

September 2010



Friends of Sierra Leone

Peace Corps Volunteers Are Back in Sierra Leone Greetings from the Country Co-Directors

Greetings from Salone! We would like to give you an update on events surrounding the arrival of new Peace Corps Trainees to Sierra Leone after a lapse of 16 years.

After a celebratory Staging Event in Washington, D. C., 39 Secondary School Teacher Trainees arrived in Sierra Leone on June 4th. They were met at the airport by high government officials and were featured on the nightly TV news. After a brief orientation in Freetown in which they paid a courtesy call on the President and were hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at a luncheon with the Minister of Education and other dignitaries, they moved on to Bo for their pre-service training. Staying with host families, they began the process of learning languages (Krio and then Mende/Temne), preparing to be effective teachers in the Sierra Leone context, keeping themselves healthy and safe and adjusting to their new life. During this period they visited their site, had a workshop with their Supervisors, participated in a Friends of Sierra Leone Returned Peace Corps Volunteer-led workshop and conducted a 2½ week Summer School for 600 youth. They swore in on August 13th.

The new Volunteers are an enthusiastic and committed group of "pioneers." They have displayed admirable flexibility in dealing with the vagaries of a new program and the realities of post-conflict Sierra Leone. They

are poised to do well as they follow in the footsteps of the many who have gone before them.

The response of Sierra Leoneans, from the government to the person on the street, has been nothing short of overwhelming. We hear regularly of the Peace Corps teacher, neighbor, or friend who had a significant impact on their lives. With very short time lines, we generated more than one hundred applications for Volunteers from junior and senior secondary schools. Many will be accommodated by our entry of 70 new Trainees next year.

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank members of Friends of Sierra Leone for their support in re-establishing Peace Corps in Sierra Leone and for ongoing support through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, continued involvement with Sierra Leone schools and communities and personal encouragement to our current Trainees. The new Volunteers recognize and appreciate the legacy of all that has come before them and are committed to following in your footsteps.

Thank you,

Joel Wallach/Gale A. Metcalf
Country Co-Directors
Peace Corps Sierra Leone

[Peace Corps was first established in Sierra Leone in January, 1962, when 37 Volunteers arrived. Between 1962 and 1994 more than 3,400 volunteers served in Sierra Leone.]

New Ambassador

On August 16, 2010, Michael S. Owen of Virginia, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Counselor, was sworn in as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Owen had served as Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs since January 16, 2009. He arrived in Washington on July 11, 2008, to assume the post of Director of the State Department's Office for India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Bhutan, in the South and Central Asia Bureau. Prior to his arrival, Mr. Owen served as the U.S. Consul General for Western India, based in Mumbai.

Before serving in Mumbai, Mr. Owen served as the Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge' d'Affaires ad interim at the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. His previous postings include assignments as Counselor for Economic Affairs at the U.S. Embassy in Accra, Ghana, Economic Counselor at Embassy Colombo,

Chief of the Political/Economic Section at Consulate General Karachi, Desk Officer for Rwanda/Burundi affairs in the State Department, Watch Officer in the State Department's Operations Center, Political/Economic Officer at Embassy Nouakchott, and Consular Officer at Embassy Dublin. He has received five Superior Honor Awards, and was the 2000 recipient of the Charles E. Cobb Award for Trade Promotion.

A native of Tennessee, Mr. Owen received a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and Economics from Rice University, a Master's in Public Affairs from Princeton University, and a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Iowa State University. Prior to joining the State Department he was an economic analyst with the Congressional Budget Office, and a free-lance writer.

Mr. Owen's foreign languages are Dutch and French. He and his wife Annerieke have a son, Brendan, and a daughter, Sigrid,

both of whom are in college.



**Order your International Calendars
before we run out! (see page 14)**

2010 Annual Meeting Held in Social Circle, Georgia

Reported by Jim Morgan, Jaiama Nimikoro, 1964-66

The 2010 annual meeting of Friends of Sierra Leone was mostly a small social gathering. So, where else would the meeting be held but in Social Circle, Georgia! On June 12, Jim Hanson and Peggy Murrah hosted the 2010 meeting in an outdoor setting at their home in rural Georgia. Sixteen persons attended and enjoyed a warm afternoon of updates and discussion.

The major topic of interest was the return of the Peace Corps to Sierra Leone. Peggy gave a report and showed a video of the June 6 reception for the Peace Corps Trainees in Washington DC, shortly before they left for their in-country training in Freetown and Bo. Once in-country, trainees participated in the Bo Teacher Workshop, which is sponsored by Friends of Sierra Leone and Schools for Salone.

