

## Wil van Koningsbrugge gets ready for Nigeria

*Wil van Koningsbrugge is one of three current VSO volunteers FON has “adopted” through the contributions and enthusiasm of our members. She is scheduled to begin her two-year assignment in Abuja in October. Here is the text of an e-mail she sent us in August.*

I am a 59-year-old woman, number 5 in a poor family of 8 kids. I was forced to leave school early without a diploma to help look after my sickly mum and to earn some money myself. But my mum made sure I went to evening classes and I continued doing that after I got married and raised a family. When both my kids went to school full time, I enrolled in the English Department of the University of Amsterdam and paid for my studies by teaching English to small kids. As a result I rolled into a teaching career quite naturally.

For the last 19 years I have been a teacher of English at a tertiary business college, where I managed the placement agency



for the finance courses. When this college merged with a bigger one, I was offered early retirement. So suddenly there I was, mother of two kids who had long since set out on lives of their own and grandmother

of two lovely girls, both nearly 4. (I will sorely, sorely miss my family, but fortunately they are not dependent on me.)

I found myself with a whole life before me and the chance to do what I would like to do: go somewhere where I could make a difference. I wanted to go where people are still hungry for education. And so I started to look around for possibilities.

I didn't want to do it completely on my own, though. Apart from the tremendous hassle of having to invent every wheel myself, I didn't think I would be very effective. So I applied to VSO and managed to get through their assessments. I thought I was going to be a teacher trainer somewhere in Asia, as most of

the requests from volunteers seemed to come from there. However, I preferred Africa, since that seemed a fascinating continent to me.

At first I was rather doubtful about the assignment. My experience with teaching primary school age children is almost non-existent. On the other hand, I have gained management experience running a placement agency, and I was really interested in the job with VSO - quite a challenge, I think. So I asked one of the primary schools in my neighborhood if they would allow me to do a placement with them, and they were very welcoming. So during the last 3 months I have worked my way through 8 grades of primary teaching and enjoyed every minute of it. I hope this basic experience will be sufficient to at least know what I am talking about when dealing with my Nigerian colleagues.

Currently, I am teaching myself Hausa, and I am reading every Nigerian author I can put my hands on. I have found the works of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Buchi Emecheta fascinating, and I can't get enough. The only drawback is that these authors all grew up in the southern states. Since I am going to be stationed in Abuja, *I would love to read also about the central and northern states. So if any of you readers can advise me on authors who speak of the northern areas, I would be most grateful. Please send your thoughts to the FON members group on Google, so we can have a discussion about Nigerian authors.*

It will be a joy to keep you informed of my experiences.

With kind regards,

Wil

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Friends of Nigeria, Inc.  
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**Editor**

Warren Keller  
warrendkk@yahoo.com  
(510) 524-0571

**Assistant Editor**

David Head  
nimbus9@yahoo.com

**Nigeria News Editor**

Virginia DeLancey  
v-delancey@northwestern.edu

**Book Editor**

David Strain  
destrain@pacbell.net

**Production Staff**

Earl (Buzz) Welker  
mysk3@aol.com  
Steve Manning  
smanning@ipa.net  
Alice O'Grady  
arogradey@hotmail.com  
Mary Ann Palmieri  
palmieri@crocker.com

**Printer**

Leesburg Printing Company  
Leesburg, Florida

**FON**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**President**

Gregory Zell  
gregzell@mindspring.com

**Vice President**

Mike Goodkind  
mgoodkind@earthlink.net

**Membership Chair/Treasurer**

Peter J. Hansen  
pjhansen@ia.net  
(319) 351-3375

**Secretary**

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destrain@pacbell.net  
Lucinda Boyd  
cindarboyd@mindspring.com  
Virginia DeLancey  
v-delancey@northwestern.edu

Walter Lewis  
wtl2@aol.com

Andy Philpot  
awphilpot@mountaincable.net  
Bob Wynne  
SandyWynne@peoplepc.com

**Web Site**

**friendsofnigeria.org**

**Website Manager**

Greg Jones

**Web site Newsletter Manager**

CLeigh Purvis Gerber

## Letters to the Editor

**From Karen Keefer (26) 66-68**

### Rediscover your Roots

“Disappointing” is the word for FON President Zell’s opinions about “The 45th Anniversary,” as expressed in the “Mutterings and Musings” section of the Summer 2006 FON Newsletter. I had heard that this is not the first time President Zell has criticized the NPCA without offering any suggestions on how to improve NPCA, or pitching in to help it become strong. It’s much easier to tear something down than to build something strong. So I call on President Zell to work on rediscovering the youthful positive and



altruistic spirit he must have had when he volunteered to join the Peace Corps years ago - a period of time when he wanted to help others develop a better world. We need that kind of leadership in our organization and in working to make NPCA become the organization all of us want it to be.

Karen Keefer  
(Offa, Kwara)

## 5 Years On

**From the President - Greg Zell (06) 62-64**

About the time you read this, Friends of Nigeria will be installing a new board and juggling our officers. Though there are still some familiar faces for continuity, this board features the first majority of new members since the one that took office shortly after 9/11/01. I was elected President then with the hope that my tenure would see a return of Peace Corps to Nigeria. Five years later, I do not think we are any closer to a return. The oft cited “safety of the PCV” issue seems overworked. They are not oil workers, and VSO has never left the country. We are all mindful of so many other current Peace Corps countries with danger issues.

The period has not been without its successes. FON is well known within the Peace Corps administration. We remain an involved voice at NPCA, an organization whose founders and reformers have included FON members.

Our most significant achievement though, I believe, is our support for VSO volunteers in Nigeria. From the amount of your contributions, apparently you share my enthusiasm. For the immediate future, this is as close to a return as we can get. Their reports from in-country excite our senses and renew our fading memories.

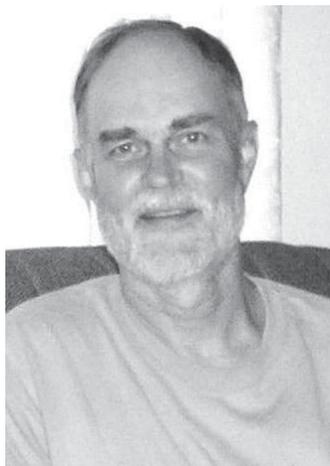
This issue of the newsletter also marks the beginning of a new editorial team in charge. We are grateful that Warren Keller and David Head have volunteered to take this on. [*More on page 3.*]

What can I say about the previous editor? Witty. Mischievous. Truly original. Dedicated. Just foreign enough to be fascinating. Award-winning. Thank you Anne Philpot for letting FON have Andy for awhile. Without a VSO voice on our board, how would we have managed to find such a worthwhile project? Thank you, Andy. You can avoid my occasional inquiries by changing you email address, but do you really want a new phone number too?

## The New Editorial Team

### Warren Keller (23) 66-67, Editor

After being evacuated from Nigeria (actually we still think of it as Biafra) in the summer of 1967, my wife Jody (Jo Anne, also (23) 66-67) and I spent a second Peace Corps year teaching in western Uganda in Hoima.



Returning to Berkeley in 1968, I spent the next 32 years working for IBM as a systems engineer and as a data base instructor until retiring in 2001. Jody went to law school in the 70s, then worked mostly in private practice doing court-appointed criminal defense appeals, including two death penalty cases.

