

## *An unlikely Return – Part 2*

Last year Steve and I shared the story of our unlikely return to Sahn Malen, our Peace Corps village of 42 years ago, and what that visit meant to us in words and pictures, now and then. You may recall that as we concluded our emotional visit we agreed with Chief Kebbie to work with the village and **Schools for Salone** to build a library at the Junior Secondary School in Sahn Malen. Just one year later, we are happy to report that the library has indeed been built. Here is its story and news about how we hope to send books to fill its empty shelves.

( [Skip to more about the Books](#) ) ( More pics and [Download original story "An unlikely Return."](#) )



New Sahn Malen Library

See more photos at [SchoolsForSalone.org](http://SchoolsForSalone.org)

The library wasn't intended to be a gift, but a joint project between (1) Steve and me, (2) **Schools for Salone** and its Sierra Leone partner **Masanga Children's Fund** and (3) the local village people of Sahn Malen. Obtaining the commitment from the village was the initial challenge. As a member of Sierra Leone's Parliament and a delegate to the Economic Community Of West African States ( [ECOWAS](#) & [more info](#) ), our Chief was frequently traveling and was not answering our emails or Joseph Lamin's phone calls. Months passed and we began to despair that this project would ever happen.



Waiting Book Shelves in the new Sahn Malen Library

In early April of 2011, I received a totally unrelated email from a fellow **Schools for Salone** Board Member, [Amadu Massally](#): "By the way, there is another youth mentor of mine, David Moinina Sengeh, who is currently working on another important aspect of things with regard to the (Sierra Leone) amputee community ..." ( [BodyNotes.org Low-cost telemedicine & prosthetic kits](#) ) When I followed Amadu's link, I was amazed to recognize our David from Sahn Malen - the young man whom we met by chance the year before in Pujehun with his friend Sarah, and about whom we wrote in our original story. This is the young Harvard grad,

who was then walking on foot from village to village to install [treated mosquito netting](#) in every sleeping area in the Malen Chiefdom and teaching people how and why to use them for Malaria prevention. This same young man was now a grad student at MIT working on pressure sensitive prosthetics for amputees. Such a passion to help people this young man has! We understand why Amadu, who is our age, says David is his mentor.

With Amadu's help, we immediately reconnected with David Sengeh and asked for his advice about how best to work with the village. Within a few short weeks, Joseph Lamin of **Masanga Children's Fund** sent us word: "I received a phone call from Chief Kebbie that his people have collected sand and stone. Meaning that they are ready for the project."

Steve and I couldn't have been more pleased. The village had committed and the library was moving forward after all! We quickly shared the good news with David Sengeh and soon received an email from his father, Paul Sengeh, who works for UNICEF in Sierra Leone and travels frequently to Sahn Malen. Paul was clearly the one who brought our project to the attention of Chief Kebbie, who then got the village moving.

"My dear Peggy, thanks so much for this good news for the children of Malen. Since I received a mail from David about this project, I had contacted the chief to take this opportunity as one of the development endeavors for the chiefdom. Thanks be to God he was able to contact Joseph and I am pleased the project is now on course."

In May and June of 2011 construction proceeded with moderate haste to beat the rainy season. As we've noted previously, these structures go up quickly, but not necessarily without problems. The local sand and rock, obtained by the village according to our usual **Schools for Salone** working plan, were unfortunately of the same poor quality that has produced the rapid deterioration of the floors and walls of the relatively new Junior Secondary School in Sahn Malen. Joseph was not willing to proceed with these substandard materials, but obtaining proper supplies would be costly. The poor conditions of the roads and log bridges approaching the village made hiring trucks for the heavy loads more complicated and the in-country price of petrol was unstable and skyrocketing. The village had recently become ripe with development projects - after all, it is the home of the [Paramount Chief of Pujehun District](#), who is also a Member of Parliament. Competition for local labor became intense. The local people had more opportunities to work for pay, and so it was difficult to find the local laborers that **Schools for Salone** normally requires for its village projects. Steve and I watched the proceedings from afar with trepidation. The project costs were mounting, but once started, how could we stop in mid-construction and become yet another failed development project in this poor country? Joseph was beside himself with any possible implications of failure against his good character and standing in Sierra Leone's development community. Cindy of **Schools for Salone** staunchly supported Joseph and was determined to proceed no matter the costs. Steve and I hunkered down, re-evaluated the project, adjusted the goals and wrote more checks. The project proceeded.

At the end of July, 2011, Cindy and several **Schools for Salone** Board Members and volunteers traveled to Sierra Leone to conduct our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Teacher Training Workshop in the provincial capital of Bo and to visit several of our schools. They attended the Opening Ceremonies of the new Lungi School sponsored by 2 incredible teachers and their students from Ventura CA. ([Read more about Lungi Village](#)) Then they traveled the additional 15 miles

south from Lungi to visit Sahn Malen. “Your library is beautiful!” Cindy reported as she gave us the photos you see on page 1.