Dan Paracka spoke about his work with the Bunce Island Project. The Georgia Humanities Council provided a \$6,000 grant to his school, Kennesaw State University, to purchase Joe Opala's Bunce Island exhibit and make it available to Georgia elementary

and secondary schools. The exhibit describes the role of Bunce Island in Sierra Leone history.

Jim Sheahan discussed his work with MedShare, a non-profit that responds to requests and ships 40-foot containers of medical supplies and equipment to hospitals in developing countries. He has been working to get Peace Corps involved in a pilot program to support the project.

Frederick Nabie, President of the Sierra Leone Community Association of Georgia, gave an update on current conditions in Sierra Leone. He said that Freetown is especially congested with the number of people who relocated there during the war. He also reported improvements to infrastructure, but also noted problems with the government paying construction firms for the work.

The meeting ended with a home-cooked meal of delicious okra and groundnut stews, fried chicken, and Georgia peach cobbler!

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An Appeal for Kenema-Blango School from Jim Hanson

Peggy Murrah and I are off to Salone in September to cut the ribbon on a brand new school in Kenema-Blango, about 20 miles north of Bo. The whole village will be out to celebrate and we have invited the new Peace Corps Volunteers in the area to join us. We are very grateful to all who have contributed to this effort. But, can we ask these bright-eyed students to walk for miles, uphill, barefoot, in the rain, to a school with no desks or chairs? Well, of course not. So, for only ten dollars, you can provide a bench that seats 3 students, and \$20 more will put a desk in front of them. Need a bigger tax deduction? A teacher's table can be had for only \$35, and a storage cabinet for a mere \$40. And the best news is that we have a donor who has agreed to match all contributions up to \$2500. You can contribute through PayPal or by check. Just note that it is for the Kenema-Blango School. And thank you for your support.

Read more about this and other projects and make your donation by going to the Friends of Sierra Leone website. Click on "Projects of Interest" for PayPal, or send your check to Friends of Sierra Leone, P. O. Box 15875, Washington, D. C. 20003-0875.

Projects Report August, 2010

From Jim Hanson, Projects Chair

The projects committee was presented with some very good proposals in April, and decided to fund three of them. Friends of Sierra Leone also made a contribution to Peace Corps Partnership to support our new Volunteers. We spent down much of our projects budget, but our committee members felt that it was money well-spent.

We funded two health-related projects at \$3000 each. The Polio Challenge Association will use their grant to treat victims of elephantiasis in Bombali District. Director Sylvanus Bundu extended his thanks to Friends of Sierra Leone and said surgical operations would begin the weekend of August 27. It is being overseen by Dr. Joseph B. Koroma of the World Health Organization. The other recipient, the Educational Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired, will use its funds to construct a perimeter fence around its campus in Western Freetown. The Centre's director, Thomas Alieu, sent the following message: "I wish to extend heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Friends of Sierra Leone for such a wonderful gesture that is geared to improve the lives of mankind, especially the blind and visually impaired in Salone."

We awarded \$1000 to Arts Education International for their project in Daru, in

the Eastern Province. They are working to preserve the traditional arts and crafts of Sierra Leone, bringing in local artisans to teach the next generation, and to develop markets for their products.

In honor of the next generation of Peace Corps Volunteers, we sent \$500 to Peace Corps Partnership, which funds secondary projects by the Volunteers, usually in the range of 100 to 200 dollars. Having the funds readily available means a much shorter time period is needed to implement these projects.

But, of course, all this great work takes money. After funding these projects, our humble treasurer, Mark Hager, reported that we now have only \$3800 in our projects fund. Our hope is to make another donation to Peace Corps Partnership and fund a couple of projects by year's end. If we all do a little, we can easily make this happen. Contributions to Friends of Sierra Leone's projects are tax-deductible. You can contribute through our PayPal account online, or send us a check. Just note that it is for our projects fund.

Once again, thank you all for your continued support. Together, we are changing peoples' lives in Sierra Leone.



2011 Annual Meeting in Freetown July 1, 2 and 3

Dear Members and Friends,

Etta Toure has been working on the annual meeting for some time now. Until you try to put one together in Sierra Leone from the States, you really don't know how difficult getting the details in place can be! She is working with a couple agencies including the Yazbeck agency that many of our RPCV members used when they were volunteers and, I imagine, many of our Sierra Leonean members used in the past as well.