We have three children and three grandchildren. John, born in 1969, lives near us with his wife and 18-month-old twins (boy and girl) and works as a data base programmer at UC Berkeley. Nina, adopted at seven weeks in 1970, lives in Maui and works in the tourist industry. Dianne, born in 1971, lives in Oregon with her five-year-old son and works as a tax auditor for the State of Oregon.

We recently traveled in Botswana and South Africa and spent a “sabbatical” year in Provence. Other interests include backpacking

### David Head (11) 64-66, Assistant Editor

I majored in chemistry at Notre Dame and assumed that was what I'd do with my life. In the Peace Corps I was sent to a small school in the Midwest region, one that had no running water, electricity – or chemistry classes. Instead I taught math. After



returning to the US and grad school, I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area, armed with a Ph.D. in organic chemistry. I've spend most of my adult life in IT, not chemistry. It's a young person's field, however, and I've reached the age where it's difficult to find a job or to keep one. So I've returned to chemistry. I have completed all requirements for a single subject teaching credential in chemistry except for the student teaching part. I'm trying to get a job teaching

chemistry and/or physics starting soon. So in a sense, I'm returning to the vocation that began in the Peace Corps: teaching.

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(I just spent a week in Yosemite), volunteer activities (schools, neighborhood association, politics), and continuing education (from astronomy and geology to philosophy and art history).

### Volunteers Wanted - Section Editors for the Newsletter

Andy told me what an easy job this would be. In the midst of my first newsletter, I'm not so sure.

Here's how you can help - by signing on as a new section editor. Your name will listed on page 2 of each issue along with our two current section editors: Virginia DeLancey (Nigeria News) and David Strain (Books). Think of the glory! Create your own title or pick one of these:

- **Development Editor** (my own favorite): Numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations are sponsoring development projects in Nigeria. Of course, we all know about VSO, but who are the others? What are they doing? What success have they had? Where in Nigeria do they operate?

- **Arts Editor** - music, theater, art, etc. Pick one area or several - your choice.

- **Political Editor** - news or opinions to help us understand the always changing politics of Nigeria.

- **Peace Corps Nigeria History Editor** - start with your own group - document your training program and group experiences in Nigeria. Then, recruit others to help with their groups.

Write your own material or gather it from the internet or wherever - use your creativity! No obligation to contribute for each issue, just when you have the time and inclination. Doesn't this sound easy? (Just ask Andy!) If you are interested, please contact me, Warren Keller, (510) 524-0571 or warrendkk@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance.

# Nigeria News

Edited by Virginia DeLancey (04) 62–64

## President Obasanjo Accepts Ruling to Bar Third Term

President Obasanjo accepted a Senate ruling on May 18 that bars him from a third term in office and called on his party's leaders to prepare for elections next year. The campaign to amend Nigeria's constitution and allow Obasanjo a third term had raised fears of a return to autocracy where 15 years of military rule ended with Obasanjo's election in 1999. The Senate voted to throw out the bill that proposed an amendment to allow Obasanjo a third term. (Source: *Chicago Tribune*, 5/19/06; *New York Times*, 5/17/06, 5/19/06).

## President Obasanjo Promises to Build a Nuclear Power Plant

President Obasanjo has pledged to build a nuclear power plant within 12 years. He announced the commencement of the national nuclear electricity program at the inauguration of the Board of the Nigeria Atomic Energy Commission (NAEC), a state nuclear advisory body. He stated that with the inauguration of the Board, Nigeria's quest for energy self-sufficiency had begun. He also maintained that any nuclear capacity developed would be for peaceful purposes, as Nigeria is committed to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Analysts have noted, however, that existing systems would have to be upgraded before Nigeria could benefit from a nuclear plant. They pointed out that there is not much point in generating power than cannot be distributed due to damage and poor maintenance of the system. (Source: *New York Times*, 8/1/06; *Nigeria First* [Abuja], 7/31/06; *This Day* [Lagos], 8/1/06; *Vanguard* [Lagos], 8/1/06).

## Candidate for Lagos State Governorship Murdered

A candidate for Governor of Lagos State, Anthony Olufunso Williams, campaigning on the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) ticket, was

strangled and stabbed to death in his bedroom on July 27 after returning home from a political meeting. His body was found bound at the hands and feet and gagged. Family members indicated that he was killed by six men who gained entry to his home in the early hours of the morning.

Chief Funso Williams was contesting the Lagos governorship against the incumbent Bola Tinubu of the opposition Alliance for Democracy (AD) party. The Lagos State Government offered a reward of 10 million naira for information leading to the arrest of the killers and Governor Tinubu banned all political rallies in the state for two weeks. President Obasanjo, who heads the PDP, also ordered a high-level investigation.

The murder has caused fears of increased violence as the April 2007 elections draw near. It occurred just three weeks after Chief Jesse Aruku, candidate for the governorship of Plateau State on the ACD (Advanced Congress of Democrats) ticket, was shot to death in Jos by unknown gunmen. (Sources: *Daily Champion* [Lagos], 7/28/06; *Daily Trust* [Abuja], 7/28/06; IRIN, 7/28/06; *This Day* [Lagos], 7/28/06, 8/1/06).

## Ten Thousand Nigerians Stranded in Morocco

The Special Assistant to the President on Migration and Humanitarian Affairs disclosed at a conference on internally displaced persons in ECOWAS that about 10,000 Nigerians are stranded in Morocco, unable to migrate to Spain and other parts of Europe through North African routes (The 10,000 includes those who have been officially identified, but it is believed that the figure is higher). She said that there is a growing number of illegal immigrants from Africa, particularly Nigeria, who try to brave the Mediterranean ocean to reach Spain but end up in Morocco or Algeria.

The Nigerian government is collaborating with Moroccan authorities to repatriate those already in police custody. Some of the migrants have been in hiding for close to nine years, surrendering

themselves to authorities only when they can no longer bear the hardship associated with undocumented livelihood in a foreign land. (Source: *This Day* [Lagos], 4/30/06).

## Global Fund Suspends AIDS Grant, Funds Malaria Eradication

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria suspended \$50 million in grants to Nigeria's National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA) because of the country's failure to meet performance targets. The Fund suspended payment on two five-year grants after only two years because Nigeria had missed targets on anti-AIDS treatment access and other goals. However, AIDS grants of more than \$180 million, which the Fund had agreed on but not yet formally signed, and which are designated for international NGOs working in Nigeria, would not be affected by the suspension.

The Global Fund has also committed \$130 million for the eradication of malaria in Nigeria. Malaria is the most devastating disease in the country. The Global Fund is already distributing chemically treated bed nets and Artemisinin-based Combination Therapy (ACT) malaria drugs to children and expectant mothers. (Source: IRIN, 5/1/06; *This Day* [Lagos], 5/1/06).

## African Summit on HIV/AIDS Adopts Challenge to Governments

Nearly 40 African leaders met in early May at a 4-day summit in Abuja, "Universal Access to HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria Services by a United Africa by 2010" (UA by UA by '10), organized by the African Union. They met to review the status of implementation of the Declarations and Frameworks for Action on the 2000 Abuja Summit on Roll Back Malaria, and progress on the 2001 Abuja Declaration on AIDS, TB and Malaria. They also set bold new targets to be achieved by their governments by 2010.

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## Nigeria news...

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They pledged that at least 80 percent of those in need, especially women and children, should have access to HIV/AIDS treatment including antiretroviral drugs, care and support; that at least 80% of pregnant women would have access to medication for preventing mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) by 2010; and that at least 80% of target populations would have access to voluntary testing and counseling services. Although civil society organizations welcomed the ambitious new targets, it remains to be seen whether they will be met, as little progress has been made in implementing goals set in 2001.

