

January 2007



# Friends of Sierra Leone



**FoSL Board members present a certificate of appreciation to Peace Corps staff Member Paul Johnson for his support of our advocacy efforts to get the Peace Corps back in Sierra Leone. Peace Corps Headquarters, September 15, 2006**

l to r : Jim Sheahan, Aiah Fanday, Judy Figi, Paul Johnson, Anthony McMillon

### Friends of Sierra Leone Board of Officers and Committee Chairs

#### Elected

	President	Peggy Murrah, Social Circle, GA	
Vice President	Aiah Fanday, Silver Spring, MD	At Large	Gary Schulze, New York, NY
Treasurer	Mark Hager, San Antonio, TX	At Large	Tim Curley, Silver Spring, MD
Secretary	Bob Heavner, Berkeley, CA	At Large, Projects	Cindy Nofziger, Seattle, WA
Public Affairs, PC	Jim Sheahan, Atlanta, GA	At Large	Dave O'Neill, Alexandria, VA
Public Affairs, SL	Adjai Robinson, Baltimore, MD	At Large	Anthony McMillon, Fort Washington, MD

#### Appointed

Webmaster	Jamie Brown, Juneau, AK	Advocacy Chair	Judy Figi, Janesville, WI
Member Database	Mike Diliberti, Falls Church, VA	Fundraising Chair	Patty Bruzek, Lombard, IL
Newsletter Editor	Carl Onken, Central Valley, NY	Education Chair	Sarah Armstrong, Falls Church, VA
Projects	Aiah Fanday, Beltsville, MD	Annual Meeting	Daphne Sawyer-Dunne, Berwyn Heights, MD

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## Annual Meetings

**Mark your calendar! The 2007 Annual Meeting has been scheduled for Friday, July 13 through Sunday, July 15 at the Asilomar Conference Center near Monterey, California. Details are not yet available, but non-group rates will be available for those who want to arrive Thursday or stay over Sunday night.**

**Planning has begun for the 2008 Annual Meeting in Freetown. The dates are not set.**

## PROJECTS COMMITTEE UPDATE

In 2006 several FoSL representatives made visits to the country to explore ways to support teacher development efforts in post-war Sierra Leone. On November 13, 2006, a phone conference was held to confirm the status of current in-service training efforts led by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and UNICEF, and to clarify ways FoSL could contribute to this effort. Attending this meeting were Sonia Spencer from UNICEF SL, Alfred Gborie, FoSL consultant in SL, Gabriel Sellu, MOE official as well as FoSL members Cindy Nofziger, Peggy Murrah, Bob Heavner and Michael Gibbons. [ *Projects Committee* continued on page 8 ]

### Advocacy

The Advocacy Committee continues to work for the return of Peace Corps to Sierra Leone. We are disappointed to learn that Peace Corps will be returning to Ethiopia instead of Sierra Leone. We were told that 75% of the Ethiopia program will be funded by President Bush’s fund for fighting AIDS/HIV in Africa.

In September FoSL Board members met at Peace Corps Headquarters with staffers Lynn Foden, Jennifer Brown and Paul Johnson. Paul has been a wonderful advocate for us and we were sorry to hear that he would be leaving Peace Corps for a position in the Congo.

We continue to work with Congressmen, urging them to contact Peace Corps about returning to Sierra Leone. The following Congressmen have done so: Senators Feingold, Kohl, Obama, Isaakson, Chambliss, and Representatives Paul Ryan, Baldwin, Tancredo, Green, and Watson. If one of these is your Congressman, thank him or her. We need help with this. Please contact your Congressmen and ask them to contact Peace Corps. Check the Advocacy page of the FoSL webpage for contact information and talking points. Contact me if you would like copies of letters these Congressmen have sent.

Judy Figi salonesix@aol.com

## Call for Nominations for the FoSL Board of Directors

The current terms of elected FoSL Board Members will expire in August 2007 and we need to elect officers and board members as listed below. The first step in this process is to solicit your nominations for these positions. Please refer to our FoSL website at [www.fosalone.org](http://www.fosalone.org), select “about FoSL,” and then “FoSL Bylaws” to review the responsibilities of the various positions. Self-nominations are encouraged!

Please consider becoming a member of the Board. Our meetings, held about once each month, last about an hour and a half. We use telephone conferencing technology to include our Board members from across the country – Alaska, California, Georgia, Maryland, New York, Virginia, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. We have become adept at holding this type of meeting and your participation would be greatly appreciated and fully utilized. Please nominate yourself or anyone that you feel is interested in participating in FoSL. We will confirm their interest before placing them on the ballot next month.

Please detach and send us the nomination form below to our P.O. Box by Friday, February 23, 2007. Please don’t delay as last time we received some nominations after the ballots were sent out. You may also email nominations to [info@fosalone.org](mailto:info@fosalone.org).

Positions open to nominations: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, 2 Public Affairs Officers, and four at-large Board members.