While there is still a lot to be done, we do have a pretty good idea of the cost for the flight from the US, at least from the east. Those of you traveling from the mid-west and west will have the additional cost of flying from your home airport to meet the group for the transatlantic portion. The round trip flight cost from the east coast to Freetown via Belgium will be around \$1785. A \$300 non-refundable deposit will be required well in advance of the departure date. This does not include any accommodations or ground transportation in Sierra Leone.

There will be a single departure date, June 26. The return may be staggered; we do not have to all return on the same day. However, return dates have to be firm when reservations are confirmed; there will be a penalty for any changes. The meeting dates are July 1st, 2nd and 3rd with a July 4th celebration at the end. There will also be a service project scheduled for either the 2nd or 3rd. As we have offered in previous meetings held in Sierra Leone, there will be a group trip to somewhere such as River #2. Depending upon the weather, we may be able to offer a trip to Bunce Island, but travel to Bunce Island during June and July is questionable.

The annual meeting committee is currently working to get the best deal available for a conference center and hotel in Freetown. You will not have to stay at the hotel where the conference will be held, but we are hoping for a discounted rate for those who choose to stay at the hotel we select. Other accommodations include guest houses and various hotels. In the past we have sent a list of accommodations and contact information when we had it, but we will not be arranging for alternate accommodations. We will arrange for a vehicle to meet us at the airport and provide transportation to the conference hotel for everyone.

For the families and friends of current Peace Corps Volunteers, we will be inviting the volunteers to attend the conference. We also expect to have the Peace Corps directors and/or their representatives join us at one of the discussion groups. We hope that some of the Volunteers will be willing to give us all a report on the first year of the Peace Corps' return to Sierra Leone. Once the conference has ended, we expect most families and friends will want to go with their Volunteer to visit the Volunteer's home and village.

Before too much longer, we will be sending out key dates for the conference. However, you can go ahead and mark your calendar for the conference dates now. It would be helpful to the planners if those of you who are **already certain** that you are going to participate would send us your name(s).

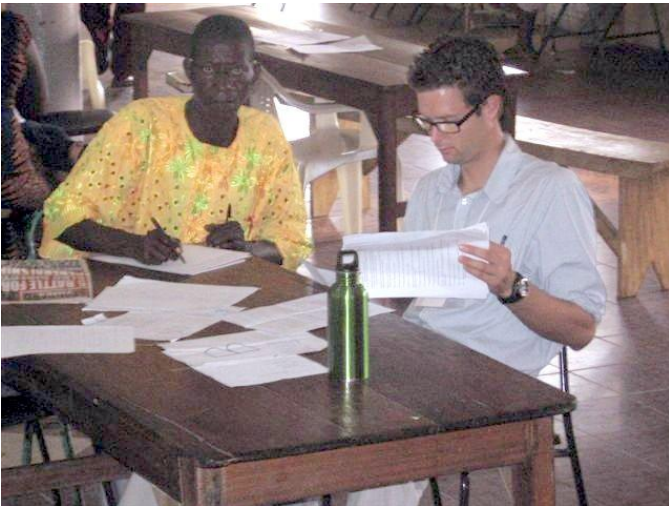
Thank you for your patience,

Etta Toure, Annual Meeting Chair

Peggy Murrah, President

Friends of Sierra Leone/Schools for Salone Teacher Workshop June 28-July 2, 2010 By Judy Figi

The second Friends of Sierra Leone/Schools for Salone Teacher Workshop was held at the Methodist Youth Centre, Bo, Sierra Leone June 28-July 2, 2010. Volunteer facilitators from the U.S. were SL/RPCVs Richard and Catherine Frazier, Judy Figi, and Peggy and Steve Garbers. They were joined by U.S. teachers Brianna Maxwell, Cherie Eulau, and Melissa Wantz and college student Megan Wantz. The program was funded by donations to Schools for Salone and Friends of Sierra Leone. U.S. facilitators paid their own expenses. Eleven Sierra Leonean teachers joined the facilitators as Teachers Teaching Teachers. For the Garbers, who documented the workshop, this was their first trip back to Sierra Leone in 42 years.



Scott Sawyer, Escalon, CA, works with a local teacher. Scott's assigned to the Ahmadiyya Muslim School, Boajibu.

Seventy-one primary and secondary teachers, mostly from the Southern Province, attended. Attendees ranged from untrained and uncertified teachers to those with university degrees and many years of experience. On Tuesday and Wednesday morning we were joined by 39 Sierra Leone Peace Corps Trainees.