While leaders reiterated their commitment to devote 15% of their national budgets to improving the health sector, the African Union found that Nigeria, Burundi, and Ethiopia had the worst record, having set aside only 4%, 3%, and 2% of their annual budgets respectively for health. Only one-third of African countries spend 10% of their budget or more on health. Yet, the Director-General of the African Council of AIDS Service Organizations (Africaso) stated that the 15% target was insufficient to address the challenge, although it was a starting point. The Head of the Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria accused African states of not taking the health sector as seriously as they should, which has caused them to lag behind the 15% target.

The special summit was also held to strengthen the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) within the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to include control of HIV/AIDS, TB, and Malaria in its reviewed priorities. It was to conclude with the preparation of the Statement of African Leaders for presentation to the World Health Assembly in May 2006, Africa's Common Position to the UNGASS on AIDS in June, which will review the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on AIDS, and the Abuja Call for Accelerated Action on HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria which will be presented to the Ordinary Session of

the AU Assembly in July 2006 for endorsement. (Source: IRIN, 5/4/06, 5/7/06, 5/8/06; *This Day* [Lagos], 4/29/06).

### International Crisis Group Publishes New Briefing

The International Crisis Group, in a new background briefing, claims that a potent cocktail of poverty, crime and corruption is fueling a militant threat to Nigeria's reliability as a major oil producer. It maintains that the Nigerian government needs to forge far-reaching reforms to administration and its approach to revenue sharing, the oil companies to involve credible, community-based organizations in their development efforts and Western governments to pay immediate attention to improving their own development aid. See: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=4310> (Source: Global Development Briefing, 8/3/06).

### Journalists Face New Threats to Freedom of Expression

The head of the National Human Rights Commission, Bukhari Bellow, was sacked after condemning the arrest of two journalists by the Nigerian secret police. The journalists had been charged with sedition over news reports questioning the true age and cost of a jet recently added to President Obasanjo's fleet. They were accused of conspiring "to bring into hatred or contempt or excite disaffection against the person of the president or the government of the federation." Human rights activists fear that the action against Bellow and the journalists signals a trend of growing repression of freedom of expression and the press by Obasanjo's government. Human rights lawyer Clement Nwankwo believes that the recent moves by authorities might stem from Obasanjo's failure to secure a change in the constitutional two-term limit; he believes that Obasanjo is moving to clamp down on those who opposed the third-term project and teach them a lesson. Bello had earlier criticized African leaders who seek to prolong their rule.

On July 26, Nigeria's National Assembly also outlined a series of harsh requirements that media organizations must meet before their reporters are re-accredited to cover the activities of the Senate and House of Representatives. Moreover, the accreditation of journalists has been revoked until they meet the new requirements. To be re-accredited, the journalists must present current tax clearance certificates of their media establishments and also present evidence that their organizations are legally registered. (Sources: International Freedom of Expression Exchange Clearing House [Toronto], Press Release, 7/27/06; IRIN, 7/14/06).

### World Bank Formalizes Accord with Nigeria

The World Bank formalized an accord to give Nigeria \$120 million to boost solid waste management and access to clean water in some areas of Lagos. It should increase the percentage of the population with access to safe water in selected areas and reduce flooding, as drainage should be increased throughout the city. It will also increase the percentage of garbage in Lagos that will be disposed of in landfills. (Source: *Vanguard* [Lagos], 8/1/06; Global Development Briefing, 8/3/06).

### Exxon Profits Increase by 36 Percent

Exxon Mobil reported an increase of 36 percent in second-quarter earnings as a result of strong oil and gas prices resulting from tensions in oil-rich regions of the world, increasing consumption in the U.S., China and India, and the beginning of production of the Erha project 60 miles off the coast of Nigeria in 3,900 feet of water. It is anticipated that with the Erha North satellite project scheduled to begin production in the third quarter, total Erha production would rise to 190,000 barrels a day by the end of the year. (Source: *New York Times*, 7/28/06).

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## Nigeria news...

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### Bird Flu Fears Decline

Three months after Africa's first cases were reported in northern Nigeria, bird flu became all but a memory for most Nigerians, as the number of reported cases declined. Kano was the worst hit area in Nigeria when the first cases were reported in February. Tens of thousands of birds were culled throughout the state as veterinary experts and poultry farmers battled to contain the deadly strain of the virus which can kill humans. The poultry trade nearly collapsed throughout more than a third of Nigeria's states, as the panicked public gave up eating chicken.

In mid-May, government officials reported that there had been no new outbreaks in the previous month. And, while cases had previously been reported in 13 states in addition to Abuja (as well as in Nigeria's immediate neighbors Cameroon and Niger and in nearby Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire), only three states continued to have active bird flu cases—Bauchi, Kano and Kaduna. However, international experts warned that it was too soon for Nigerians to drop their guard, as this could lead to another round of infections.

By June, the government had paid about \$180,000 compensation to 47 farmers in Kano State, home to about half of the 450,000 birds that had died or been culled in the country. The farmers demanded more than the \$2 for each chicken, saying this was just half the market price, but none of the farmers refused to take the government's offer. Some farmers were also unhappy because the payments only covered those birds which were killed by the authorities, not those that died from the disease.

Officials now believe that the flocks of migratory birds that flew south to Africa last fall did not carry the deadly bird flu virus or spread it during their annual journey. Specialists from Wetlands International, deputized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization sampled 7,500 African wild birds last winter and found no A(H5N1). Specialists

increasingly suspect that bird flu in African countries (in contrast to Europe), was introduced through imported infected poultry and poultry products. They believe that the strength of the virus among wild birds possibly weakened as the southward migration season progressed, which probably limited its spread in Africa. (Sources: BBC, 6/3/06; *New York Times*, 5/11/06; IRIN [Kano], 5/15/06).

### Gasoline Pipeline Explodes, Killing About 200

As many as 200 people were burned to death and dozens of others injured on May 12 in the fishing village of Ilado, about 30 miles east of Lagos. Gasoline gushing from a ruptured pipeline exploded as villagers scavenged for fuel. The pipeline, run by the state oil company, to transport fuel from a depot at the Lagos port for domestic consumption inland, was breached at several points. The preliminary investigation suggested that the incident was a result of vandalism, as more than 70 jerry cans, long hoses, pliers, nut removers, and chisels were found at the scene.

Villagers often tap into pipelines to steal fuel for cooking or reselling on the black market. More than 1,000 Nigerians have died in recent years from such pipeline explosions. (Sources: *Chicago Tribune*, 5/13/06; IRIN, 5/13/06; *New York Times*, 5/13/06, 5/14/06).

### At least 43 Killed as Building Falls

A four-story apartment in central Lagos collapsed in mid-July, causing 43 confirmed dead and dozens unaccounted for at the time. The building was reduced to a pile of rubble while the power was out in the Ebute-Meta district, requiring volunteers to work through the night with candles and flashlights, to rescue those still buried.

Survivors of the disaster subsequently attacked two other properties owned by the same developer while scavengers invaded the collapsed structure. One

survivor claimed that an area boy, pretending to rescue victims, stole N300,000 from her daughter's room before hitting her dead daughter on the head with a hammer. Journalists reporting on the tragedy also saw individuals who claimed to have lost property removing items such as doors and window frames, as well as the water tank from the building.

Residents had questioned the speed with which the building had been constructed and alleged that the developers had bribed the Physical Planning Ministry officials. The original approved plan supposedly stipulated a one-story building, but the developers added three floors and a pent house onto the original, approved plan.

