

THE GRIOT

Volume XIII Issue 1

the Friends of Mali Newsletter

Spring 2004



Letter from the President

Greetings from Washington DC-

I hope this newsletter finds everyone happy and healthy. As we approach the second anniversary of our group, I'd like to thank all of you for your continued support and participation. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the FOM board for their hard work and dedication in pushing the Friends of Mali forward. We've seen a lot of growth in the past year and we hope to continue to build on our strengths.

As always, we are looking for you, our members, to get involved in helping us make this group truly exceptional. We want to use this year to really build our membership and make the communication and ties within our group stronger in a number of ways. We got an overwhelmingly positive response to our email calling for regional reps. Thank you to those that have agreed to take on the position. You will be instrumental in strengthening and reaching out to those interested in Friends of Mali at the local level.

In order to better serve the membership, please find on the last page a Members Survey. The executive board would like a better understanding of the activities which are a priority for the members of the organization. Please fill out the survey and return to Sabrina Washington by April 30.

Our next step is to update our website. We hope that the new website will not only give you access to the latest news about Mali and related activities, but more importantly, it will help you communicate more easily with each other. Stay tuned for more information about this project. More importantly, if you would like to be involved, please send me an email.

Lastly, we are planning on reaching out to future FOM members as they are leaving for in-country service. We are currently working on putting together a kit for the new volunteers that they can use during their service.

We look forward to your participation. Contact us with your ideas, comments, and suggestions. Thank you for continuing to spread the word.

K'an soon!

Sumana Ramruddin

Making Strides: Peace Corps Mali's Annual Youth Retreat

Written by Synda K. Mahan/PCV

They say that life is a journey of 1000 miles and that journey begins with a single step. In some cases, it can be 1222 kilometers and begin with a two-day bus ride. That was the farthest distance traveled by a participant attending the 4th Annual Girls' and Boys' Youth Retreat sponsored by Peace Corps Mali's Gender and Development Committee (GAD). The 74 participants, aged 12-19, came from cities, towns, and villages located throughout six regions of the country. For one week they embarked on an adventure through intense education, inspiration, and cross-cultural interaction designed to stress the importance of gender equality among the next generation.



After submitting an essay, audiotape, drawing, or other personal statement that answers the question, What can youth do to improve Mali, those selected then venture to Bamako. For many of these children, this is their first time away from home (for one child, it marks his first time in a car). They are faced with the challenge of meeting other young people with various levels of schooling, diverse backgrounds, and ethnolinguistic differences from across this large and varied nation. Reaching another milestone for GAD, this year these individuals include 'at-risk' participants from settings such as trafficking and run-ins with the law. Their involvement was due to a collaboration between Peace Corps and UNICEF's Children's Protection Division. Upon arrival, the participants form teams, and each chooses a name and "dugutigi" (leader); a reference point that every member - regardless of their background - understands.

Over the course of the week, the teens take many steps and make many advancements in self-exploration, their futures, and the future of their country. They actively learn about nutrition, hygiene, the importance of washing one's hands with soap. They grow to understand how to maintain a balanced diet by asking questions such as "Is fish a meat?" They look at treated and untreated water under a microscope to see how simple water purification would prevent widespread parasites and river blindness. Malian doctors

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"Kusu kang boro gana, a hima a ma a denjo tan"

A man should feed the fire under the pot from which he eats.

Songhai proverb - courtesy of John Hutchinson, Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures, Boston University



African Cup of Nations Mali's Fourth Place Finish by West African Rivals

The Mali Eagles went home with a fourth place finish in the 2004 African Cup of Nations football tournament held in Tunisia. The tournament, which began on January 26, ended for Mali on February 13 at the hands of the Nigeria Super Eagles 2-1. This is the second time that Nigeria secured third place in the Cup of Nations and Mali came home with a fourth place finish. As you all might remember, the 2002 African Cup where Cameroon took home the cup and host Mali, surprising the world, took a fourth place finish. Mali was also the runner-up in their debut appearance at the Nations Cup in 1972, losing the trophy to Congo 3-2. They have also played in two other semifinals, in 1994 and 2002, when they staged the tournament. The Mali Eagles made a fantastic run up to the semi finals of this 2004 tournament in Tunisia. After squeezing past Guinea in the quarterfinals as a result of shot allowed by goalkeeper Kemoko Camara, the Eagles were overwhelmingly shut down by Morocco, 0-4, in their bid for the finals. The loss to Morocco set Mali against its West African rival Nigeria for third place.

