big show at SF Camerawork. I really shouldn't say it's "over" because I believe some of the SF students will return to Ghana to work with the Nima kids. When the SF students were crying on the last day I told them not to think of this as the end but the start of long friendships and many more trips to Ghana. I often tell people that you can't go to Africa just once and I think the SF students have caught the Africa travel bug.

I'm down to my last few days, and then I'm going home to California. It's only been 2 months, but this trip was action-packed, so it feels like it's been 2 years. ★

RPCV Taylor McLean Publishes Book on Ghana

Submitted by Ken Autrey

Taylor McLean, whose work was featured in the Winter 2006 Talking Drum, has recently published a collection of essays written while serving as a Peace Corps fisheries volunteer in Tano-Odomase ('04-'06). McLean asks those who read the book to leave a review on Amazon.com. The book's title is Love and Butterflies: A Collection of Memories. It is available at: http://www.iuniverse.com/bookstore/book_detail.asp?isbn=0-595-51022-1

The author sends the following description of the book: "Freshly minted with an undergraduate degree from Cornell University, Taylor joins the Peace Corps hoping to put her skills and knowledge to use for the good of others. She soon learns, however, that this is easier said than done. Through language and cultural barriers, loneliness, and insecurities, she develops a newfound sense of self and a deeper understanding of others. Like a butterfly, Taylor emerges from her own chrysalis, and in doing so, she finds the love of a man to whom she dedicates this book. Originally published as a wedding gift for her husband, Stephen, Taylor's first book is also a profoundly insightful collection of essays documenting her journey of discovery in West Africa, and the people and experiences that changed her life." ★

Peace Corps/Ghana Briefing Paper-- June 2008

(from the Peace Corps/Ghana Desk in Washington, D.C.)

COUNTRY DATA

Ambassador: Pamela E. Bridgewater

Country Director: Robert Golledge

Country Desk Officer: Jennifer Brown, 202-692-2326

Country Desk Assistant: Evan Baker, 202-692-2319

Number of Volunteers: 124

PROGRAM OVERVIEW: Historical Perspective

Ghana was the first country in the world to welcome the Peace Corps. The first group of Volunteers arrived in Ghana on August 30, 1961. More than 4,500 Volunteers have served there successfully since that time. In its 46th year, Peace Corps is as relevant now as it was in 1961. A 45th anniversary celebration was hosted by U.S. Ambassador Bridgewater at her residence in Accra on September 26, 2006 with 450 people in attendance, including President Kufuor, Peace Corps Africa Regional Director Henry McKoy, the Minister of Education, and 178 Volunteers and Trainees.

During the 1960s, the size of the Peace Corps program reached 415 Volunteers, most of whom worked as secondary school science and math teachers. In 1983, due primarily to political and economic uncertainties, Volunteer numbers dropped below 100 for the first time in 22 years. Conditions in Ghana have improved considerably and Peace Corps has increased its Volunteer complement, making the Ghana program among the largest in the Africa Region.

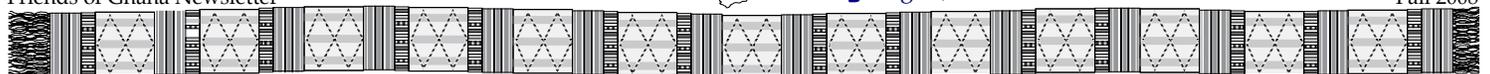
Peace Corps continues to enjoy widespread official and public respect and support. Volunteers' work is regarded as a significant contribution to Ghana's efforts to achieve community and national development, and Ghanaians appreciate the effective cultural linkages between Ghanaians and Americans. The Government of Ghana has consistently voiced its strong support of Peace Corps Volunteers' innovative work.

Peace Corps Volunteers provide assistance in education, environment, health, and small enterprise development. Education Volunteers teach science, math, information and communications technology (ICT), and visual arts. Environment Volunteers reduce environmental degradation through partnerships with governmental and nongovernmental agencies and facilitate the planting and sale of seedlings. Health/Water and Sanitation Volunteers promote behavior change to reduce water- and sanitation-related diseases and to create HIV/AIDS and Guinea Worm awareness and prevention. Small Enterprise Development Volunteers work as business advisors providing advice and assistance to a variety of rural and urban small-scale entrepreneurs under the sponsorship of government agencies as well as private sector associations.

CURRENT PROJECTS

Education (49 PCVs)

Secondary school teachers teach math, science information and communications technology (ICT), and visual arts at many of the 143 new rural schools built as part of the 1992 educational reform. The reform program increased access and improved the quality of instruction, making it more appropriate to the country's human



Briefing: (Cont. from Page 4, Column 2)

resource needs. Teachers demystify science, math and technology through practical hands-on demonstrations and activities using locally available materials. Many visual arts teachers communicate in sign language to teach in schools for the deaf. Volunteer teachers relate their lessons to the world around them, motivating their students to acquire life skills. They transfer community organization and planning skills to colleagues by mobilizing their schools to build latrines, wells, dormitories, libraries, art studios, laboratories, and science resource centers. Volunteers develop teaching resource manuals and help identify and acquire computer and library resources at schools. They also organize math, environment, and science clubs, work with health clinics, teach AIDS awareness, and coach sports. The education project was formally reviewed in 2007 to refocus its goals and objectives.