The plot of land where the four-story building used to stand has now been taken over by the state government for the construction of a public housing project. Proceeds from the planned project are to be used for the upkeep of the dependents of some of the victims of the collapsed building. The state governor also vowed to confiscate, without compensation to the owners, all properties in the area with similar defects. (Sources: *Daily Trust* [Abuja], 7/24/06; *New York Times*, 7/19/06, 7/20/06; *Vanguard* [Lagos], 7/26/06).

### Nigeria is Short-Listed to Host the 2010 Nations Cup

Nigeria is one of five countries short-listed to host the 2010 Nations Cup, the continent's biggest football spectacle. It believes that it has reinforced its bid by proposing nine venues for inspection by the Confederation of Africa Football (CAF) Committee. The proposed venues include Lagos, Abuja, Warri, Bauchi, Ijebu Ode, Port Harcourt, Kano, Kaduna and Enugu. Nigeria plans to reduce the number to six if given the nod by the CAF Executive Committee. Other countries short-listed to host the games include Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Libya. (Source: *This Day* [Lagos], 7/31/06).

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## Obituaries

### J. Douglas Klafehn (16) 65-67

By Dafna Linzer

Douglas Klafehn, 63, a former deputy associate commissioner of the Head Start program, died of multiple myeloma May 5 at his home in Washington.

Mr. Klafehn was born in Medina, N.Y., and moved with his family at age 16 to Winchester. He received a bachelor's degree in history from Swarthmore college in 1964.

He served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1965 to 1967. Based in Nigeria, he was initially an agricultural worker, where he relied on what he had learned working on his uncle's farm in Ontario, Canada, during summers. When that project was completed, he became a secondary school teacher and was involved in education for the rest of his life.

After his Peace Corps stint, he was an elementary school teacher in Philadelphia and in Washington, before joining Head Start in 1969, four years after its creation. He stayed with Head Start for 37 years, much of that time as deputy associate commissioner and on several occasions as acting associate commissioner. "Doug was for us sort of an even keel," said Craig Turner, a special assistant to the associate commissioner and Mr. Klafehn's colleague for 25 years. "He was very good at synthesizing everything and bringing everybody to a common point."

He retired in December.

Survivors include his wife of 33 years, Patricia Delaney Klafehn of Washington; a son, Patrick Klafehn of Washington; and a sister, Linda Klafehn Nelson of Washington. (Source: *Washington Post*.)

### Robert K. Olson (6) 62-64

Friends of Nigeria is sorry to learn of the death of Robert K. Olson, who died Nov. 20, 2005, in Cincinnati, OH. At the time of his death he was retired, having worked as an engineer for General Electric. While in the Peace Corps, Olson lived in Okene via Owo and taught in Okene Secondary School. He was a generous financial supporter of Friends of Nigeria.

### Douglas N. Rice, Jr. (24) 66-67

Friends of Nigeria is sorry to learn of the death of Douglas N. Rice, Jr. on Dec. 4, 2002, in West Hollywood, CA. Rice lived in Nsukka and worked in rural development during his Peace Corps years.

## Nigeria news...

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### Remittances to Nigeria Reach \$4 Billion

The (former) Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, has estimated that about 20 million Nigerians are in the Diaspora throughout the world. The majority of them live in Europe and the Americas, while some live in Saudi Arabia, Sudan, South Africa, and other West African countries. She has emphasized that such Nigerians are a national asset, as some of the highly skilled professionals could serve as a channel for technology transfer and new investments. She has also estimated that remittances from the Diaspora have reached over \$4 billion. (Source: *This Day* [Lagos], 7/36/06).

### Nigeria to Yield Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon

Nigeria agreed on June 13 to withdraw troops within 60 days from Bakassi, a potentially oil-rich, 400 sq. mile peninsula. The World Court ruled in 2002 that Nigeria had sovereignty over the peninsula. The two countries have fought over the area for more than a decade. (Source: *New York Times*, 6/13/06).

### NDLEA Destroys N50 Billion of Cocaine

The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) destroyed about 16.3 metric tons of cocaine valued at approximately N50 billion. The drug was found in 264 50-kg. sacks mixed in with 640 50-kg. sacks of white cement in a container at Tin Can Island Port, Lagos. It was said to have been imported from Peru by a yet-to-be-ascertained group of persons and is reputed to be the largest seizure in Africa. (Source: *This Day* [Lagos], 7/25/06).

# VSO Project Update

By Mike Goodkind (16) 65-67



## Two New “Adopted” VSO Volunteers

FON’s fourth and fifth “adopted” VSO volunteers in Nigeria are **Marilyn Ota**, who will work in AIDS treatment, and **Wil van Koningsbrugge**, who is slated to work as an education adviser.

Both volunteers are scheduled to begin two-year placements starting in October, explained Claire Lanham, VSO events and community relations officer with the British-based international aid charity.

Wil, from the Netherlands, is headed for the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Abuja, where she will serve as an education adviser. *[See her letter on page 1.]* VSO sources say her chief goal will be to enhance preparation of teachers who are beefing up Nigeria’s primary/junior secondary school teaching. She will work with colleagues, other VSO volunteers and trainees to help teachers learn to use student-centered teaching.

Helping teachers improve their skills as well as their public esteem is viewed as a crucial component of a Nigerian government program, the 1999 Universal Basic Education Scheme, aimed toward giving every Nigerian child the right to free and compulsory education up to the junior secondary level.

Marilyn, from Canada, will be based in Lafia City, Nassarawa State, where she has been assigned to the SACA (State Action Committee on AIDS). She will be part of a comprehensive AIDS program that is funded by the UK’s Department for International Development.

Marilyn’s “placement concentrates on one of VSO’s main development goals: HIV and AIDS,” her placement summary explained. “Marilyn’s work will contribute to the expansion of access to treatment of HIV/AIDS in Nassarawa State.”

Marilyn and Wil join FON’s third “adopted” VSO volunteer, **Panni Kanyuks**, whose vivid report on her life and work in Lagos appeared in the last FON newsletter. Panni, a U.S. resident, began work earlier this year as a business and communication adviser, helping to develop a marketing strategy for Communicating for Change, which is working, largely through mass media, to raise Nigerians’ awareness of the environment. *[See her most recent letter on page 9.]*

## FON’s VSO Support Project

FON’s VSO Support Project was launched in August 2004, when the FON board, acting through the voices of its members, decided that a worthy organization with an international interest and reach should be identified and supported now that the Peace Corps is no longer active in Nigeria. The project is co-chaired by Lucinda Boyd (05) 62-64 and Mike Goodkind (16) 65-67, vice-president of FON. *[See the box on page 9 for a summary of FON’s financial support for the project.]*

Two of FON’s original “adopted” volunteers, **Irma Fortuin**, who trained primary school teachers at the College of Education, Pankshin, in Plateau state, and **Annette Uhlenberg**, who worked in program evaluation and fundraising for Society Action Coalition on Education for All (CSCEFA), based in Abuja, have completed their VSO tours.

VSO, which fields some 2,000 volunteers in Eastern Europe and the developing world, was selected because of its continuous history of successful work in Nigeria since 1958. FON members may learn more about VSO on the organization’s website:

“We rely on the ongoing interest and generosity of our membership to make sure that our support continues without interruption,” noted Greg Zell (06) 62-64, president of FON. “We have three volunteers with two years of commitment who are counting on our commitment.”

