CDC Ebola Response Oral History Project

The Reminiscences of

Dante Bugli

David J. Sencer CDC Museum

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

2016

Dante Bugli

Interviewed by Samuel Robson
October 21st, 2016
Atlanta, Georgia
Interview 1 of 1

CDC Ebola Response Oral History Project

Q: This is Sam Robson here today with Dante Bugli. Today's date is October 21st, 2016, and we're here in the CDC [United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] audio recording studio at the Roybal Campus in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm talking to Dante today about his experiences as part of our CDC Ebola Response Oral History Project. Very happy to have you here, Dante. Thank you so much for being here.

Bugli: Thanks for having me.

Q: Of course. To start off, would you mind saying the sentence, "my name is," and then pronouncing your full name?

Bugli: My name is Dante Bugli.

Q: Great. Thank you. Can you tell me what your current relationship is with CDC?

Bugli: Currently, I'm working as an ORISE [Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education] fellow for the Global Rapid Response Team, which feels good because that means I'm still involved with emergencies, closer to the emergency response world. But

that's also within DGHP [Division of Global Health Protection], so it's nice to run into some familiar faces very often. So, technically a fellow now, but still connected, and that's good.

Q: Are you currently attending Rollins [School of Public Health] as well?

Bugli: Currently pursuing my master's of public health [degree], in the middle of my second year. Can see, it's so close, I see the light at the end of the tunnel here. About another semester and a half left. Balancing that part-time work and full-time school has been difficult, but also really rewarding, really rewarding.

Q: If you could give me like a capsule, two- to three-sentence summary of the work that you did as part of the Ebola response, that would be great.

Bugli: I spent a full year on the Ebola response, but my main response activities were within the first three months when I was deployed to Guinea as a health communications specialist, focusing on supporting what we called "micro-cerclage" or mini-quarantine, through rapid assessment and social mobilization activities.

Q: Thank you so much. We're going to back up just a bit now. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Bugli: Wow, very far back, okay. I was born in Detroit, Michigan, 1989, on a cold, fall day in October. [laughs] Grew up in Michigan my entire life and went to the University of Michigan as well. My entire family did. We're Wolverines, born and bred. Both parents, both sisters and myself. I spent a lot of time in Michigan. I didn't really leave the state much up until right after college, when I moved to Chicago for a little while, while waiting for the Peace Corps.

[break]

Q: Growing up, what kind of kid were you?

Bugli: As described by my mother, I was a ham. [laughs] That's what she would call me. I was pretty rambunctious. I was kind of an odd kid, in a sense that I was—I grew up with all girls around me. The entire street I grew up on was all girls, and so I only hung out with girls. But then you know, still being very all-boy at that same time, it created a little—a weird dichotomy of myself. But it's definitely helped in what I do now, working with everyone and being very comfortable working with women. That's always nice. But as a kid, I don't know, just out there, really talkative. For a while there, I found I liked to be—I guess you could call a BSer [bullshitter]. [laughter] I would spew random lies as a child and I had no problem with it. Then I later realized, that's a problem. I shouldn't do that. [laughter] It was good that I had that kind of introspective realization very early.

Q: Do you remember a time when you lied about something?

Bugli: All the time. When I was young. All the time when I was young. I would lie about uncles that I didn't have, who were rich and had cool things that other people said that they had. I was kind of a one-upper. But this is, we're talking like fourth grade, fourth grade. But then I moved in the fifth grade, and that's kind of a traumatic experience for a kid that age. Fifth grade is a really big year. That year changed a lot of things. I was the new kid. I learned a lot of things I didn't know that year because of the bus, much like most kids. But I think I was better for it. I moved on, moved on. I figured out who I was a little bit more. That I liked to be friends with as many people as I can and interact with as many different people as I can because that touches on the breadth of interest that I have. I definitely knew I wasn't the cool kid, but I wasn't uncool. I could talk to those cool kids and I would do sports, but then I'd also do theater, and so it was a good mix of having all those kinds of friends and having that breadth of experience, which is, looking back now, something I value the most.

Q: Were you raised by your parents?

Bugli: Raised by both parents. My dad is a dentist. My mother is a speech pathologist in an elementary school. Education and science were both things that were around me, growing up. I didn't realize how much random dental knowledge I had internalized, but now I feel like I can give fairly accurate recommendations of what you should do about your teeth. [laughs]

Q: Do I have food in my teeth right now?

Bugli: No, you're doing great.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Bugli: No problem. [laughs]

Q: Just ate a salad. Did that interest in science translate to what you were interested in in school?

Bugli: It didn't, originally. I actually fought it for a while, especially in high school. I really disliked chemistry because I was just like, what's the point? These things are so small. Who cares? But then moving on past that, I realized that, looking—I was like, but I'm getting all the best grades in those classes, [laughs] so I guess I should probably stick with this. Which led into college, trying to decide what I did want to do as a major, because I was going back and forth. I could either do pre-med [pre-medical studies] and go the full science route—I also thought about doing pre-law, because I enjoy talking. [laughs] Being able to use that skill in a daily—as a career, really, was something that interested me, and so I kind of went back and forth. But overall, science won out because I have that skill and those things came to me. And I don't like reading that much, [laughter] and to be a lawyer, you've got to read everything and just have it all. So I left that to my—actually, my best friend's a lawyer, so I left that to him. [laughs]

Q: What did you end up majoring in then?

Bugli: My major ended up being something nice, long, and fancy because that's what impresses people. Brain behavior and cognitive science, with a minor in sociocultural anthropology. Right? The more words the better, in majors. But it breaks down to essentially just neuroscience. I worked in a neuroscience lab [laboratory], an animal lab, actually, in college, working on aggression and different opioids in the brain, in voles. Not moles, not mice, not rats, voles. Which was very unfortunate for me, because I was very allergic to those. [laughter]

Q: Really?

Bugli: Very allergic. I ended up being the primary animal care undergrad [undergraduate student]. I was always in a room, a small room about this size with—

Q: What is this? Like ten by ten or something like that?

Bugli: At best, at best.

Q: At best.

Bugli: I'd be in that room with probably around three to five hundred voles and all their dander in the room, and so I would just be all clogged up, and after either—you know, moving around. If some of them had babies, you'd have to identify the sex and then move them into pairs, or even estrogen prime some of the females, stuff like that. And I'd leave the room and [gasps] finally be able to breathe again. [laughs] So that was, it was fun.

Q: Now, did you go in knowing that you had an allergy to voles?

Bugli: No, not at all. [laughter] Not something you run into too often in the forest. But I found out the hard way when I was first around them. Without being in the room with them, I was just—we were just running the tests, and they get a little bit gruesome because it is neuroscience, that means you have to take their brains. But when holding them, they're also very violent. If you hang out with a rat, even a lab rat will get very comfortable with you and he'll just hang out on your arm. I've known friends to adopt their lab rats afterwards, [laughs] because they really do just get comfortable with you. Mice, they just scurry away, they're always afraid. Voles, they fight back. When one bit me one time, through like a garden glove that I was wearing, my finger swelled up really big and I was like, wow, I guess I'm allergic to these guys. [laughter] So every now and then, I'd pop some Benadryl, but for the most part it was tolerable.

Q: So did you know what you wanted to do?

Bugli: If anything, I think college and my experiences in college helped me decide what I didn't want to do. If anything, I was eliminating it that way because my interests were so wide and so varied that I got to try out—I tried out a lot of different things. Even in college, I was doing what I considered a dichotomous life. I was in a fraternity and went real Greek and worked on student governments. But I'd also do theater, and I worked on an educational theater company, and was also trying to do school stuff. Even my classes, me and my friends joked about it, for about the first two years, freshman, sophomore year, I took the shotgun approach. Just try a little bit of everything, spin the wheel, see where you end up.

Q: The liberal arts approach.

Bugli: Yes, a very liberal arts approach. I was eliminating what I wanted to do, and actually, research was one of those things. I had a great experience working in that lab, probably mostly because of the people who were running it. My PI [principal investigator], the doctor I was working for, really nice guy, really personable and cared about where I was going in life, but also realized that research isn't something I wanted. But I was also still willing to support him throughout the rest of my college career. I wasn't just going to leave him. So he kept me on. That's where I did the animal stuff, is because I was good at it at the point and I'd known it. It was funny, every time we tried to hire someone to take over for me after I graduated, they would only make it about three or four months, [laughs] not even. They always needed me. That felt good, that I could at least fill that role for him and both of us get something out of that relationship. But I

definitely realized that I didn't want to be in a lab. Especially an animal lab. Animal labs really run your life. Because if that animal is ready to be tested that day, you've already been preparing it for multiple months. I don't care if it's Thanksgiving or if it's Christmas. You've got to go test that animal. Because you've been preparing for so long. There's multiple times I would have to leave the bar, go back to the lab, switch over some video—because it was a behavioral lab still, and so we're videotaping them for seventy-two hours—and I'd have an alarm on my phone. [laughs] You've got to go change the videotape. Leave the bar, cross the street. That's what's nice about Ann Arbor—Ann Arbor, Michigan. The buildings are always right next to the bars. [laughs] So I was able to get there quickly and go switch the tapes and then head back to the bar and continue my evening. [laughter]

Q: Can you also tell me about the minor in what was it, sociocultural anthropology?

Bugli: Yes. Sociocultural anthropology. That one, it was a general—I mean, a general cultural anthropology kind of degree, a few classes. Because I'd taken—based on that shotgun approach, I had already covered a few of them, and so then it just required one or two more courses for me specifically to take. I took things like medical anthropology. I took anthropology of primates, and different things like that. I was also involved in an American culture class, that was pretty cool. But that one was also a little bit just for my interest. But really, it was just something I saw that I could attain pretty easily and take interesting classes, to get a bump on my minor. And I enjoyed it. I definitely enjoy the idea of looking at cultures from a kind of a little more of a scientific perspective and

breaking them down as to what, how their environment and what their context, how that context creates who they are and then who they interact with, how that creates who they are and stuff like that. I think honestly, looking back at it now, that's kind of what started my path towards not only interest in other cultures—that was born much, much earlier. But also seeing it scientifically and being able to objectively look at cultures, and that that helped me appreciate other cultures.

Q: So what happens after college?

Bugli: At the end of college—we're really going to start far back here. It's kind of funny, a lot of things that I hadn't planned for made very big decisions for me in life. It's funny, but it actually all—if you want to call it the inciting incident starts with my sister's at-the-time boyfriend, current husband. He did Teach for America, and I saw what that program involved, and I said, I don't know what I want to do after undergrad [undergraduate school]. That sounds like a good way to give back, and a good way to delay what I want to do in life. So why not? I applied to Teach for America, and that was before even the beginning of my senior year. I had set it down and I thought, okay, good, I'm all set for the senior year. Then I didn't end up getting a phone interview. Not only not the job, but not even a phone interview. I was very, very disheartened by that. But then also, that opened up, hey, look for more. I looked at a bunch of different programs, some of those being City Year, and then a City Year and Teach for America spin-off called Blue Engine in New York. I got final interviews for both of those, got to travel. I went to Boston, I went to New York, nothing. [laughs]

But then, the whole time, I had been thinking about applying to the Peace Corps. That was honestly my fourth choice. I was slow to get going on that application, even though knowing that it takes a very long time, and slowly my options dwindled to where the Peace Corps started looking like the thing I should be doing or will be doing. But it wasn't until well into my senior year that I really realized that, because the other jobs had denied me. But throughout that senior year, and right before that senior year during the summer before that, I had been a part of the Educational Theatre Company at the University of Michigan. Part of that, during that summer, involves doing shows for the freshman orientation. These shows involve general information that freshmen need, but given in a much more fun, usually a little bit of improv [improvisation] and comedy, sketch kind of thing. But then we'd also attack some really serious topics, like sexual assault and homesickness—things that a freshman doesn't want to talk about but needs to hear. We would portray that, even mental health—that was also a good sketch we had. We had a talented director who would use our—not only our stage, but the way the actors would stand, to represent different things. We got to attack those different topics, and we always ended it with our last sketch was one about the fiftieth anniversary of the Peace Corps. Because in 2011, it was the fiftieth anniversary—maybe not of the first Peace Corps volunteers going out, but it was the fiftieth anniversary of an impromptu speech by John F. Kennedy, given to the University of Michigan students who—while he was on the campaign trail, he was staying at what was the Michigan Union, which was also a hotel at that time. He was staying there.

Two AM, a bunch of students are gathering outside of the Union, asking for this presidential candidate to come down and speak to them. It was on that speech—it was actually in the rain, and he was not really prepared. He just had ideas and started talking to them, that he mentioned and kind of put the first idea, the bud of an idea of the Peace Corps out there. It was not called "the Peace Corps" at that time. It was just something about service and giving back and having those ideals of doing more for the world. A bunch of students at Michigan, graduate students at Michigan, picked that up as a petition, got a bunch of people to sign it—faculty, students—and then they got that petition to John F. Kennedy, which kind of spurred him to make it a real thing, a part of his campaign. As history would show—I wouldn't say that that won him the election, but that pushed him towards that edge. We were celebrating that. It was cool. A really, really great thing for me to be a part of, and I didn't realize it at the time, but it was truly affecting me. I got to meet the guys who started that petition. That was really cool. I got to meet, hear talks from the current—the at-the-time Peace Corps director. It was a really great experience. Because we even, our whole anniversary event for that itself, not only did we do the sketch for the show for freshman, we did a whole big event on the actual day of the anniversary at 2:00 am on the same spot that JFK gave his speech. That was a really cool event for me to be a part of, and it was actually at the end of that night that I truly decided, okay, Peace Corps is a definite option now.

That was in October, and that's when I started the application. Notoriously, at that time, Peace Corps applications take about twelve to eighteen months, and that's when I started. At the time, it was still kind of a back option, a fallback. But end of senior year, I still

didn't have a job, and Peace Corps was still pushing me through on the application. So I said to myself, you know what? This is what I'll do. I told myself to do some kind of service, some kind of give-back, and so I was playing Good Samaritan chicken with myself. [laughter] I kept telling other people about me wanting to do the Peace Corps and me planning on doing the Peace Corps, to either publicly shame or just set myself into being on that path. In the meantime, after graduating, I just went home, like most people do if they don't have a plan after college, and I worked cement for about five months.

It was a very interesting five months. That's my uncle's company. It's a very classic Italian thing to do during the summer. That's what my grandfather did. That's what my cousins do. That's what my dad did. It's what I did often throughout college summers to help pay for college. I was back doing that, doing manual labor, and every now and then I'd get a call from the Peace Corps either wanting another paper filled out or another quick phone interview, a few questions to answer, so I'd have to run away from the job because the jobs are loud and you've got machines around you and all the guys yelling at you. I'd run away, answer a few calls, and then go back.

But I'd also, at that same time, made a promise to myself to move to Chicago before my birthday. My birthday's in October. I needed a reason to move to Chicago, I wasn't just going to go. But I ended up getting an internship for the [American] Red Cross in Chicago, and I moved there about two weeks before my birthday. Started doing a special events internship with the Red Cross of Greater Chicago, and then also I had friends in Chicago, and one of them set me up with a bar job. Over the mic [microphone], you can't

tell how large I am, but not that big, [laughter] average male size. But I was a bouncer, [laughter] a bouncer or a doorman, is better described. I was the guy at the front of the bar saying yes or no to whoever walked in. But lucky for me, it was kind of the hipster/yuppie bar of Chicago, so the crowd was easy to control. [laughter]

Q: Relatively weak people. [laughter]

Bugli: Yes. It's always safe there.

Q: What year was it that you graduated?

Bugli: I graduate university in 2011. So then this is all happening. Me moving to Chicago happened in October, or actually in late September of 2011, and I ended up staying in Chicago up until about July or June 2012. Throughout that time, I was doing a lot of different things to help keep me going. Help me stay not poor. I was working at the bar. I picked up a temp [temporary] job for a little while that was terrible.

Q: Doing what?

Bugli: Data entry. Have you ever used Grubhub?

Q: Yes.

Bugli: I would have to take menus, paper menus, and put them onto Grubhub's server.

Q: Oh my gosh. In case this doesn't exist when—I mean, this won't exist when we're talking. This is an online delivery service for food.

Bugli: That was a very menial, just a mind-numbing job that I did not enjoy, but I needed a day job for a little while, for a very short period of time, and so I knew temping was something that could work. But then I also did some acting. I did some acting. I got to follow up on my acting from college in Chicago. Did a show on the North Side of the city, and it was a comedy show, and it was actually a really fun show. Worked with a lot of fun people that I still keep in contact with now, or at least can keep an eye on what they're doing, because they were much more serious about the acting and theater world than I was, so it's nice to see them succeed in their realm.