The Malian team had concerns about Nigeria prior to the match. Lagos' Daily Champion reported Malian captain Mahamadou Diarra saying "I respect Nigeria a lot. They have so many experienced players and when I saw the list of the players they had picked for this tournament, I knew they meant business."

Their fears were founded. Seventeen minutes into the match, Mali's Sammy

Traore was booked for his untidy challenge on Pius Ikedia resulting in a free-kick with an even greater penalty. BBC African Footballer of the Year Nigerian Jay-Jay Okocha's shot from 30 yards beat Mahamadou Sidibe in the Mali goal. Before halftime, Okocha played a neat one-two with Ifeanyi Udezue before curling a delightful cross deep into the Malian box which Osaze Odemwingie needed to score his third goal of the tournament. Just when it seemed Nigeria might increase their lead, most notably through the powerful running of forward John Utaka, Mali halved the deficit. Super Eagles Vincent Enyeama saved a 30-yard free-kick from Djibril Sidibe on the hourmark, but the Nigerian keeper could do nothing to stop forward Janvier Abouta scoring on his Nations Cup debut ten minutes later. Abouta received a long pass on the left-hand side of the penalty area from Sidibe in the centre-circle and let the ball bounce once before drilling a volley across Enyeama 70 minutes into the game. But it was already too for the Eagles. "I am disappointed because we failed to clinch the third place which would have meant a lot to us but our future is bright," according to Malian striker Frederic Kanoute quoted by BBC Sport.

Coverage largely compiled and excerpted from BBC Sport. Other sources include All Africa.com and CAFonline. Anyone willing to provide periodic coverage of the Malian Eagles through the 2004 Olympic and 2006 World Cup qualifying rounds for The Griot please contact newsletter@friendsofmali.org

Country Footnotes

PC Mali Country Director Byron Battle was reassigned to open the new Peace Corps program in Mexico. Cheryl Turner, APCD of Health and Water Sanitation, is acting Country Director.

Josh Rosenfeld and Christine Danton observed the installation of the first payphone in Bla. Bla has over 15 phone boutiques, Kemei has one phone booth, and Yangasso at least three.

It all started with a little song about rabbits! Jumping off the path paved by Greg Flatt, a Peace Corps band led by PCV Adam Klein is traveling around Mali performing songs based on educational animations from all sectors with up-tempo beats with the help of SPA funding. There are rumors of a video for ORTM and a record deal.

Photograph to the right: Mali on the Web - African workers construct bridge pilings at Mahina (Mali) in the Upper Senegal basin about 1895 *A Trip on the Dakar Niger Railroad* by Jim Jones <http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his311/slides/slide4.htm>

and peer counselors talk to them about AIDS, STDs, family planning, and contraception. Afterwards, many children said the most important thing they learned at the retreat was how to put a condom on properly. They shadow a Malian professional – visiting places such as a Bogolan gallery, dentist, and local hospital - to see how these people have balanced traditional dignity and their ambitions. They discuss gardening, chicken amelioration, field crops, tree grafting, and test plots. They use computers and the internet, most for the first time.

Leadership skills are encouraged, and they are given responsibilities such as dish washing, translating, and community conduct reinforcement. An open environment is fostered in order to spawn questions. They brainstorm steps they can take when they return home; exploring everything from creating youth groups to modifying their own behavior and serving as examples.

The kids have a relay race containing tasks to be completed to foster teamwork. They work together to present the differences between their regions using pictures, skits, song and dance. After ice breakers and games, they discuss what important lesson it was designed to teach them; "how to work as a team," and "that we are all different, but have many things in common," are just two examples.

This year almost 30 local businesses assisted with various donations that included transport from a bus company, a 375 Kg rice, sugar and salt donation, and various Malian professionals hosting children for Career Day. GAD also collaborated with two Malian NGOs as well as UNICEF, an international NGO. Furthermore, two school teachers and four participants from last year served as counselors, helping us take our steps into the future.