“For those of us who have both a keen interest and fond recollections of Nigeria, our VSO project is a great way to stay in touch on a very human level with Nigeria and the community of those who serve there. At the same time we are helping a world class organization, VSO, ‘keep the lorry rolling,’” Zell said. “The VSO Project is the core of what FON is about, and many of you have told me how much you enjoy hearing from our ‘adopted’ volunteers serving on the front lines. That won’t happen without your help.”

“We want to thank those members who have contributed in the past but we need to remind those who have not yet given - or have not contributed in the current year’s campaign - that funds are needed to make sure that support is continued and possibly expanded,” Zell said.

Please send a generous contribution to “keep the lorry rolling”. Checks may be made payable to Friends of Nigeria and sent to FON Treasurer, c/o Peter Hansen, 1203 Cambria Court, Iowa City, IA 52246-4530. *[See the coupon on page 16.]*

# A Letter From Panni Kanyuks

## From Lagos with Love...

Work has been hectic recently, so I've had to resort to eating one of Nigeria's favourite foods apart from pounded yam: Indomie. It is basically instant noodles sprinkled with MSG. The manufacturers of Indomie are doing very well for themselves, just like Nestle and Cadbury in Nigeria. In fact most of the ads I see along the expressway from Ikeja to Victoria Island are for corporations advertising Maggie cubes or Guinness or some other fast food product.

But the culture of bad eating is soon to vanish from the surface of Nigeria forever! Our NGO is in the process of shooting two short films on healthy eating habits for kids of different age brackets. It is really exciting: we are doing a film set on a football pitch for 7 to 10 year olds, depicting a match between two teams - healthy and unhealthy eaters. The other filmlet is a music video showing a teenage guy and a girl leading parallel lives - one is eating and doing the right thing and excels in

### FON Dues vs VSO Project Donations?

Financial contributions from FON members have created an exciting link with volunteers now serving in Nigeria, but FON still needs to collect dues to keep the organization's own lorry rolling smoothly. The quarterly newsletter you are now reading and the whole palette of informational, social and outreach services are funded entirely from your annual dues.

Not sure if it's time to renew? Just look at the date stamped above your name on the address label on the back of this newsletter. Then please take a moment to return the coupon on the back page with your dues and/or contribution to our VSO Support Project.

By the way, every dollar you earmark to the VSO Project is used to support our "adopted" volunteers in Nigeria, not for administrative overhead or for fundraising expenses.

school, while the other is not up to his daily tasks because of bad nutrition and has to face the consequences.

Another project we are doing is on slum dwellers, to give them the opportunity to tell their own story and have it broadcast internationally in order for slum communities all over the world to be able to share experiences and learn good practices from each other. We presented our story idea at the UN-Habitat World Urban Forum in Vancouver in June. A little while ago I went with my boss and the director of the production to one of Lagos' biggest slums: Ajegunle, where our protagonist, Uwa, lives. He is an artist and lives behind this huge football pitch (named Maracana after the field in Rio) in Ajegunle where apparently all the star Nigerian football players have been discovered. He paints landscapes even though he is in the middle of an urban ghetto where the closest he comes to 'greenery' is the colour of sewage water. In fact the whole of the beachfront that his quarters face is littered with empty water bottles, used plastic packaging and God

knows what other trash. There is no running water and they sleep six in a room (husband and wife, three kids and sister-in-law); their bathroom is a shed built on stilts on the waterfront and the health clinic is an even more dubious-looking shed next to the bathroom. The BBC World service was blasting out of the radio, which reminded me of all those times I was riding in NYC taxis and the immigrant cab drivers were listening to the BBC. It was very interesting - depressing and hopeful at the same time. What struck me most is that Ajegunle did not actually seem that much worse than other parts of Lagos, so I guess the term slum is relative. It is a very topical issue as it is estimated that one in three of the world's population will live in slums in the near future.

And now a funny little anecdote: Our office compound has become engaged in trench (stench) warfare with the neighbour who puts his trash next to our fence all the time. Finally someone in our office came up with a creative solution and we decided to put up a bamboo partition around the smelly dustbin to shield it from visitors' eyes. But low and behold, instead of praise we got a proper piece of Mr. Neighbour's mind. He tore down the partition and accused us of juju, saying the bamboo fence looked like a shrine and we were trying to unleash evil spirits. By the way, 80% of Nollywood productions are on the topic of juju (equivalent of voodoo) and have a corrupted heroine who is possessed by the evil spirits. In my boss's office I discovered another Nollywood film called "The AIDS Patient". It is about a young girl contracting HIV and how this affects everyone around her. This is all good: development messaging in a commercial film. But then shockingly, in the end the main character gets cured by the grace of God. Religion is an extremely strong influence in Nigerian culture and many actually believe in miracles so it is a very risky message to convey. But I suppose it is already slight progress that HIV/AIDS issues are being incorporated into feature films to raise people's awareness and hopefully reduce stigma. Seems like we shall continue to have our work cut out for us to communicate for change!

## Keep The Lorry Rolling!

As of Aug. 20:

**Total raised to date: \$14,159**

**Number of donations: 230**

# Wole Soyinka's Memoir

## Book Review

### **You Must Set Forth at Dawn: A Memoir by Wole Soyinka**

499 pp. Random House: NY 2006 \$26.95

**Reviewed by Ed Gruberg (5) 62-64**

In its 46 years since independence Nigeria has the dubious distinction of never having had one civilian federal government succeed another one. Perhaps 2007 will be different. President Obasanjo has been constitutionally and legislatively blocked from seeking a third term next year and the forces of democracy are perhaps strong enough to keep the military in check.

It is a perfect time to read Wole Soyinka's new political memoir, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*. The book begins in the late 1950s, when Soyinka was a student in the UK, and ends somewhat triumphantly at the beginning of the current civilian government. And what a story he tells. He has known most of those who have ruled Nigeria. He has been an eloquent, fearless, independent member of the democratic opposition. He has written plays and poems and novels and memoirs, run his own theater companies, spent time in Nigerian jails, and won the Nobel Prize in literature.

He was something special from the beginning. As a student in the UK he was reading his poems on the BBC and building a theatrical reputation. He was not impressed with the first batch of politicians of soon-to-be independent Nigeria, with their "preening, ostentatious spending, [and] cultivated condescension...toward the people they were supposed to represent." He was obsessed with "the humiliation of racist entrenchment in Southern Africa" and coped with it by an "inner confidence of one's mental superiority." He had a passing interest in fighting for freedom in Hungary as preparation for fighting in South Africa. But his father wrote "You were sent over there to study. In any case, charity begins at home, so if you feel inclined to jeopardize your studies by succumbing to some war-like urge, kindly return home and make this your battlefield." Soyinka thought his father was "infuriatingly rational." He came home 9 months before Nigeria became independent. He had a Rockefeller Fellowship and traveled throughout Nigeria documenting performing companies and sizing up the country. He was exhilarated on the road "but it is not all idyllic. The road was a violent host.... in the road's later decay is recorded a nation's retreat from a humanism I had imbibed quite unconsciously from childhood...the nation turned carrion and scavenger."