It kind of all worked itself out where the timing of that show ending and the timing of my temp job and internship, that had already finished, but a lot of things were wrapping up right around the time that I got my invitation for Peace Corps. I got my invitation to my house in Chicago, opened up the invitation, and read that I was going to Guinea, and I immediately had to Google where Guinea was. [laughter] I remember that I was actually—the timing of it worked out great because I had a friend who I had just met while working at the Red Cross. He was one of the few other male interns at the Red Cross, and so me and him connected right away, not only because we're both men, but both from the Midwest, both enjoy hockey, and he had just finished Peace Corps as a

science teacher in West Africa. I was like, that is just too many things in common for us not to be friends. [laughs] We become close friends, and he actually became a bit of my Peace Corps mentor. Really talked me through what I would be expecting and next steps and what to expect and what to pack and everything. We talked about anything and everything. I'll actually say his name, John Bressler, because he actually comes up later in many stories because I've slowly followed his life as well. Because he makes good decisions, so why not just follow that? [laughs] John had talked me through a lot of what the Peace Corps process would entail, and he was over at my place, he was over at my apartment at the time when I got my invitation letter. We opened it together actually, and he was—it was really cool to see how excited he was for me. Because he knew exactly what I was going through and the experience that I was—he might have been even more excited, because for me, I had the excitement mixed with trepidation. He was able to look at it with full excitement, because he's not the one going and he knows exactly what I'm in for. It was really cool to have him by my side, not only for that moment, but for those few months beforehand, really talking me through what I would be going through. He's still a great friend to this day, and I still lean on him for advice and whatnot.

Q: Do you remember any piece of advice that he gave you about Peace Corps?

Bugli: I actually wrote this into one of my first blogs, because just like every Peace Corps volunteer, you blog. It's our generation's journaling. Now, we just get to share it with everyone. In my first blog, which I actually wrote right before I left as kind of my goodbye letter, I wrote a quote from him. Because one of those big concerns that I had is,

I had just left college, and you'd left all those friends, and I had moved back home and reconnected with my family. I was working with my cousins, so I'd really reconnected with those cousins, and I left them and I went to Chicago. I made a bunch of whole new friends and a whole new network of people in Chicago, and I was going to leave them again. So I was really worried. I was really, really worried about—I'm making all these temporary friends, and it's almost selfish in my life to jump into their life, and then I'd be like hey, we can be really close, but I'm going to leave you. I was struggling with that idea, and he said to me, "The people who truly care now will truly care in two years," and that was probably the greatest reassurance that I could receive at that time because it's a true fear. That's just a fear of growing up, really. You grow distant to people that you once—who once played such huge roles in your life. With that advice, it not only gave me more confidence that those people won't leave me behind; those people will still care. But also, that put in perspective, it's okay to have those quote-unquote "temporary friends," or for truly appreciating how close you were at that time. Because maybe that's just what you both needed at that time. Having that perspective allowed me to more confidently go forward into the Peace Corps, because then also I knew that I was in for a whole new group of—probably more than temporary friends. These people are going to be lifetime friends. Because you're going to go through so many life-changing experiences with these people that you won't have a choice, but you'll be really close with them. [laughter] Having that excitement, it really made it feel okay.

But I don't want to downplay it. It was a huge move for me, and it really hit home when I was actually finally driving back from Chicago. My mom and a family friend, because

my father was busy that weekend, came over to Chicago. They stayed for the weekend. They came to see the show, and then they were there to help me pack up and drive back. It really wasn't until I got home-home, back to my parents' house, I get out of the car, and I just had a moment. I had to take a moment to myself because I saw, it had been so long since I'd been back to my childhood home, and seeing all that and feeling that comfort and then knowing that I'm about to walk away from it all for so long. I had a moment. I just looked at my parents like, it's all moving so fast right now, it's all moving so, so fast. Usually, I'm the kind of person who's totally fine with that. I like moving fast, and I like when things are—there's a lot of action. This was weird for me to have that first moment of true fear, almost. Maybe it wasn't fear, but it was true nerves. I think maybe born of being that confident, loud kid had pushed me through. That confidence and boisterousness had pushed me through high school and college with confidence, but now I knew too much. [laughs] Living in Chicago had taught me too much. It teaches you, the more you know, the more you realize you don't know anything. I don't get credit for that quote. [laughter] Someone else has said that before, obviously. But it's just more and more true. That's what created that—I finally think I had my first experience with nerves, being nervous about something. Every other time, even while doing shows, while doing plays, performances, speeches, I never really truly felt this nervousness or anxiety before doing something. That was a big moment for me, of getting back home and knowing I only had about two weeks before I was going to leave for the Peace Corps. And I hadn't even packed. [laughs] There's a great picture on my Instagram of me being entirely unpacked, an empty bag, and it's—I think it was 4:00 am, and my flight—we had to leave for the airport at 6:00 am. I was entirely unpacked up until two hours before

leaving. [laughs] That's just the way it was. Lucky for me, I had one of my best friends, a guy I've known since fifth grade. He lived nearby, and he had come back to his parents' house for the weekend because he knew I was leaving. He was there with me, and he didn't stay till 4:00 am, but he was with me till about one or two in the morning, just talking and catching up because we hadn't seen each other in a while. But then also, talking through what I was about to go through. Then I finally got to pack. [laughs] That was a very big moment, a very big change, those very fast two weeks of seeing family, seeing friends, moving out of Chicago, all that, all that wrapping up so fast before leaving for the Peace Corps.

It's really funny. It feels a little anticlimactic because you do this big goodbye with your parents and your friends, the tearful goodbye at the airport, and then you fly to Philly [Philadelphia]. [laughter] Because you have to do a staging in Philly first. So you catch up. You get all the basic information there. It's really funny. It feels like this big moment, these big meetings, but they're very basic stuff, just to get your feet wet before sending you over. It was another two days before I actually flew out to Guinea. The Peace Corps, you know, they know what they're doing. They realize they can't bring you out there, no training, no information, and throw you out to the village. So they give you—there's three months of training, and that's what I set in for. I had been slated to be a secondary chemistry teacher—that means in about the middle school level, middle school to high school level, seventh through tenth grade, teaching chemistry, which I had to essentially relearn because who remembers their seventh grade chemistry? I got to relearn a lot of things, but then also relearn them in French. I had taken French in high school and a little

bit in college, but really, I'd forgotten most of it. That was a big thing to get back into that.

Those are those three months where you're truly next to, excuse me, the big group of—the group that you had arrived with. Our group was about—we started with twenty-seven. People would slowly remove themselves from that group, for many different reasons. But that bonding happens so fast, so, so fast. The guys I still keep in touch with closely now, we joke about how connected we still feel to the guy who made it through a day and a half in Philly and then about a day and a half in Guinea with us. [laughter] He really was only with us for three days. But we still remember so much about this guy, and we still try to keep in touch with him because he was there for that. [laughs] Even for that brief amount of time, made that kind of bond. If he had survived those three full months of training and then the next two years of service with each other, that's what really creates those true bonds.

The training aspect was great. Got to learn how to be a teacher. Got to learn how to speak French, how to survive in Guinea. I lived with a host family. They gave me a—right away, the first thing before—obviously, you don't just go to the host family. They had a little adoption ceremony. We had an adoption ceremony where I was trying to follow what they were saying, but really couldn't. I heard my name, they clapped. I got up there and a family grabbed my arm, took a picture, and then you move on. [laughs]

Q: This is something the Peace Corps organized?

Bugli: Yes. The Peace Corps organizes all this. There's a great amount of work done in-country to plan all this before all this happened, before anyone touches the ground. Then I got back to my host family's house, and we were just sitting there, we were eating a little bit and trying to communicate. "This is my name," just trying to ask questions like what their names are. Then they told me that my name is now Issiaga, and I was like okay, Issiaga. That was very different for me. I would later find out that Issiaga is the Guinean equivalent, or the Guinean take on the name Issa, the Arabic name Issa, which is like the biblical name Isaac. They're kind of equivalent. So I was Issiaga. I asked them, "Why Issiaga?" and they go, "That's our dad's name." I was like, that's awesome, that's like a lot of respect. A dad's name right away? That's a big deal. I said, "When do I get to meet him?" They go, "He actually passed away last year," and I was like wow, okay, I have to take this with a lot of respect, because you gave me your dead father's name. Okay. I started asking about him because I was curious. Like, "What did dad do?" "He was a really well-known and really respected teacher here." I was like, okay, no pressure. [laughter] I'm only over here to be a teacher, too. But I did take that with a lot of respect, and I love that they gave me that name because of that. It gave me that little bit of inspiration. You know, if I wasn't inspired enough by arriving there. I actually kept that name throughout my entire service.

It's what taught me how malleable names really are. As long as someone keeps calling you something long enough, you will respond. [laughter] Issiaga became my name. It was cool in that sense because it gave me the perspective that I wasn't any longer living as

Dante. This wasn't two years of me living as Dante, and so it let me separate these two things of, I have a lot of goals and plans and things I want to achieve back home. But I've been so lucky and so blessed to do the things that I've already done in life and know that—go forward in my life with confidence that even if I fall flat on my face with something, I have an amazing support system and family to pick me up. Not everyone has that, and so I kind of reconciled that with the whole idea of wanting to do service and giving back. This allowed me to say, I'm not even living as Dante anymore. This is two years as Issiaga.

At the time I was Issiaga Diallo. That was the name of the family, last name of the family. That would make their ethnicity Pular, they're Pul. Pulaar is the language, Puehl is the ethnicity. I would actually be slated to move to a village that's in a Susu region, Susu being another ethnicity in Guinea. I can't have a Puehl last name living in a Susu village. That's just confusing, and it also shows that you're not a part of the village. To be a part of my village, my little town of Wonkifong—that's the name. Crazy little name, crazy little town. But when I moved to Wonkifong, they gave me a new last name, but I told them, "No, I'm going to keep this same first name," because I really respected that name and I liked it.

From then on out, I was Issiaga Bangoura. Which actually turned out to be a very popular name in my village. If you broke it down by my students' last names, about seventy percent of them are Bangoura. [laughs] I actually did that count. I put all my students'

names into an Excel sheet and made a pie chart, [laughter] because I just had to know. I had to know.

Q: How many students did you have?

Bugli: Overall, I probably had close to three hundred, three hundred and fifty students at my school, between the seventh and tenth grade.

Q: Wow. So that's like 210, or something like that, students named Bangoura.

Bugli: [laughs] Yes, it was a very popular last name. But just in general, the variety of last names is not great over there. When I say those regions or those cities are ethnic-specific, that's mostly because those people stayed within themselves and there wasn't a lot of travel. I had a varied amount of kids, students from other regions. You can tell that based off their last name. But for the most part, it was all what we would call Susu names. It would be the same thing if I was in the Puehl region, or in—there's also a Malinké region. The last region—Guinea gets divided into four regions, and the last region you just called "the Forest" because the Forest is actually so diverse with different ethnicities and different tribes that they just call them the "Forest People," which sounds a lot less offensive when you say it in French. [laughs] Les Forestieres. It sounds way less offensive. [laughter] Calling them the Forest People sounds a little weird in English.

Q: A little strange. [laughter]

Bugli: But they have so many different languages and so many different cultures down there that you just kind of lump them in—there's not one that's a huge majority, unlike the other regions. That actually led to them being able to speak French better, because they can't communicate in each other's languages as easily. Whereas in the other regions that are more mono-ethnic, they're able to—there's people who just survive on the one language their entire life, without having any need to speak French. Because everyone around them speaks Susu. Or Pulaar.

That was the culture I was being adjusted to, was the Susu culture, which is actually—it's really funny. At first, when I didn't even understand Guinea, living there for two and a half years really, really teaches you. It's like majoring in Guinean studies for two years. I know just too much about that country now. [laughter] There's so much. Whether it's from hearing stories from other volunteers who had learned things from other people, or grabbing tea with another one of my neighbors and talking, having my students tell me all about Guinea. They love drawing maps and telling me different stories and different facts. So, learning all about Guinea, I know so much about it now and it feels weird because I didn't even know where it was at first. But I also feel good because neither did anyone who knew me. Everyone else who knew me—my family, my friends—they didn't know where Guinea was either. Now, via me, it's nice that those people can point that out, and even some of my closest friends and family can tell you a lot about Guinea, too, because they've been subject to as many stories as I've told them. [laughs] I guess I've lost track of where I was going with that.

Q: I think you've just arrived in the Susu region. Tell me about what happens then.

Bugli: Okay. Moving in, moving in was a big to-do, obviously. I called it a big Band-Aid pull, [laughs] because after all that three months of training, you get really connected to those other Americans that you're living with. Everything's comfortable, and you've learned how to survive in Guinea with each other. Then it's just a drop off, a big hug and a goodbye, and now I live in Wonkifong. The next thing I know, I'm two and a half hours or more from the nearest American. At least the nearest American I knew of. Maybe there was someone I didn't know. But it really was just a big rip of the Band-Aid and good luck.

It was lucky to be a teacher because that gives you a semblance of a routine in your life. Whereas if you're a non-teaching volunteer for health or for community economic development, you really have to discover that on your own, and you have to build up based off nothing, or whatever community network you can establish. This way, I had a school, I had a job, I had—I will never call it a nine-to-five because their school started at eight and it was done by two, and some days I wouldn't teach at all. Their scheduling was more like college scheduling. It's not an elementary, it's not our high school or middle school schedule. I would teach chemistry to each level once a week.

It was definitely a rough go at it at first. I could barely communicate with the kids because they weren't used to my style of French. At that same time, my French was

limited. I wouldn't say limited—it was enough, but definitely wasn't what they were used to hearing or how they were used to hearing that language or that structure of French. Even at my ability now, it's very easy to see that I'm an American speaking French because of the way I structure phrases. It was difficult for them to adjust. Then also, I found out that some of those seventh graders just plain didn't speak French, [laughs] and so me figuring that out, why aren't you listening to me? Me getting frustrated like, why aren't you doing what I'm telling you to? It's because they have not a clue what I'm saying. Realizing that was very tough as well. But it was really great, a great experience of teaching and having that support system. I had a really great mentor as my vice principal. He took care of me. He definitely walked me through. If I ever had any questions, he would help me out.

It wasn't long into that that I got comfortable and it became routine, that I was already looking for more to do. That's when I discovered malaria work. Again, something I did not plan on. A lot of these adventures in my life are very serendipitous, [laughter] they just pop up and I take it and run with it. A friend of mine who was another volunteer who was there specifically as the malaria coordinator, he was like, "Dante, I know that you're loud enough to handle this. I need you to advertise this for me, get everyone excited about this." I was like, one, you came to the right guy. [laughter] Two, I'm in, one hundred percent in. He had asked me to really get people hyped about these malaria activities. We were going to be doing a malaria competition. Like, whoever can do the most activities surrounding malaria education, awareness, what-have-you, will win different points for different scales of things. He wanted me to get everyone excited about

it. I did that, but at the same time, got myself excited and really started getting deep into malaria education, malaria awareness, to the point where myself and another volunteer and the gentleman I was just speaking of established our first malaria committee amongst volunteers.

Then we started working to coordinate volunteer activities, support volunteer activities, provide them with essentially toolkits, like hey, I know you want to do something, you're not sure how to do it, here you go. Whether that be a malaria fair, a little malaria skit, a radio skit, stuff like that. It really just meant I'm making it as easy as possible to do malaria work. But then also on that committee, I served the role as the—I guess it was the partners coordinator, and in that, I was the point person between Peace Corps and all the national organizations working in Guinea. I got exposed to people who worked for Johns Hopkins' Jhpiego. That's how you say it in English, right? Jhpiego?

Q: Jhpiego?

Bugli: Yes, it's a really weird acronym, it's J-H-P-I-E-G-O.

Q: This is just something I don't know about. Johns Hopkins—something.

Bugli: Yes.

Q: What is it?

Bugli: I actually don't know.[1] But I always said it really weird at first amongst Americans, because in French, "joo-pee-yago" or something along that line, that's how I said it. But then someone was like, "You mean juh-pie-go?" I was like, "That sounds wrong." [laughter] "That can't be right." But it was cool that I got to interact with these people, people who were already public health professionals. I hadn't even identified them as public health professionals. They were just people I was working with doing malaria stuff. I got to sit in on the national malaria committee meetings. At the time, they were scheduling a routine, or a generalized—a universal bed net distribution, and so that means getting bed nets to every person in the country. I got to be there, and not advise, but put my two cents in every now and then. For one, how to do the censusing, doing a census. That verb is terrible to say. Censusing.

Q: Yes. Is that really a verb?

Bugli: I don't know. [laughter] To do a census is what we'll say. Got to help them through those steps, and then also the distribution itself, which is in my mind, probably one of the only and probably one of the most tangible interventions you can do in public health. Because usually in public health, you're doing things like collecting the data to give back out that data, and information is power. Or trying to change a behavior and things like that, or doing research that people don't see until a long time after. But then

---

[1] Initially, the Johns Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecology and Obstetrics; now just Jpheigo.

that represents, this is a way to protect yourself and to protect the health of the people around you, because with bug nets that have insecticide already on them, you not only get the physical barrier of protecting yourself while you sleep, but when that mosquito lands on that bed net, it later dies, and then you protect those around you.

It really was a cool thing to be a part of such a tangible public health intervention, and I got to see it from the steps in the national level all the way down to handing out the nets myself in my village. That was really cool for me to see every level of that, all the different trainings. I got to help out and guide so far as the spreadsheets they were working with. Because if there's one thing that I know as Americans we are great at, at least American professionals, we love organization and we're good at it. It's just so embedded in our systems, in our thought processes, that we always think that way now. It's a skill that not everyone has. I didn't realize how valuable the skill was until working with other people who may or may not have strong organizational skills. That's something I felt comfortable providing to those teams, because I was like, you guys are—you're the malaria coordinator for the entire country of Guinea. Don't listen to what I'm saying about malaria. I can tell you about Excel, though. [laughs] It was cool to be able to influence, even in the most minute way, what was going on for that distribution. It was really great.