Northern Malians Written Out of History

A Book Review of Joy Masoff's
MALI: LAND OF GOLD & GLORY
by Larry Childs

I was initially excited by MALI: LAND OF GOLD & GLORY by Joy Masoff. Most impressive is her ability to bring this significant and under-recognized period (14 – 16th centuries) of African history to life for elementary school teachers and children. The combined use of age-appropriate text, voice of the Griot, and graphics make it compelling and hard to put down. All those elements and the narrative is still mostly accurate. However there are several factual omissions and errors that mislead the reader. Since the book is beginning to enjoy widespread recognition for introducing a positive and 'glorious' portrayal of African history, its faults must be closely examined.

Masoff's portrayal of Mande peoples as solely responsible for the greatness of the Malian Empire is inaccurate. In fact there was much more of a sharing in this legacy with 'non-Mande' peoples. Of particular note are the Amazigh peoples inclusive of Amazigh (Berbers) prominent in northern Africa, related Tamashek (Tuareg) peoples of Mali and surrounding countries to the north and east, as well as Arab peoples, and others. To better understand the

role of these differing peoples consider the trans-Saharan trade. It was guided and protected largely by Amazigh and Arab peoples and was essential for the phenomenal growth of the commercial, social, scholarly, and religious traditions of Mali. These peoples were not only in the arid zones guiding and protecting caravans, they also lived in Malian cities where they assumed key roles in all aspects of urban development and governance during the Mali and Songhay periods. Though Masoff properly attributes the bend of the Niger River at Timbuktu and Gao as the locus of trade and geographically central to commercial and social advances, Amazigh peoples – so prominent in the region - are mentioned just in passing. A small but strange omission is no mention that the woman who founded Timbuktu, 'Buctou', was Amazigh and of Tamashek descent.

Another problem with the exaggerated prominence of Mande peoples is encouraging – perhaps inadvertently – an already rampant revisioning of African history along color lines – with emphasis on a black telling. US audiences have been particularly subject to portrayals of Africa as 'black'. This perspective falsely racializes the continent and denies the more complex dimensions of diversity and physical types that were well represented in the region historically, and that are still there today. To her credit Masoff does not reference skin color as a means to characterize peoples mentioned in the book.

Furthermore the reader is left with the impression that the height of civilization was reached under Mali. This impression is achieved in part by characterizing the Songhay Empire which followed Mali, as entirely despotic. Though Songhay was indeed despotic under Soni Ali (for just 15 years I believe) the portrayal of a steady decline thereafter is incorrect. The historic record clearly indicates that after the fall of Ali, Timbuktu scholars led a strong revival of the social traditions. Inspired by Islamic faith and African traditions, they continued to effectively encourage leaders across the region to embrace tolerance and honor diversity. Askia Mohamed is especially renowned for leading the Songhay Empire to unite western Africa and further develop the pacemaking traditions that had gained so much ground during the Malian period. This was achieved in spite of trade beginning to be drawn away from the Sahara towards sea routes to the south. The 16th century should therefore be characterized as a period of social progress despite an eroding economy.

In mis-characterizing Songhay, excluding mention of Gao as the capital, and not identifying the prominence of Amazigh/Tamashek influence - the Malian Empire has been artificially and unnecessarily pumped up. If the full character of Songhay and prominence of Askia Mohamed had been revealed, it would have only served to further credit Mali for the sustaining force of its great traditions – which was and is its real and enduring impact.

Building on this point, there is a general overemphasis in the book on material wealth and material achievements. Yet the pacemaking traditions of this era are the most enduring and substantive aspects of the historic legacy in Mali today. For instance, the current success with democratic governance in Mali has been directly attributed to popular association with Malian traditions as much as or more than to the influence of contemporary western notions of democracy. Many states and regions around the globe



Teacher Resources on the Web

The National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) and Peace Corps have collaborated to create the Peace Match Program (www.PeaceMatch.org). The goal is to increase the number of RPCV classroom presentations throughout the year by making it easier for returned volunteers to find a speaking opportunity and by helping teachers identify speakers willing to visit their classrooms. PeaceMatch connects Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) with teachers to bring the Peace Corps cross-cultural experience to students throughout the United States. If you are a classroom teacher looking for firsthand information on the and way of life of the people in the countries served by the Peace Corps, visit <http://www.peacematch.org>

Voices of Youth, UNICEF's interactive website for young people, distributes a newsletter bringing attention to the thoughts, reflections and suggestions for action on topics put forth by young people on the website's discussion boards. Available every second month (<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>), the newsletter is to further links between programming and the concerns of today's youth.