Not only was the library now a reality, but there was more good news on the horizon. In early June we received an email out of the blue from the mother of one of the new group of 2011 Peace Corps Volunteer teachers, who was completing in-country training that summer. We were delighted to learn that her daughter, Amy Schober, had been assigned to Sahn Malen Junior Secondary School. Upon hearing the assignment of her daughter, Amy’s mother Kathy had searched the internet and found our [Sahn Malen page](#) on the **Schools for Salone** web site, as well as Steve’s and my story, “An Unlikely Return” posted there. Kathy was ecstatic to find our connection to and support for this far away place where her daughter would live and work for the next 2 years! Steve and I could hardly believe this “small world” connection!

We had immediately lobbied the Sierra Leone Peace Corps Directors, Gail Metcalf and Joel Wallach (whom we met last year), to allow Amy to attend the **Schools for Salone** Teacher Training Workshop in Bo so she could meet with the library specialist, Beverly Rannow, who with our encouragement had volunteered to be a part of the 2011 US training team. Unfortunately, the Peace Corps Volunteer teacher trainees were engaged in their own student teaching at the time, but Amy was instrumental in inviting the Principal of the Sahn Malen Junior Secondary School, Henry Jusu, to the Teacher Training. Beverly sent both Amy and Henry back to Sahn Malen with copies of all her library management information and library lesson plans. Not only did our Sahn Malen Library now exist, but it also had access to somewhat knowledgeable staff.

Now all that remains is to fill those beautiful new shelves with books !

### **Books for Sahn Malen Library**

In 2009, **Schools for Salone** sponsored a container of [22,000 books to Sierra Leone](#) through [Books For Africa](#), who for several decades have been the world’s largest shipper of donated books to the African continent and whose goal is to end the book famine in Africa. Dick Simpson, a professor at the University of Illinois and supporter of our first BFA shipment, organized a second container in 2010, and is now working on a third. If we act quickly, we can be part of this latest effort to send books to Sierra Leone and to our Sahn Malen Library. This container is scheduled to ship by early December.

The Books For Africa program is not without drawbacks. 1) The program seems expensive. In addition to the nearly \$10,000 to send the container, there are in-country costs of about \$5,000 to clear customs and to distribute the books to the schools upcountry. 2) Not all of the books that are sent are appropriate for the students at the destinations, sometimes as to content, sometimes as to academic level. 3) Books can potentially be purchased in Freetown that would be curriculum specific, more appropriate and would support the local economy without the considerable cost of a container.

However, Steve and I are not sure if or when we might visit Sierra Leone again to purchase books in Freetown. Traveling to Sierra Leone is both arduous and expensive. We did, however, visit the Books For Africa warehouse in Atlanta last year. They allow sponsors of shipments to come to the warehouse and personally select the books they want to ship to a specific destination. We also understand that Dick Simpson has obtained a discounted price for this shipment, inspired by these current economic hard times. Joining this Books for Africa project seems like the more prudent and cost effective option available to us at this time. I have made plans to travel to Atlanta in early November with a librarian friend of ours who will help us make appropriate book selections at the BFA warehouse. We have also heard from our current Peace Corps Volunteer Amy, who has now begun teaching in Sahn Malen, that only a handful of her junior secondary students can read a simple sentence. There is such a huge need for books to inspire kids and adults alike to learn to read. Amy has proposed a short list of books she would like to have for her curriculum and we will do our best to find them.

Mostly, we wanted to share this story with you, but If you would like to help make this shipment of books happen, Steve and I, Amy Schober, **Schools for Salone** and the students and people of Sahn Malen would be very grateful.

The Books for Africa books are free. However, we need to help Dick fund the container shipment and raise funds for the in-country expenses.

If we join this shipment, we could have books in the Sahn Malen Library by early next year.

Steve and I would like to invite you to attend the **Schools for Salone** fall fundraiser: on **Thursday, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011** at [Herban Feast](#), 3200 1st Avenue South in Seattle. We will be sponsoring a table for our friends and money donated by our friends will be used to send books to the Sahn Malen library in this upcoming Books For Africa shipment.

Ishmael Beah, the best selling author of "A Long Way Gone, Memoirs of a Boy Soldier" will be the featured speaker. Margaret Larson of KING5 "New Day Northwest" will be the moderator. Other special guests will include Joseph Lamin of **Masanga Children's Fund** from Sierra Leone and [Seattle Sounder, Steve Zakuani](#), a Congolese who grew up in London.

There is a \$250 **VIP Reception** with Ishmael Beah and other special guests beginning at **5:30pm** with dinner following. For those attending the \$125 **Dinner and Program** only, it begins at **6:30pm**.

You can read more about the event and **Schools for Salone's** activities at our web site: [www.SchoolsForSalone.org](http://www.SchoolsForSalone.org).

If you want to donate, send to **Schools for Salone, PO Box 25314, Seattle WA 98165-2214**.

Thank you all for reading our story,

Peggy & Steve Garber

PS. There is a wonderful video just made by New York film maker Copper Pot Pictures about the school for war orphans that **Schools for Salone** built with their support just outside of Freetown: <http://vimeo.com/29738973>