Q: Is all of this kind of your introduction to public health?

Bugli: Yes. That's actually why I bring it up, is because I hadn't really known public health as a career or as a field at all. I had kind of, throughout college, kind of pulled away from the idea of being pre-med, just because the MCAT [Medical College Admission Test] did not sound fun, and I know that you can't limp into being a doctor. You've got to be one hundred percent, you've got to be gung-ho. This has to be a passion. I wasn't going to put myself through that. While I was looking for that, I found public health as a good medium for me of mixing my skills, of my event planning, group coordination, leadership skills, and the communication skills, along with the science skills that I always realized I had and probably should have used. It was a cool way to marry those two ideas, and it definitely was what introduced me to the idea of doing public health. I actually didn't really realize that I should probably go into this until about halfway through my second year, when you start talking about hey, you're almost going home soon. What's next? I got the idea, I'm still not sure what I want to do. Why not some more school? [laughter] Even before the Peace Corps, I had looked into doing either clinical psychology or organizational psychology programs. But a master's of public health is also something that existed, and I was like, that looks like a good fit for me. I really wasn't even sure at the time how diverse public health really was. It's a massive field with so many different pieces to it, and all I was really seeing was the health communications side of it. Health promotion, health education is what I was doing. Because that's all I really was qualified to do at the time. I was an American who understands basic germ theory, and someone had taught me how malaria gets transmitted, and I was using that to then disseminate that information. That's the basis of health education. I had an audience and I had information they needed. I didn't realize that

that's what I was doing, but then that's what also pushed me towards the pursuit of a master's in public health.

Even more serendipitous is what then occurred right at the beginning of 2014. January 2014 is when we first started getting text messages and emails, usually text messages, because I had very little access to email, about the first cases of Ebola. Like I mentioned, I was in the Susu region, which is the Basse-Côte region, or the Lower Coast, and that put me right near Conakry and right along the coast. Whether you're near Conakry in the southern coastal area, or up at the top by what is called Boké, that whole area is the Basse-Côte. That's actually the farthest region from where the source cases had started, down in the Forest Region. We had been hearing all about it. We had heard about a few cases making it into Conakry because of people being moved around, usually secretly. We had heard that Doctors Without Borders was starting some interventions, along with the government and a few other partners. We were just given the general idea of keep an eye out, things should be okay. Just keep an eye out, we'll let you know, don't go to the health center. I was like, I don't go to the health center, there's no one sick. I can obviously identify someone who is ill, visually, which is actually a good thing about—it's probably one of the only easy things to identify with Ebola is when you're visibly sick is when you're actually contagious. So I knew, don't hug someone who's dying. I can handle that.

Q: And they told you, don't go to health centers, also?

Bugli: Yes. They told us not to go, which really didn't affect my day. The most interaction I had with my health center at this point was to plant a few trees at their area, in their little yard. They're called moringa trees. I don't know if you've ever heard of moringa.

Q: I think maybe.

Bugli: Maybe? [laughter] It's big in the Peace Corps world because it's kind of the—we like to joke around and say it's that miracle tree, because it grows in very little soil and very little water, grows strongly, and you can use its leaves, its bark, and a lot of different things from it, the nuts and fruit from it, to gain a lot of nutrients. I was helping—I planted those at the health center, and I'd planned on teaching them how to utilize those leaves and how to make those—use those to supplement whatever medical intervention they're attempting.

It was pretty cool because I got to plant them as very small saplings, actually planted them as seeds myself, and just grew them on my porch in little plastic bags that I'd cut open and put soil in. I grew them into little saplings. I planted five of them over at the health center. They were about maybe a foot and a half high when I planted them. By the time I left, they were about fifteen feet tall. Very thin, but fifteen feet tall, and that was really cool. They just grow so fast, and they don't really need a lot of water or soil, so that's why we called them "the miracle tree." But that was the minimal—that was about the extent of my interaction with the health center. When they told us not to go to the

health center, I was okay with it. Some of the other health volunteers, the health-specific volunteers whose activities were directly done out of those health centers, their days were obviously much more highly—much more affected. But I think a lot of people just went at it with a, just be safe with it. I'm going to go to work. They were still going to the health centers, but being more aware of who was coming into the health center. But that was in January, February, all the way really through June, even parts of July, it was a pretty calm reaction.

We had noticed that in Conakry, in the capital, they were starting to make some public health responses to it, in the sense of if you went to some of the fancier restaurants, they would make you wash your hands before you went in. Because soap and water aren't exactly the most ubiquitous out there, they would actually just have really chlorinated water, and so everyone was walking around with really dry hands [laughter] or just over-using hand sanitizer. But they also started implementing the—[laughs] they would just call it, it was like a fist bump for Ebola, instead of shaking hands. Small public health interventions and recommendations to help slow the spread of disease. We were starting to notice those things, but again, they didn't have a great impact on my day. I didn't really—it didn't really change what I was doing.

It wasn't until closer to June and July that we started hearing about more cases, and there was more in Conakry, and more in other places and in other smaller villages in Guinea. Because again, someone would either be a patient or someone who had just passed away from Ebola, would be transported back to that village to be buried, and then funeral rites

usually involve a lot of touching and a lot of handling of the body, and it spreads again. We saw those problems throughout the entire response. But this was just the beginnings of it, and we had just heard about these things. It wasn't through any news source, it was just through Peace Corps a little bit and through friends.

Closer to June and July is when we started noticing that these cases were getting a little—that the outbreak was becoming more of an established outbreak, and we were a little more worried about it. But still, we were there, and there was no word about us being removed. The Peace Corps had recommended, have that ready bag, that bag you can grab if—in the instant you have to get out of there fast, have that ready, and that was about it. But they recommend that pretty much at all times. Especially depending on the country you live in. We were always prepared to be aware for what we call "consolidation," because we're all spread out throughout the country, so step one is to consolidate so it's easier to pick us all up. We were ready to consolidate if needed. But really, it didn't stop us from continuing on to do big projects. Throughout June and July, I was part of two different week-long camps. We did a week-long science came where I brought two of my students, one guy, one girl, everyone brought one male student, one female student, and we did a bunch of science experiments for the whole week. Things that these kids would never have seen. We built rockets with them and shot them off, a bunch of fun stuff. These kids loved it. It was really fun to be—that was entirely volunteer-led and run. A lot of the days, the volunteers would be in the kitchen making food for all these kids. We had a few talented chefs that we could rely on, and I was a great sous chef, just the best support. [laughter] But we continued on, powered through with that.

Then directly the week following that, we had a girls' camp, so it was kind of a women empowerment thing. Brought along a good range of girls between middle schoolers to high schoolers and a little bit older. That really allowed them the opportunity just to be girls and ask those questions that they're not usually allowed to ask each other. It's a big thing within Peace Corps, it's called the GLOW [Girls Leading Our World] program. I believe it stands for Girls Light Up the World. No? I totally forget right now. I knew back then, I promise. [laughter] But it was a very big movement, and it's being picked up hugely right now by Michelle [L. R.] Obama's good support for it. She actually gave us a shout-out on [The Late Show with Stephen] Colbert recently. She said the Peace Corps is doing a great job, and I said yes, they are. [laughs]

It was another cool project to be a part of, and despite all the warnings about Ebola, it didn't stop us, we didn't slow down. Peace Corps didn't give us any recommendations of hey, cut that. [laughs] Actually, a really cool opportunity for me, although I didn't realize—looking back, I realize how huge it was. Following those two-week camps, I went to my friend's village in a small village called Porékiré. Porékiré is technically in the same region I lived in, the Basse-Côte region, but it's closer to the mountainous region, Moyenne Guinée, the middle of Guinea, which is almost a straight mountain ridge all through the country.

Porékiré, my friend Geoff's village, it's kind of secluded through the mountains. Real tough road to get up there, like talking an eight-hour drive after two three-hour drives. It

took us about two days to get up there. I hung out at his village for a few days, because I'd never been up there, and I knew how pretty it was, so I wanted to get up there. Because also, he's one of my closest friends in Peace Corps, and so I wanted to see how he was living, what his life was like. It also happened to be the weekend that Doctors Without Borders stopped by his house and said, "Geoff, great job, we did it. There's no more Ebola in the city," and he was like, "Alright, great," and they're like, "Thanks for all the help, we'll see you soon." For about the past month and a half or more, there had been cases that had made their way up to Porékiré, which is pretty secluded. I'm trying to remember the true term that everyone uses for it. It's kind of an enclave. I think that's what they were using. Because among the mountains, there's pretty much one in, one out. A case got up there and bred more cases. Unfortunately, even the people as close to my friend Geoff as the person he normally gets his rides from passed away. Geoff had been working with Doctors Without Borders, with the [International Federation of] Red Cross [and Red Crescent Societies], and with the community to spread awareness, to sanitize houses, and really just get people onboard with, this is real. This is something that's happening. They responded to it correctly and efficiently and were able to stop transmission in that little village within a month and a half, two months.

There's actually a small article on this. I believe it was on a WHO [World Health Organization] page—I believe so, yes. It said something about like, "the little village that defeated Ebola," and I remember posting that on my Facebook and giving credit to where credit is due, to my superman friend Geoff for being such a key part of that. He played a good role of linking these outsiders, these science professionals from Doctors Without

Borders and within the Red Cross, to the village. Whether or not that actually means a role of explaining things, it really just means a role of presence to show the community, who had already accepted Geoff and who already knows Geoff very well, to be a part of that community and a trustworthy person. When he says, “These people are good, they’re here to help you,” it settles the community and it gets the community behind that. It was so great to see that, and it was so cool that I was there when they were done and as you walked away, “Thanks, good job, Geoff.” Doctors Without Borders left, and they took their equipment with them. I didn’t realize how big of a victory that was until looking back on it in the response itself.

It’s kind of a sad thing that we would end up being evacuated, because of that role that Geoff was able to play. By taking us out of those communities, we no longer could play that. We could never, no longer do that. The ambassador for Guinea, who is one of the most impressive guys I’ve ever got the chance to know, his name is Alexander [M.] Laskaris, great guy. Really cared about Guinea. Learned that country in and out better than anyone I know, better than any volunteer I know. By the end of his time in Guinea, he was giving full speeches in Susu. Just a great guy. He saw more parts of Guinea than any government official that I knew. It’s just because he knew what it took to get out there and go see the community and truly understand, while at the same time balancing pressures from the president about elections and legislative elections and trying to keep the peace. Very impressive guy. While the whole time he knew that we would eventually have to be evacuated, he fought so hard to keep us there, because he knew what kind of

role we could play. I didn't realize that until I got to go back with the response, but that's further down the line. That was in July. That was in July 2014.

It was right around—that was the beginning to the middle of July, when I was hanging out in Geoff's village. We got to explore different parts of the country because I'd finished teaching, so I was doing a bunch of different traveling. For that past Christmas, I had traveled down to the Forest Region, which is even more scary, knowing it now, because that means I was in that region right when the original cases were getting going. Because if you trace it back, that patient zero, if you will, was likely from December of 2013, which is when I was in that region. Those are part of the stories I don't tell my mother. [laughs]

Q: Cover your ears, Mom.

Bugli: Just skip over that part. But we had been traveling throughout the country, enjoyed our 4th of July, and I guess just another quick plug for my friend John. John, who had begun his master's of public health at Emory [University] at Rollins, he was doing his practicum in Guinea. While I was in Guinea doing Peace Corps, he came to Guinea as well, was living in Conakry, working for Helen Keller International, doing trachoma research, and actually a good amount of it in that same region, in the Forest Region as well. But then he got to hang out with me and I got to show him my village and show him the country that I got to know so well. My Peace Corps mentor was now there. [laughs] Just another crazy way our lives are intertwined.

It was right after things were really calming down from that beginning of summer. We had all those big events, those camps. I was planning one last big activity. Because I'd already been in-country for about twenty-five months, and a full Peace Corps service is twenty-seven months: three months of training, twenty-four months of service. I was really close to the end there. I already had friends who had gone home. I would call it COSed, completion of service. They'd already COSed, because you can leave a little bit early, pending, if you've got things going in your life or if your projects are done, just go. But I was holding out to that full twenty-seven months, and I was planning on doing my one last big event, [which] was an art exhibition. I'd worked with a bunch of artists along with two other volunteers the year before to hold an art exhibition for a bunch of artists in the capital, in Conakry. We ended up being able to help them sell close to four thousand dollars' worth of Guinean art, which if you put that into Guinean franc, it's multiple millions, multiple millions. I forget what the math is right now, but multiple millions. It was a huge impact for them to have access to these people who actually want to buy their art. It's beautiful art and for a decent price.

It was really cool that I could be a part of that, and we were planning on doing it again. We were ready to take the next step and even make them a true art collective, if you will, or an art association, artists association. I had been drawing up a constitution, which is something I'd never done in English, but now I was attempting to do in French. We were having elections for them, of like who their board would be, and we were creating those roles, having them talk through what those roles would entail. We were really making

progress, and it's been great. Because there's a little more legitimizing their profession in Guinea, or in the capital, because mostly the only way they sell is by vending on the street or just getting lucky, by some expat [expatriate] who's driving by. This would a little bit more legitimize their profession, and give them better access to people who want to buy art.

It was July 31st. I won't say I'm a hundred percent confident on that, but I'm ninety-five percent confident, it was July 31st that I was riding my bike back from the big village right next door to my little village, buying some food and hanging out with friends there. I was on my way back, and I would always just listen to music on my little—[laughs] it was a really terrible little phone, the Motorola phone with Snake [note: video game] on it, but it was a color, so it was cool. But you could get good radio reception, so I just had the radio on. I was riding my bike, it's usually about eight kilometers. It usually took me about anywhere between twenty-five, thirty-five minutes, a ride that I'd made at that point hundreds, thousands of times because I would go back there all the time. I had heard on my headphones while I was riding, I heard I got a text and I realized, I've got to read that text when I get off the bike. Get back to my house, and it's about six or seven, seven o' clock in the evening, and I read the text and it says that all volunteers are to consolidate and be evacuated. I have the actual text, the verbatim text somewhere in a blog. But I remember reading it and not totally processing it. Not totally even realizing what was going on. I just didn't believe it. It was such disbelief, to the point where I called someone else and I was like, "Did you see that? What does that mean? Does that mean what I think it means?" Because we had been given zero warning. There was no,

hey, things are getting worse, look out, it might happen. It literally went from six months of "This is something that we're aware of, be careful," to "It's too dangerous, you've got to go now." We never saw it coming. I guess you can't say that truly, but that day I didn't. I sat there the rest of the night. I couldn't believe it, that I was truly being evacuated. I almost wanted to be like, no, no, they'll change their minds. To the point where I just sat around that night. I didn't do anything. I did my normal routine of—I went to my night market, bought some food, went back. Watched an episode of something or other. Listened to a podcast and read and went to bed. Because I just didn't want to believe it. I didn't want to think that I was leaving. When really, I probably should have been frantically packing and communicating with people. But then, I think at some level, I definitely knew. Because unlike any other normal day, my body woke me up at 6:00 am on the dot. It was like, hey, it's going to be a big day. You're going to want to start early. My body wakes me up and I realized that, yes, this is happening. I'd already received a few text messages with a few more details about how I would be evacuated and who would be picking me up and when, and it turns out that because I was so close to the capital, they did a closest-in kind of thing.

At that point, some of the trainees who were in the capital or in a city very near the capital, Dubréka, a city that will come up again later, they were doing their training in Dubréka, and they had already been brought back to the capital and flown home. I was being told that there would be a car in my village to pick me up by around 4:00 pm that day. I realized I had about—I guess about 4:00 pm, I had about ten hours to pack and say goodbye to as many people as I could. It was just so not fair, just so not fair to be ripped

away from that two years of living, and I don't even say it's not fair to me, it was so unfair to the people I was working and living with. Because I had literally, just the day before, right before I got on that bike, people asked me, "Oh, you're still here. What are you doing here? Your school year's done, I thought you were done." And I was like "No, don't worry about it. I'm here till mid-September, I'm hanging out." I had literally just told them. Then I had to go back that next morning, because I had a few loose ends that I really needed to tie up. Random enough, I had a bunch of—a whole box full of old soccer cleats that a group from America had brought me. They were a dance group from Massachusetts who specialized in Guinean dance because they have a Guinean teacher. They had come over to Guinea to perform for people, which Guineans thought was amazing because they were watching white kids do their Guinean dance. I'd been in contact with them and they'd actually performed in my village for my kids, and they had been pen pals with my kids, my students, and so that was a cool interaction for them to actually meet their pen pals.