Our workshop opened Monday morning with an opening ceremony attended by area dignitaries, including keynote speaker Bo Mayor Dr. Wusu Sannoh, District Council Chairman Mathew Manah Margo,

Paramount Chief Samba Bindi, U.M.C. Superintendent Rev. Francis Charlie, Head Teachers and Administrative Council Representative Mr. Alex Nallo, and Sierra Leone-South Deputy Director of Education Steven Swaray.



Allison Sinning, Lennox, SD, helping teachers with a workshop newspaper. Allison is teaching at Harford in Moyamba.

To address literacy skills and syllabus topics and lack of local materials our project focused on the production of newspapers. Teachers first read and discussed local



Danielle Gannon, Strum, WI, assisting some Sierra Leonean teachers. Danielle is at the Islamic Call School, Jembe.

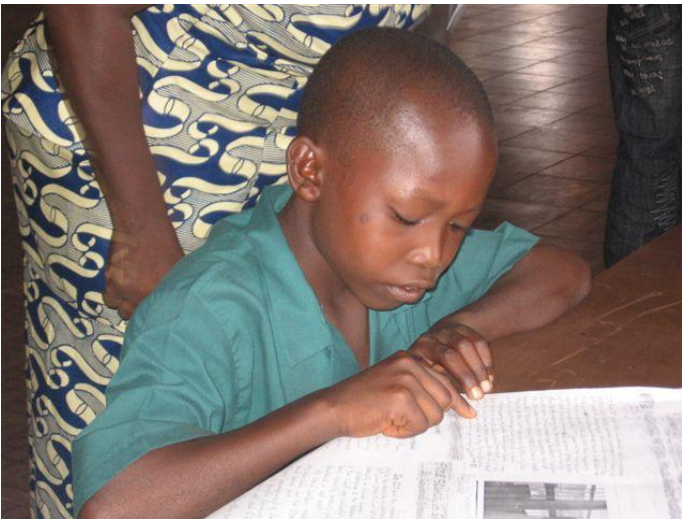
newspapers. Then they were divided into 16 groups, each assigned to produce a newspaper. Presentations were made on parts of a newspaper and the types of writing and articles involved. On Tuesday participants and Peace Corps Trainees brainstormed to choose topics for their newspapers and on Wednesday morning they traveled into the community to conduct interviews, take photographs and collect data for their newspapers. Thursday was spent writing, editing and copying the groups' newspapers. Also on Thursday all participants were able to spend an hour at Kama's Internet Café for introductory computer lessons. By the end of Thursday all groups had completed their newspapers and taken them to be copied.



Teacher Augustine shows his group's newspaper to a student.

Peace Corps Directors Gale and Joel Wallach seemed positive about developing a partnership with our Friends of Sierra Leone efforts to provide professional development for teachers.

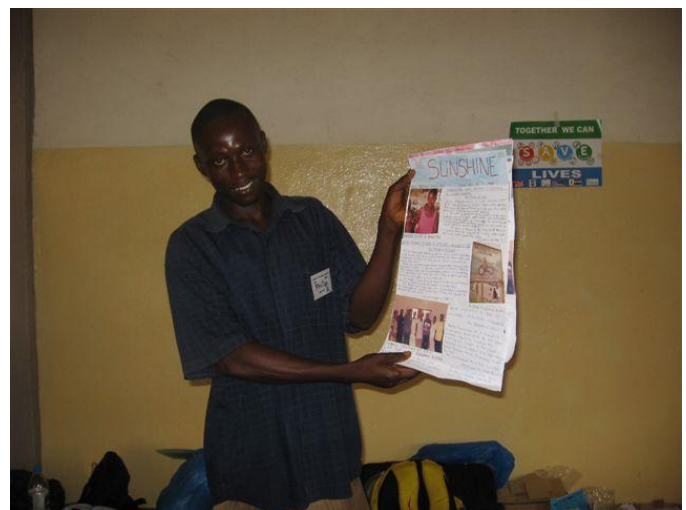
Watch the Schools for Salone and Friends of Sierra Leone websites for news of a 2011 workshop. Volunteers, especially those with experience in teaching and teacher education and with experience in and knowledge of Sierra Leone are needed. Contact Richard Frazier at richard_frazier@hotmail.com.



A schoolboy reads one of the student prepared newspapers.

On Friday morning 32 school children of all ages were invited to come and read the newspapers the teachers had produced. Teachers were delighted with the response of the children. Friday concluded with groups sharing their newspapers with each other and the awarding of certificates at our closing ceremony.

Breakfast and a noon rice meal were prepared by local Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE) women. Teachers were given materials and a per diem allowance for transportation and an evening meal.