Environment (26 PCVs)

Agro-forestry Volunteers promote alternative livelihood activities that increase community members' income and reduce environmental degradation. Many Volunteers work with communities through Non-Governmental Organizations. Most projects focus on the sustainability of natural resources. Volunteers have established tree nurseries (fruit crop or forest tree species) with communities to sell seedlings for income, to establish woodlots where the produce will be harvested for sale, for fuelwood, or to satisfy other environment plans in the communities. Volunteers also help to establish groups or work with existing groups in their communities to identify issues of environmental concern. Some examples include bushfires, deforestation, drying up of water resources, and soil erosion. They also identify ways of finding solutions to problems while educating on preventive methods. Other Volunteers act in advisory capacities as they work with farmers to identify farming practices that may negatively affect soil fertility or the environment. Together with farmers, they look for interventions that are available within or outside the communities. Volunteers work with community groups or other organizations to find natural resource enterprises that reduce the communities' dependence on consuming naturally existing resources (e.g. bee keeping, mushroom farming, or snail farming). In 2005, the Environment Project had a formal review to reevaluate and refocus its goals and objectives.

Health /Water and Sanitation (23 PCVs)

Health Volunteers work to eradicate Guinea worm disease, promote behavior change for improved health, and deliver HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. They assist communities to plan, acquire, operate and manage water and sanitation facilities. They support the Health Education Program, and assist rural health clinics to extend health education and services. The Health/WATSAN project seeks to promote health and hygiene sensitization through the promotion of positive behavioral changes to reduce water and sanitation related diseases and to create awareness and prevention, problem/need identification and community mobilization that will result in action planning, implementation and capacity building. The project also addresses HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and the prevalence of Guinea Worm. As part of the School Health Education Program (SHEP), students are engaged as partners in hygiene promotion through demonstration of practical hygiene procedures and information

dissemination in their schools, homes and communities. Every year, PC/Ghana organizes an AIDS bike ride where Volunteers and their Ghanaian counterparts ride from village to village to educate isolated communities about HIV/AIDS. The project was reviewed in 2007 to refocus its goals and objectives.

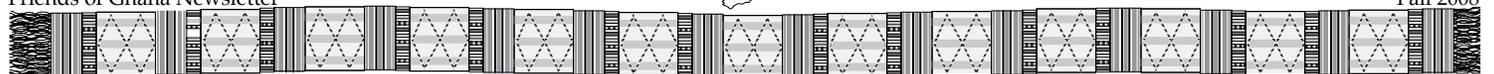
Small Enterprise Development (26 PCVs)

Business Volunteers provide training in eco-tourism, small business and micro-business development, financial management, marketing, product development, and non-financial services for small entrepreneurs. Some Volunteers support an eco-tourism project in collaboration with NCRC, a local NGO. Others work with local government bodies called District Assemblies, as business and tourism advisors. Volunteers focus on small business development activities, such as training in financial management, marketing, and product development as well as in credit availability for small entrepreneurs. Recent Volunteer projects include: working with District Assemblies in their Poverty Alleviation and Village Infrastructure Programs and in developing District tourism management plans; assisting women and youth to join in economic associations and cooperatives to process value added products for the local and regional markets; assisting a vegetable exporting association to develop soybeans for export; and working with a craft association composed mainly of women basket weavers. ★

From the Editor: Have You Signed Up for the Online Newsletter?

Submitted by Ken Autrey

Increasingly, we hope to rely on the online version of our newsletter to stay in touch with Friends of Ghana members. Newsletters will continue to be posted on our website: <http://www.friendsofghana.org>. Our hope is that as many members as possible will agree to forego the printed newsletter in favor of the online version. There are several advantages of a web-based publication over a printed and mailed newsletter. It saves money that could better be spent supporting projects in Ghana, it provides more possibilities for photos and other graphics, it has the advantage of immediacy, and it is less cumbersome to produce and distribute. We will continue mailing newsletters to those who prefer this format. **But if you are willing instead to receive an e-mailed notice with a newsletter link, please e-mail Ron Yamamoto (ryyamamoto@aol.com) and tell him to add you to that list.** ★



Help Us Find New FOG Members!

(Pass this form on to any Ghana RPCVs you may know.)

Yes! Sign me up in the Friends of Ghana and the National Peace Corps Association

Membership:

- Regular: \$50 (\$35 for NPCA, \$15 for FOG)
 Add \$10 for overseas mail
 Special Donation to FOG \$ ____ NPCA \$ ____ (thank you!)

I want to help Friends of Ghana (please mark all that apply)

- Newsletter Membership Projects
 Fund Raising Special Events Big Mailings

Please make check payable to NPCA and mail to:

1900 L Street, N.W., Suite 404
Washington, DC 20036

NPCA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Membership dues and contributions may be tax deductible. Consult your tax advisor.

For FOG membership only, enclose a check for \$15 Payable to Friends of Ghana and mail to:

Debby Prigal, Treasurer
1625 Q St. NW, #207
Washington, DC 20009

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____ Country _____

Telephone (home) _____ (work) _____

Current Employer _____

Current Occupation _____

Country(ies) of Service _____ Dates _____

Volunteer Staff Assignment(s) _____

I only wish to join Friends of Ghana at this time.



Newsletter of the Friends of Ghana

c/o Susan Caster

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