But then they'd also brought this box of cleats, and they wanted to give them to my kids. I was like, none of these fit my kids. You guys all brought things for elementary school kids. My kids are all—because when I say middle-schoolers, because of the way the education system works and how difficult it is to move forward in it sometimes, my youngest seventh grader might have been thirteen, maybe twelve. But then my oldest tenth grader was twenty-eight, [laughs] twenty-eight and thirty, actually. That's a huge range of kids, and these shoes did not fit any of them. Also, I knew that it wouldn't be fair to give just a few pairs of shoes to a few kids. My idea was to sell the shoes in the

market because I knew they could get a good price. Sell the shoes on the market and then buy a bunch of supplies for the school. Because the school was always in need of something or other, because it's almost, without fail, every year the kids pay their dues to go to school, and then somehow a good chunk of it goes missing. I thought, this would be a great way for me to collect that money myself, have a bit of ownership over it, but not even hold—like I would hold it, but they would have ownership of it, and then I would help them use it in a very productive way. That was my plan to do that, but now I just had to offload these shoes and hopefully get them the money. Because I do still one hundred percent trust my vice principal, who had then at the time gone from vice principal to principal. My mentor, my counterpart, I could trust him, and I knew he would use it because he actually cared about those kids a lot. My idea was sell the shoes, give him the money.

That was like my first thing I've got to do. I knew I had to get rid of that. So I spent [laughs] two hours in the market in the morning selling these shoes and trying to get a good price for these shoes, doing the classic African market tradition of talk about the price for twenty minutes, not be happy about it, walk away, and then ten steps away he says, "No, no, no, come back, come back," and so then you get the price you want. I was going through all that with a friend of mine. I gave her the nickname of Coyah Market Lady because Coyah was the city that I was selling these shoes in. This lady, very early on in my service, had stopped me while I was in the market, and she was at her stall selling things, and she told me to come over. I was talking to her for a while, and she really took me under her wing, to the point where her family would send me food

multiple times a week. They're an amazing family, and I still stay in touch with them because they had given me so much and they never asked for anything. She was helping me through all of this, my Coyah Market Lady, and at the same time, she was also just trying to be around me because she also couldn't believe that I had to leave. A few of the family members were also with us too, because they were just so sad that I was leaving. I didn't even have time to process the actual emotions of leaving. I was just trying to get everything ready to go because the car was on its way.

I did my best to pop around Coyah to the spots, my normal haunts of saying goodbye and explaining and doing my best to explain that it's the government's call. I work for the government. If they decide that I have to go, I have to go. Every time I had to have that conversation, it became more and more clear to me that what I was actually saying wasn't something that was sad for me, but it was something I felt so selfish to say. Because essentially, what I was saying was, it's too dangerous for me, good luck. They don't get that option. They don't get the option of leaving, of evacuating. There's no one, the cavalry's not coming for them. Every time I had to say that more and more to more people, to people that I truly cared about, I had known them two years, had spent a long time with them and so thoroughly frustrated by them, whether or not I even considered them a true friend. Because as a bigger reflection on my Peace Corps service, I'm not sure those people are my true friends, just because they never saw the true me. It would be so hard to actually explain all of my background to them, just because there's no context for them. But they were Issiaga's best friends. That's what it was. They were such a big part of my life then, and they were such a great support system, that I couldn't

believe that I was still doing that, saying goodbye and having to do it so rushed. It felt a little calloused to me. If anything, by Guinean standards it was pretty normal. Guineans do not like huge shows of emotion, especially what you would typically call a "weak" emotion, of weeping or crying. Anytime I teared up, they had [laughs] very calloused, yell at me in French, "Cesser la pleurer," stop crying. Essentially, directly translated, cease crying. Cease the crying. [laughter] It had actually occurred in other times throughout service where someone would yell that at me and I'd say, "No! No, I want to cry," [laughter] like no, it's okay to cry, it's fine. They're like, "No, stop crying." This was a very different situation. Those were usually frustration situations, or where I was being very, like—my safety was being violated or something like that. Those were different situations. This time it wasn't, it was just that pain of saying goodbye to them and not sure when I'd see them next kind of thing, if ever. That took up my whole morning, and it seemed like it went by quickly, but also at the same time, just so slow, trying to get tasks done and then also see people and then delaying getting out of the city because I was like, did I catch everyone? Did I see everyone? Then, I'm realizing, the countdown is on. It's this weird, fast-paced, but still trying to soak it all in kind of moment.

Then I finally ride back to my village. Say goodbye to the taxi guys that I normally go with, all that stuff. Start packing up everything as fast as I can. I'd already told a few people, hey, this is going to be happening. I know I'm not going to be able to jump over to your area to see you. Please, please, please come see me. Come over to my house and we can talk while I'm packing. My counterpart, he came over, a few of my favorite

students came over while I'm packing, and I was setting up different things in different areas and labeling them for this person, for that person, for the school, for the mayor, and stuff like that. I have no assurance whether or not those things ever made it to those people, but that's what I thought was the best to do at the time. I was packing up things that I knew I wanted to take with me, things I had to take with me. Different pieces of clothing that I didn't want to leave behind. Trying to pack it all up as best I could.

The one thing that I definitely knew I couldn't pack and wouldn't come with me was the dog I had. I had a dog named Monkey. Monkey was this little dog, little. Can never tell you the kind of dog, just called him Guinean, because no one knows what kind of dog. It's just a big mutt. He had these very beautiful, really pretty colored, big floppy ears. He'd become a pretty American dog in the sense of he's comfortable around people, which is unlike most Guinean dogs, who are usually kind of wild dogs out in the cities and forests. But he was still very Guinean because he wasn't—despite my best efforts, and I've trained dogs. I've been around dogs my entire life, so I knew kind of what I was doing, as far as training a dog. He's just not the—it's just not, he's just not the kind of dog to be trained. He would sit when it suited him. He would come when it suited him. He would stay when it suited him. [laughs] But he did not have a choice this time. He had to stay. I was trying to figure out what I was going to do with my dog that whole time, and the only reason it was actually a big problem is because the kid who I was going to give him to, I'd planned on giving him to another volunteer, because that would probably be the safest for him, is moving onto another American to take care of him. But barring

that choice, I was going to give him to the kid who had spent the most time at my house. He was a kid, his name is Lamine.

Q: And the dog stays at the house.

Bugli: Yes. He would always roam around my house. If I let him run, he'd come back for food. Mostly inside the house, because if he was outside he'd always just bark at people and it would be really annoying. He'd scare people. But it was always fun, whenever I could walk at night with him, I'd walk to the market to go get my food and I felt like the classic Old Yeller, like the little farm boy walking with the dog that never leaves his side. My dog, he'd walk with me, he'd go explore this, explore that smell, but he'd always come back. At night, once I got comfortable, once I knew he wouldn't run off-run off, it was cool that I could just—no leash, just walk with him. I was planning on giving him to Lamine, and Monkey was going to go live with Lamine's family, who had already met him, already stayed with him and his family a few times. I figured that would be a very safe choice. Problem was, Lamine wasn't anywhere nearby. Lamine had just lost his grandmother. Literally about a week before we got that text, I had paid for him to travel out to that village to go pay his respects and go stay there for a while. Because when someone dies in Guinean culture, you hang out and you hang around the family for a long time. Especially because he'd actually grown up there. His grandmother had raised him for a while. So I paid for him to get out there. But now, because of that, he couldn't get back, and he couldn't come say goodbye, and it was crazy hard for me and him. He called me—how many times a day? That was pretty normal, for Guineans to call multiple times

a day. They'd usually call and just say, "Hey, how are you?" "I'm good, how are you?" "Okay, good. Just to say hey. Talk to you later," [laughter] and it would be less than a twenty-second call. I was used to those, and those were fun. I got to the point where I appreciated it, actually.

But Lamine called me many, many times that day, or those days. Just to check in, to see what's going on. I was actually leaving, and just to say hi multiple times a day now. But I was like, okay, I'm going to give him to my principal and the principal will hold him for a little while, and then Lamine will pick him up from the principal's house. But then the principal couldn't take him, so he's like, "Just leave him, leave him in the house. I'll come check on him multiple times and it'll be okay, and then Lamine will get him when he comes back." It wasn't the best plan, and I wasn't totally assured of it, but I didn't really have a choice. These were all logistics I was trying to schedule in under twenty-four hours. Really, in under twelve. I ended up having to just lock up Monkey in my house and close the door. I was really sad about that because it was just so uncertain where he was going.

I guess to close the loop on that, because it may not come up later, he ended up getting taken by my neighbor, who was a government official. That government official obviously was not going to let my little student take him. He was like, no, that dog's mine now. He's like, well, okay. So Lamine never ended up getting the dog. He ended up living with the government official, who then ended up having to pass him off to an army guy who then moved him even farther away from the village, even farther in the brush.

Hopefully, I kind of lie to myself and just, Monkey's out there living in the brush, living life, enjoying it, hopefully. I'd rather stick with the fake happy ending in my head. Who knows where he actually is. But that was just another piece to the day of me trying to get out of there, trying to leave.

I ended up getting picked up probably a little later than four o' clock, probably closer to six. The car, the Land Rover rolls up, the Peace Corps Land Rover rolls up, and I already had made a few laps of the village, giving people hugs and saying goodbye to the students that were nearby. Taking lots of pictures, a lot of selfies, [laughs] of kids and me. The car had already picked up two other, three other volunteers, so they were there too. We still can't hide—you can't hide the relief of seeing each other, seeing another American after so long. At that point, we were just so used to it, but it's always a nice time to see those people. But it was this weird, somber tone around it this time. We were still so excited to be—one, to be going to the capital to get nice things, to get a hot shower. But then at the same time, all of us not talking, wanting to talk about how bad it really could be. Because if anything, we were lying to ourselves at the time. It wasn't certain that we wouldn't be back. It was pretty certain that I wouldn't be back, because I was at twenty-five months in my service and it was unlikely that Ebola would go away within a month, and they wouldn't bring me back for one month. I knew in the back of my head, I knew I was done. But the others, they had eight, ten, sixteen months left, a lot left. I kind of assumed, yes, they'd still get a chance to come back. They'd just had this weird, segmented service that had a gap in the middle. They weren't truly leaving their village. They were kind of like, okay, we'll be back soon, and they probably even left a

bunch of stuff they would have wanted to bring with them. Spoiler alert, they don't get to go back.

But that's the kind of tone, you get into that car and we're all just in disbelief together now, and we get back to the capital, and unfortunately, there was a group of probably five or six who had not only just arrived in the capital that day, but then got on a flight that same evening. There's just about three—I think about three or four of them who had to do that. It was really unfortunate for them because that was just so fast, so, so fast, to be flown out of the country in like twenty-four hours. I can't imagine that.

I was given the grace and the luck of having already scheduled a flight out of Guinea. Because I was so close to leaving, I'd already bought a flight to go to Madrid. I was going to start a big trip right afterwards. The Peace Corps was trying to get me to rearrange that flight just to go home, and so they're like, alright, take care of that and we'll figure your stuff out when you figure it out. But then they were figuring it out, they were planning everyone else's flight at that same time. Then the first region all gets there. We have this big meeting of, this is what's going on. This is why it's happening. A quick little debrief, as best you can, with our country director, and then thank you for your service and goodbye. Every night, the first region would come down, we'd have that meeting, we'd have a party, they'd fly out the next morning.

I ended up getting to and having to go through that for all three regions, and really, it was four nights because like I said, part of my region flew out the first night. So then there

was four nights of what we'll call a going-away party that was this weird mix of those emotions of so happy to see each other, realizing that it might be the last time we're all together, one hundred percent realizing that it'll be the last time we're all together in that spot, and the great deal of uncertainty of where it was going. Those were really emotionally-laden, hardened parties. I got to go through those, but then I had to go through those, too, and I had to say goodbye to everyone. I've got to say goodbye, but I had to say goodbye. It was a little bit of that, it's lucky, but man, was that just so heavy for so many days in a row. Not to mention the drinking. [laughter] Peace Corps volunteers are known for enjoying the libations.

It was still such a whirlwind, and real weird for me to have said goodbye to my village and then be on the phone with them for four days before actually leaving. The last person I got off the phone with was Lamine. I was literally standing in line to board the plane when he called. Somehow he knew. I don't even know how he knew. He knew that I was just about to go, and I'd texted a bunch. I did a huge mass text to people I'd worked with, people who I was friends with and stuff like that. I just sent all that out, and so maybe he'd gotten that and then knew I was leaving real soon, and so he called me while I was standing in line boarding the plane. We talked for that last time at that point.

I just got on the flight and it was—it was weird, I'm on my way home. Because now that I was home, on those flights, and you have so much time to sit there and fester in those emotions, and you don't know whether it's appropriate to just sit there and let yourself feel all those, because you're sitting on a plane and you're in this confined space and

that's not really healthy. At the same time, you're just trying to keep it together, just get home. Got to go through all these different gates, I had to switch in Paris, all that stuff. But then, for as weird and as terrible as all those things were, we were given this chance, this opportunity to leave Peace Corps as a group, which is rare. Everyone else usually, they leave on their own, you have this anticlimactic, like, this is the day I chose. It works, this is the day that works for me, and I go home. You say goodbye and you catch whoever you can. We were all leaving as a group, a bunch of people on the same plane. No one was on my plane to Detroit from Paris, but into Paris we were all still together. We still all got to say goodbye and talk on the plane and commiserate for a while. Then it really, really felt alone—that flight from Paris to Detroit was way heavy, way heavier, being alone and being that much closer to home. I don't know, I told a brief synopsis of what I was doing to the stewardess, and she kept bringing me Jack Daniel's. [laughter] It's an Air France flight, they're free anyways. She helped me out, she helped get through that a little bit, because again, I had that feeling of true nerves, of that big adventure was now over. That huge Peace Corps service, that quintessential experience of my life, it's done.

But at the same time, that feeling of accomplishment was kind of taken away from me, and whether or not I actually felt like I'd finished Peace Corps, it was this weird undone and this weird unplanned timing. I would later realize after being home for a while that that was just a part of the guilt. The guilt that I was feeling from walking away from them. Trying to deal with all that while trying to also deal with the fact that I had been gone for two years and I was moving back home and I was living in America again and

rediscovering [laughs] American culture, American friends, everything. That's not easy in itself, but then being evacuated as a part of that.

Really, I don't know, maybe I was just good at hiding it for a long time. Because it really wasn't until maybe a week, probably less than—no, just a few days, because I remember I got back, it was like a Monday or a Tuesday, because I flew out on a Monday. I think it was that Thursday that I found myself just sitting in my basement, a spot where I'd spent a lot of time because I have two sisters and they're off doing their own thing, and if I was ever home alone, or just home, I always loved hanging out in my basement, it was my cool little getaway. We had a pool table, had the TV, I could just put on whatever I want. So I was just down there, and I had been doing my typical activity of leave the TV on, put on SportsCenter, something like that, and play pool. Then, I found that I just didn't want to do those things. I just didn't want to do that right now. I put down the pool cue and turned off the TV and I just sat on the couch, on the futon in the basement for a while. My mom calls me, she's like, "Dante, dinner, dinner's ready. Get up here." All this, and I never really reacted. I couldn't tell you how long I was sitting there. But then my mom came down, which is very rare that she actually would come down and check on me, so maybe I was down there for a while. But she comes down, interrupts, she's like, "You doing all right? Are you coming to dinner? The food's on the table."

That was my first true panic attack of—maybe "anxiety" attack is the better word for it—the full weight of that guilt, and not knowing what I was going to do now, and I couldn't believe that this had just happened. Finally, the weight of that just set on me. I took quite

a long moment to myself down there. I think my mom realized—my mom's a very nurturing, very comforting person. I think she just realized that I had something I needed to sit through on my own, and just let it pass or let it run its course. Then, I guess probably in the typical, Midwestern, male way of just power through, let's not talk about these things anymore, I proceeded with my weekend. My cousin took me out on his boat to a huge boat party that I was just not ready for. It was just, oh man, I was so weird. I was just such a weird person to interact with.

Q: [laughs] What do you mean?

Bugli: How do you explain to someone like, what did you do last weekend? Oh, last weekend? I was in Guinea. [laughs] I don't know, southeast Michigan is full of people who would start the phrase—any reaction to me, any story that I would tell them about Guinea, their initial reaction, "I can't imagine." [laughter] "Can you? Can you? I can't imagine. I could just, I could never," and that's the entire tone of my interactions with them for so long. For that whole weekend, and me trying to be in this party that looks like a white trash MTV party of people who bought boats and put speakers on those boats, but they might fall into the water, and they're super drunk, and it's just—there was a lot more knee than I was used to. I had just left a conservative country where you wouldn't see knees all that often, [laughs] and now I'm seeing girls in bikinis. I'm a little freaking out about that. I was a really weird guy. [laughter] Props to my cousin for being willing to take me out there. Since, I have brought that back up to him, and he's like, "Oh really?

Yeah, I guess that was a really crazy weekend for you," and I was like, "Yeah, kinda. Yeah, kinda."

Then things calmed down after that point, to where I knew that I had things planned. I was going to go on a big trip. I had my big Euro [Europe] trip planned for following service, and I adjusted it a little bit. I was going with a friend, so I was excited for that. Used the month and a half that I did not anticipate being home to study for and take the GRE [Graduate Record Examinations]. If anything, that gave me a good structure of just plow, plow through this, just do this, focus real hard on this. I really didn't have a choice because my parents only had two cars and they both work, and I live far off from a lot of things. I was just their house cat, sitting at home, waiting for them to come home. Then them asking, "What did you do today?" [laughter] And waiting for me to tell them an interesting story. They would leave food out. I was their house cat. [laughter]

I took the GRE. Did my big Euro trip with my buddy, my buddy [James] Caleb [Taylor Wilson], who was also a Peace Corps volunteer with me. It was great to, after all that, get back to him and be able to talk with him. We ran into other volunteers throughout that trip, and it was really great that we could talk it through together, especially having been out for a month and a half, two months, three months then, and experience a lot of Europe. It was a really great trip, and we saw a lot of places.