Nominee

Position

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**Report to FoSL from Search For Common Ground  
on Ministry of Education, Science and Technology's *Radio Education* Program  
December 7, 2006**

*Ambrose James, Sierra Leone Country Director, Search for Common Ground*

SFCG - Sierra Leone received a grant from Friends of Sierra Leone through the Foundation for West Africa to support *Radio Education*, a station of the Ministry of Education Science and Technology.

The support focused on providing a reliable, standby power supply. This included purchase of a generator and construction of a secure generator house for the station.

With the support of the technical department of SFCG, the work has been completed and handed over to the Ministry of Education Science and Technology.



*Fixing a steel door for maximum security*



*The 5 KVA Honda Generator*

The handing-over ceremony took place at the Ministry of Education Science and Technology headquarters New England Head, in the presence of the Minister and Deputy Minister of Education, Permanent Secretary, and other senior officials.

Radio education supports the Ministry's education objectives and is currently on air for eight hours a day.

**New Air Service to Sierra Leone**

BMED, a franchise partner of British Airways, has announced a new service from London to Freetown and Dakar. Flights operate three times a week and make seamless connections with British Airways flights through London Heathrow

Dear fellow members of FoSL,

I left for Sierra Leone on November 9 to work there until February 2. While in country I plan to be:

- getting new candidates for spinal surgery X-rayed, treated for T.B., and fitted with back braces where needed.
- welcoming home to Sierra Leone and seeing to the post-surgery care of the five children plus two escorts we currently have in Accra, Ghana, for spinal surgery by the Foundation of Orthopedic and Complex Spine (FOCOS).
- hosting a surgeon and nurse from FOCOS on a short visit to examine patients.
- funding and arranging for indigent patients to have general surgeries performed at the very new Holy Spirit Hospital in Makeni. This will probably include women to be treated by an OB/GYN surgeon visiting from Italy.
- setting up a water purification system to provide safe drinking water at the Holy Spirit Hospital.
- hosting two surgeons from Manhattan doing evaluation check-ups on some of our post-op hernia surgery patients.
- transporting patients to the Baptist Eye Hospital in Lunsar and funding their treatment, including various eye care including cataract surgeries.
- hosting representatives from the Scotland-based International Reconstructive Plastic Surgery (IRPS), who will be coming to evaluate hospitals and start to plan a surgical mission trip to Sierra Leone for early in 2007. The plastic surgery team, which will include a hand specialist, is badly needed to help several people with burn damage to hands, feet, and arms, to help babies born with cleft palates, and to help other people with various plastic surgery needs including victims of war atrocities.

Thank you for your past support. I will keep you posted with a trip report after I return in February. For more information on our work please visit our website at: [africasurgery.org](http://africasurgery.org) (no "www." in front).

Tom Johnson, Jr. RPCV Sierra Leone, 89-91

Ancestor Stones by Aminatta Forna, Grove/Atlantic 2006

Book review by Michael McCone [PC Staff/Freetown 62-64]

Ancestor Stones is a rich, engrossing novel that starts at a leisurely pace and gathers momentum and at its conclusion one is taken up in a whirlwind. Aminatta Forna, author of the stunning memoir about her activist father, The Devil That Danced on the Water, writes as Abie of her return to her homeland recording the lives of her four aunts over the last century of dramatic cultural change. But the stories begin a long time before that and through the tales and songs one learns of growing up, the hard and easy lessons learned, the marriages, children born, heartaches endured, struggles won and lost, and the incredible atrocities of war.

In the end one finds the four aunts alive, strong and passing on to Abie the legacy that Africa's daughters take with them wherever they live. "They'd lifted the past from their own shoulders and handed it to me. I didn't see it as a burden, not at all. Rather a treasure trove of memories, of lives lived and lessons learned, of terrors faced and pleasures tasted."

Powerful stuff! But of those who know something of Africa and even a little about women in Africa, this conclusion should come as no surprise. [ *Book Review* continued on page 6 ]

Schools for Salone Update  
Cindy Nofziger

Schools for Salone is a sister organization sponsored by FoSL board member Cindy Nofziger. Schools for Salone does not receive direct support from Friends of Sierra Leone.

The first school built by Schools for Salone, (SFS) [www.schoolsforsalone.org](http://www.schoolsforsalone.org), in Maforeka, Simira Chiefdom, Tonkolili District, opened in November 2005. Since that opening, the school has thrived. The number of teachers has grown from 4 to 6, the students from 121 to 174. SFS continues to pay teacher salaries for five of the teachers – the head teacher is on a government salary, paperwork has been completed so that all the teachers will soon be on government salaries. New textbooks arrived in Freetown in November 2006, through a collaborative effort with FoSL, the Sabre Foundation (Cambridge, MA), the Sierra Leone Book Trust (Freetown), and the Foundation for West Africa (Barrington, RI). Some of these books have been targeted for delivery to the Maforeka Primary School. School to school exchanges continue with schools in Santa Fe, NM and Seattle, WA.

