

# The Talking Drum

Newsletter of the Friends of Ghana

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## Returning to Asankrangwa After 40 Years

submitted by Dorothy Brown Soper (Asankrangwa 1963-65)

I returned to Asankrangwa, my Peace Corps hometown, in 2004 and 2007 and am planning to be at my school's Speech Day in February 2009. Now that I've contacted some of my former students, revisited the still reigning chief and his wife whom I had known, seen the progress as well as some needs, I can't stay away. Although I left in 1965, I've always felt welcome in Asankrangwa, no more so than now.

I first arrived in Asankrangwa in September 1963, in the baby blue jeep that my PC neighbor and I shared. The town is in the Wassa area of southwestern Ghana, an eight-hour drive from Accra. Its population was about 3,000. I taught French at Asankrangwa Secondary School. I was 21 years old.

In 1963, posters of President Kwame Nkrumah were everywhere. News of the CPP dominated the papers. The Young Pioneers marched in the afternoons on the grounds of the elementary school. Three Irish nuns, nurses at the local hospital, came to town wearing their full white habits. Two Dutch priests held sway at the Catholic Church.

Letters to Chief Nana Buadum III, and his wife, Madame Agee, from Sargent Shriver hung on the walls of the palace. The letters celebrated Shriver's earlier visit to the town and his dancing with the elders in the chief's court. There was also a thank you letter from President Kennedy for the leopard skin that the chief had sent him.

The school had 350 boarders and a dozen staff members, including two Peace Corps Volunteers. It was in its fourth year. The Italian builders were still on site. A new headmaster had just arrived. I was the first and only female on the staff and the only French teacher. Twelve girls, all first formers, had been admitted, and I was placed in charge of them to oversee the dorm, have their uniforms made, take care of them when they were sick, and encourage them to study. I had as much to learn as they did and we learned together, often with the help of the female head cook and the chief's wife.

No lessons were more penetrating than my growing understanding of the people who surrounded me. They were accepting, tolerant, respectful and willing to try most of what I suggested even as they also taught me.

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After four decades with no contact I was curious about what had happened to my friends and my town. My husband was interested, too, and so we visited Ghana in 2004 and 2007. I needed two trips to find some of my students. On the first trip I located two in the town, and they led me to others. In 2007 I was able to visit with five former female students and talk with one by phone.

The town and school now look comfortably familiar and yet modern. There are cell phone and TV transmission towers on a hill just outside of the town. People watch CNN and talk by phone to their relatives in the US. There are two banks, a new tech school, an expanded market, two small hotels, and a neighborhood of new houses called "Little America" because money for them was sent by Ghanaians working in the US.

The chief's four sons live in the US. (This has got to be a PC influence!) There are more people and more traffic, although no Europeans or Americans are in sight.



The Sopers were invited to attend a meeting of the traditional court

During our last visit, Nana invited us to witness the adjudication of a land dispute by the elders. The traditional court still meets twice a week and takes care of some land issues. The presiding officer translated some of the proceedings for us. I believe that this continuing strength of traditional life contributes to social stability and structure. Nana just celebrated his 55th year on the Wassa stool.

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## Message from FOG President Frank Yates

Greetings to fellow Friends of Ghana members. Since the last newsletter was sent out, I have attended the NPCA Annual General Meeting and Group Leaders Forum, held in San Francisco on October 3-4, 2008. Ben Bellows, San Francisco, was elected the new Group Leaders Forum Coordinator, replacing Trina Janes from Chicago.

Shriver and Ruppe Awards were announced, and groups with the best websites and print newsletters were recognized. Topics of discussion included NPCA's Virtual Community online presence, the More Peace Corps initiative, and the 50th Anniversary of Peace Corps celebrations planned for 2011 in Washington, DC. Here is the link to the Group Leaders Forum meeting notes: <http://www.rpcv.org/groups/2008GLFDraftMinutes.pdf>

The afternoon discussion revolved around several topics and brought out more detail on several issues, including More Peace Corps, NPCA relationship with Peace Corps, two Peace Corps-related bills before Congress, and the NPCA RPCV member database. Here is the link to the afternoon discussion: <http://www.rpcv.org/groups/DiscussionNotesGLFOct2008.pdf>

I am continuing to work with a recently returned PCV, Mary Jayne Cassidy on enhancements to the website. I was also contacted by Tammi Martin, a current PCV in Ghana who will help us to provide links to the blogs that all the current PCVs in Ghana are writing. As we get the information to implement these changes, we will roll them out on the website. I will let you know in the next newsletter.