But then got home again and was really unsure. I knew I wanted to get that MPH, and I was on the application trail now, and then picked up a bar job at a place nearby, learned a

lot about beer because I didn't have anything else to do. I studied beer at night because I was also working at my uncle's company again, the cement company. But if it's winter, you don't do cement. We do snow removal. I would have the 7:00 pm to 7:00 am shift of either selling salt for snow removal or doing the snow removal myself. I would study beer in between all those things. I worked at the beer bar for a long time.

It was, again, something I could not control or plan or even know was coming, but Peace Corps emailed us saying, "For those of you who just left, are you guys interested in going back and working for the CDC as a part of the response?" Right away, just zero thought, "Yes." Yes was my answer to that. They asked for a résumé, and you just put your name in kind of thing, and I sent it off and I was like, cool. Let's see what happens with that. I didn't really realize it at the time, about like—I didn't know who was on the receiving end of all these emails, people who I now know fairly well, but apparently about sixty, forty to sixty of us applied, of about what was probably about a hundred people who had just been evacuated. About forty to sixty of us applied, and they ended up picking six of us. I couldn't tell you what their criteria was because we were very different people, very, very different people. I don't know what made me stand out, what made the others stand out, but they took us, and I got a phone interview in—that was probably in April. I was hanging out at my—[laughs] I was hanging out at my aunt's house, actually, I was housesitting for her. I get this call and it's someone from the CDC. To me at that point, the CDC is this still—amazing monolith of a public health institution, and so I was like, oh my God, someone from the CDC is calling me? What? [laughter] I was all nervous and I'm pacing. I'm doing this phone interview, just talking out my—just spewing

whatever I can say. Then she ends the conversation. This was Lorna [M.] English, Lorna was working out of the EOC [Emergency Operations Center] for a long time on the Ebola team, doing a lot of the staffing when she was in-country [in the United States]. But she'd also go to the countries themselves and do other work. She ended the conversation with, "How soon can you leave?" In my head I was like, say what? [laughter] Are you serious? In my head I was like, did you actually choose me? I couldn't believe it. But I told her, I was like, "I guess I should at least give my current work two weeks' notice, and I would like to give my family two weeks' notice. So in two weeks?" And she was like, "Great, good to know. We'll be in contact with you soon."

To this point, I hadn't told anyone in my family or friends that I was applying or that I'd been considered. Now that this was actually something that might happen, I was like, I should probably tell my parents. I was pretty afraid, I was pretty afraid to tell my parents just because my mom had just gotten me back, and she's a typical worried mother who wants to see that her son is safe. I was really nervous about telling them, so I led with some good news about me getting a scholarship to one of the universities I'd applied to for public health school. I was like, "Look at that, how cool is that? Right? Lucky me. Other side is, I might be going back to Guinea soon." I got real choked up, and I don't know, maybe just because I saw it in my mom's face. And because of my mother, I have this thing I like to call "sympathy cry," when I see someone else crying it makes me want to cry. At this point in my life, I've gotten to the point where I can control it mostly, "mostly" being the operative term. But when you see your mom cry, there is nothing harder. I got real choked up trying to tell her, this is an amazing opportunity. This will

really help me find some closure and some resolution to this service that got truncated. This can only be a good thing for me. I need to do this. Trying to express that to them, and I think she understood. She probably didn't want to accept it at the time, but she understood. Then it was a waiting game for a little while. I'm just trying to figure out, waiting to see when I would leave.

Got to about mid-May of what is now 2015, mid-May of 2015 is when I ended up getting a flight down to Atlanta to visit the CDC, or to come down to the CDC to start training. It had happened the weekend—I think I planned it out to be just one or two days after my cousin's wedding. I was at this big wedding, which again is weird for me to be at, even still now because they're just so, so juxtaposed against the world I had been working in for so long, and that's one of those things that you can never explain to a Guinean, the level of how luxurious things could be. My cousins are very ostentatious. But in the best way. They're Italian ostentatious. They like things gaudy. I at least got to have that weekend of seeing a lot of members of my family all at once, and of course, the Italians, emotion on your sleeve. They all get emotional at the end there and I'm saying goodbye and all that good stuff. But it was great that I got to see them again before I left.

Then flew down to Atlanta, and again, it was that weird thing where I'm saying these big goodbyes and then I'm in Atlanta for two weeks, for training. Training was a very weird mix of "fill out these papers," "go attend this training," "go talk to that person." There was no actual schedule to it. It was just catch things when you could. That lasted for about two weeks, but it was lucky for me that other people were going through this with

me, people that I knew and was super close to, those other Peace Corps volunteers. Then I had them to help me through it all.

There's a lot of people out of the EOC who were helping me through and keeping a close eye on us. They gave us the nickname of the Peace Corps Group, because they're going, "Those are the Peace Corps volunteers." They didn't really understand that we weren't Peace Corps volunteers anymore, but it is what it is. That actually resulted in some people incorrectly processing me in People Processing, so I was technically hired as a special government employee, ie, I worked for Peace Corps but then was going to work for CDC. But that's not what it was. I was just a normal, I was a temp FTE [full-time equivalent staff member] is what I was. But everyone just called us the Peace Corps volunteers. Which is because that's what we were.

At this point, I feel like I've been talking for so long that I don't know if we take a break during these things. I don't know if you have any questions. Do you want to guide me any more?

Q: I really appreciate the way that you're doing this and the way that it's structured. If you want to take a quick break and run to the restroom or take a drink of water, because those waters are for you.

Bugli: Yes, I was going to grab a water.

Q: Yeah.

[break]

Q: In all, you came home in August of 2014, is that right?

Bugli: Right.

Q: So you were home from about August through May of 2015.

Bugli: Yes. That makes it about ten months. I usually call it eight months because two of those months I was in Europe.

Q: Ah, yes. Quickly describe your Euro trip.

Bugli: Euro trip was mostly just the classic jump around from hostel to hostel, using buses and trains to travel. Started in Barcelona. Went Barcelona, Bordeaux. Barcelona was a lot of fun. A really fun city, a lot of good food and just vibrant. I liked it a lot. Bordeaux, really weird place for two single dudes to go hang out. [laughter] Beautiful, but I think it's a city for the couples, not for two dudes, not for two single guys looking to go mingle. But very pretty city. Then Bordeaux to Paris, and Paris is where we saw another one of our Peace Corps friends because he had moved there. He'd already had plans to move there for a program called TAPIF [Teaching Assistant Program in France].

It's where the French government hires non-French speakers to come in and teach their language. He taught English in a middle school there, and then he also still lives there now doing a master's, and that's actually Geoff, the guy from Porékiré, and the guy who also got to go to Guinea with me. He was part of that group. Then Caleb and I got to hang out with Geoff in Paris, and he got to show us around a bit, taking us to some fun spots, and just really great to see him. He's probably one of the most loving people I've ever met in my life. He's such a warm person. Anyone who's around him always loves Geoff, and it was just great to be back with him. Then from Paris to Brussels. Brussels was a fun time. It was a different city. I'd never been anywhere in Belgium, but Brussels is a small city, still. It's a big city in Belgium, but a pretty small city. Not a lot to see. Don't tell anyone from Brussels that. [laughter] Then Brussels to Berlin. I loved Berlin, cool architecture. Probably the most westernized looking city, because half of it was bombed, and so they had to rebuild. The structure, the city planning is just very different than the rest of the other places I was used to in Europe. Berlin to Prague. Prague to Vienna. Vienna to Milan. Milan to Florence. Spent a few days in Florence before Caleb flew out from Rome. He went home and then I went to my family's place in Italy.

I still have an aunt and uncle and a few cousins over there, and so I just went and lived with my aunt for two weeks, which was amazing. I gained so much weight. [laughter] Just sat around drinking espresso and eating food all day. Then I have, one of my cousins, she's a handful of years older than me and she had a—at the time, he was six. She had a six-year-old named Filipo, and Filipo was all boy, he's just this rambunctious, playful little guy, and me and him would hang out. We played cars with his toys all the time, and

he loved Spiderman, and those would be the only words I'd really understand. Because I understand a little bit of Italian, but at that point I was mostly hearing French still. He would just be yelling things in Italian, and all I'd catch is "Dadada, the Spiderman," I'd go, okay [laughter] and we'd do the cool hand motions. It was great to hang out with some family and connect with them. Really great trip. Ended the trip by going to Singapore next. Saw some friends from college in Singapore. Then from Singapore to San Francisco. My older sister lives in San Francisco. Then San Francisco to Detroit. So I can officially say that I've been around the world at least once. [laughs]

Q: Pretty great.

Bugli: Yes. That's always one of the fun facts I bring up. In a new class, what's your name, where are you from, fun fact? That's my fun fact now.

Q: [Ferdinand] Magellan. That's cool.

Bugli: Yes. Completed one rotation. [laughter] That was just a great trip, and you know, blew most of the—Peace Corps gives you a readjustment salary, readjustment funds. I used it all on that trip. [laughs] I'll readjust later. That was a great, great trip.

Q: Tell me more about what you're learning about what you're going to do in Guinea and the situation there, when you're going through training.

Bugli: Yes. That's probably the cool part, is once we got into Atlanta, stopped filling out papers and stopped going through safety briefs, which we all thought were a joke because we're like, we know how to survive in Guinea, we'll be fine. But we finally got to start talking about what the situation was and what people were doing, what people were planning on doing. It was cool that right away, I felt like we had something to add, because whether or not I was a true health communicator or any bit of an epidemiologist or anything close to a laboratorian, I one hundred percent was a Guinea SME, to use the CDC term.

Q: Subject matter expert.

Bugli: Yes. One hundred percent, I was a Guinea SME, and so I felt confident in being able to throw a little bit more context and at least predict a little bit better than someone who's never been there how Guineans would react to said proposal. It was cool that we could add that perspective, and people right away, they're like, "No way, that's really—" I couldn't believe how little of an understanding of the country they had.

Q: Do you have an example of a time when there was something that demonstrated that, and you could chime in and be like, "actually?"

Bugli: I can't think of one exact example, but usually when we were just talking over different communication strategies and translating things. They'd be like, okay, we'll put this in French. I'm like, that's not going to help anyone. We brought that perspective of

you might be able to get away with doing a billboard in the capital, but putting a billboard anywhere else, it's got to be—even if you somehow translate it into Susu or Pular or any of the other languages, it's very unlikely—those languages are almost entirely unwritten. So very few of them will be able to read it, if they're literate in the first place. Giving that perspective, I was like, that's a terrible idea, guys. Why waste your money? But in a much more diplomatic way. I said that. And it's probably not even diplomatic. It was more like tail between my legs. Like, guys, I don't, I'm not sure maybe—I was terrified. I don't know who I was—I didn't know who I was talking to. That was a huge thing that I know now, looking back, because I have been in the CDC emergencies realm for going on a year and a half now, and you run into a lot of the same people. It's actually not that huge of an agency. You run into a lot of the same people, and I realize now who I was talking to then. I'm like, man, I had access to some really high-level people, some amazing people who are professionals in their field, highly sought-after.

Q: Like who are you talking about?

Bugli: People like Pierre Rollin, people like Ben [Benjamin A.] Dahl. Craig Manning, Barb [Barbara J.] Marston actually wanted to give me the time of day, to sit and talk. George [A.] Roark. [laughs] People who recognize me now and know who I am, and can stop and chat real quick. But at the time, I was just talking with them all casually, because I didn't know who they were. [laughs] People who are now like—David [L.] Fitter, who's the CDC director for Haiti now. It's just so weird for me to be able to have talks and have hung out with those people in Guinea, but then come back here and realize

where they fall in the hierarchy and I was like wow, I was reaching much higher than I assumed. [laughter]

But from this end, from this side, it was all just a lot of talk, and it was all a lot of context, and just trying to set the stage for what we would be doing, which is probably one of the bigger lessons that we had to find out the tough way, is you can never really plan from this side. It's the wrong thing to do, is plan from this side. As long as we were given the correct context to what was going to be happening, what our role would be, or what's expected of us, that's the best they could do. Especially at that time.

We finally got out there right at the end of May. I flew out on the 29th, arrived on the 31st. Arrived a day before the team lead who would be supervising us. We got to Conakry, and it felt cool to be—I was already back. It felt so natural to me to land in that city and get in the taxi—or I didn't get to get in the taxi, I got picked up in a Land Rover. I was like, I was going to take that taxi. Can I not? Okay. Because as you know, all these new government rules that I didn't have imposed upon me as a Peace Corps volunteer. Then we had already been pretty excited about where we would be staying because it was the nice hotel, it's a five-star hotel in Guinea. In real life, on the westernized side, probably not that. But while I was a Peace Corps volunteer, we would drive by that place and I would always say, "One day," [laughter] "one day I'll see the inside of that," and turns out, yes I would. Turns out I would live there for a few months. It was cool that we were staying in the [Hotel] Palm Camayenne. It's a beautiful, beautiful building, right on the coast. Conakry itself is a peninsula, and staying at the Palm, you're looking right out at

the ocean every morning, every morning. I couldn't believe it. Because then you look out the other window on the other side and you see the streets of Conakry in all their glory as well.

It was a cool, very odd feeling to be back in that capacity, but being like, this is my city. I know this city really well. Because even among the Peace Corps volunteers, because I lived so close to the capital and had worked so much in the capital with those organizations I had mentioned, I knew that city better than most volunteers, if not all the other volunteers that were there at that time. Solely by exposure. But that also got to be an asset. I got to explain to the rest of the CDC team places you should go, places you should not go. Because it was really weird. They'd already been there for going on a year. They'd been in a small, small team throughout that year, but the team was really ramping up now, and it had been at a good number of people for a while before I got there. But they really hadn't explored a lot of the city. They had a little map in the office that showed cool restaurants to stop by, and I was like, you guys are barely scratching the surface. [laughs] It was cool that we could tell them about these other places to go.

We convinced them right away, within our first few days of being there, to allow us to go schedule a meeting with the Peace Corps—the head of the Peace Corps, the country director and their people over there, because in those ten months that I was gone, the Peace Corps didn't stop. The people and the staff there, they had been doing great things. They were out doing trainings over in the Forest Region. They were doing train-the-trainers. They were right on the ground, right at the ground level doing a lot of work. I

wanted to check in, not only to see them, but see what they're doing and see how we could help and evolve that collaboration as best we could, because obviously that's the network I was most comfortable with. We got a meeting with them and got to see them, and it was just reassuring. They were so happy to see us back in-country, and they were so proud of us and proud to see that we were willing to come back. Willing and anxious to get back. They were really happy to see us.

Q: Can I ask, are they Americans or Guineans, or—

Bugli: Mix. A mix. The country director, his name is Doug [Douglass P.] Teschner. He had actually just arrived a few months before we got evacuated, maybe less than two months, actually. We jokingly call him "the Closer" because he had just left the Peace Corps Ukraine program that got closed down. He closed down Ukraine, shows up in Guinea, closes down Guinea. Poor Doug. [laughter] Great guy, great guy. He has such a good attitude about work and life in the Peace Corps, and it was cool that he welcomed us back without even really knowing us all that well. But more so, a few of the other Guinean staff who had been there for—they've been working for Peace Corps for twenty years or twenty some years, really. One of the guys, his name's Ousmane Besseko Diallo. If anyone in Guinea has worked with Peace Corps, they will know this man because he is the true heart of that program. He has worked there since 1994, 1995. Slowly made his way up from being just a facilitator, teaching random classes, teaching language classes, to being a part of the staff, to being a part of the leadership of the staff, to being a very, very focal point of that program. Great guy, just a great guy. Probably one of the best

guys I know. It was really cool to see him. He was happy to see us back. They were real surprised that, "Dante, you wanted to come back?" I was like, "Yeah, I did." [laughs]

It was cool to be back and interacting with them, but then also keeping in mind, I've got to do CDC work. This isn't Peace Corps work anymore, this is CDC work. We were treated a little weird because of that, because we were these Peace Corps volunteers who were hired just for the emergency response. We were kind of sat down very early on and told that we were under close watch, if you will. Wasn't the most welcoming of environments at first, to be told like—essentially, we were told, you're not a true professional here. We're going to keep an eye on you.

Q: I'm sorry. Who was telling you this?

Bugli: Some of our team leads.

Q: Oh. CDC team leads.