During my visit to Sierra Leone in November 2005, three additional villages were targeted as future project sites – Makali (primary school), and two small villages several miles east of Bo - Kandor (primary school) and Koribondo (refurbish a roof on a secondary school partially destroyed during the war). Since November 2005, over \$25,000 has been raised through note card sales (made from drawings done by the children in Maforeka) and donations from private individuals, a rotary club and the Sabu Foundation. Construction began on these three schools in October. As with the first school in Maforeka, the villages are providing sand, stone, and unskilled labor. In the first week of construction in Kandor the school foundation was dug and concreted, brick laying started, including over 2000 blocks molded, 13 pillars completed, and the building built to window level. In Makali, as of mid-November, only construction of the desks and chairs and plastering of one classroom remained to be completed. In Koribondo the damaged section of roof was removed, reinforcements built. Work at all three construction sites should be completed by mid-December 2006. I am planning to return to Sierra Leone in February 2007 for the Opening Ceremonies in all three schools.

The schools need money to pay teacher salaries in Maforeka (\$50 will sponsor one teacher for one month), purchase school supplies, and educational materials, and to sponsor teachers to attend teacher training workshops. Additional projects have also been targeted – and possibilities for new programs, including helping the villages develop income generating projects, are being considered. Note cards can be purchased - 12 different cards + envelopes (checks to “Schools for Salone”) by sending \$15 + \$3 S&H to Schools for Salone, 9215 40th Ave., NE, Seattle, WA 98115, (206) 525-5834. Tax- deductible donations can be made through The Foundation for West Africa (checks to TFWA with “Schools for Salone” on the memo line) mailed to Topher Hamblett, President, The Foundation for West Africa, 27 Walnut Rd, Barrington, RI 02806. (401) 289-0673.

[*Book Review* continued from page 5 ] The stones of the title are treasured as a collection held by one of the aunts, Mariana. They represent the names of the women who went before. “The women who made me. Each stone chosen and given in memory of a woman to her daughter. So that their spirits would be recalled each time the stone was held, warmed by a human hand, and cast on the ground to ask for help.”

Sierra Leone is never mentioned in the book and Aminatta Forna lives in London, but she often returns to the Temne village where her father was born and grew up. Her story is universal, timeless and contemporary...the roots are clearly in the sad but oh so beautiful country of Sierra Leone.

The Refugee All Star Band  
Michael McCone, Deputy Director/Sierra Leone 1962-1964

This great band, found in the Sembakounya Refugee Camp in Guinea in 2002, is made up of musicians who escaped from the gruesome civil war in Sierra Leone. Discovered by Zach Niles and Banker White, musicians themselves and fledgling filmmakers and promoters, the band was rehearsing in a ramshackle bar called “The Place to Be.”

From this fortuitous meeting has come a documentary film that has won awards at film festivals around the country and a CD of their music. The style is largely reggae with a blend of Sierra Leone pop which Rueben Koroma, the band leader, calls goombay, updating elements of African folk music. The band has appeared at the South by Southwest, Toronto, New York and Japan music festivals, as well as gigs at major clubs around the country.

“I always kept on writing my songs,” bandleader Koroma said. “That kept me alive and kept other musicians alive. Helped us forget about most of our worries because of the war.” Band members came to the refugee camps in 1999 and Koroma put the band together, asking the U.N. refugee agency for musical equipment. “They were singing ‘Living Like a Refugee’ when we arrived,” said Niles. “It was all very amazing...they had a little generator, one microphone and two guitars.”

“Life wasn’t easy,” said Koroma, while on tour in the U.S. “We just handled it. When we did the album, we were able to get some money and take care of ourselves, get enough to eat, take care of our families. There are many things people need...medicine, electricity, bathrooms — those are the only problems I’m experiencing. But I’m here right now. You can go anywhere in this country and people really appreciate the music.”

Keep an eye and ear out for The Refugee All Star Band. They are truly great.

(Quotes from a 7/13/06 article by Joel Salwin, San Francisco Chronicle)

Order a FoSL sweatshirt! We are going to place an order for white sweatshirts with the design shown here. We need to have these preordered to get the group rate. The price will depend on how many people order the sweatshirt. It will run anywhere from \$21.50 to \$30.00. If you want to see the way it is shown on the website, you can go to: <http://customink.com/cink/r.jsp?E=pmurrah%40mindspring.com&F=fosl11>



Please email Patty Bruzek at [bruzekkp@comcast.net](mailto:bruzekkp@comcast.net) to let her know how many and what size of sweatshirt you are interested in buying.