A teacher participant shows off his group's newspaper.

Donations can be sent to Friends of Sierra Leone or Schools for Salone with an indication they are for the 2011 workshop.

Dr. Karefa-Smart, born in 1915,
died August 25, 2010.

My Memories of Dr. John Karefa-Smart

By Gary Schulze
Peace Corps Volunteer
Freetown, 1961-1963

John Karefa-Smart played an important role in my life. As a young Peace Corps Volunteer in Sierra Leone in the early 1960s I had to come up with a useful project to work on during the 1962 summer months. At the time, I was teaching history and civics at Albert Academy, the Doctor's alma mater. The project I chose was to work for the elderly Dr. M.C.F. Easmon at the Sierra Leone National Museum by the Cotton Tree. When the summer ended, Dr. Easmon asked if I could spend the rest of my tour working for him since his African curator was going to Germany on a scholarship. I told him it was doubtful that the Peace Corps would agree since we had been sent there as teachers. Dr. Easmon asked Dr. Karefa-Smart, who was then Foreign Minister and a member of the Museum Committee, to talk to the Peace Corps. I still have Dr. John's handwritten note, in his characteristic green ink, telling the Peace Corps Director to transfer me to the museum. Since Dr. John was constantly traveling overseas, I did not see him again until many years later when I went back to Sierra Leone as a UN Election Observer for the 1996 Presidential Elections. The Doctor was now running for President and I saw him at his headquarters and at a reception at the UK High Commission. As always, he was gracious and happy to

see me. I saw him again after that at a few Caulker Family reunions in the States. He was extremely proud of being a Caulker from the Rotifunk branch. At one of those meetings I screened the 1961 British documentary for him, titled "The Story of Sierra Leone." He and I sat in a room alone together while he watched himself as a young man in his thirties talking about Independence. He was then already in his 90s. He beamed when he saw himself on film with Dr. Margai welcoming the Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa-Balebwa on the tarmac at Lungi Airport.



Then, three years ago, I contacted him and asked if he would be willing to allow me to interview him on video about his life and career. He readily agreed and we spent two full days together in Washington, D.C. where we were like two kids again reliving past experiences. What an incredible life he led. I still chuckle when I think of the story he told me about his visit to apartheid South Africa as a World Health Organization official. He was a guest of WHO but when he got to the airport, taxi drivers would not pick him up because he was black. He called his hosts and they sent a double-decker bus to pick him up. He sat on the upper level, the only person in the vehicle, while the bus took him to a

church facility in Johannesburg. When he arrived, everyone welcomed him enthusiastically. The next morning at breakfast, no one would talk to him. Then he found out they had a morning vow of silence. The first day of the videotaping, which was done at the National Peace Corps Association headquarters, we went out for lunch at a nearby food court. The Doctor noticed three black gentlemen in suits sitting at a table who he told me were probably African diplomats. He went over and introduced himself. It turned out they were from Guinea. They were surprised when he told them who he was. When he told them he had been a close friend of Sekou Toure, they looked at him with awe. By the way, during the interviewing, I produced the old note on Foreign Ministry stationery to the Peace Corps Director in green ink. The Doctor said, "Oh yes, in those days I always used green ink."

The Doctor traveled all over Washington, D. C., on buses and the subway using his Metro Card. He was nearly 94 but bustling with energy and curiosity. He told me he hoped to live to be over 100. After we wrapped up the last round of interviews at a Washington hotel, I walked with him to a bus stop. A little later he came back to the hotel. He had forgotten his Metro Card.

I spoke to him by telephone many times after that. He was working on his memoirs and asked if I had any thoughts about what the title could be. I gave him a few suggestions but in the end he called it "Rainbow Happenings," an appropriate title explained in the book.

The last time I saw Dr. John was at a hospice in Kent, Connecticut. He was surrounded by Reena and his daughters. His voice was weak but despite the gravity of his condition, we shared stories about Sierra Leone and talked about some of the things he had told me in Washington about his career. His mind was as alert as ever. Soon after that he stopped eating. His last wish was to spend his final days back in Sierra Leone. He wanted to be buried at his birthplace, Rotifunk.

The family flew him back to Freetown. He and Reena and the girls had registered for this year's Caulker Family Reunion in Columbus, Ohio. He wanted to visit his alma mater, Otterbein College. He was so disappointed that his illness prevented him from going. We sent him pictures of the reunion. I don't know if he ever saw them.