FRONTLINE/World, the PBS international news television show, has launched a new Educators Web site dedicated to helping teachers use FRONTLINE/World to introduce international topics into the classroom. With classroom activities focused on social studies disciplines such as Culture, Geography, Economics, History, and Politics, as well as cross-curricular activities in Math, Music, Art, and more, the new Educator Web site provides student-friendly television stories and Web features for the classroom. Visit the new Educators site online at: <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/educators/index.html>

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Grand Masters—Guitare et Voix

by Matthew Heberger, Segou Region, 1996-98

Our music reviewer is back after an absence while he was absorbed writing his Master's thesis at Tufts University in Boston. In this issue, the acoustic revolution continues with a pair of solid albums released last year by two venerable figures of Malian contemporary music.

Sigui, Djelimady Tounkara

Indigo, 2002

Guitarist Djelimady Tounkara has been a mover and shaker in the Malian music world since the 1960s. In the following decades, he earned international acclaim backing Salif Keita and then Mory Kante in the legendary Super Rail Band. *Sigui* is his first individual recording, and he has pulled together an ensemble of nine talented singers and musicians for this acoustic session. They lay down fine accompaniment to his acoustic guitar on the kora, ngoni, balafon, and djembe laying down fine accompaniment, which is nothing short of virtuosic.

However, it is Tounkara's adept finger picking style of playing that makes this album extraordinary. I love the mellow bluesy melodies in "Diaoura." One shortcoming of this album is that there are not more guitar solos, as in the flamenco-tinged "Samakoun."

The disc includes a few Mande griot standards, and some old Rail Band songs, thoroughly updated with a fresh sound. Lafia Diabaté (brother of Kassemady Diabate, reviewed below) and Mamany Keita lend vocals in soaring griot style. If you've got a halfway decent stereo you'll be able to appreciate the clarity and timbre of their golden voices. The recording quality is first rate—no screechy *baché* music here. Recommended if you want a very good recording solidly rooted in the Malian idiom... or if you're a guitar geek.



Kassi Kasse, Kassemady Diabate

Narada World, 2002

Kassemady Diabate is thought by many to have the best voice in Mali. He certainly comes from an esteemed pedigree. Both his brother, singer Lafia, and son, kora player Toumani, are famous musicians in their own right. Kassemady was born to a family of *jeli* in the Kela, "off the main dirt road some 6 km after Kangaba, where a sandy track takes you into a village of round thatched houses, with geometric patterns carved into the gray mud brick." This excerpt is from the unusually rich liner notes—while they don't provide lyrics, they do give several paragraphs of background for each song.

This acoustic recording was made on-site in an infirmary in his home village. A handful of songs are original compositions rooted in the tradition of *jeli* praise singing, such as "Naaren" and "Madu Jeli." Their sparing accompaniment allows Diabate's full, round voice to carry the song. A pair of rollicking Cuban-style numbers sung in Bambara are great fun. "Maimouna" was composed in the 1970s by Los Maravillas de Mali, whose founding members spent eight years in Cuba at the Havana Music Conservatory. The album takes on an ethnographic feel on a pair of tracks where hunters Zoumana Diawara and Yacouba Doumbouya join the group to play traditional melodies on the seven-stringed hunter's harp. Overall, an interesting album from the foremost practitioner of the griot style; while not an essential, a worthwhile addition to your collection.

****Next Issue:** *Kora versus balafon—adventurous young musicians push the musical boundaries of traditional instruments.*

Job Opportunity:

International Development Organization seeks a **Project Assistant** to support our International Programs in Mali. The successful candidate will have a minimum of 3 years of accounting experience and a BS in a related field. Professional working ability in French is preferred. Excellent computer, accounting, and word processing skills, including knowledge of Excel spreadsheets and accounting software. Quicken a PLUS. Experience working in Africa, Peace Corps or USAID a PLUS.

Responsibilities include logistic, accounting/financial reporting, and home office support of field based activities. Salary—mid to high 30's, commensurate with experience. Great Benefits Package.

