



Hanna Biliński/Index
Alumna Brie Vuagniaux stands in front of the Aquadome. Vuagniaux is the president of The Aquadome, a non-profit community venue, which she opened last summer to host music shows, lectures and writing circles.

All eyes on: Brie Vuagniaux

KATE LINMAN
 Staff Reporter

One trip changed alumna Brie Vuagniaux's life.

She has been in rock bands, opened a music venue and worked at a clown camp, but the four and half months studying abroad in Ghana during the Fall 2010 semester is when Vuagniaux said she realized her greatest passion: nursing.

While in Ghana, Vuagniaux visited the Buduburam Refugee Camp, which housed 20,000 Liberian refugees. She and a few friends who also were studying abroad, saw the need for basic sex education with the women of the camp, she said.

The group decided to make a zine, a homemade magazine, with information regarding women's health. They printed copies to bring into the camp with them. They hosted three workshops and met with women groups ranging in age from 13 to 80 years old.

"They told stories that showed how little they had over their reproductive rights," Vuagniaux said.

Many of the women wanted other birth control options that they could control, but they didn't know what their options were, she said. She said there was a large teenage prostitution problem at the camp. Vuagniaux and her friends sat down with some of the teen girls to address it. She said the girls were mature about the discussion.

"These girls really wanted to know how to protect themselves," Vuagniaux said. "They want to know what tools there are. You could tell they appreciated the information."

Vuagniaux said she became a better person through her experience in Ghana. She said the longer she was there, the less anxious she felt and the more her interactions with people benefited.

"It really restored my faith in people because of how strong their community was," she said.

Vuagniaux has also made an impact on the Kirksville community. Vuagniaux is responsible for revitalization of The Aquadome, a community venue that hosts music shows, lectures and writing circles. Vuagniaux said she had heard about The Aquadome, which was opened during the early 2000s, by some of her older friends. She said she always wished it was still around, so she decided to reopen it last May because she

had time to work on it after graduating.

Junior Hannah Copeland, The Aquadome board secretary and friend of Vuagniaux, said Vuagniaux is quietly courageous.

"It takes a lot to just say 'I'm going to live in this abandoned building by myself and hope that some people volunteer to help me make it into a music venue,'" Copeland said.

Copeland said Vuagniaux is a humble person and has had a wide range of accomplishments in her life. Yet she isn't the type of person to push her resume in someone's face. Without Vuagniaux's leadership style, Copeland said, The Aquadome wouldn't be able to function.

"I think she is a really good leader, and she doesn't realize it," Copeland said. "It important to have a strong, passionate figure to build something out of nothing."

Copeland said she thinks Vuagniaux's passion and abilities to work well with people also will help her with nursing. Vuagniaux will be attending Barnes-Jewish College during the fall to complete an accelerated nursing program. She received her Bachelor's of English from Truman. Vuagniaux was planning to attend graduate school at Truman, but her experience studying abroad in Ghana changed her mind.

Now, Vuagniaux is working toward her new dream of becoming a nurse by working at the Chariton Valley Association in Kirksville. She provides personal care, such as feeding, bathing and range of motion exercises for the patients at the private, non-profit residential home for people with developmental disabilities. Heather Thornton has been Vuagniaux's supervisor since she began working there last April. She said Vuagniaux has good potential as a nurse because of her communication skills and fun personality. Vuagniaux said is the one thing in her life she would want to keep even if she had to drop everything else.

"It brings you closer to people because you are dealing with their basic needs," Vuagniaux said. "Art happens all the time for me, but its not what I want to make money doing — nursing is."

Vuagniaux said her work with The Aquadome has allowed her to settle in Kirksville, which has helped her enjoy her job even more. But Vuagniaux describes herself as a traveler and hopes to continue her journeys after nursing school. She said she would love to go back to Ghana and continue her work with women's health.

Alumnus preserves Gambain music

Alumnus creates music preservation project after serving in Peace Corps

BY DAVID HUTCHINSON
 Staff Reporter

Truman State alumnus Brendan Loula and his team traveled for eight hours on poorly paved roads, to interview members of a group keeping their traditional ways. Loula was not headed to meet the Amish near Kirksville, but to record the music of an ethnic group in a secluded village in the Republic of the Gambia.

Loula said he knew after graduating from Truman during 2007 that he did not want to immediately go to graduate school. His thoughts quickly turned to the Peace Corps and the countries he contemplated serving in mostly were in Latin America and Africa. Loula was assigned to the Republic of Gambia, a small country in West Africa, and for two years he was a health volunteer.