John Karefa-Smart was a man who always saw the glass half full, never half empty. He was an eternal optimist. When he told me how the Prime Minister position had been unjustly taken away from him in 1964 or how he had been imprisoned at Pademba Road by Siaka Stevens, there was no bitterness or hatred in his voice. He laughed when he described the terrible conditions in the prison. He told me his life story in an amazingly upbeat way. He was a man who enjoyed life to its fullest. In a country where corruption was a way of life for government officials and politicians, John Karefa-Smart died a poor man. He was my friend. I will never forget him.

Meghan Welsh's African Adventure

By Tara Welsh

[Editor's note: The following is a series of e-mails sent by the mother of one of the new Peace Corps teachers to update family and friends and members of Friends of Sierra Leone. They have been shortened and edited, but I've tried to preserve the tone of the originals. The views expressed are those of a mother of a volunteer far from home and do not reflect the opinion of the editor or the Friends of Sierra Leone.]

Thursday, June 10, 2010

Meghan called last night. She said they traveled from Freetown to Bo today. She said the road from Freetown to Bo was paved and smooth. She will live with a host family for three months during her training phase. Then she will get her own place. They are a family with 7 grown children. One of their daughters is about to deliver her first child at their home any day now. The school day is from 8 to 5. Meghan said her family will walk her to school for the first few days to make sure she knows how to get there and back. She has her own room and the house has electricity which they don't use during the day but only at night. She shared her photos of us with her family. They were very interested in her life here in USA. She said it is very hot and humid there and the food is VERY spicy.

Sunday, June 13, 2010

We spoke with Meghan. She sounded better than she did on Wednesday evening when she called me at home at 4:30 on the first day with her host family. I think she was freaking out a little bit but trying her best to mask it.

Her host family revealed on Saturday that they had a TV and they watched some Nigerian soap operas and the World Cup. Her African studies professor from College of Charleston, Dr. Simon Lewis, gave her name to another professor friend of his in Sierra Leone, Joseph Opala. Dr. Opala came to see Meghan while she was in Freetown. He gave all the PCVs a 4 hour lecture on Sierra Leone history and traditions. Peggy Murrah from the Friends of Sierra Leone has a friend, Emanuel, who lives in Bo, where Meghan is now. Meghan's brother Mohammed is friends with Emanuel's son

Monday, June 21, 2010

We spoke with Meghan last night. She was having a bad day and needed to vent. She has been eating hard boiled eggs every day from the family chickens. The other meals all include rice and palm oil which she doesn't like. She says it is too heavy. Her host family's daughter had her baby this past week. He is the first grandchild in the family. The family is overjoyed. They don't name the baby until the 7th day.

Peace Corps Volunteers from a neighboring country who have 3 months left on their stay came and visited with them this past week. They have developed recipes, through trial and error, with local available foods cooked for a western pallet and have written a cookbook. They will get copies for our PCVs which should be very useful. These volunteers shared great information with our PCVs.

After training is complete she will receive her assignment and move to her duty station where she will live in her own home for 24 months.

Sunday, June 27, 2010

When we called her last night, Ghana had just defeated the US. She was watching the game with a bunch of jubilant locals and the other PCV's in the Obama Community Center (about 60 people in all watching one television). They have found a local restaurant where they can get hamburgers & pizza. She said a hamburger costs 1700 Leone which equals about \$5. This week in training, she will learn to kill a chicken. She has to go to the market first and buy herself one. They had a field trip to the market and were taught how to shop and negotiate

price. Meghan said many new boy babies are named Obama. The locals want to know if she knows him or if she has been to the White House.

Sunday, July 4, 2010

Tonight, experienced female Peace Corps Volunteers from neighboring Liberia are holding a girls night out evening with our female PCVs. They will be giving advice and tips on women's issues like hygiene and safety.

This past week, they had actual teaching training with students and evaluations. Meghan said her first teaching experience in Sierra Leone was quite memorable. She was reading a story to the students aloud. She said it started raining torrentially and she was reading at the top of her voice but no one could hear her. Some of the choices on the required reading syllabus for the older students seem very challenging. Meghan said they have *The Merchant of Venice* on the list. She said she didn't read that until she was in college.