[*Projects Committee* continued from page 2 ] Ms. Spencer reported on the status of the current in-service primary school teacher training programs. During and just after the war, teacher training needs expanded dramatically but the in-service training was severely restricted. Thus a significant gap in teacher training for primary schools currently needs to be filled. Since 2000 several NGOs have rushed to fill the gap where government schools were destroyed, damaged or closed. As a result, a number of unregulated training activities sprang up to train and support ‘untrained teachers,’ meaning those who agreed to fill a teaching post but who had not attended a certified teacher training college. There is now a new push to address quality teacher training and certification undertaken by MOE and UNICEF. The purpose of this effort is to re-develop a Ministry/NGO in-service training capacity via the following four steps:

- 1) To review and synthesize various training “packages” to ensure quality, fairness and coordination and to help MOE to be able to certify and absorb new teachers to cover needs in under-served areas in a sustainable manner.
- 2) To develop a set of primary teacher training manuals in math, sciences, life skills child development, and communications that MOE can approve for use by all training agencies.
- 3) To fill the training gaps expeditiously, particularly in under-served districts and inspectorates through one month training courses.
- 4) To develop a core training team to carry out initial training and to continue to train new under-skilled teachers as they move on to college or as new schools expand.

Currently, UNICEF, through The World Bank Sababu Project funding, is coordinating the review and harmonization of training materials, the development of core training manuals, and has begun a process of one month in-service training courses in seven of the fourteen inspectorates. The MOE is overseeing this overall effort and coordinating training in the remaining seven over the next two years. These efforts are being funded through the African Bank. Manuals have been drafted and are in current use. However they contain omissions, factual mistakes, and other editing tasks that are not completed and need correction now. UNICEF has been seeking help with this. Also the current round of training is underway by the core training team but this will not cover all schools and districts. As attrition occurs in the next few years, more training and trainers will be needed.

FoSL has the following to offer:

- US (including RPCV) teacher trainer and curriculum specialist volunteers
- Volunteer editors working to correct, edit, enrich and publish the core training manuals
- Interest in serving as volunteer teacher trainers in under-served areas.

Project Committee members will be in contact with at least two funding sources interested in Sierra Leone education. Sonia Spencer responded with strong interest in FoSL support to edit and enrich the core manuals. She also expressed strong interest in funding for a mass printing of the manuals, as well as interest in training assistance in areas beyond current project scope as initial training is completed.

Implementation of this process is underway. Updates will follow in our spring newsletter. Readers who are interested in supporting our efforts are encouraged to send contributions or ask about volunteering through [info@fosalone.org](mailto:info@fosalone.org).

Bob Heavner and Michael Gibbons  
FoSL Project Committee

## FOSL – Sponsored Textbook Shipment Reaches Sierra Leone

*Report by Topher Hamblett, President, The Foundation for West Africa*

In October, 2006 the FOSL board of directors voted to contribute \$3,000 to The Foundation for West Africa, which was raising \$13,000 to support the procurement, shipment and distribution of textbooks to Sierra Leone. This generous gift triggered a matching grant of \$3,000 from the Robertson Foundation (RI). FOSL will be pleased to learn that we received contributions from the Sierra Leone community in Rhode Island: \$1,000 from the Sierra Leone Descendants Association and \$500 from the MaCauley Foundation, a family foundation established in honor of a Sierra Leonean dedicated to education.

With these and other partners, we raised the \$13,000 needed for this project. We split full project cost (\$25,000) with the U.S. Department of State. In November, a 40' container arrived in Freetown and was offloaded and transported to the warehouse of the Sierra Leone Book Trust (SALBOT), a non-profit organization established by Sierra Leoneans to promote literacy and education. The U.S.-based partner that makes this possible is the Sabre Foundation of Cambridge, MA, which promotes literacy and education worldwide (<http://www.sabre.org>). Their program is *demand-drive*, with carefully screened lists of titles made available to teachers and librarians through the SALBOT.

The Sabre Foundation reports that 12,782 books were shipped, with an estimated fair market value of \$724,434. The majority of books are university-level, while some are primary and secondary level.

SALBOT is now distributing textbooks to the institutions that requested them. If any FOSL members visit Sierra Leone, SALBOT's executive director and founder, Sallieu Turay, would welcome a visit and would be pleased to take you to schools that are partners in this program.

For more information contact me at 401.289.0273 or [topher@tfwa.org](mailto:topher@tfwa.org) Thanks again, FOSL, for your great work on behalf of Sierra Leone!

## Peggy Murrah's Travel Tips

I often get questions about traveling to Sierra Leone on the FoSL info account. Some suggestions are:

1. It is much cheaper to travel during the winter except for the holiday season.
2. There is more than one travel agency that handles Astraeus flights. While the prices will be the same, you may find payment options vary from one to the other. I prefer to pay for travel using a credit card and there is at least one agency that accepts credit cards.
3. There is an online service available that I found immensely helpful. You may use the services to pre-book hotel or guesthouse services, book a car, and get answers to other travel-related questions. There is a flight schedule posted on the site as well as Freetown based travel agencies listed. Visit [www.visitsierraleone.org](http://www.visitsierraleone.org) and take advantage of the many conveniences available. While in Bo, I used one of the Internet cafes to book additional hotel reservations in Freetown for the following week. While I was not able to use a credit card to book my hotel, I [ *Travel Tips* continued on page 10 ]

[ *Travel Tips* continued from page 9 ] could use my Paypal account to pay for it thereby not having to worry about the cash I had with me going for a hotel room. There is no question in my mind that I will use this site when I travel in the future.