Bugli: CDC team leads. I think like I mentioned earlier offline, I didn't have the best relationship with that team lead. It was mostly her. The other team leads who were also—the volunteers were on different leads. Excuse me, on different teams. I was on the health communications team, along with Geoff. Geoff was also on that team. While the others had different team leads, they were sympathetic to the point that just like hey, this is a different environment. We run a different ship here. You guys just got back from Peace

Corps, this isn't Peace Corps, and it's going to be different requirements. They came at it with that. My team lead came at it with, we're not sure if you can handle this. We're going to keep an eye on you. We'll try to coach you to catch up. It was pretty condescending, and at the time I didn't know how to tell her, this is my country. I know how to do this. You don't know crap about this. [laughs] But we definitely didn't let it—we definitely whined and commented about it amongst ourselves following that. But we definitely never let it stop us from doing work. We never let it slow us down. Any kind of barrier that that person would put in front of us, we would power through. Whether or not we agreed with what she said we were supposed to be doing, if we were doing it, we did it well. We took offense to it because, okay, we might be early twenties, mid-twenties, fresh off the Peace Corps. We're still professionals. I know how to do this. I've worked in offices, I've worked in teams before. This person had just as much emergency response experience as I had. I'm sorry I can't hear you from your high horse. [laughs] It was what it was, and I knew what I wanted to achieve out there, and what I wanted to achieve was helping Guineans. Helping the country to respond to what they're facing.

We spent a few weeks in Conakry, again doing that planning without actually knowing what's going on. We were so frustrated, Geoff and I were so frustrated because we're so used to the field and we know the field the best, that we're like, let's get out there. We have to know what's going on if you're going to plan anything. That created a bit of a tiff amongst our team, even though the majority of our team was in agreement with Geoff and I, [laughs] but the team lead wasn't.

We finally got a chance to go out to the field really early on, maybe the second weekend or third weekend we were there, probably the second. There was a new—I guess we called it the "door-to-door campaign," it was not only to educate people, but also to—active surveillance, case-finding kind of thing. There was a new campaign of that starting in Dubréka. But Dubréka's a very confusing term because it's not only the city and the capital of a region, but then it's like they're the state itself, so it's Dubréka in Dubréka. It's like New York, New York. In the Dubréka prefecture is where this campaign was going on, in a city a little farther north of Dubréka City called Tanéné. So we went out to Tanéné. That's hard to say.

Q: Tanéné.

Bugli: To Tanéné.

Q: To Tanéné, okay.

Bugli: We went to Tanéné to observe this campaign and how it got launched and what they would be doing. We were alongside that team lead, and Geoff and I were getting very frustrated because things were not going positively. We were throwing it. We were being very American about it, of, we can do this for you. We'll do this for you, telling them what we could do for them, instead of asking, what can we do for you? That was the attitude Geoff and I brought. Looking back, that's the correct approach you should have.

We were really frustrated to be associated—essentially, we were pretty embarrassed to be CDC at that point, and that was sad.

After the campaign, we went back to Conakry, regrouped, starting talking about new ideas, new things we could start getting going, even though both of us hated the idea of planning in a silo, planning in a CDC silo. We really wanted to be out there as a part of those other collaborative teams, from all different organizations. Then, whether she was told to or she just acquiesced and allowed it, she sent us out to the field. I get sent to Dubréka, because in Tanéné there were still a fairly strong concentration of cases. I was going to help work the communications for that while Geoff got sent up to a place called Kamsar, which is up near Boké, a city I mentioned earlier, in the northern side of the Basse-Côte. He was working up there with the communications team up there. Separately, without too much communication between each other, we actually ended up in very similar roles, because like I said, there's a certain set of skills that you inherently have as an American, those organizational skills, those computer skills that we have because we're that tech generation. Those things I can confidently bring to the team. Being on the communications team, I got embedded first with the WHO team. It was just really about one or two people, and one was a Guinean native, one was Senegalese, and about a week or two later, a lady who was their team lead, she showed up. She was—I believe from Gabon, if I remember correctly. It was the three of them and me, and they had really finally brought me in because I was the solo CDC guy, solo CDC communicator, and I had been looking for different ways I could get involved.

I had proposed different ways to the—he's the director of health for the prefecture, for Dubréka Prefecture. I proposed different ways that I could help out and serve the team, to help the team run better. They were just a bunch of ideas that I had, and I was waiting for someone to say, yes, that looks good, we need that. It wasn't happening really. They were like, those are good things, but no one was going to follow up with me to make sure it happened. So I kept looking for where I could fit in and where I could be most effective. I started working with the WHO team. We started setting up some meetings to establish a survivor association, and we were a few steps down the line to do that when the micro-cerclage was proposed. Micro-cerclage being mini quarantine. In French, it just means mini circling. It was this quarantine-lite that we had determined would be most appropriate for a Guinean neighborhood or Guinean community. Because as we saw in Liberia, in Monrovia, a straight quarantine to a neighborhood is a death sentence, almost. Obviously, we couldn't have that, but at the same time you're trying to limit the transmission and limit movement, and so you've got to meet them halfway. That's where the micro-cerclage came from, and with that comes a whole breadth of activities. Because not only do you have to provide—you want to provide food, proper sustenance to those families who aren't supposed to move. You'd have a social mobilization component to it, a rapid assessment component to it. You'd have to provide health, you have to provide doctors. You can't just identify a problem then walk away from it. You have to provide an answer to it. There was a nearby Ebola treatment center, Ebola treatment unit, but then also there were small stations of doctors just to diagnose anyone and everyone. Like a kid who has dysentery, or a kid who has a stomach ache for a while. The government provided that free, and there's just a huge effort.

My role in that became kind of the health communications data manager, almost, if I had to put an American title to it. I helped them establish what their rapid survey was, how they would collect it. I helped them create the collect tool. I established, on my own, on my own computer, the database where all this would be collected. I was even given two UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] interns to do the data entry for me. That was good. I didn't have to do that by myself. But then at the same time, I was teaching them how to use Excel better, so I made a kind of an exchange thing. I didn't want them to just sit there typing away. I would teach them how to—like during the downtime, while we're waiting for more data to come in, we were just sitting in these little tents set up by WFP [World Food Programme], and I would teach them different things about how to create graphs, how to make different looking graphs that change, and stuff like that. They loved it. They were doing their entry, but then they also learned stuff, so they liked it a lot.

Q: I have a question. Not to take this—I want to come back to this point. What is a "collect tool?"

Bugli: Oh, the survey itself. Whenever you're asking someone all these questions, they give you a list of questions, but then you want to be able to have each team have its own consolidation point on one piece of paper, and so it's essentially a big spreadsheet of things that you would fill in. If that's not set up in a really easy way to make the data entry easy, you lose a lot of good data. So essentially, just having correct papers, to one, what questions to ask; two, how to collect all that information onto one thing. Because

you can do the point where you do one piece of paper and one survey per person you talk to, but then to aggregate all that down to one piece of paper, to then make that transfer even easier. That collect tool is an aggregate piece.

Q: Gotcha. And the rapid surveys. What are you surveying?

Bugli: We are surveying mostly just the people affected by the micro-cerclage. The neighbors of and the community of those who were being asked not to move. Then we would check in on them for—it's a bit of—I was basing it off of what I had learned very minimally during Peace Corps, for malaria surveys. The knowledge—what is it?

Q: Knowledge, attitudes and practices?

Bugli: Their attitudes, thank you. I was going to say "actions," but that's not right. Yes, KAP [knowledge, attitudes, and practices] study. I had based it loosely off of a KAP study, because we didn't want to go too in depth because you didn't want to take too much of their time. It was mostly knowledge, practices, and observations, really. Because what have you seen? Have you seen people moving around? Have you seen people trying to hide their sickness and stuff like that? We were asking questions like that. Also, to see what knowledge is out there, whether or not they really understand, whether our communications are successful.

It turned out that, yes, things were going pretty well, because that micro-cerclage was also one of the first times that they implemented a mobile radio. Red Cross had this truck that had a mobile radio station that would drive around to different parts of the village that were being affected that day or being checked that day, and they would broadcast songs, but then also, in between it, they'd have people talking in local languages who are giving out the good information, essentially. Then we would tell people, "Listen to this," I forget what the radio station is at this point. But "Listen to this." They called Santé FM, so Health FM. [laughs] So then, you know, "You all listen to Santé FM. Hear all the messages." It was a really cool, really cool way of reaching out, because Guineans actually listen to the radio. That's their main forum. That was something that actually, I couldn't believe took that long to realize in that country, but they finally got to it. Then we got to the point of starting to break down all that data. The micro-cerclage, I would say, was pretty darn effective. It was set to be—if you had started one at the appropriate time, it would have to last twenty-one days, because that's the twenty-one-day wait period, twenty-one-day—

Q: Incubation period for the virus.

Bugli: Incubation period, yes. But we had started it late, and so it was really, it only ended up being about eleven or fourteen days. At the end of it, there had been such a great effort, they needed to know some kind of reporting on it, and so I did start pulling some numbers out of that, out of the information I had had. I had been presenting that daily already at the daily coordination meetings in Dubréka, but then now came the

report, and this was probably the most fun I've ever had working with Guineans. [laughs] I say that very sarcastically, if that wasn't clear. I ended up being their primary, I guess "scribe," because again, one of the skills I have is being comfortable with tech [technology]. I sat at a table with about eight to ten Guineans who had been involved, and had my computer screen projected up onto the wall, and I typed what they yelled for two days straight. [laughs] I had about two ten-hour days' worth of that, just writing up this report. Someone had given me kind of an outline, and we kind of knew where we were working through, and they would start saying different—like, we should say this, and I'm talking word-for-word, they would dictate, I would type. Every now and then I'd go rogue and put the correct grammar or put a word that I thought sounded better and they'd go, "Mm-mm, that's not what I said," [laughter] I'd have to go back and I'd have to put that word in there for them. It was just so funny. Very tedious, very tedious work. To the point where there's two other Canadians who were technically there via CDC, two field epidemiologists, and they were out there running the epis [epidemiologists], the epi [epidemiology] team out there. They were doing a lot of Excel training, data management and collection of all those and monitoring. I guess not running, but yeah, kind of guiding the different—the active case surveillance, the different people who were going out in the contact tracing, the contact tracers. All that information would go back to them. They got the hard epi, they got that stuff going. I remember François, he came back one day after doing his thing, because we all got there at the same time in the morning, usually around seven thirty in the morning, and the meeting would be at eight. I sat down after that meeting, nine o' clock is when I started writing that paper with them. He comes back and it's like six, seven, eight o' clock at night, and he's like, "You're still there, you're still

there." I was like, I've barely moved. Because it was also Ramadan. It was Ramadan. So that means they're not stopping to eat lunch. So that means I'm not stopping to eat lunch. [laughter] I got no lunch that day. No lunch for me. Which I'd kind of been used to that. That was kind of the system I'd worked under when living there for Peace Corps, too, because it's so rude to eat in front of everyone when they can't eat. I would eat breakfast whenever I wanted—the sun was up, I didn't care, and I would eat dinner usually after the sun went down anyway, just because that is how my day went. But then I would just skip lunch and coyly drink my water, kind of hide whenever I was drinking water. But that's what my day was that day, for those two days. I went from writing the report all day, spent about three or four hours at night reformatting everything and moving everything around so it actually looks presentable, and again, changing some words that sound ridiculous. But then the next day we were going to review it and I was like, alright, cool. A few hours' review and then we're done. Nope, another eight-hour day of doing the same thing, to the point where there's an evening meeting that I had to go to, so I go to the evening meeting. I had left them, I was like, email it to somebody, and they were working on it as a team of their own. I got back to the health center, the main health center in Dubréka, and it's probably eight o' clock at night at this point, and they're all still working on it. Some guy comes across the compound, and he yells, "Monsieur, Monsieur CDC, Monsieur CDC," and in my head I was like, one, love that you guys don't know my name. "Yes?" [laughs] That's what it was, is they were finally getting done with the report and putting the final touches on it, which is the front page, which is the acknowledgements page, essentially. That's the part where Guineans shine. Their language is so flowery already that when they type it, it just sounds, "Written for His

Excellency in the hopes of"—like all this beautiful, flowery language, and then "signed," and they had put all their names, and they were going to put my name on there, too. I was like, cool, I'm glad I'm on this report. But they didn't know my name [laughs] and so they had to come get me for my name. I think someone had already given them my first name, but they didn't know my last name, so I put that up there. Then after my last name, he puts a comma and he goes, "And you're a doctor? What is that? What degrees?" I was like, "Just Dante." [laughter] Just my name. Because I wasn't going to be like, put a BS after that. No. No one puts their bachelor's on their name. I didn't have an MPH at the time, and I definitely don't have a doctoral degree, [laughter] so it's, "Doctor, doctor, doctor, master, master, master, Dante." [laughter] It was really funny that they were like—that's when they realized, okay, he has a different set of skills. [laughter] He's not unskilled. He just has a different set of skills. It was through all of that that I really became connected with all those guys, all the people on the communications team from UNICEF and from WHO and from Guinea itself, a few people from Save the Children. It was really great. They really embraced me after that.

Because it really was a hard start. There was even a point where after the coordination meeting, they were having a little—UNICEF was running the communications out of Dubréka. They were the communications lead in Guinea in general, and being the communications guy, I was like, okay, they're having a little communications meeting, I'll jump over there. I walk up and I'm listening in on what the UNICEF meeting is, and the UNICEF lead looks at me and she goes like, "Can I help you?" I was, "Yeah, just seeing what you guys are up to today," and she's like, "This is a UNICEF meeting," and I

got kicked out of a meeting. It's not even a meeting. It's just a little grouping. I was like, we're all supposed to be doing this together. Why are you kicking me out? I was just like, oh, okay, and I awkwardly went away. There's a lot of moments like that where you're off on your own because CDC is only supposed to play this technical assistance role, and at that point, they really didn't see what kind of value I brought. Maybe they thought to some extent I was checking up on them. Maybe? But it was really funny because things changed greatly over that time, to the point where they really respected my opinion and what I could add because they knew—they realized that I truly understood Guineans. I can only say that in reference—in relativity to every other expat who was working there that day. I had lived there for two years, I knew things about the Susu people that some of the other Guineans didn't know. [laughs] I knew more of the local language. All I knew was greetings and small things, but that's more than most. That really is what bridged that gap for me, which was super important, super, super important. Because moving forward, after the micro-cerclage, things were really calming down, and we were looking towards, what would be these activities? What's the role of all these people that are working here now in a non-active zone?

We started talking about community-based surveillance, and I had a differing opinion to the UNICEF lead. I'm trying to remember her name. Mariama? I believe it was Mariama Camara. I believe it was Camara. She was Senegalese, but she had a very Guinean name, and I think her family was originally from Guinea, but she had grown up in Senegal. This woman was so impressive. I was entirely impressed by her. She actually might have been a Sylla, now that I'm thinking about it.

Q: Might have been what?

Bugli: Sylla.

Q: Sylla? Not Mariama?

Bugli: No, Mariama is definitely her first name.

Q: Mariama Sylla.

Bugli: Yeah, it's either Sylla or Camara. I can't remember. She was just so darn impressive. She worked so hard and had the command and had the respect of everyone she worked with. To put it into context, that's not normal in West Africa. It's just not normal. It takes a special lady to command that kind of respect. I loved working with her, and once I realized that I had a bit of her respect and that she respected my opinion, I knew that I had been finally like, I'm on the team. [laughs] Because we got to a point where we differed on what we thought, theoretically, not based on what's right and what's wrong. We had differing ideas of what the plan should be in a non-active zone, and that's just a differing opinion of what the priorities were, and it's not that hers were wrong or mine were right. It was a good discussion, a good professional discussion on what we thought the communities could handle.

Q: Can you break that down a little bit?

Bugli: Yeah, yeah. I'm speaking mostly in part to—we were talking about establishing a community group that would kind of—we called them "The Platform," and this platform of community leaders and people who were well-connected in the community, people like an imam or other religious leaders, or the leader of the women's association, or just the main guy from the taxi moto [motorcycle] station and stuff like that, even kids from the youth organization. We would bring them all together because between that network, you capture most of what's going on in the rumor mill, and it would be very hard to hide someone who's sick if you have those people all in constant communication with each other.

My proposal was to give them—empower them with this, and create a clear line of communication between them and the health system, whether that health system is at a distance from them, or—because Guinea was also establishing an alert system. Really, all we had to do was put that in touch with the alert system and empower them to always call this if you see something. I wanted to make sure that they had the correct case definitions, know what to look for, and that's about it. Make their work as minimal as possible. Make them our surveyors, our ears and eyes in those communities that we can't always be in.

She wanted to make it bigger. She wanted to make it to a point where they were not only taking in information, but they were also being health educators and getting out there. My theoretical opposition to that is that these people already have jobs. [laughs] They're

already a teacher, they're already an imam, they're already super busy. The more work—if you assign them more work, the less likely they are to do all of the work. But it came out less of a no, do this, no, do this. It was more of a really good conversation back and forth between Mariama and myself, actually mostly over email because she was traveling or I was traveling. We were planning this and really trying to set up and establish what would go on after we'd left, and I thought that was really awesome and I was finally digging my teeth into that.

This is about a week or two, about two weeks following the micro-cerclage, when they wanted to move me. [laughs] I got moved back to the capital for a micro-cerclage that was going on in Ratoma. Ratoma is one of the communes, which is kind of like a borough, of Conakry. The five different sections of Conakry.

One thing I also want to tell you about, because it's just such a great story, is while I was there, while I was in Dubréka, if you recall, that's the same city where I had my host family. The host family's house, right across the street from where the health center was. I'd be at the health center all day, I'd walk by, I'd give a big wave to my host mom. Give a big wave to my host sisters and say hi to everyone, catch up.

Q: Issiaga!