Most of the book is about the rough and tumble of Nigerian political life with which he was involved "in a very personal obsessive way." He tells of the night in 1965 he prevented the broadcast of a taped victory speech by Western Premier S.L. Akintola after a rigged election. Soyinka borrowed a tape recorder from a Peace Corps volunteer and taped a counter message. Masked, he sneaked into the radio station gun in hand. "It all proceeded according to plan. The duty officer responded as any sensible person would under the gun ...removed the premier's tape and replaced it with mine: 'Drop your stolen mandate, leave town, and take your reprobates with you.'" With the help of a network of friends Soyinka escaped to the East. Eventually he came back and was charged with "robbery with violence." Conviction could carry a life sentence. He expected a political trial, not this. "True, I had made away with the tape of the Western Region and there was the unavoidable introduction of a firearm in the process, but I did leave my own tape in its place. And if it was a question of content, well, the comparative value of both messages was something that could have been settled amicably in a court of arbitration. I would be the first to admit that, in wit, word play, and verbal resonance, my



**Wole Soyinka in 1963**

humorless message - and in strident accents of the English language to boot - was no match for Ladoke Akintola's adroit Yoruba." The judge dismissed the charges because of contradictions in the prosecutor's case. Soyinka had spent 3 months in jail awaiting the trial.

From farce to tragedy, the nation falls apart with coup and counter-coup and ethnic killings in 1966. In 1967 Biafra breaks away and civil war is imminent. Soyinka feels the need to travel to Biafra to try somehow to prevent the conflict and to co-opt the two sides with a more peaceful "third force." He meets with O. Ojukwu, the head of Biafra, who is unyielding. But he also meets Victor Banjo, a Yoruba military officer in the Biafran army who wants to take a

*(Continued on page 11)*

## Soyinka's Memoir ...

(Continued from page 10)

military force to Lagos to try to reunite the country with a popular uprising. Soyinka goes back to the west. He contacts a Lt. Colonel who commands the Federal Army troops in southwest Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo (yes, *that* Obasanjo) and describes Banjo's plans. Soyinka's ad hoc trip is extraordinarily naive, even in his telling. Banjo eventually leads a force towards Lagos that is stopped at the town of Ore. He is later executed by the Biafra side. Soyinka is jailed without trial and spends almost 2 years in solitary confinement.

After his release Soyinka is often in exile but speaks out against various military regimes. He makes distinctions between the various military dictators - Obasanjo: "relaxed, self confident," "needed, sometimes pathetically, to be right"; Babangida: "suave, calculating, persuasive listener with sheathed claws"; Abacha: "murderous imbecile," "cretin," "psychopath".

Soyinka in the fray is quixotic but keeps trying. He is almost killed trying to enter a chaotic and violent Nigeria after Gen Babangida annuls the presidential election of B.M.K. Abiola. Soyinka steals back a Yoruba antiquity in Brazil only to find it is a fake! He, along with J.P. Clark and Chinua Achebe, petition unsuccessfully to prevent the execution of a general in Babangida's government. He prepares for an armed attack on Sani Abacha.

Curiously this is a very impersonal memoir. Although the book is dedicated to his wife and "stoically resigned" children there

is virtually nothing about his family. I had corresponded with his wife during the Civil War when I had raised some money for Wole's legal defense during his solitary confinement. When I was in Ibadan in 1973 I stopped by the Soyinka house to say hello. His wife met me at the door. He was in exile. Their 3 daughters, pre-teenagers, were dressed up and about to go to a party. The youngest was sad because she had new patent leather shoes that didn't fit so she would have to wear some old shoes. A younger son was sad because he wasn't going to the party. Ah, the daily trials of parenting. Mrs. Soyinka assuaged the children and made sure their day would go as smoothly as possible. She had a job as a University librarian and ran the household. Overseas Wole Soyinka mostly tended to other matters.

Soyinka is extraordinarily gregarious and knows everybody, but he is isolated by temperament and design. His best friend, Femi Johnson, is portrayed as a Sancho Panza who is there to abet and appreciate Soyinka rather than interact with real give and take. It is a very asymmetrical friendship

Now Soyinka is no longer in exile. He is widely respected in his country and he is very much rooted on his piece of land in the bush. He begins and ends his memoir by asserting (disingenuously?) that he is back in the place where he should never have left. If he had stayed we wouldn't have this fascinating book.

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## "Biafra" - an Opera

By John Sherman (23) 66-67

I received a Creative Renewal Arts Fellowship in 2005 from the Arts Council of Indianapolis, a \$7,500 grant, to pursue activities related to my 2002 book, *War Stories: A Memoir of Nigeria and Biafra* (Mesa Verde Press). My intention was to return to the Port Harcourt area and revisit places where I had worked with the International Committee of the Red Cross during the Civil War and, of course, also return to my Peace Corps school, Ascension HS, in Eleme, near P.H.

Unfortunately, the risks of traveling in that part of Nigeria are so great that Lois and I decided not to make the trip, after much agonizing. Instead, I have pushed ahead on two other fronts: I am offering the book for adoption either for memoir-writing and other literature courses or for African Studies/world history courses. Thanks to the wonders of e-mail, we have contacted virtually every campus in the U.S. and several are considering it and one, thus far, has decided to adopt the book as a textbook. The other project came, even to me, as a surprise: Years ago, I had

started outlining an opera ("Biafra") based on my experiences with the Red Cross. It was only weeks ago, however, that I decided, while attending the Indianapolis Opera, to turn a short, rough outline into an entire libretto. Weeks later, I had done just that. A composer/conductor, Nathan Blume, is composing the music for a portion of one of the scenes which he will conduct on December 6 at 7pm in the Arts Garden in downtown Indianapolis, with 10 musicians, vocalists and even dancers (this scene contains a dream sequence that includes a macabre dance by women with their children seeking help at a clinic). Even Mami Wata is one of the characters being presented!

Soon after the performance, a video clip of the 15-minute performance will be on my website, [www.mesaverdepress.com](http://www.mesaverdepress.com) <<http://www.mesaverdepress.com/>> and on Nathan's, [www.nathanielblume.com](http://www.nathanielblume.com) <<http://www.nathanielblume.com/>>. We are expecting to find grant money to allow Nathan to finish composing the entire opera.

# Marty Wong's Recollections from the Porch

## The view from the porch, or, A bu Onye Ohafia

By Martin R. Wong, Ph.D. (5) 62-64

Evenings in Ebem, Ohafia, are not for thrill seekers. The somewhat weathered wooden porch that makes up the totality of Kalu's Stylish Bar overlooks Ebem's main street, the only paved street, on the way from Umuahia to Arochukwu. Off to the left side of the porch is the kerosene fired beer cooler. I think I can remember it actually being turned on once. On the right side was a wooden bench that would seat five in a pinch. Men in Nigeria don't shrink from sitting hip-to-hip even when the temperature is 90 plus. A chair where Kalu usually sits completes the furniture.

After two hours of tennis in the hot West African sun, Kalu's Stylish Bar was irresistible. It was there I learned what transplanted German beer will do to your head when it comes to you at 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Sometimes when finances were tight, a little palm wine was in order. At other times I could even get a little "illicit" white lightning distilled from palm wine.

The porch was a great observation post for watching people. Ebemers mostly walked since the town was not that spread out and bicycles were for long-distance travel. Just as with Times Square, sooner or later everyone you wanted to see would walk by.

Across the street was "Stay Young" photo studios run by Uduma Okala who usually spent more time on the tennis court down the street, and on the porch, than actually in his "studio" since business was not that good. He was perhaps the most sophisticated of the porch devotees since he had lived for a short while in Lagos and knew the ins and outs of diplomacy and trade. Unfortunately his several "wives" and 23 children had kept him somewhat tied down of late to Ebem.