4. British Airways has just announced a new service from London to Freetown three times a week. Hopefully as time goes on, more and more airlines will add Freetown to their destinations and the prices will become more competitive.

One final note, when you travel around Salone people will not separate you from the Peace Corps. No matter how many times you tell them you are not a Peace Corps Volunteer – oh yes you are. In addition, I am not able to separate Friends of Sierra Leone from my personal dealings in Salone. I tell people when a project is completely separate from FoSL and I still get thank you messages for our membership. Thank you to FoSL for allowing me to represent you.

**A Report from A Brighter Tomorrow for Africa Foundation  
Sarah Armstrong, Director  
November 2006**

A Brighter Tomorrow for Africa is a sister organization sponsored by FoSL board member Sarah Armstrong.  
A Brighter Tomorrow for Africa does not receive direct support from Friends of Sierra Leone.

I am sending this report directly from Freetown. This is my fourth trip to Sierra Leone in two years and I cannot tell you how happy I am to be back here again. The country, as many of you know, is filled with the most wonderful people ... warm, wise, funny, and caring. And working with the people of Sierra Leone fills my heart.

A Brighter Tomorrow for Africa (BTA) is an organization I began a year and some ago to help support programs for children and women throughout Sierra Leone. My first visit here was in November 2004 when I interviewed over twenty community-based organizations to select those I felt – together – would make the most immediate impact on the building towards a stronger future for Sierra Leone.

Five organizations were selected from the twenty-plus with which I met. They are as follows:

- Children of the Nations
- Children's Learning Services
- FreeTong Players International
- National Accountability Group
- Sierra Leone Market Women's Association.

Thanks to friends, family and colleagues, BTA has been able to supply some of the funding needed to fund the commencement of programs for three of the five organizations to date. The following are details about these programs and the work I am doing while in Sierra Leone at this time.

**Children of the Nations (COTN)**

We began by launching an inoculation program providing multiple vaccinations to nearly five thousand children and women of child-bearing age in Upper Banta in the Moyamba District in the south of Sierra Leone. Then, a feeding program was established by BTA and COTN to provide a high-protein diet to

those so desperately in need. The program feeds over 300 children in the primary school attended by the children of villages in the chiefdom. We supply them with food and milk each day for lunch. The children participating in the program have gained an average of 25% of their original weight in just six months; they are more alert and therefore learning more. They now go to school regularly – never missing a day – and their performance is noticeably increased in their academic work.

Additionally, we have started a program for malnourished preschoolers also in Upper Banta. Twenty children a month are provided a nutritious formula up to four times a day depending on their needs. And, we are also teaching the mothers of the villages how to care for the children. These young children have added an average of 2 pounds to their weight in just the first month of the program.

### **Children's Learning Services (CLS)**

In the Northern Provinces, we are working together with CLS on a conflict-management program. We have started "Peace Clubs" in the secondary schools – an education module that provides the children with the skills to resolve conflict in non-violent ways. For this program on this particular trip, I visited Port Loko, Lunsar, Makeni, Kabala and Mile 91. At one school we planted a "Peace Pole" (a specially designed flag) which symbolizes the school's commitment to peace. Additionally we launched a "Peace Club" in Kabala and began to help sensitize the children, the teachers and the principal to peaceful conflict resolution – a very necessary, wanted and needed skill after so many years of the brutal rebel war here in Sierra Leone. You can see in the faces of the children that they are hungry for this learning.

We also did one radio interview in Makeni and one radio panel discussion in Mile 91 to educate and involve the community in the essence of the school conflict management program.

### **National Accountability Group (NAG)**

BTA has also started funding a program throughout the country working with the NAG where we are establishing a new, different type of school-based club—this time with a focus on Anti-Corruption. We are sewing seeds of integrity in children so they will be the successful Sierra Leonean leaders of tomorrow.

We visited some of the participating schools on this trip including a journey to: Kenema, Sebgwema, Pujehun, and Bo. We also did spend one night in Daru which has quite a road! And to start children thinking at a young age about recognizing and learning to respond to corruption in the schools, communities and elsewhere we are working in both primary and secondary schools with the plan to establish workshops and clubs for this essential program in as wide an area as possible.

### **Next Steps for NAG, CLS, COTN**

BTA will continue to reach out to everyone we can think of to raise money for both the National Accountability Group and Children's Learning Services to

- add depth to both the "Peace Clubs" and the "Anti-Corruption" clubs
- reach out to more children and
- produce, print and distribute the module materials they need for the education.

And to note: these are *peer-to-peer* programs. Once the children have gone through the workshops, they will be expected to share their knowledge with all other members of the schools. They will be model citizens and mentors for the entire school and the community.