Bugli: Yeah, they would call it out still. Even people in Dubréka general, they had gotten to know me as, that's Issiaga, to the point where people still remembered me from a year

or two ago. Because there had been times I'd off-and-on be in Dubréka for other Peace Corps training things, and people still remembered me. I'd be walking with other UNICEF people, just going to get lunch, and I'd get a call-out like "Oh, Issiaga!" "Yeah, I know people here." [laughter] Then, like I said, it was close to Ramadan, or it was the month of Carême, so then everyone's fasting. But then for the fête, the celebration, the actual Ramadan celebration, I finally got to celebrate Ramadan with my host family, which is something that I had not worked out throughout my two years. Actually, three Ramadans in more than two years. Three Ramadans in Guinea. Even when I was living at their house, I was away on something for the first fête of Ramadan, and then I was not living there for the next two.

This one, I was still there. I was still in the area, and no one was going to be working much that day, and so I spent the day with them. I put on my nice—my nice Guinean outfit. I brought that with me when I flew back. I got all dressed up, and I hung out with them for the day. I ate with them and just sat in their living room at night, like I always did, like I used to do for those entire three months. It was just so cool to be back sitting there and having my little host sisters—because it was the host family—I had my host mom, and she was pretty old. She's probably around fifty-some, and then there was the oldest sister and she was probably a year or two older than me or my age. A host brother who was right around—maybe a year younger than me. And another one about a few years younger than him. Then there were four little kids who were always around, too. The one—it was really confusing, they were both named Aïssatou. There's Aïssatou Diallo and Aïssatou Barry. And Aïssatou Barry, she was I believe three when I first

arrived in Guinea with Peace Corps. This is now 2015, this is three years later, she's six. She's her own little person now. When I first got there with CDC and I saw the family, Aïssatou Barry comes running up to me, gives me a big hug around the legs like she always did after all my Peace Corps—like I'd go to school, essentially. You go to training, then you go back home. Every time I got home, they'd run across the yard yelling, "Issiaga!" And they'd come and hug my legs or hug me and then they'd go back inside. She did the same exact thing to me, the same exact thing. But now instead of just yelling, "Issiaga!" and she would be too afraid to talk usually because she didn't speak French, or really she didn't speak much at all, but she didn't know that I spoke Pulaar, or at least could understand Pulaar or Susu. So she's six years old now. She runs out, grabs my leg, and she said, "Issiaga, ça va?" and I would go, whoa, no way. You actually speak French now? She knows just very, very minimal, but she knew and she spoke, and it was just so, so cool to see—it had been three years, and see this little person grow up. Because I don't have kids. [laughs] It was a touching moment for me, to hang out with them, just sitting in the living room all night.

The entire day I'd actually spent with a couple of coworkers. We played soccer and we had this big fête match, a celebratory match, like a gala, if you will. We played the soccer game, and I got to play with the coworkers, and then we had a big dance party at their office afterwards. It was just me, them, a dance party, a bunch of sodas, [laughter] because they're Muslim and it's a fête, so you try not to drink them until the sun sets. It was just us and them, hanging out all day, and it was so cool because I had never really had that kind of interaction, that kind of bond because all the people in my village

weren't that age. They were either young kids or adults and elderly, and so there was not too many people around my age in my village during Peace Corps. So I never had to bond with anyone on a personal level. Especially to the point where I think they understand who I am and I understand who they are. But these guys are the—these are the WHO UNICEF doctors who are educated. They know American references, to a certain point. We can exchange culture, because I knew so much about Guinean culture at that point, especially pop music and what's the cool music. Just recently, I had met one of the biggest Guinean stars. His name's Oudi Primière and I got to hang out with him. I told them all about that, they were all jealous. Stuff like that. I finally felt like I was talking and hanging out with these guys, and it was really, really cool to feel like I connected with them. I spent my day of Ramadan with them, and that night with my family.

That entire Fête de Ramadan was just so cool for me. I even used the rest of that weekend to go back to Wonkifong. I got to go back. Obviously, you have to pass all traveling and movements through the CDC country office and make sure everyone knows where you are. But because it was Ramadan and they knew how much it meant to us, they allowed us to set up travel to go to our villages. Lucky for me, mine's so close, I barely had to set up anything and they were like yes, just stop by, it's okay. For Geoff, Andrew [Alesbury], Cullen [Seaton] and Laur [Ebone], the four others who were with me, they had to drive much farther. [laughs] They had to pay for their own vehicles and pay the driver and pay for the food for the driver, all that stuff. I really just paid for the afternoon of a driver, and we went over there. I stayed at the hotel of a friend of mine, and I stayed

for free, and I paid him for some of the food and stuff like that, but that's about it. Then I got to see some students.

Q: Did you see Lamine?

Bugli: I did see Lamine. I have a lot of pictures of me and him now, and he had finally gotten a phone that has Facebook on it. Facebook's just getting big there, and I'm all over his Facebook, and that's cool with me, I love it. Got to see a bunch of students who had just heard that I was here and they came to see me at the hotel where I was staying. I walked through my village again, which was actually a really weird opportunity for me, because I walking to the village and it had only been ten months, maybe eleven at this point. No, no way, nowhere near. Ten months still. They didn't even know I'd left. [laughs] Some people were like, "Oh yeah, where you been?" I was like, "What do you mean, where have I been?" [laughter] "I'd been evacuated. This was traumatic. What?" [laughter] It was just so funny that they'd never—some people didn't realize.

There was a four-year-old who—at least she was like four when I left, probably closer to five when I got back. Zero difference. She saw me walking, she goes, "Issiaga!" Throws her hands up in the air and just runs, says hi, runs away. Literally no different, as if I had done that the day before. It was just so funny, too, back in the village and people would be like, oh, he's back, cool. [laughter] Just so casual. I was like, come on guys. I guess I wasn't expecting the red carpet, but it was just funny. It was really nice that I got to see all those people again. I saw that family, the one I described earlier, the Coyah Market

Lady family, they're also the Syllas. Like I said, not a lot of variety in last name. But I got to see all the Syllas, and that was really cool. Hung out at their house for a while. That was finally that opportunity for me to get that closure.

Like I said, that's really what I saw out of this opportunity with CDC. One, I saw an amazing career opportunity. But that was just luck. That's a bonus. What I really wanted was to go back and help, and to get that closure, and to be able to say—truly say goodbye. Reassure them that hey, you guys meant something in my life, and I'll never forget you. And I finally got that. I felt a different weight off my shoulders, and a different burden of me being there, once I had seen them all. Typical stuff of calling them all the time now, while I was in Guinea, and then I moved back to Conakry.

I essentially restarted with a whole new team because now I'm working out of Ratoma, doing a micro-cerclage with almost entirely a UNICEF team. There weren't any WHO communicators there. It was just UNICEF. But UNICEF in Dubréka had a team of about twelve, maybe even more, and they had a lot of people because to cover the entire prefecture, you can't have one guy do the whole thing. It's just so much area. It may not be that many people, but it's just huge area. You would send people out that way. But when it's in Ratoma, it's a lot more people, maybe the same number of people, but so much closer that you don't need as many people. The UNICEF team was only three in Ratoma. Right as I roll in, they took me onto that team. They needed people, they brought me right on that team, and essentially put me as the number two, and that was amazing and amazingly different from what I had in Dubréka. [laughs] But I think part of that is

because I was coming with experience, I'd just done this. I know what needs to be done and I can help.

But then also, it was that UNICEF lead, and then he'd ask me, and then his two UNICEF coworkers, and I didn't really see it that way. I saw us as a little more level, especially with the other two communicators. But it was cool that they right away gave me a sense of leadership and gave me a sense of responsibility, which is all I really need to get me going. Give me a task I'm responsible for, and let's work. It was from there that I was doing a lot of—I was helping to lead all the social mobilizers, because they'd identified a whole team of people who could be social mobilizers in the community that was getting the micro-cerclage. Those people would go out every day to check in on everyone and make sure everything's okay and disseminate any messages we had. But then also again, we needed some assessments to be done, and so they became our assessors as well. I again wrote the assessment, but this time I had a little bit more lead-time. In Dubréka, I had, we need this tomorrow or as soon as possible. This way, in Ratoma, I was given a bit of lead-time to where I could actually make a nice survey. We'd already missed the pre-survey, so this was just going to be a post-survey, post-assessment. I got a lot of input from UNICEF communicators, from CDC communicators, from CDC epidemiologists, who could help me break down how to best collect the data. Looking back on it, this was like the first true, true-true-true public health work that I was doing, and I felt like I was doing it well. Because I'd gotten input from so many people, and it felt like it was a good tool to use, a good survey, and actually a well-set-up survey, and I got to train all the social mobilizers on how to give that survey. It's not something you're always granted, a

chance you're always granted, and got them to get out there and do it. The only problem with it now is I was reaching the end of my time, my deployment, because school was approaching. At this point, I had chosen to attend Emory, and my orientation started August 19th. I obviously needed a few days at home to collect and move, because I hadn't even moved to Atlanta yet. I was on a bit of a time crunch, and all the data for that and all the surveys came in maybe a day or two, right before I was supposed to be scheduled to leave.

Q: Do you remember what that day was?

Bugli: That was August 11th. I'm pretty darn sure. Yeah, that sounds about right. Because then, if August 19th—I can work backwards from 19th, because the 19th is when I started orientation. I arrived in Atlanta the day before, the 18th, and I had five days at home. That would put us at the 13th. So then fly out, yes, the 11th or 12th, one of those two. It was moving fast, it was moving really, really fast. It was probably right at the beginning of August there that I was finally getting all the data and I was doing all the data entry myself, because I didn't have those interns like I had in Dubréka. Bummer. I even tried to get, I tried bringing them in and they were—

Q: The same people? [laughs]

Bugli: Yes, the same guys. Because one of them was in Conakry. I said, "Just come out, man. I'll help you out, I'll pay for you," [laughs] and he couldn't do it. I spent like the

entirety of my last working day at that post, just doing data entry and talking with people and doing meetings while doing data entry. That was a funny day. I didn't get to see the entire completion of that, to the point where I see the analysis and see what kind of data we could pull out of that or any information, which is kind of a bummer because I think if we had struck while the iron was hot, we really could have done a lot of good information in a good retrospective paper showing the difference between how we did in the first micro-cerclage and what we did there in Dubréka, compared to what we did in Ratoma. A lessons-learned kind of paper, because it was actually warranted and needed then.

Because it was a new idea that they were implementing in Guinea for the first time, I really wanted to write that paper, but I was also starting school in the next few days, so I was like, this is a bummer that I can't—I tried getting one of the UNICEF leads to write it, and I'll be his ghost writer. Or help him, support him through it. But it just didn't work out. He's like, I've got too much going on. [laughs] I have a bunch of data that's just sitting dormant now, but that happens a lot in science.

Another big thing, I guess I don't like jumping back chronologically, but I didn't want to interrupt you. Do you—

Q: I welcome it.

Bugli: You have a question?

Q: No, I'm just telling you, jump back, man. Tell me where you're going, though.

Bugli: Not too far, still in Ratoma. Because during that time, during the micro-cerclage, there was a scheduled [Dr. Thomas R.] Frieden visit. Yes, right. Frieden was scheduled to come visit Guinea. Originally, there were two posts in Guinea that were really active. There were the Ratoma cases and the concentration of cases in Ratoma, but then there were also a bunch of cases in Forécariah, Forécariah being the biggest city right near the border of Sierra Leone. But then also, as we know now, the last real bunch of cases was right there, for the big epidemic. Those were the two things that were going on. CDC had people at both spots. Like I said before, I was the only CDC person in Ratoma. Everyone else was working out of the CDC office and doing a lot of work there, and then a handful of field epidemiologists in Forécariah. But besides me—I was the only American—there were some FETP [Field Epidemiology Training Program] from the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo], so those guys were there with me as well.

We had been told that we were Plan B, so have some ideas. If Frieden needs to come here, have some ideas of where we would take him and what we would plan, just go and set that up. I was like, cool. I can be Plan B, that's fine. Plan A was Forécariah. They were going to take him in a helicopter, all that good stuff, get him out there, show him the field, while in Ratoma I'm over here like, okay, if I do this meeting, I'll have this person—I started setting up venue and where and who we would visit and why and stuff like that. Then about a week, a week and a half before his visit, I got told that they're scrapping Plan A, and Plan B is now Plan A. I was like, come again? [laughs] So I was

now like—this is one of those things that, obviously, as important of a visit as it is, to have the CDC director visit, it needed to go smoothly and it needed to go well. Though I was already given the responsibility of being the planner for all of it, it was now very clear that I would just—that it would be taken over from me. That's fine. That's totally fine. I didn't need to be the event planner for that. I guided them and I helped them choose, or I showed them who they should be talking to and where they should be hosting these things, and then let them take care of the gritty details. This was another time where there was a very big tiff between me and that team lead, but I try not to dwell on that too much. Because it just—I don't have that relationship with many people and it's weird for me to have that with one person. I don't want a nemesis. [laughter]

Q: No one does. Maybe some people do.

Bugli: Yeah. I don't know, maybe it encourages some people, but it feels weird that they just put that person out there for me.

Q: What was the basic argument? You don't have to go beyond that.

Bugli: She felt that once it had been decided that that was the area that he would be visiting, she essentially wanted me to succumb to whatever whim that she was saying. And I was just giving her the reality of the situation. She got very defensive towards me, saying that I was being very disrespectful to her. To the point, and then she was not—she did not stay very professional with it. She was pretty catty about like, "I heard what you

said from this person" kind of thing, and I was like, really? This is what we're going to—this is the CDC. What? So I didn't like that. She even went so far as to put it in an email, put it in an email form of thanking everyone except for me. And then—[laughs] I don't know.

Q: That's okay. We can get out of this.

Bugli: We don't need to be on that one. The only thing that I need to say is that Geoff, the guy who was on my team who is also a guy I know for a long time now, he's like I said, the most lovable person and probably the nicest person I know, and he has a problem with this woman. Litmus test, it's not just me. [laughs]

Q: Sorry, I was only asking because I was wondering, is there some sort of lesson to be gained from this, or—

Bugli: There is, really. The lesson is that not everyone has that ability to be in an emergency situation, and in any emergency situation, personalities are tough. People who have done emergency response, much longer than I, know this. This is not new news to them. It's just—it's unpredictable. You can't always see where it's coming from. Some personalities don't always work together. Some people have differing opinions on how things should be done, and both those people could be very successful, if not having to work together. Maybe this was one of those scenarios, but it is what it is.

Q: How did Frieden's visit go?

Bugli: It went pretty well. [laughs] He got in off the Land Rover at the health center I was working out of, and I got to greet—I was the one to greet him, like welcome, thanks for coming. How's traffic? Because it's Guinea, and Conakry traffic is the worst. It's got nothing on Atlanta. I'm sorry, Atlanta's got nothing on Conakry traffic. I had set up the meeting, and I had set up who all would be there, and I was the one who approved the presentation. It was cool to feel so involved, but then it was even better that I didn't have to do much during the presentation. [laughs] I got to send it off, I sat down, I said, "Guys, this is Dr. Frieden, Dr. Frieden, this is the guys," and then let them take it from there. Because you know, there's obviously much higher people. I was just the CDC bridge, and that's all I had to play, and I think I played it well.

Q: Well done, sir. [laughs]

Bugli: Thank you. And then actually, for the rest of the day, it was really cool because I really enjoy working in those day-of-event kind of environments, putting out small fires and just making sure that things run smoothly and things get done. I got to work with—following my meeting, he was supposed to go visit one of the laboratories, but there was too much traffic because there was a high school graduation going on or a college graduation, I forget. So he turned back and he went straight to his news conference, and he did the news conference, and I got to sit in on it, sit near that. It was a huge room, a lot of people there, and I was just listening and hearing.

After that, I went with all the survivors that we had brought together for that news conference. Then also, he wanted to have a meeting with them afterwards. It was less of a meeting, more of a get-together. The ambassador was hosting it and the survivors were invited. Because they'd given up some of their time and all this stuff, that we were sponsoring them to be there, so I got assigned to be the money guy for that. But then also, I got to hang out with these survivors and talk with them and mule them about, just mule them, make sure they got there. It was cool to hang out with them because they're the Guineans, and I'm comfortable and I love hanging out with Guineans, and I can do that now. I got to just hang out with them, and there was something real, real different. I haven't even stopped to think about this before, but the idea of being in the same room of people who have been through that and survived that. I mentioned before that Guineans aren't exactly the most emotionally mature in the sense of—maybe "mature" is the wrong word, but emotionally connected to where they totally know how to deal with those feelings, or at least don't have the resources to help them through those things. You can only imagine what kind of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] these guys are going through, what kind of trauma they've faced, what kind of family members they've lost. But then to see them as this group, and see—they kind of fell on each other and lean on each other, being all in this association, the survivor association. Yucking it up and really loving it for what it is now, in a sense of, they get all this food. They're sitting in some beautiful American expat's house eating food that someone else made for them. There were cookies. And they got paid. [laughs] It was a very existential moment, I guess, to be with those people. Inspiring, as well. It was really cool.