Kalu owned the Stylish Bar. It was his house and his porch after all. He was a large affable man with a broad voice, an onye Ohafia in the old tradition - a warrior without a battle since time had taken the edge off his aggression as well as his need to prove anything to anyone other than it was nice to sit awhile over a warm beer. He frequently wore a wrapper and sometimes a striped wool stocking cap that had seen many campaigns. When tanked up a little, he was known to jump to his feet and yell, "A bu onye Ohafia", a kind of Ohafia uber alles chant.

The other regular devotees of the porch numbered two or sometimes three but there were always drop-bys who stayed awhile to soak up atmosphere. Kalu's was the only place in town where one could honestly come by a beer, or just conversation, if you happened to be down on your luck. Conversation - whether in Igbo or English - was an Ohafia delicacy and the art of it was not taken lightly. Everyone enjoyed a well-spoken phrase even if the content was not very relevant.

### Money doubler

For several days that summer the conversation was all about the money doubler. An old Hausa man had taken to sitting on the football field with a basket in front of him. He just sat there most of the day and apparently slept there. Food magically appeared for him to eat.

It soon became known that he was a money doubler with contact to the spirits. He could double your money just by praying over it. Nobody questioned this in any real sense nor did they question why he looked so thin, malnourished, and impoverished himself if he could double money. When I finally begged the question I was told the obvious: it was spirit money that was doubled. He, as the progenitor of the money, couldn't spend it. I had finally come across a true idealistic spreader of good will for all. On any other occasion than this Hausas were seen as good "watchnights" but generally lacking the motivation and drive seen to be inherited in the blood of Igbos.

For a few days some of the non-porch dwellers were trying out the money doubler with a ten Naira note or perhaps even a little more - nothing that couldn't be done without. Denizens of the porch were far too sophisticated to go for anything like that. The word spread like wildfire. It was true. When someone gave the money to the old Hausa man and put it in his basket and he prayed over it all night, the money doubled. When he opened the basket in the morning, there was 20 Naira, handed over to the owners for their inspection.

Conversation on the porch was heating up. Most Ohafians have a little money stashed away somewhere for a rainy day; and heck, the prospect of doubling it sounded quite good. Nobody on the porch would admit to it, but brewing inside a few minds was the possibility of getting richer.

I think it was a Wednesday night when the money doubler really made his haul. Emboldened by the early successes, many Ohafians (including a few of the porch devotees) secretly took during the night what they had to the doubler for praying over. In the morning, the old Hausa man with his basket was gone.

The fact of his disappearance with a considerable amount of Ohafia money was predictable to anyone who has been around the block a few times. Nevertheless the conversation on the porch for the next few days was all about the story, the money that no one on the porch would admit to losing, and how it all had taken place. What was more interesting was that no one actually saw the Hausa man as a thief, a grifter, a con man or any of the other terms that might be applied to the typical Nigerian scammer. They didn't even seem angry. The money was gone, but the conversation was all about spirits, and why the man had left before completing his promises. He had to do it, they suggested. It was getting to be too much, the stakes were too high, the spirits could not convert so much cash. It just wasn't reasonable to think that it would happen the way they had hoped. He was a Hausa man after all. They shouldn't have expected so much. Suddenly their own brand of logic was being applied to the spirit world.

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# Wong's Recollections ...

*(Continued from page 12)*

My hard-wired brain thought a lot about superstition and juju and the hold it has on people and I wondered about the Nigerian mind. Two years after I got home my son was telling me about how he had had money doubled on a real estate transaction. I resisted his urging to invest. His experience with the money doubler in America was a reenactment of the visit of the Hausa man. He lost his ass.

## **Palm wine stories**

Some would say that alcohol is alcohol and the vehicle one uses to get it into one's veins - whether that be beer, wine, whiskey or whatever - doesn't matter. It's not true. Palm wine tastes something like a kind of juice you've never tasted before and because it is like food, it takes awhile to sneak up behind you and loosen the tethers of the tongue. A more descriptive name for it might be "story elixir" or perhaps "liquid Maryanne", but certainly not "truth serum". It has two effects on the human psyche: (1) to tell stories to an appreciative audience who love everything you have to say; and (2) to insert a drummer into your head who doesn't begin drumming on the inside of your skull until the next morning. In this case, however, the going up is usually worth the coming down.

Ohafians are story tellers anyway, but give them a few glasses of palm wine and the technique is tweaked to perfection. Tales of the bush, tales of times past, tales of basic human foibles gone amuck, tales of the spirit world and most certainly, true tales of the power and results of juju victimization are automatic. One such victim was the coach of the Ohafia High School soccer team, an intense man with a furrowed brow. He was not a porch regular but dropped by occasionally to let off steam. His team had had very little success in its season, games were lost at the last moment by free kicks, and other sure shots had gone awry.

One day after a close loss to a nearby team, he showed up while we happened to be working on a gallon jar of the grey bubbly liquid that had been sitting on the porch for a few days. The wine in his belly combined with the anger in his mind and he suddenly declared loudly, "If you want to win you have to have means!"

"Absolutely," I agreed, thinking that he meant practice facilities, time, balls, money, and so forth. He didn't.

It seems the final free kick that was to win the game for our side had started out unerringly for the upper-right corner of the goal. Just before it got there it swerved and took a right-hand slice of the kind any golfer has experienced. The other coach had been seen visiting one of the suspected juju men in the area and this was irrefutable proof that the other coach had means. "How can we win?" he sputtered. The ball didn't just slice, it was pushed by the notorious means. Full stop. He declared that if we wanted to win, we had better be prepared to cough up for some means of our own. Everyone on the porch nodded in assent and commiserated with the beleaguered coach. Vince Lombardi truly was a man who had means!

## **A sense of privacy**

One day, the street was more crowded than usual. People were standing idly, or haggling with the street-side vendors when suddenly about twelve women strode purposefully by, their long wrappers waving to uncharacteristically firm strides. They looked fierce. The man who stood in front of the tank during the Tien An Mun shootout in Beijing would not have dared to stand in front of this phalanx. They were shouting about something that I couldn't make out. They were truly a sight.

"What's it all about?" I asked to nobody in particular. I figured one of the five or six men gathered there would give me an answer.

At first there was no answer. Then Uduma Okala spoke up, a slight tremor in his voice. As the story unfolded, it seemed that some male person had been seen peering out through the underbrush at the women's public toilet. The women were enraged.

Uduma's comments unzipped the mouths of some of the other men and conversation ensued about the event. Apparently it had been a topic of discussion for a day or two unbeknownst to me. These women were the heads of the women's counsel and they were out to avenge their spied-upon sister.

They were shouting something but what they were saying went far beyond any rudimentary Igbo I knew. "They say that if this person wants to see so badly let him come out," someone said. They were threatening to surround the person and unwind their wrappers en masse, the better to shame him. No man in town was ready to stand up against 12 angry women willing to bare themselves seeking justice.

Clothes that went beyond the hundreds of beads that young women used to wear had been brought to Ohafia long ago, and with it came a sense of privacy that was not to be trifled with. Women in this patriarchal society, in addition to the cooking and child rearing, did most of the other laborious work. They didn't have a whole lot of clout in the town counsel, but the further indignity of someone spying on their private moments was more than they were about to bear. As they strode purposefully by, a chill went up my spine. I never found out what actually happened nor whether the man was caught, but my imagination went wild.

## **Morals**

One evening the town crier stopped on the corner beating on his bells, bleating out the day's news in a kind of sing-song Igbo that was completely unintelligible to me. The news was not good. Among other things, a young girl had been discovered to be pregnant. She was not married.