Money will also continue to be needed to support the Banta school feeding and malnourished preschooler

program. We will do all we can to secure uninterrupted daily nutrition for these special young Sierra Leoneans.

### **Other Activity**

In addition to the journeys to the provinces, while here in Sierra Leone, there has been a meeting with the Brighter Tomorrow for Africa board members (two wonderful Sierra Leonean women) to discuss the programs. We will incorporate their wise counsel into future planning efforts.

Also, Fatie Haffner, the Program Manager for FreeTong Players International came by to discuss the effort we hope to launch with them. BTA is working to raise money for FreeTong Players to build a school to educate children through the performing arts.

Finally, Maria Vandy will meet with us from Sierra Leone Market Women's Association to discuss a program we hope to fund soon that will teach women remedial education skills as well as marketable skills. As many of you know, the illiteracy rate among women here in Sierra Leone is a staggering 85%.

### **One More Journey**

We leave for Banta Sunday to see the children who are participating in the feeding programs and will stop in Moyamba on our way back to visit with the Education Officer of the District. We will then continue to work here in Freetown at our office. In addition to myself as Director, there is an amazing young man here in Sierra Leone – Abu Bakarr Kamara – who works for A Brighter Tomorrow for Africa to help monitor all of the programs, send reports, transmit evaluation information and share other requests to/with me on a frequent basis. It is from his computer here in Freetown that I now submit this report.

### **Friends of Sierra Leone (FoSL)**

One other important note ... I am also the Education Chair on the Board of Directors of the Friends of Sierra Leone and did visit with the US Ambassador, Ambassador Hull, to share with him what FoSL is doing as well as what A Brighter Tomorrow for Africa is accomplishing. He is a strong supporter of all we are undertaking and a great advocate for this country as I am sure you know.

### **Conclusion**

This country – Sierra Leone – is a place I hope members of FoSL will all come again to visit. And stay for a while to find additional ways of helping these beautiful people.

It would be great to hear from any member of FoSL. I can be reached at [sarah.armstrong@brighterafrica.org](mailto:sarah.armstrong@brighterafrica.org) if you have any questions about the work I am doing here or are interested in supporting the work. My phone number in the States is 703-237-3172. Goodbye for now from Freetown.

Goodsearch is a search engine powered by Yahoo that donates a penny to a cause of your choice every time you use it to do an Internet search. Just go to <http://www.goodsearch.com/> and use Friends of Sierra Leone as your designated charity in the box at the bottom of the page. You can even check on the current amount of donation due to FoSL via the searches done in our name. The donations are paid for by the advertisers on the site.

## Siegler Report

During July and August of this year, Chris and I were privileged to return to Sierra Leone as a follow-up to the generous donation of \$12,000 from the Missoula YMCA directly to the Sierra Leone YMCA. We were met in Freetown on the evening of July 21 by Christian Kamara, National General Secretary and head of the Sierra Leone YMCA. The trip surpassed our expectations.

From email exchanges before we left Montana, we knew that half the donation had been received in April of this year. The money was immediately used to assess the situation for youths in Makeni, the northern province of Sierra Leone, previously without YMCA programs. Christian Kamara and Abraham John, the Y's Development Secretary, had met with youth leaders in Makeni to initiate the discussion of youths' needs for empowerment, advancement, and development in this northern province. Makeni was the last rebel stronghold during the ten year war. When we visited Makeni two years ago, excombatant and displaced youths were roaming the streets, stealing whatever they could and harassing what few people were there. Food was scarce and safety was a big concern for everyone. This July, the reversal was almost overwhelming and to see the YMCA's roll in bringing some positive future to the displaced youths was outstanding. On July 27, in the District Town Council Building of Makeni, Chris and I witnessed the first certification ceremony with over fifty youths, male and female, anxious to put together their lives in a positive way. They had been through the first youth leaders' training session and received certification contingent on their participation in training a small group of their peers. All of the ideas for improvement came from the bottom up rather than mandated from the top down. As both Christian and Abraham said many times during our visit, this simple concept of "ground up" makes a huge difference in how youths buy into their roll in development. The enthusiastic response in Makeni was beyond our dreams. As one young man told us after the group photo, "this is only the beginning for me, I want to become a lawyer and do something good for my country."

Enthusiasm and hope were everywhere in that group of young people. To see the difference an opportunity makes for displaced youths headed down the wrong path is so encouraging. During the ceremony, officials from the Makeni Town Council, the Bombali Chiefdom, the police, a female representative of the District Social Services and numerous other dignitaries lauded the program and the participating youths. Most emphasized the same message: It was up to these young leaders to ensure the positive and honest development of their country.

A presentation of soccer balls, sporting equipment and team jerseys collected by the Missoula YMCA Teen Leaders group was given to the training leaders in Makeni as well as to directors in the eastern and southern YMCA extension branches. The \$250 grant from Western Montana's RPCV group was given directly to Christian Kamara for the purchase of locally made sports equipment.