Monday, July 12, 2010

She is teaching summer school for the next three weeks. She teaches speaking English. Her classroom is the size of a typical American classroom. Her students are middle school aged (6th, 7th, & 8th grades). She has 77 students crammed into the classroom with three students sharing each desk. Sierra Leone teachers use corporal punishment but the PCV teachers do not. Meghan had a girl in her class who was talking while she was trying to teach. Meghan warned her three times to stop talking and tried to engage her with the lesson. With the third warning, Meghan told her to leave the classroom and go home. The girl started crying knowing full well her parents were going to be VERY upset with her. Meghan insisted that the girl leave and told her that they would try again tomorrow but she would have to leave today. The remaining 76 students were very well behaved after the girl exited the classroom. The other teachers who were observing were very impressed with Meghan's handling of the situation and gaining control of her classroom. She laughed and told them that she learned from her mother not to issue empty threats or you won't be taken seriously by children.

At their 4th of July celebration, the PCVs brought their chickens for dinner. They learned to kill, clean, and cook their chickens. She said it was surreal. Meghan said someone found a giant jar of barbecue sauce at the market and they grilled their chicken with bbq sauce. She said it was delicious!

She has lost 6 pounds. The doctor came out and weighed them all. Everyone has lost weight but nothing dangerous. She was so excited to find jelly, oatmeal cookies, and raisins at the market.

Sunday, July 18, 2010

Meghan called us yesterday when she got home from a Peace Corps outing to a monkey & pygmy hippo reserve. They also had an 80s night at their local watering hole on Friday. She said the market is full of 1980 clothing (like they are in a time warp). So they all went shopping and dressed in 80's outfits. Her family thought she looked really really good and she thought she looked crazy & ridiculous! One of the PCVs is a DJ in the US, and they all had a blast.

Meghan said her Summer School & Peace Corps Training for the past few weeks have been very busy days. Teaching in the morning and training in the afternoons. They were not supposed to find out the assignments until next week. Our PCVs were called into the large room where a big map of Sierra Leone was chalked onto the floor. They were each placed in the location on the map where they will be assigned to teach for the next two years. She has gotten her school assignment and is very excited about her location. She will be teaching secondary students at St. Joseph's Secondary School in Moyamba. It is a girls only boarding school. Meghan will be teaching literature and English. Her closest Peace Corps friend, Alli Sinning, will be living and teaching at a nearby school. A Computer & Technology school just opened in Moyamba so we are hoping that the internet connection availability will be better for her there.

She will not be far from the beach. They will all visit their sites next weekend to assess their potential living and work situations.

One of the female PCV terminated her stay in Sierra Leone. She said it was harder than she imagined. This was very upsetting for those remaining. Meghan thinks that's why they gave them their assignments early so they wouldn't dwell on the sad news.

Saturday, July 24, 2010

Her school is called St. Joseph Secondary School. It is a girls only convent boarding school. I think she said the church is called St. Columba which is also located on the compound. This is all located in Moyamba, Sierra Leone. Her neighbors are all teachers at the same school which is only a 5 minute walk from her house. She says it is a duplex with another family sharing a common wall with her. It is a two bedroom (in case anyone wants to visit) house with an indoor bathroom. She has a kitchen sink & a toilet but no running water so she will have to lug water in to flush and wash. Meghan said her living room is painted two very happy and sunny shades of yellow. She loves it! It is fully furnished so she will not have to use her PC move-in allowance to buy furniture. She says that she has light fixtures, light bulbs, light switches and electrical outlets but no electricity. She may purchase a generator with her allowance. She said they go for 500,000L which may be \$125US (I think). The language spoken here is Mende, which she has to learn. She has had two Mende lessons so far and her new co-workers were happy to see her practicing and trying out her new language skills. She has been trained in Krio.

Sunday, August 1, 2010

She is excitedly awaiting finishing her Peace Corps training on August 13 and moving to her village. She said while she was in Moyamba all of her neighbors came over and gave her things they thought she would need. Her entire house is furnished with beds and living room furniture. She said some of her Peace Corps friends have nothing in their homes and will have to buy furniture out of their Peace Corps move-in allowance. She said that in Bo there is a mosquito problem since they are surrounded by rice fields and swamps. In Moyamba, she finds no mosquitoes but a lot of ants. Ants everywhere there is food. She said that you put something down and in moments it is covered with ants. While she was in Moyamba, she attended church. She said the service was 3-1/2 hours long and the languages were English, Krio and Mende. There was lots of singing and dancing, unlike the American Catholic service.

The PCVs had to take public transportation to get back to Bo after visiting their school/villages. The local taxi driver owns a very old station wagon called a Bush Taxi which has three benches (4 people per bench), a trunk and the roof for accommodating passengers. She said there were 12 passengers, two babies breastfeeding, a big bunch of bananas inside, 3 goats in the trunk and people picked up along the way (20 mile stretch on unpaved road took 1 hour) climbed on the roof. The driver's name was Jones and he had a great mixed CD collection for their entertainment. He had Madonna (the singer) bumper stickers all over his car.