After the crier had moved on to his next corner, the boys on the porch were murmuring amongst themselves about the event. It was not good for the girl, it was not good for the girl's mama, and it was not good for the town. The virginity of a young girl of marriageable age was still worth something in Ebem, Ohafia. Morals had to have loosened up in the town for something like this to happen. The men on the porch were not moralists, but

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# Wong's Recollections ...

*(Continued from page 13)*

they somehow knew that this did not bode well. Free love had to lead to something worse, like television.

## **Presbyterianism and a goat sacrifice**

One day the usual crowd on the porch was small. Time to clear and plant, I was told. That was the busiest time for men. Men cleared the bush, burned away the underbrush, tilled the soil, and planted the yams. The quotidian work, such as weeding and tending, was done by women. The men returned to the fields at the end of the planting season to harvest.

A week or two later was the ceremonial day for the "blessing" of the planting. Ohafia was nominally Presbyterian. I had been raised a Presbyterian and I knew what that meant - the proceedings would be kind of dry, low key, and dull. I was wrong.

We all went out to the edge of the bush where it appeared that everyone in town had gathered. Everyone was in a festival mood. But when the actual ceremony started, it was plain to me that this was serious. A bare-chested young man in traditional Ohafia warrior garb, carrying a machete, was being feted in a manner I knew nothing about. After the ceremony that involved a lot of speechifying and the laying on of hands, he was sent out to the bush with a goat, the cheers of the crowd following his every step.

We waited. I was told that if we heard three drum beats it would mean that the head of the goat was severed completely with one cut and that the growing season would be good.

As I stood in the crowd, an old man in front of us turned and looked at me with what I thought to be more than curiosity. He then talked to his friend standing next to him in a fairly loud voice. Uduma explained that he was questioning why I, a Beke, was at the ceremony. He complained that it was the white people, after all, who had ruined the ceremony in the first place. After the missionaries had come, the traditional sacrifice of a member of the Udo - a sort of pariah class among the Igbo - had been stopped, and a goat had been introduced in their stead. The old man remembered with chagrin. This was Presbyterianism unlike any I had ever seen.

## **Dr.'s house on top of the hill**

Dr. Ogbenna had built, in honor of his own success I suppose, a huge, walled compound just a half mile up the road on the cross street. One day the hot sticky peace of the afternoon was shattered when a huge Caterpillar rolled into town and immediately began its duties by knocking down the few remaining palms next to the dirt road and smoothing out the ground. It was bright yellow and moved lumberously but purposefully. Half the children in the town followed its every move laughing and shouting at this powerful godlike creature, "Ca Ta Pi Lo".

It was obvious; the road to Dr. Ogbenna's house was to be paved. Everyone on the porch laughed uproariously at the corruption and influence that would allow one to have the government build a road to your house. Dr. Ogbenna, as a doctor, a "been to", and a government official, was the most influential

member of Ebem society. If he wanted a paved road to his house, he could damn well have it.

## **Dreams**

The second most influential man in town, Igwe Okaha Igwe, showed up one day. He was really just walking by and since everyone on the porch knew him, as principal and as a famous beer drinker, he was called up to the porch and a place was made for him. Mr. Okaha, as I called him because I was merely a teacher in his school, frequently wore a tie and was also perhaps the most distinguished looking man in town. He was one of two or three men in town who had been overseas to be educated. He could laugh and joke, but it was always with a serious, distinguished air.

He nodded to me and made some kind of comment about finally understanding why my lectures were so obtuse and turned to the rest of the group. He started in with his usual conversation about how things are in Detroit where he had lived as a student. Everyone had heard it all before but listened politely until he moved over to what had happened at the faculty meeting that day. Miss Chineke, a math teacher, had disrupted the whole meeting when she called out to the other math teacher and said, "I don't like what you did to me in my dream last night," and further went on to demand that he stay out of her dreams in the future and what she was going to do if he didn't. Much laughter erupted on the porch as Mr. Okaha described the momentary chaos in his faculty meeting.

I was told later in an aside that Mr. Ubamadu, the other math teacher, was well known for doing that kind of thing. After all, it was explained, she was 27 years old - well past the age of marriage for women - and for him to come visit her in her dreams was reasonable. (Mr. Okaha later wrote a book of memoirs. I got a nice mention on page 127, if you care to look.)

## **An airplane went over**

One day a small airplane flew over at a fairly great height. You could hear the engine but the plane appeared to be very small - perhaps a Cessna. The porch emptied quickly as everyone went out into the street to catch a glimpse. An airplane flying over was an event worth emptying the porch for. After the small plane sputtered its way across the sky it was back to the porch for beer and talk about the wonders of technology. Kalu mentioned that he had once been to Lagos and had seen real airplanes up close. Nigeria Airlines had one 737 painted green on one side with "Nigeria Airlines" and on the other side was blue with "Pan American World Airways." It was always parked with the green side toward the terminal. An airplane, flying or grounded, was still a grand sight.

We looked in the direction the plane had flown. It went off toward Arochukwu, another Ohafia town down the road where the pavement ended. Arochukwu was a town well known for two things, its warriors and its uncircumcised women. I wish I had something to say about the latter but I was a Peace Corps Volunteer. We were told we were ambassadors for America.

## Update Files

### Barbara Tansey Bush (11) 64-66



After I graduated from college in June 1964, I trained to be a math teacher in the Northern Region with Nigeria XI and went to Sapele in the Midwest Region to teach English and French in a girls' secondary grammar school. I went back to Nigeria shortly after I left the Peace Corps. Soon after, in August 1967, the Midwest was taken over by the Biafrans so I and many other expatriates left for Lagos on freighters that had been docked at Sapele. Several months later, I returned to Sapele. Once the schools started up again, I taught in another girls' school briefly and then returned home for good.

I settled in Boston, MA in 1969. After leaving teaching, I got a job as a mainframe computer programmer at an insurance company. I spent the next 30 years working at various jobs in data processing on IBM mainframes as a programmer, a systems

analyst, a systems programmer, and finally, a database administrator at several Boston companies. Over the years, I found that my Peace Corps experiences were very useful in my work as each department was like a different culture with its own language and orientation. In 2002, my mainframe job was moved to another state so I retired.

In my last several years at my final job, Nigeria came back into my life. A young Nigerian woman was hired for a new project and we worked together. Efua was born the year I left Nigeria; her father is Itsekiri (from the Sapele/Warri area) and her mother is Ibo. It was such a pleasure to work with Efua and share our experiences - mine in her country and hers in mine. Somehow it brought my work life full circle working with this bright, articulate woman on a technical project after having been a PCV in her country. Also, at that job, I met Dave Crandall who had been in Nigeria V and taught in the West Region. Every so often, we got together to reminisce about Nigeria.

Several years after coming to Boston, I married but later divorced. Then I married a man with three grown sons. Now I am 'Nana' to six stepgrandchildren. Luckily they live nearby so I can take them on 'adventures' often.

Retirement has been a pleasure. I have spent time tutoring at a local family services center and volunteering in a local middle school. Recently, I mentored a Somali Bantu refugee family of nine for almost a year. Since only two members knew any English, it was quite a challenge to help them get adjusted to life here. Also, I spend time on various crafts, take singing lessons and show my photographs at several local places.

**Left - Barbara then with Roseline Maduanusi, her student, and Grace, Rosaline's older sister, a teacher in another school in Sapele, and friend of the Sapele PCVs.**

**Below - Barbara today with stepgranddaughter, Olivia**



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