[Inside Track: Hiring Manager says position is "most appropriate for entry level development folks...people just out of Peace Corps etc. or someone looking to break into development with no prior program mgt experience. Some travel to Mali might be required...but mostly based in Washington DC.]

National Cooperative Business Association

Attn: Human Resources

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Washington, DC 20005

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**Concert watch:

In 2004, favorites *Habib Koité* and *Bamada* are on tour, as is Senegalese star *Baaba Maal*. Visit their promoter's web site, <http://www.immworld.com> and click "Artists". RPCVs Matt Heberger,



Elizabeth Buckkius, Katie Lesesne and Heather McCurdy enjoy the Pre-Habib Koite and Bamana concert get-together in February 2004 in Boston. Know of any other concerts? Or great new music? Let Matt Heberger know via email at

treasurer@friendsofmali.org.

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Pedicures and Toh

by Perri Sutton

Two years to the day after COS, I found myself packing panjas and flip flops in a checkered rice bag once again. Thrilled to know I would soon be sweating and smiling among the smells, sights and sounds of Mali, I bid snowy Boston adieu, and boarded my plane with alacrity and. . . my laptop.

Greeted near the entrance of Senou International by the warm smile of Fofana and a computer printed sign with my name, I was shocked at the speed and order by which my luggage arrived and my passport stamped. Something about the peaceful ease I felt as we strolled past the bloodthirsty shark tank of airport taxi-tigs on our way to the project Land cruiser gave me an indication that this sojourn in Mali would be unlike any time I had spent as Meresougou Togo the PCV. After all, I was in Bamako to smooth out financial and programmatic issues for a sixteen million dollar health and education project, and three hour rounds of tea were not written into my USAID approved scope of work.

While in Bamako, I stayed at the home of our American project director, and worked from 9-5 in an air conditioned bureau where coworkers attempted to call me "Patron." Our cooks prepared such things as tofu tacos with Monterey jack cheese, and Pete's Coffee was freshly ground and served every morning. My tiled bedroom floor was mopped daily, and my clothes were cleaned by a washing machine and dryer. I had pedicures in the company of the Ambassador's wife, sipped Castels with the French as we applauded their children at the Hippodrome equestrian center, and celebrated the first night of Chanukah (in the midst of Ramadan) with all the Jewish ex-pats in Bamako. I was even coerced to attend an "African dance" class for rhythmically disadvantaged tubabs. Silent tears came to my eyes as I watched our director buy bananas from the American Cultural Center grocery store for 1 mille a piece.

These two weeks were emotional torment as I grappled to accept and make sense of this enigmatic side of Mali I was exposed to and expected to work within. Each night I said my Dogon prayers and

REUNIONS

Up for a Reunion Adventure.....!?!?

Ethan Salter is inviting RPCVs to join him at Black Rock City, home to the Burning Man event. Ethan will be there for the week long event from August 30 - September 6 with a block for Peace Corps people. Tickets are available at www.burningman.com for as many days as you can stay be it 1 or 7. Burning Man is an annual experiment in temporary community dedicated to radical self-expression and radical self-reliance. People make the journey to the Black Rock Desert for one week out of the year to be part of an experimental community, which challenges its members to express themselves and rely on themselves to a degree that is not normally encountered in one's day-to-day life. If you are interested, see the website or give Ethan a call at 775-747-5353. In Ethan's words, "It is a good excuse to see each other and go to the biggest hippie dippie counter culture thing in the world."

Winter 1993 Stage

Anyone who trained at Tubaniso from January - April 1993, your stage is planning a reunion. Please see Terry's post on the Friends of Mali website for information.

drifted into larium dreams of my family and friends in Koporo-pe, my Peace Corps village. I had every hope that my third and final week in Mali would be spent with them as planned, and that being in their presence would give me clarity of mind, and bring me back to the Mali I loved and longed for.

I counted my lucky dog-star when those hopes and dreams came true in this sandy village on the plain. I arrived and was immediately embraced with the love and laughter I remembered and that continues to reside there. My host mom's to was as thick as ever, and the tea as sweet as my memories. I held on to each greeting, and wanted every late night rap to last an eternity.