The bikes which the PC is trying to get delivered to the PCVs will not arrive until December. She may buy a refurbished bike to get her around her new village out of her move-in allowance money since she doesn't need furniture.

Saturday, August 7, 2010

She is back in Bo after spending the week in Freetown at the Peace Corps Compound which was formerly the British Tobacco Compound. While she was in Freetown, she was given her move-in allowance, 1.5 million Leones and half of her monthly stipend for August (another 1 million Leones on a bankcard, approximately \$635 USD). She is so excited to be a millionaire in Sierra Leone. She went to the market to buy things to bring to her new house. Bartering was a

class they had in training and she considers herself very good at it. First, she needed a duffle bag to carry all her purchases home. She found a large duffle bag with Obama's face all over it. She went to another stall to buy a small frying pan. The price was 40,000 Leone (\$10). A big crowd gathered to watch the bartering. Meghan and the seller kept sliding a piece of paper back and forth until the final price was agreed upon 20,000 Leone (\$5). While in Freetown, they were given the Peace Corps Cookbook and Meghan bought some kitchen staples for her new house.

The PCV's were told to find their way back to Bo from Freetown in groups. Meghan and her three best friends (Alli, Brandon & Liz) took a taxi to Moyamba Junction where they could catch a Government Bus connection to Bo. Once they arrived in Moyamba Junction, their taxi driver escorted them to the correct bus. He was afraid they would get on the wrong bus. Meghan said the people are very gentle and take extra good care of the Peace Corps Volunteers.

Sunday, August 15, 2010

Meghan completed her Peace Corps Training and was sworn in as an official Peace Corps Volunteer on Friday, August 13, 2010 by the Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy in Sierra Leone.

She was traveling to her village with Alli and Brandon and ALL of their belongings tied on top of the Peace Corps vehicle driven by Joseph, the craziest of the PC drivers. Meghan said that Joseph honks the horn 70% of the time and drives what feels like 100 miles per hour.

Meghan and Alli's homes are all furnished and perfect. Brandon, however, wasn't so lucky. No one was waiting for him to arrive. When they found someone with a key to his home, it was empty. No furniture. The Site Coordinator, Andrew was very vexed (meaning angry in Krio) indeed. He said Brandon's principal "humbugged me boocoos and I will humbug him" (meaning annoyed in Krio). Brandon had his new mattress with him and said he would be willing to sleep on the floor on his mattress and work out the rest of the issues the next day.

Her first night in her home went smoothly and she slept well. The convent/church people are concerned that Meghan is living alone. They hired a fellow named Anthony to be her gardener and her guard. He sits outside her house from 7:00 pm to 7:00 am. She went shopping and bought some candles and kerosene to light her home once the sun goes down. She fashioned some candlesticks out of a coca cola can she cut in half.

August 22, 2010

Meghan said she spent the past week setting up her house and learning how to cook on a kerosene stove. She said it is not easy to use because it is either on or off, with no other settings like high or low, so food burns easily. She said she feels like she has it figured out now after trial and error. Meghan was issued a West African cookbook which features recipes with readily available ingredients and is working her way through the book. She is able to receive a radio signal from a Freetown radio station. She said she is eating a lot of eggs and peanut curry and exercising every day.

Meghan lives in one half of a duplex house. Her neighbor, Beatrice, is a nurse practitioner with UNICEF. Beatrice just bought a generator and had Meghan's house added to the generator. Beatrice runs it at night once the sun goes down for about 2 hours. Beatrice offered Meghan use of the generator while it is running. Meghan said Beatrice is a great neighbor.

Monday, August 30, 2010

Meghan is experiencing very heavy rains during the rainy season. She said there are very loud frogs because of all of the water everywhere. She has a very large barrel in her bathroom and she collected many buckets of rainwater in 30 minutes to fill up her barrel which she uses for bathing, and flushing her toilet. Meghan also uses this water for her laundry.

The **2011 International Calendar** produced by the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Wisconsin is available through Friends of Sierra Leone. This year the calendar celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps by featuring the first 13 countries served, including Sierra Leone (February). In addition to volunteers' photographs from host countries around the world, the calendar includes historic days, holidays, and holy days from many cultures, astronomical data and references to recommended books, music, films and local fare from the featured countries. A portion of the proceeds will go toward Friends of Sierra Leone activities. Make your check to Friends of Sierra Leone.

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