Please contact me with your ideas for how to make the website more relevant and useful to you in maintaining 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).

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](mailto:rkyamamoto@aol.com), or write Ron at 742 Arce Street, Watsonville, CA 95076 to opt out. ★

## Friends of Ghana 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 ([rkyamamoto@aol.com](mailto:rkyamamoto@aol.com)) if you haven't already done so, and tell him to add you to that list.** ★

## Friends of Ghana Donates to Peace Corps Partnership Projects

Submitted by Debby Prigal

At the early 1980s reunion in August FOG sold bags made by the ladies of Global Mamas in Cape Coast. The purpose was two-fold: to provide RPCVs with mementos of Ghana and as a fundraiser for Peace Corps Partnership in Ghana. It was a success on both counts with all 80 bags sold for a profit of close to \$350.

2 This was donated to the Ghana country fund which the director distributes to various projects. ★

**Asankrangwa:** (Cont. from Page 1, Column 2)

Madame Agee, ever an energetic businesswoman, has created an NGO to raise money to educate the orphans of AIDS victims in the area. This sad sign of modernity is at least being addressed.

The school itself has grown to 1,000 students, of whom 800 are boarders. There are many new buildings on campus including an expanded dining hall and kitchen, a large chicken coop (built by a PCV) and a productive school garden. Goats and chickens roam freely. Students keep the buildings clean and the grounds well tended. But there is never enough money for maintenance.

The school's headmaster is energetic, and the expanded staff is better educated than before. Still, there is one female teacher, who teaches French. I was flattered when she invited me to teach a class.

My scientist husband struck up an acquaintance with the school's science teachers who invited him to teach a few classes. He was grateful to be accepted and was impressed with the students' knowledge and curiosity.

Students and staff alike were interested in my photo albums of the school and town in the sixties. It was a little strange to be considered an authority on the school's history.

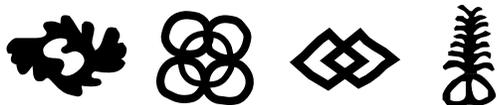


*Dorothy Brown Soper with three of her former students.*

My former students were the best discovery of all. The six women that I contacted had all continued their education for at least a year after fifth form. One had graduated from the University of Ghana. Several had children who were attending or had graduated from the university. Two own businesses, three are teachers, and one is appointed head of the newly created Wassa Amenfi East District.

Seeing Asankrangwa after fifty years of independence and the continued expansion of education, I'm encouraged for Ghana's future.

Sadly, there haven't been PCVs at the school for several years. The current headmaster says that there isn't enough housing for them. I hope that one day they'll return. ★



## How We Did It: Lessons from a Ghana RPCV Reunion

*submitted by Aaron King (with input from Bruce Doneff)*

This past summer, from August 8 to 10, the Ghana PCV cohorts of 1980, 81, and 82, held a reunion at the home of Bruce Doneff in Beaufort, South Carolina. An article in the last FOG Newsletter described the reunion and the great fun we had. I'm sure all 62 RPCVs who attended would agree that the reunion was a success, well worth the year-long effort to pull it together. So, the newsletter editor has asked me (Chair of the Reunion Committee) to offer some advice on how we did it, what worked, and what we would recommend avoid in the future.

### Major Requirements for a Good Reunion

1. A dedicated committee of 3 or 4 people willing to make the reunion the object of their free time for about a year, including several days on-site just prior to the actual reunion. It's probably a good idea to start with a committee of 8-10 because some folks will get busy, and some will be more motivated than others. You want a truly dedicated group of at least 4-5. Our on-site prep involved four dedicated people (not all committee members) for about 60-72 hours right up to the first event Friday night.

2. A database of cohort members, supervised by a very dedicated database manager.

3. A listserv of members' email addresses (we used a Yahoo Groups listserv), and a dedicated moderator.

4. A Reunion Host with a big heart, the patience of Job, and an ability to roll with the punches. Also having a good host location with free or low-cost venues kept costs down.

5. A Reunion Chair who is on the case from beginning to end and supervises all aspects of the reunion, keeps committee members involved, solves disputes, and delegates projects to spread the work around. This is a hard job and requires a lot of dedication. The success of the event can rest with this person as much as it can rest with the host. The Reunion Host and Chair MUST be different people.

