



The Atkins Family

Ministering in Guinea-Bissau

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SPREADING OUT by Jason

A difficult reality faced us on returning to Guinea Bissau in November. Before coming back to the U.S., we had developed a plan with the leadership of the youth center here to allocate a few parking spaces in front of the existing shop to allow a modest expansion of the shop building to house new equipment. It was in this expansion that we were going to place the new machines that we sent in the container. Unfortunately, when we returned, we found out that the leadership had decided that the space was going to eventually be required for a new classroom, so we could not expand the shop. Once the container arrived, we were faced with a tough choice as we couldn't fit everything inside, and the rainy season was bearing down on us.

Fortunately, WAVS (West African Vocational Schools) in Canchungo was happy to help. WAVS is the organization that we partnered with to send the container; much of the equipment in the container was for their welding and auto mechanic programs. The school is located about an hour-and-a-half from Bissau. They offered to clear out part of a room they aren't using where we could install and use some of the machinery that didn't fit in our shop here. I had a hard time with the idea of splitting up the equipment that had just arrived the month before, but we had no other choice.

So, we started making a plan. Moving a trio of machines that are each over 2,000 pounds with no forklift requires a plan. We had rented a forklift here in Bissau to help unload the container, but we couldn't find one for rent in Canchungo - being able to load on one end doesn't do any good if you can't unload on the other! After some napkin sketches and then some more in-depth research about existing commercial hoist designs, we came up with an idea to build a gantry crane to let us load the equipment onto a flatbed truck and then unload on the other end. Such a crane has been on my project list for a long time anyway to help move heavy stuff around the shop, but this need provided the impetus for tackling the project.



Using the gantry crane to lift the lathe



Lowering the second machine onto the truck



All three machines and the crane, loaded up and ready to head out to Canchungo



CONTINUED ON PAGE 2...

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After scouring the local scrap yards for the heavy iron required to build a platform to safely lift 3,000 pounds, we set to work. The resulting crane ended up working perfectly!

It took several days to get things pushed and pulled around in the shop to have enough space to assemble the gantry inside the shop to start lifting machines and moving them outside where we could back the truck under them to load. One close call happened while lifting the main beam up to bolt the gantry's sides under, but God was protecting us and no people or equipment were hurt during the whole process.

After a careful drive on marginal roads we arrived in Canchungo, reassembled the crane, and reversed the process - picking up one machine, driving out from under it, and lowering it onto the floor. Rinse and repeat.

It's difficult to have equipment split up like this, but we had already been asked to come out to the WAVS school once a month to help teach classes in their welding school, so our hope is to set aside projects requiring those machines during the month, then take them with us and work on them while we're out there anyway. Unfortunately, the electricity they use out there is different than our machines need, so I'm now in the process of trying to make/find the equipment required to convert it. Please pray that we'll be able to do this so that the machines can continue being used! Please also continue praying with us that God will eventually provide a situation that allows the shop to be reunited under one (larger) roof so we can use its full potential.

FARMING

by Jason

This month we were able to travel to the eastern city of Gabu for 11 days. We helped set up a walk behind tractor that our friends sent in the container, and were able to work with them to assist the youth group of the local church to use it in planting rice. Gabu is not a popular destination during this time of year - as the rainy season begins it is muggy, scorching, and generally uncomfortable. The work happened each day in fields with temperatures over 100 degrees. As we sat in Tanja's living room playing board games one night at 10pm, it was 95! Needless to say, despite her kind hospitality, we didn't sleep very soundly in that kind of heat.



Finishing up the tractor assembly and getting ready to test out the rotary plow



After a successful plow test, they attached the tiller. Notice all of the kids watching - you can't do anything here without a crowd of kids cheering you on.



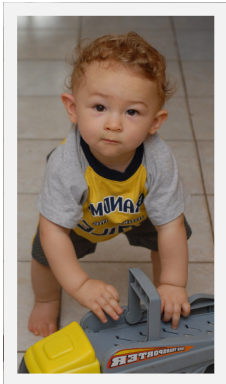
The freshly plowed rice field, ready for planting

We were glad to be able to lend a hand to friends' project though, and to show support to another congregation of the national church. We pray their efforts are fruitful and serve to show God's love in practical ways to the people of Gabu.

CELEBRATING *by Emily*

The rainy season always brings lots of sickness, but this past month has been off the charts for our family. Both Savannah and Nathaniel got malaria for the first time while we were out in Gabu, and it was rough to watch both of them suffering so much. We were able to get the right medicine, and they both recovered.

We returned to Bissau run down from the heat and sickness, and in focusing on the kids recovery, the nasty head cold that I've been struggling with since mid-February turned into Bronchitis. These past four months of sickness and fatigue have been really difficult for me, and we're continuing to pray for complete physical healing. But even with all of that, we've had so many things to celebrate.



The sweetest little one-year-old ball of energy I've ever seen



Savannah and some of her new friends playing out in Gabu

Nathaniel had his first birthday last week, and it has been exciting to watch him change from a baby into a toddler. Now that he's starting to walk and talk, Savannah is asking pretty much everyday when we're going to have a new baby ☺ She'd actually prefer that I have septuplets, all girls, and name them after the Disney princesses, so her opinion isn't carrying a lot of weight around here ☺

Things are moving forward in the shop and we're excited about our partnership with WAVS, and all of the other projects we're looking forward to helping out on in the next few months!

Jason + Emily