That was the end of his visit. There was another meeting where, after I got the survivors to where they were supposed to go, I got to go back to the office or back to the hotel and Dr. Frieden was meeting with the entire Ebola team. I was the only one who wasn't there at the moment—I think maybe one person was still out in the field. But I think almost everyone was at this huge conference table, one big table all the way around, like sixty some people. I go to enter the door, and it's a pull or a push door. You're not sure. I pulled when I should have pushed, and it makes this massive, foooom! A really deep metal sound, and I pushed forward and everyone's just—[laughter] sixty people and Dr. Frieden looking at me as I enter, and I was like, smooth, so smooth. I just slink over to my seat. Because they were just doing a round of quick description, who you are, what organization you work for, what division you work for if it's CDC, and then what you're doing here. He was just doing that because he wanted to hear what we were all doing and how we were all doing, and so we're getting all around there and I was really, really hoping that I sat in the spot they'd already gotten to. Nope, I was the last one, [laughs] the last one. It was a very awkward moment for me in front of Dr. Frieden. But I very highly doubt he recalls. [laughs] At least we hope.

Q: Yeah, that's true. He has a lot of experiences and probably can't recall most of them, but then he's also extremely smart.

Bugli: Yeah. Yeah, who knows how deep that memory goes. That was right near the end of my deployment, and like I said, the end of the deployment came really fast with all the

work that I was doing with the health communications team in Ratoma. Got the data to a guy on the UNICEF team, a UNICEF lead. He was their data manager, and I left it with him to analyze, break down and present, which he did and people really enjoyed it. I just don't think it went anything further than that. I think it was just kind of a hey, it was a reporting, it wasn't an analysis. Which is a bummer but it is what it is.

Then I was back before I knew it. It was pretty crazy how fast it was. Again, not a lot of chance to sit and commiserate or really understand what I was doing, I was just doing it. Got home, was home for a while. Like I said, for five days. Saw some family and then moved. I drove myself down to Atlanta with a packed car and moved my furniture the same day I drove down. I stopped in Knoxville because it's from Michigan to Atlanta, about twelve hours. I stopped in Knoxville so I could get into Atlanta real early the next day. Then moved everything into the apartment where my roommate was already living. Everything was moving real fast, [laughter] and started orientation. But then I still had an FTE with CDC. I was just taking administrative leave. I was on leave for a while, and then came back, and they switched me over to part-time because I smiled at the right person, apparently.

Q: Really?

Bugli: I don't know. Part-time is not often found here at CDC.

Q: Sure. No.

Bugli: And somehow I've talked my way into two part-time positions. I don't know what, I don't know who I'm smiling at, but I'm going to keep smiling. [laughter] So they kept me on part-time. It's kind of hard from this end. For the first few days, I was just taking care of all the administrative—like all the debriefs, especially after all the problems that I've explained. There's a lot of debrief around that, to the point where I was like, okay, I'm done talking about this. [laughs] But then after all that was done, I was like, okay, now what do I do on this team? What am I here to do? I'm going to be working for you guys. I want to work.

I got kind of absorbed onto what was the—kind of the budget co-ag [cooperative agreement] management, cooperative agreement management team, and I was helping that. There was a bunch of information that I didn't want to know, but it is good to know, about how agreements and contracts and all the money gets moved around. It's nothing sexy. It's all real dry. But if you even have a basic knowledge of that, it really helps with programming moving forward. Being the person asking for that funding. It makes it a lot clearer if you know the steps and if you know what to expect. I was working with someone named Alison Amoroso, who is great with that stuff. She definitely knew the intricacies of that pretty darn well, and she knew how to get things done. I was lucky to be working for her, and got to learn a lot from her. She's a really nice person, so I liked working with her. Then we moved to a point where the budgets and the contracts and the cooperative agreements were kind of steady, and so we were moving that off of Allison

and myself and onto others. Then from there is when I went to a general program support role, picking up whatever needed to be done.

I ended up doing a lot of French translation. Most of the French assessments for anyone trying to go to Guinea, they would have them call me first and I'd assess their French. Meanwhile, I'm all in school for my first semester and second semester at school. I hadn't been in school for four years, so I was back at it, and there's a lot going on. But I don't know, that's the way I operate. That's what I like doing, I like keeping busy. But ended up supporting the general team for not only the French, any French needs that needed to be done, but then a bit of the survivor services and coordinating that stuff. I ended up being a good point of continuity, because I would hear a lot of things and there's not a lot of things that I should be doing, especially within twenty hours, just not limited by my ability, but limited by my hours that I can give. I was a good point of continuity and a good point of access between others who didn't really—who weren't sure, who do I talk to for this? I'd guide them here and facilitate that. It was really an ad hoc, as it came, between working with the Health Communications Team for Guinea and then working for Barb Marston's team, Dr. Marston's team, doing that general program support. At times it felt like I wasn't doing anything, but still doing stuff. Still translating, translating a twelve-page document into French. That was really boring. [laughs] What that made me realize is, despite how professional anyone is, we're all just people, just trying to achieve something. No matter what it is, you work on it, you do something and hope it is beneficial to somebody. If I could in any degree have achieved that, it was all

good. Because I know that I was their very, most minimal budget item. Definitely, very easily the lowest paid. [laughter]

Q: But you are going to school.

Bugli: Now I am. I won't be for long. But I was definitely a very cheap line item.

Q: Gotcha. You can't pay students. You can't pay them too much.

Bugli: Yeah, right?

Q: What are they going to expect when they graduate? [laughter]

Bugli: So then that pushed me through, pushed me through the rest of the year really, up until May, and I even got to use my time here on Dr. Marston's team in the Ebola-Affected Countries Office, as my practicum for school. I got that out of the way, which is really nice because I didn't want to pay to go anywhere else. There was always a slight possibility that they'd keep me on and I'd go back to Guinea over the summer, and I was like, oh please do that. But then it just didn't work out. They didn't need anyone with my particular skills at that time. It was kind of a bummer I didn't get to go back to Guinea. I would have been open to going anywhere else, because I now have this weird amount of experience in one country in the world. I'm this odd specialist in Guinea.

But in the general sense, it was an amazingly formative opportunity for me, being on the response and being on it from this end as well. The response taught me that I didn't want to be a health communicator. I think I was good at it, at the time. I think those are some of my instinctual skills that I could use, especially after being in Guinea for so long. I'm definitely not qualified to be a health communicator in many countries. In Guinea, I would say yes. Just because I know it. I'm real glad I had to use those skills. But then seeing the response and seeing it for its whole, the holistic side of it, epi is what's really driving that response. Those are those hard skills you can walk away with from an MPH, and it actually drove me to switch from what I started as a global health—I was a global health concentrator. Now I'm a global epidemiology concentrator. They're very different skills. You can either be a global health practitioner or an epidemiologist. I'll be an epidemiologist when I graduate, which is nice. It's even funnier because it's even a further step from where I thought I would be when first applying to MPH programs. In every other program I applied to, I was in what would be the health promotion/health education equivalent, and that's what I thought I wanted to do, that's what I thought I was good at. It turns out I'm totally wrong. Again, I just let life choose for me. I'm really great at that. [laughter] Life and good friends who I think can make better choices than I do, I just follow what they do.

When I switched to global epidemiology, it gave me a better sense of, I'm going to gain these hard skills, and I'll be able to hopefully use them in the future. But then I'm also getting a concentration, or a certificate in complex humanitarian emergencies. Between my jobs here—between my job here on the Ebola team, my current job as an ORISE

fellow, and those classes that I took on humanitarian emergencies, I've been exposed to so many people here at CDC who work in emergencies and so many different sides of it. It's been so lucky. I'm trying not to throw off the wave. I don't know how I would, but I just don't want to throw off the wave because it's going pretty well for me so far.

I'm really happy that I can trace all this back to joining the Peace Corps, and really, I can attribute joining the Peace Corps to my brother-in-law. It's really crazy to me how far all these things have come full circle into where they are today, to a point where I'm excited where I'm going next. This is a big year, the second year, and I finally have to join the real world now. There's no more delaying it. I have a master's and I'm not trying to do a PhD, so it's this year. I've got to be a real person now.

Q: Do you have any inkling of what you want to do next?

Bugli: I definitely want to be in the emergency response world. That's the pace I want to work at, and that's the work I want to do. Where that ends up, who knows? I would be remiss to walk away from this amazing network of professionals who have accepted me with at first no experience and now the little experience I do have. If they're going to keep accepting me, I will happily stay along. But then I also have to keep in mind that I have skills now. I have learned things and those things are worth a certain amount. I have to keep that in mind as well because debt. [laughs] Because of student debt. But still a little further down the line. For the time being, I'm really enjoying working for the Global Rapid Response Team. We just finished—we haven't even finished, but we're

now ramping down activities for the Hurricane Matthew response. I've been on that, I've been back in emergency mode for the past two or three weeks now, again as operational support. I've got to stop telling people I really know how to do technology stuff. I keep getting wrapped into that. I've got to stop telling them. But it was great, just to be back in that environment again. I was back to working eleven-hour days when I was skipping class and not going to class and just working all day, even though I'm paid a stipend, so it's not like I get paid hourly or overtime. It showed me again, this is what I want to do. That kind of work, that kind of intensity. Some people call it—some people might even devolve it into, you're an adrenaline seeker, which I would be lying if I didn't say that was part of it. But it's where that adrenaline's coming from, I hope, is a little bit more natural of a place. It's not a dark place. So. Hopefully, hopefully I end up there. We'll see.

Q: Alright. I want to take a moment and look over my scribbles that I've been doing this entire time.

Bugli: I'm going to finish this water.

[break]

Bugli: I did forget one harrowing tale.

Q: Do you want to—

Bugli: I kind of do.

Q: Okay, please. So where in time are we? And where in place? Where in place are we? Dumbest question I've ever—[laughter] If I ever write a comedy movie, I'll include that.

Bugli: Where in place. Back in my time in Dubréka, following the end of the micro-cerclage, so this would put us probably around mid-July—no, early July, maybe even late June of 2015. I was working with some more of the UNICEF people, the UNICEF team to do some of the contact—not the contact tracing, but some of the general outreach into the Dubréka community. I totally forget the purpose of the meeting, but there was a reason, there was a day where me and another—two other UNICEF guys went to the mayor of Dubréka. That's like being the mayor of New York City in that area, in that prefecture, because it's a big town, so he's kind of a bigwig. We were kind of coming to him with empty pockets like, hey, we're here to do this work. Hopefully you're okay with it, and if you're cool with it, we're going to keep going. We get there, and it was the very typical Guinean authority meeting that I've been used to where you wait around for a long time. You're the fourth in the line, and he'll talk as long or as short as he wants. We get in there finally, and he's got this like—it's all just ridiculous furniture in there. It looks really funny. It looks like you took your grandma's furniture, but then [laughter] glossed over it with shiny paint. It looks bad. Then there's pictures of the president all over the place, because he's a government figure and you've got to love the president, so he's all over. His Excellency, Alpha Condé.

We're sitting in this meeting with the mayor, and I'm really bummed that I can't remember the actual purpose for the meeting, but we were updating him for a while. After the business that we had set out on was accomplished, the meeting devolved into a discussion. Ebola was still this huge, looming topic in Guinea, but it had gotten to a point where it's real. We know it's real. It's time to talk about it, it's time to face it. We'd gotten to that point.

One of the guys from UNICEF that I was with starts telling a story. We'd all been in a jovial mood, it was a light mood, different stories of things we had seen or heard, and it was pretty light. But it took me a while, and I didn't see where he was going with this story, but he ends up telling me this story—telling all of us this story of his day in the forest, in Macenta—I believe it was Macenta—where the entire convoy and the entire group of aid workers were attacked. It was this crazy—I didn't even know what I was hearing at first. He was describing these women in full black clothing, and these tall masks, which is something very forest-associated, with the cultures out there. They were swaying and coming low to the ground, and it sounds like they were in a big meeting. Not a big meeting, but a big campaign announcement, like a lot of people gathered. These women start coming in from different angles, and everyone gets super scared and runs off. Everyone's like, this is bad, and they just bail. But then they're targeting the aid workers. This is the day that a few people from UNICEF were killed. They were running away. This guy's telling the story, and all of us are silent on the table because we realize where he's going with this now, and we couldn't believe how we got onto this topic, but

he’s telling us and we’re not going to stop him. It even looked to me like he hadn’t told this story in a long time, or even ever, to the point where he was really reliving it. You could see it in his eyes. He wasn’t looking at anyone, but he was still talking. He talks about how they ran away from where they were, and they run into the church because in the Forest Region, there are a lot higher percentage of Christians as opposed to the rest of the country being Muslim. They run into the church and they see that the priest has had his head cut off and thrown down the well. When he says this, he’s shaking. His mouth is shaking, and for the first time in my two and a half years in Guinea, I saw a Guinean man begin to weep. I’d seen boys, I’d seen teenagers cry. I’d never seen a grown man actually show that kind of emotion. You could see how it was tearing at him. He said it out loud, he said he feared for his life for the first time, and that fear was in him again. The space was almost empty in between his words, of him not filling that space. No one was breathing. No one interrupted, no one made a noise, and that is not how normal Guinean conversation goes. There’s even this funny tic that Guineans have when you’re telling a story to show that you’re following the story. They go, [gasps], almost like they’re scared of something. They go, [gasps]. For the first while when I heard it, I was like—I was telling you, “I was going to the market,” [gasps]. “No, it’s fine, I promise.” So normally, you would hear some kind of audible grunt or the [gasps] to say yeah, I’m listening. No one was making that noise. Not one person, and no one was moving until the end of this story. The story just kind of hung for a little while, and then the mayor picked it back up by giving a general comment of, these are the things we have to avoid. I’m so, like—he never even did the apology of, I’m sorry you had to go through that. It’s just like, “Yeah, things are crazy here.” Because they just don’t know how to—they didn’t even know

how to—how do you—where do you go from there? They don't know how to interact with that.

I couldn't believe what I had just heard. It was so intense, and I don't know. That was one of those things, it made it very, very real for me. Obviously, as any kind of health worker, every now and then you'll be exposed to something like that. It's usually not targeted against you, but usually, maybe you see a patient that's really suffering or this or that. But that was my first foray into that kind of realm, and it changes those numbers you look at. It changes the words that you're writing, the report you're writing, it changes that. It gives it a whole different flavor of realness to it.

There was only a certain number of people that were there that day, and now we're on the entire other side of the country doing the same work, and somehow that guy was in that room with me and he told that story. I'd heard about it in Reuters. I'd heard about it on BBC [British Broadcasting Company] radio. Now this guy was telling about it, and I could not believe what I'd just heard. It was a very harrowing tale indeed.

Q: Have you since been thinking about it and retelling it? What have you done with the story since you heard it?

Bugli: I share it every now and then. Not with many. There's definitely a time and a place for that story. I think that's probably what struck me most is that I thought that was neither the time nor the place to expect to hear that story. If he wanted to share that, that's

totally his prerogative, and I'll listen. I just had never expected to hear that. And now for sharing it, at times—even just now, I feel almost selfish for sharing it because it's not my story to share. I'm telling the story about a story, and that feels almost selfish to tell how it affected me when he's the guy who lived it. But at the same time, I do like to share it, if I find it's the right time to share it, because it gives that level of realness, intensity of what people went through.

I still run into people, not people in Atlanta because we're all so public-health-minded around here, but people back home who—they still think Ebola was fake or that the American government sent it there. When I first ran into that, a conspiracy theory like that, I didn't have any—I couldn't even say anything to them. I even remember right after, when I got back from Peace Corps, when I was evacuated, that was when the real height of Ebola hysteria was going on, and I had a friend who—she couldn't get a dentist appointment without being tested for Ebola first. I had a nursing friend from college post, "If you're a nurse and want to go over to help them, stay there." I made a short comment on that one. I don't normally engage on Facebook, but I couldn't stand by on that one. I made a short comment that said something along the lines of, "Anyone who goes over there is a hero in my book and they would be lucky to go over there. For your information, I just got back." Then I deleted her as a friend. Because you don't want that in your life. It happened to me personally when I was on my travels, like in Europe. I would be like oh, what do you do? That's what people always ask like, why are you on this trip? For me it was, I just back—done with Peace Corps—from Guinea. I would have all different—I had a Canadian nurse, people from France, people from Germany, all of

them had the same reaction. They would physically back up away from me, as if I was infected. Some of them, you could tell it was a bit of a joke. But there's still that ounce of truth in it, and especially with the Canadian nurses, there was a group of four of them and I got offended. I was like, really? I hope you're smarter than that. [laughs] You're a nurse. But it's those kind of—that side of the Ebola story that I, even in my head I gloss over, because at this point I look at it so scientifically, as a scientific experiment almost. Or a case study, is the better word for it. But it was real for a long time there, and still is very real for a lot of people who are in Guinea.

Q: I appreciate you sharing it, and I appreciate you sharing everything that you shared today, Dante.

Bugli: You're welcome.

Q: Thank you for your time, for the energy that you've put into this.

Bugli: I feel probably at a good level that I'll appreciate later tonight, that this was very cathartic, so I appreciate it.

Q: Good. I'm glad that if—I'm glad. [laughter] So alright. I think that is a pretty good place to wrap up. What do you think?

Bugli: Parting thoughts, I don't know. I think I touched on everything I wanted to touch on. There will probably be something that comes up in my mind later today.

Q: Well, if it does, you're absolutely welcome to come back.

Bugli: I appreciate that.

Q: More than welcome.

END