6. Depending upon how long ago you were PCVs, a couple of communicators who can spend a significant amount of time on the web and the phone finding folks.

### Major Successes of Our Reunion

1. We had a centralized and dedicated hotel/motel that was willing to hold a set of rooms—and a back-up hotel when our first hotel room block sold out. Both provided block room discounts negotiated well in advance.

2. We put together a reunion "book" that gave cohort members a forum to "tell their tale" of what they've been up to since their PCV days. This was a lot of work, but well worth it.

3. We provided lots of Ghanaian food. Many of our attendees had not had the opportunity to eat fufu or kenkey since their days in Ghana. The 3-4 person group in charge of this (plus two Ghanaian ladies) was not from the committee; this was a separate group that produced what turned out to be a fantastic part of the Saturday evening meal.



## How We Did It: (Cont. from Page 3, Column 2)

4. A beautiful place to celebrate together, with plenty of peace and quiet, but also a nice mix of family-friendly activities and spaces. We didn't want to detract from those who simply wished to sit under a tree, drink a beer, and share stories.

5. From beginning to end, we worked hard to keep costs low. We negotiated hotel discounts, bought and prepared a lot of the event food ourselves, focused on cheap or no-cost venues, got discounts on beer and wine, and did all the set-up, clean-up and all the rest ourselves. At the end of the day with three major events, three meals, plenty of food and drink, a remembrance book and t-shirt, the total average cost was about \$100-110/person (not including travel and hotel): a great price for all the fun.

### What to Avoid

1. Don't over-plan the Reunion with activities; most will just want to sit, drink, and chat with old friends
2. Send the people away smiling; don't plan for more than 2-3 days, but hold it in a location and time of year where attendees can make the reunion part of an extended family vacation before or after.
3. Don't under-estimate the funds you'll need per person; you'll need to pay for more than you think. Start budgeting/planning early to figure out all your costs and make sure folks know ahead of time how much the event will cost. (Consider providing a mechanism for anonymous donations from those who can afford them, as well as appeals for individual financial help from those who need it. This helped us do more than we could have otherwise.)

I, as well as any member of our Reunion Committee, would be happy to advise any Ghana PCV cohort considering the possibility of a reunion. And, while we strongly recommend that you do it, don't underestimate the effort you'll need to invest beginning a year before the event. ★

## Ghana's President Kufuor Visits Washington

By Ben Feller, Associated Press

Washington, D.C. (AP) - On September 15, 2008, President Bush lavished the full White House treatment on Ghanaian President John Kufuor, a West African ally who holds a kinship with the U.S. president as their two-term tenures near a close.

Kufuor began his day on the South Lawn with all the pageantry of a military honor guard, flag-waving spectators and a 21-gun salute. He capped it as the guest of honor at a rare state dinner late Monday, complete with black tuxedos and fancy gowns -- just the sixth one held during Bush's presidency.

The treatment reflects Bush's fondness for Kufuor, whom he considers a voice of peace and progress in a region where both are often elusive.

"He has shown the world that democracy can flourish on the continent of Africa," Bush said during a Rose Garden appearance with Kufuor.

Earlier, Bush declared that Ghana and the U.S. "stand as one" in combating poverty, disease and illiteracy, and promoting free Friends of Ghana Newsletter

elections and trade.

Just as Bush called the ties between the two countries strong and enduring, so are the ones linking him to Kufuor.

They came into office about the same time and will leave soon as well, as required by term limits in both their countries.

"Perhaps we are two of a kind," Kufuor said during dinner toasts.

Throughout the day, Kufuor drew good-natured attention to Bush's upcoming retirement. And he gave the U.S. president a rather colorful send-off.

"Your tenure has been full of events and challenges, some very mind-boggling and hair-raising," Kufuor said to laughter. "Through them all, you have been strong, forthright, consistent and faithful. You are a survivor. And my hope is that history would prove kinder to you."

Ghana is the type of story Bush likes to promote on the often volatile continent. It is a stable, relatively well-administered democracy that has largely avoided ethnic clashes, played a busy peacekeeping role and reduced its still-persistent poverty.

The U.S. pumps hundreds of millions of dollars into Ghana to help fight disease, build roads, train teachers and expand markets for its crops. In turn, Kufuor says Bush's administration deserves more credit for its humanitarian efforts, not just in Ghana but across Africa.



John and Theresa Kufuor are greeted on the North Portico of the White House by George and Laura Bush.