Our trip surpassed our expectations and we hope a future connection/partnership between the two YMCAs becomes a reality. We'll keep you posted on any future developments.

Jeannie and Chris Siegler  
Sierra Leone RPCV, 1967-70

## Reflections on a Sierra Leone Experience - Peggy Murrah

"I had a goat in Africa..." is how Laurie's memories would begin. "Had" is the optimum word in Laurie's version as I just learned in a phone conversation with a friend in Bo that Lucky, the goat, had been stolen and probably long since become goat stew.

Laurie is my daughter who owes her very existence to Sierra Leone for without her parents having met while in the Peace Corps during the late 70s she wouldn't be here. Jim was an aggie; I was a teacher trainer. We both liked Coker's, Star, ordinary stew and each other.

This whole experience of traveling to Sierra Leone with an adult child is one which I know several of our members have experienced in the years since the war ended. I found myself sitting back watching her and trying to see Salone through her eyes. These children of ours are a different traveler than any others to Salone. Their parents were volunteers who apparently must have had a positive experience or else why would they bring their children on such a trip? These children know more about Sierra Leone than a tourist (are there tourists in Salone yet?) and probably even speak or understand a little Krio or Mende or Temne or some other local language. Many of these children grew up eating groundnut soup, cassava leaf, potato leaf and fried plantains. They have heard the merits of Star beer discussed in detail and they know how much it cost in the 70s. They are sick of the home slide shows and the same stories that are dragged out every time a fellow RPCV comes to visit. Laurie knew full well who Rose and Pa Coker were and Rose was waiting at the airport to meet her.

Freetown left Laurie cold. She found it big, busy and dirty. As a quiet and somewhat reserved person, I think she was overwhelmed by its noise and aggressiveness. Freetown did not come out of the war for the better. The crowds are bad enough, but those piles of trash on the sides of the road are just incredibly repulsive. I never thought I would see refuse that a Freetown dog would ignore, but it is everywhere. The guesthouse we stayed in for the first couple of nights did little to make her feel welcome either. The walls holding out the city also held her in and there was little inherent beauty in the grounds to make her want to stay. Just concrete and metal and humidity.

Only upcountry did she begin to understand what it is about Sierra Leone that has such a hold on her mother and father. The guesthouse at the Cheshire Home in Bo is the complete opposite of the first guesthouse in Freetown. It is cheerful and warm and welcoming.

Visiting with the handicapped children who live at the Home was a delightful experience and having our lodging money going to support them was a good use of our money. The Cheshire Home guesthouse has a pleasant sitting room area where we could visit with the various friends who dropped by and friends dropped by on a regular basis. Usually they were there when we woke up and there when we went to bed. Someone was always sending food over and there was a fridge full of cold Star, soft drinks and bottled water at a reasonable price.

While Bo has certainly changed too and is not the same old Wild West biker town of the 70s, it has retained more of its personality than Freetown did. Rose has reopened Coker's Saloon although it no longer takes up the whole corner of the intersection. She has a solar panel in the courtyard out back although I am not sure what it powered or if it was even hers. She is dyeing gara again and making beef sandwiches and running off anyone she thinks is up to no good. Pa Coker would be proud of Rose and her business-savvy dealings. The British soldiers who are in Bo working with the local authorities have adopted the bar as their own and "autographed" pictures of Her Majesty adorn the walls. They have financed a generator and all is right in that little corner of the world. I spent a couple of very pleasant interludes visiting with the legendary Bob Moran and Ma Rose. Bo also boasts the availability of affordable Internet cafes including the brand new business center very near the lorry park. This newest Internet center was made possible by the work of our own FoSL Board member Anthony McMillon.

But nothing can come close to the experience of life in the villages. We had been in Mandu, Jim's village, for no more than five minutes before the women had Laurie pulled off the veranda and dancing down the street. She had tears running down her cheeks. She was totally unprepared for the excitement that her visit caused in her father's village. The people were appreciative of the fact that he cared enough about them to send her. I can't imagine any place in the States that could make a visitor feel as special and as welcome as Mandu made Laurie feel. I will be always indebted to the women of Mandu for caring about my child. There is no doubt in my mind that if she had to stay there for whatever reason, she would have been cared for, safe and loved.

Our village visits were as one would expect. In one day Laurie was given the goat, two country cloths, five chickens, honey, and an untold number of bananas, plantains, pineapples and cucumbers. We spent our time visiting friends and projects. There was never enough time to see everyone and every thing. On the day of the visit to Mandu, we started with a brief visit to Danballa. There we were served a huge plate of rice and ate until we were stuffed. On to a small nearby village to visit a project being funded by a friend. Another

huge plate of rice - more eating. After that we went to Mandu and, you guessed it, another enormous feast. The last visit of the day was to a village which currently has no school. Two friends and I are sending one young man to BoTeacher's College and he has agreed to return to the village to teach when he completes the courses. Of course, a huge feast had to be attended. At this point, we were no longer finding room to hide any food. Even our Sierra Leonean friends traveling with us were beginning to have difficulty and the whole scene resembled a bad sitcom.