However, after devoting so much of his life to music as a teen and as a music composition major at Truman, he wanted music to be a larger part of his life. Loula's service with the Peace Corps became an opportunity to reinvigorate his interest in music, culminating in his creation of the Gambian Music Preservation Project, which recorded the musical

traditions of groups in Gambia.

Loula's service initially did not include the Gambian Music Preservation Project, but music always was on his mind. While serving, Loula said he began noticing the traditional music of the Gambia was drowned out by imported western music. Loula made a conscious effort to understand Gambian culture and collected local musical instruments like the Nyanyera, a type of string violin. Loula said there were no other projects like his in Gambia, so he felt he should help preserve a culture with which he was fascinated.

Loula said he first went to the United States Embassy for assistance, but after a series of frustrating interactions, his proposal was rejected and his search for support led him back to the Peace Corps. Because it was a new project, the Peace Corps officials initially were apprehensive about the expected results, Loula said.

"It was a new project and I think there was some worry that if it didn't work, there would be anger from Washington," he said. "But the way it worked out, everyone was actually thrilled with the results and they are thinking of making something like this viable for other projects."

Loula was the Preservation Project manager and said the goal

was to contribute to the value of traditional music to the greater Gambian community. Loula said for a month he and his entourage trekked to nearby villages of under-represented ethnic groups, with special attention to the Manswankas, Bainounkas, Fulani and Soninke, collecting their music and interviews with a small recording device Loula bought with the project funds.

"We would basically record whenever we could," Loula said. "If people could record during the night, we'd do it then. If people could record during the day and we could get to them, we'd record during the day and we'd do as many as we could."

Loula's interest in non-western cultures began during his childhood. When Loula was about 4 years old, his father received a Fulbright grant to teach in Taiwan and the family moved to Asia. He was immersed in Taiwanese culture, which was frustrating at times, Loula said, because it was difficult to communicate. Loula said that as he aged he became more receptive to Taiwan and practiced Tae Kwon Do.

While a Truman student, Loula continued to develop his interest in other cultures. Loula became interested in Capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian style of martial arts that incorporates musical instruments. For his senior recital, Loula staged an elaborate piece entitled "2/28" centered on the massacre that occurred in Taiwan Feb. 28, 1947. Loula also was exposed to other cultures as a member of the International Club.

While in Gambia, Loula maintained regular correspondences with his former music professor, Warren Gooch. Loula studied composition with Gooch at Truman. Gooch described Loula as personable yet intense.

"By intense I mean that when he's into something, he's

really into it and he becomes very enthusiastic," Gooch said.

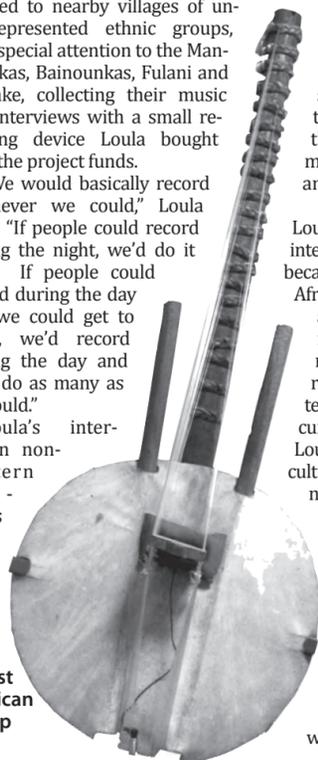
Although Loula's primary interest might be music, Gooch said Loula sees the connections between music and other aspects of society. "He likes to tie musical and cultural aspects with political and social aspects," Gooch said.

Loula said anyone who wants to understand a society, must examine those objects that are most important to them, and for the people of the Gambia, it is their music.

Loula shared his experiences in Gambia with the Truman community Feb. 17. Loula had the opportunity to speak with sophomore Eyo Ita, who is from Gambia, after his formal presentation. Ita said he missed the presentation because the flyer did not have the room number posted, but he did have dinner with Loula that evening. Ita and Loula talked about their experiences in Gambia and Ita said it was nice someone from the states took such an interest in his culture.

"It's just amazing how someone can leave the states and go all the way to where I'm from to study culture," Ita said. "In the Gambia we don't have a program like [the Peace Corps] so I just think it's really cool."

It is not enough to just complete the project, Loula said, but informing others about cultural preservation is just as important.



West African harp

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