As the Dogon say, their relationships are like the roots of a calabash. During my stay, I was reminded to imagine those roots at every moment entwining every aspect of my life. Now, I keep that wisdom in my pocket wherever I go. It nourishes me as I sit in my cubicle toiling over budgets and expense reports, and grants me hope and humor when the world seems to make no sense.

Perri was a Health Education Volunteer in the Mopti Region from 1998 -2000.

Continued from page 3

boast a legacy of material wealth and power, but few – even in Africa - combined wealth with a social tradition and literary heritage emphasizing tolerance, peace and justice. In your book there are references to the warmth of contemporary Malians, but this characteristic is not connected well to these historic and living social traditions.

Exploring misrepresentation of culture further, the photo caption for the men on camels wearing turbans is wrong. They are described as 'Berber' yet clearly they are Tamashek/Tuareg. One reason this distinction is important is because peoples indigenous to Mali (in this case Tuaregs) are characterized as peoples seemingly 'from somewhere else'. Though related to Tuaregs, Berbers live primarily in Northern Africa not Mali. Another small but important point is that the caption beneath the photo of Tuareg boys says that they keep their face covered for religious reasons. In fact turban use is not at all related to their Islamic faith rather it is a cultural custom.

Also unfortunate is an exaggerated and negative characterization of the desert as a 'sand box' – as if nothing grows or flourishes there or anywhere in Mali these days. But today agriculture is the main pillar of the southern Malian economy. Though drought and desertification are prominent and catastrophic forces, an agro-pastoral economy is active in the northern Malian Sahel and Savanna today. Young people and educators in the United States should not be led to view the Malian arid zones, or deserts anywhere as a sandbox/wasteland, rather they are rich and diverse ecological zones where many species including humans and their ruminating animals have learned to thrive – though often on the edge.

Despite flaws this book has great promise. It requires only small revisions so that the next edition is more inclusive and historically accurate. Meanwhile the accompanying curriculum guide should be modified so that educators are aware of the problems and able to dispel myths of Mande over-representation in historic and present-day Mali.

Larry Childs is a co-founder and currently Vice President of the Timbuktu Heritage Institute. For additional information see www.timbuktuheritage.org

M e m b e r s h i p

Dear Member,

We have greatly appreciated your support during 2003, and hope that you will continue to support the organization in 2004!

With your support, Friends of Mali in the past year has:

- * Published 4 quarterly newsletters
- * Partnered with the Smithsonian in the 2003 Folklife Festival featuring over 200 Malian participants
- * Held a national reunion on the National Mall in Washington, DC on July 4th
- * Organized dozens of happy hours, potluck dinners, and other events where former volunteers, family, and friends reconnected and reminisced
- * Created of an informative website
- * Become "official" by drafting bylaws, filing incorporation papers in DC, and beginning the application for tax-exempt status with the IRS
- * Helped members find old friends and teammates through our membership directory
- * Linked with Calabash Music to provide MP3 world music downloads at low cost through the FOM website.

In 2004, your membership will continue to build on these activities and allow you to:

- * Help Friends of Mali pursue new activities, such as developing an educational toolkit for schoolteachers and outreach to PCT's during staging.
- * Support Friends of Mali in its mission goals, including support for current PC/Mali Volunteers and sponsoring nationwide get-togethers
- * Receive a 15% discount on all merchandise purchased through Friends of Mali
- * Access to the Members Area webpage, where you can look up old friends through our member database Receive the latest newsletter online
- * Participate in and vote on all group affairs, including

Ever wanted to be a Regional Rep?

As Friends of Mali enters the second year since a recent revival of activities, we are requesting your help in rebuilding the organization. We are looking for volunteers to help coordinate some of these activities by serving as regional representatives. One immediate source of help would involve a commitment to act as focal points for organizing periodic events and gatherings in your local area. Boston has been one of our hubs of national activity. Andrew Mitchell, Ann Bonner Carpenter and Jean Crawford (pictured) created their own affair in November 2003 at the Enormous Room in Cambridge, MA with Alexis Sham, Cindy Hellman, Greg Flatt and Heather McCurdy. All had a great time over excellent middle eastern food. If you are interested in becoming a regional representative, email Jumana Qumruddin at president@friendsofmali.org



MEMBER NOTES

An organization is only as strong as its membership! We are doing our best to ensure that we are responsive and serve the needs of all our members. We look forward to your continued input in order to better respond to your interests. Letters to the Editor, suggestions, announcements, comments, concerns and criticisms are all welcome.