To start the evening, Bush and first lady Laura Bush greeted

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Kufuor: Page 5, Column 1.

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**Kufuor:** (Cont. from Page 4, Column 2)

Kufuor and his wife, Theresa, on the North Portico, then posed for photos.



Dinner guests dined on gratin of Maine lobster, late summer corn pudding, ginger-scented farm lamb with whipped sweet potato and creamed spinach, baby beets with chicory and blue-veined cheese and apple cider vinaigrette. Dessert was banana coconut pudding.

In their toasts, both presidents shared their appreciation once again. Bush said he was heading into the “ex-presidents club” with Kufuor, and proud to leave behind a strong relationship for the next leaders of the countries. “I have loved being in your presence,” Bush told his friend. Kufuor said he felt “so at home.”

The post-dinner entertainment in the Rose Garden was selections from “The Lion King” as performed by the theatrical cast.

The five previous state dinners were for the leaders of Mexico, Poland, the Philippines and Kenya and for Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II and her husband, Prince Philip.

Kufuor’s treatment at the White House is reciprocation for the welcome the Bushes received in Ghana in February. Several thousand children in their school uniforms lined the streets of Accra and waved tiny Ghanaian flags as Bush’s motorcade bounded through the city that day. Kufuor also threw a lavish dinner for 500 for Bush during his visit, and announced that a highway there had been renamed the “George Bush Motorway.” ★

## Oldest Volunteer Serves in Ghana

By James Hannah, Associated Press

Dayton, Ohio (AP) — As a new member of the Peace Corps, Ralph Bernstein is trying to get used to the heat and humidity in the equatorial African nation of Ghana, the bone-jarring rides over unpaved roads and unsanitary conditions.

It would be a challenge for volunteers in their 20s. Bernstein is 84. The Dayton man is the oldest current volunteer in the Peace Corps and part of a tidal wave of volunteers age 50 and older.

The agency last year started a marketing strategy to try to capitalize on the trend of baby boomers looking for a nontraditional retirement. It is the first time the corps has targeted older volunteers as a group and on a national scale.

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Bernstein, whose wife died two years ago, said he was looking for something to make his life rewarding.

“If I weren’t working, I’d say: ‘What am I getting up in the morning for?’” the engineer and Yale graduate said in a telephone interview from Ghana.

When the Peace Corps was created in 1961 the idea of promoting world peace by supplying developing nations with trained manpower was irresistible to many young volunteers.

Today, about 5 percent of the Peace Corps’ 8,079 volunteers are 50 or older, many of them serving as teachers. The number of applications from people in that age group has jumped nearly 40 percent this year.

That’s 9.4 percent of the total number of applicants, the highest percentage in the 47-year history of the corps, according to available data.

“It seems this generation is still looking to put their skills and knowledge to work,” said Peace Corps spokeswoman Christine Torres.

The agency still recruits the young heavily. But the experience of older volunteers qualifies them for higher-level programs, Torres said, and they command an instant respect because elders are revered in many cultures.

A new Peace Corps Web site has been created for this group: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/50plus/index.html>

Former volunteers who served in the corps when they were 50 or older were hired and placed in the agency’s 11 regional offices to recruit people their own age. Information sessions for older prospective volunteers are being held at libraries, Rotary Clubs, AARP meetings and colleges that offer courses for seniors.

Some overseas offices have changed their practices to accommodate older volunteers.

To make it easier to learn foreign languages, more emphasis is being placed on oral and visual teaching and less on written materials. Language tutors are made available to older volunteers throughout their service.

Offices are being stocked with more and different medications and medical equipment directed at illnesses and maladies common to older people.

Denney and Linda Rives, both 60, of Kansas City, Mo., left in September for a two-year tour in Azerbaijan — nestled between Iran and Russia — after selling their house and disposing of their cars.

“It’s funny being homeless,” Denney Rives said. “It was a big step. It’s an odd feeling, but it is sort of exciting.”

Rives, a Baptist minister who later went into computer programming, said he obtained a student deferment during the Vietnam War and feels some guilt about escaping the combat.

“I owe my country two years,” he said. “This is a way I can serve.”

The oldest volunteer in Peace Corps history was Arthur Goodfriend of Honolulu. He finished his second tour in Hungary in 1994 at 86. ★

# 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

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 Special Donation to FOG \$ \_\_\_\_ NPCA \$ \_\_\_\_ (thank you!)

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

  
**The Talking Drum**  
Newsletter of the Friends of Ghana  
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