Sierra Leone has retained her method of treating visitors as if they are the most special people in the world. We were certainly "held fine" in all of our visits to all of the places we traveled.

Work is progressing around the country. I felt that life appeared to be more "normal" than when I was there in 2004. More children appeared to be partaking in educational opportunities although we were there during the summer break. Kids spoke of school and school uniforms were visible every place we traveled. People were selling their wares on the sides of the road just as they did when I lived there. The various public transportation methods all seemed to be getting plenty of business. Lorries and vans were loaded with people and wares traveling in every direction. No place that we visited made us feel unwelcome or strange. Even the little children didn't seem as awed by us as I felt they were when I was there in 2004. In all of the Internet cafes we visited there were ex-pats coming and going checking email and surfing the web. Sitting right by their sides were Sierra Leoneans doing the same. It's not your mama's Salone any more.

I asked Laurie this week if she would ever think of going back for another visit. She said yes with no hesitation. I think she finally got a real look at some of the things her father and I have tried to impart to her. She has a greater appreciation for what she has and the opportunities afforded her. She has seen poverty and she has seen friendship. She understands there is a world beyond Athens, Georgia and a visitor in her home would know immediately that the décor isn't Old South.

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**Need a calendar? See page 17**

**Gay Wilentz, RPCV 1977-1979, Passes.**

Gay Wilentz, a humanitarian, pioneer, scholar, teacher, and mentor, passed away on Monday, February 6, 2006. She suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease.

Dr. Wilentz was born September 1, 1950. At the time of her passing, Dr. Wilentz was a professor, the Director of Ethnic Studies, and Co-Coordinator of the Multicultural Literature Concentration in the Department of English at East Carolina University. Gay's experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Sierra Leone from 1977 to 1980 inspired a passionate interest in African Literature that led to her pursuit of graduate studies in African, African-American, and Caribbean Literature at the University of Texas, where she was awarded her Ph.D. in 1986. [*Wilentz* continued on page 18]

The **2007 International Calendar** produced by the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Wisconsin is available through FoSL. In addition to volunteers' photographs from host countries around the world, the calendar includes historic days, holidays and holy days from many cultures. A portion of the proceeds will go toward FoSL activities.

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[Wilentz continued from page 17] After receiving her doctorate degree, Wilentz began working as an Associate Professor in the English Department at East Carolina University in 1988. In 1991, her research led her to Belize, where she was on several occasions a Visiting Professor at the University of Belize. Gay once said that "the telling of stories, passing them from one to the other, is what we call orature. Instead of literature, it's orature, a way of passing down tradition." Gay passed this "orature" down to generations of students by being the conduit between the University of Belize and East Carolina University. She annually recruited students from Belize to earn their Master of Arts degree at ECU and she brought students from ECU to Belize to experience the study abroad program at the University of Belize. Gay was an intellectual mentor, a nurturer of minds and souls, and introduced numerous students to unconventional learning, literature, and culture.

Dr. Gay Wilentz was widely recognized for her professional service and performance as a professor, scholar, and researcher. In 2004, she received East Carolina University's Lifetime Achievement Award for Excellence in Research and Creative Activity. She was a recipient of the Fulbright Scholarship wherein she taught at the University of Nigeria. Additionally, she received the Department of English Award for Excellence in Teaching, the North Carolina Board of Trustees Award for Teaching Excellence, the Z. Smith Reynolds Award, and a multitude of other honors.

Gay's books included two critical studies published by prestigious university presses. *Binding Cultures: Black Women Writers in Africa and the Diaspora*, (Indiana UP, 1992) examined women's roles in the transmission of culture on both sides of the Atlantic. Her second book was *Healing Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Disease* (Rutgers UP, 2000) which explores the relationship between culture and health. In that work, Wilentz linked feminist and cultural literary theory with developments



in medical anthropology and traditional healing strategies

Gay will always be treasured for her altruistic spirit, her relentless pursuit of educational advancement for all, and her gift of life through teaching. Donations in Gay's honor can be made to Batovi Instituto Organico-Internacional (BIO Uruguay), Tacuarembó, Uruguay and sent to the Gay Wilentz BIO Uruguay Fund, c/o John Sabella, PO Box 146, Stokes, NC 27884

Kidney, Anna HARLEMVILLE, N.Y. Anna Kidney, 45, of Harlemville, died Friday, November 24, 2006 at her residence after a long illness. Anna was born in Maracaibo, Venezuela. Anna graduated from the University of Florida and was a Peace Corps member who served in the Sierra Leone. She moved to N.Y. in 1993 to pursue a Eurythmy degree at the Spring Valley Waldorf School. Her anthroposophical interest took her to Hawthorne Valley where she met and married the love of her life, John Kidney. After living in Australia for 6½ years, they returned to Hawthorne Valley this spring

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