Ala ka dogoni caman d'u ma (May God grant them many younger siblings) The FOM family congratulates former Tubani So language professors Abida Maiga and Binta Bocoum on the December 2003 arrival of their daughter Nora Maiga. And let's not forget our newest Segou chick Jade Sharkey, courtesy of hot momma Jackie Sharkey in October 2003.

Wedding Bells? Rumor has it that Esther Langford got married in December 2003. Congratulations!

All around the world....The latest tidbits from the Peace Corps grapevine about RPCVs near and far....

Pattie Murray (Kemini) moved to Norfolk area of Virginia to begin work as a recreational therapist. Andrew Barnes (Wakoro) is working for Peace Corps headquarters in DC.

Sylvie and Denise Mortimer gave a presentation on Mali to educator Bess Long's third grade class at the Key Immersion School in Arlington, Virginia

Guido Grasso-Knight, Heidi Voigt, Jessica Gorham and Sabrina Washington literally squeezed in a meal at local NYC favorite Panna II to celebrate Guido's birthday and to welcome Mark Nilles and Aisha Samples during their quick "Spring Break" trip to the Big Apple.

Diana Wolfe (Sikasso) and Susan Coke (Kayes) toured up the Pezac and Ollantytamba ruins and hiked up the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu during a break in Diana's 4th year clinic rotation in Peru. Quan Nyugen (Koulikoro) is in Malawi and Marie Bastin (Koulikoro) will be eating a lot of meat during her six month stay in Naimbia through Crisis Corps.

In case you missed it, the December 12-18, 2004 cover story of the Washington City Paper was dedicated to an article and photo essay by Shawn Davis on Joseph's House AIDS hospice. Check it out at <http://>

Nathan McClintock is teaching basic farming techniques at Central Carolina Community College in a course designed to help people who want to do agriculture work in developing countries. The course subtitle: "What I wish I'd known before I went off to the Peace Corps."

Cheap Seats! Literally!

If you are looking for inexpensive flights to Bamako check out Point Afrique website <http://www.point-afrique.com/> There is a special on flights from Paris to Bamako for 296 euros. Hop a cheap flight to Paris and you are in Mali for less than 700 bucks!

NPCA National Conference

Mark your calendar for August 5 to 8, 2004 at the Palmer House Hilton as nearly 2,000 RPCVs from around the country descend on Chicago. Register before March 31 to take advantage of special "early bird" registration fees. Additional discounts are available for seniors and recently returned PCVs (COS after Aug. 1, 2000). Registration fees range from \$95 to \$220.

FRIENDS OF MALI MEMBERS SURVEY

1. Please number the goals of Friends of Mali in their order of importance you.

- Promote an understanding of the people and culture of Mali, West Africa. Support the Peace Corps' third goal - to bring the world back home, by encouraging members to share their experiences with their own communities.
- Continue to promote understanding of, and goodwill towards, the United States of America in Mali.
- Promote sustainable development in Mali and support the Peace Corps mission in Mali, including financial support for certain projects.
- Serve as the alumni organization for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Mali, West Africa. Organize meetings, reunions and other events to bring members together.

2. Name three activities that you would like Friends of Mali to initiate or participate in.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. What types of events would you commit 2 hours to during any given month? (Please check all that apply)

- Social activities (ie. happy hours, group dinner, entertainment events)
- Presentation to Peace Corps Trainees during Staging
- Outreach to New Members
- Telephone Calls
- Presentations to community Groups
- Fund-raising for Peace Corps Mali projects
- Curriculum Development
- Other _____

4. What talents or skills can you contribute to the Friends of Mali? (Please check all that apply)

- Database Management
- Web design
- Writing
- Photography
- Poetry
- Organizing events
- Fund-raising
- Availability for Informational Interviews/Career networking
- Other _____

Please list your contact information if you would like to be contacted regarding your comments:

Name: _____

Email Address: _____ Telephone Number: _____

Please return all surveys to Sabrina Washington by April 30 electronically at newsletter@friendsofmali.org or via mail at PO Box 27417 Washington DC 20038-7417. Thanks for your help!