



The Atkins Family

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Breaking Ground *by Jason*

We are over the moon to announce, after much anticipation, that the drinking water filter factory construction has started! The team of masons began digging the factory's footing a few weeks ago. It doesn't look like much yet, but now that the work has started and all of the materials are at the site, we expect things to march forward quickly. The masons will pour the foundation and slab and then begin forming and pouring steel-reinforced cement columns.

As the masons are working, we'll be designing and fabricating the metal roof trusses here at the shop in Canchungo. Once the masons are done, we'll truck the truss sections from here to the site and begin assembling them, raising them, and setting the roof. Once the roof is on the building, we'll begin placing the various machines that were sent over for the project. At that point (hopefully mid-April) we'll be ready to have the American chemist and Canadian ceramics expert come back to Guinea Bissau to build the kiln that will be used to fire the filters, and start training the national workers on the production cycle.

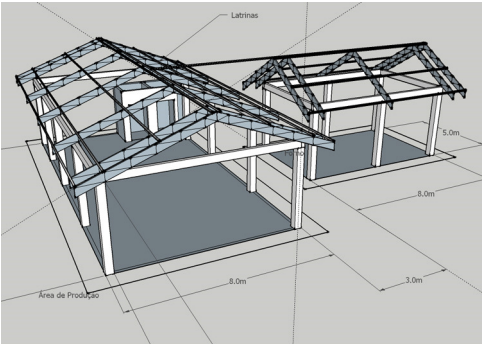
We're excited that work has begun, and are now pressing forward to get everything ready so that the workers can run a few batches of filters before the rainy season starts, slowing production down again. We appreciate your continued prayer throughout the project, especially for the safety of the workers as we're working up in the air to set the roof trusses by hand.

Entering In *by Emily*

Perseverance - not the easiest virtue to teach children, but quite possibly one of the most important. Ever since we moved out to Canchungo in October, Savannah has been making friends, and gradually learning more and more Portuguese Creole. It hasn't been easy for her. She is very verbal and loves to talk about everything she sees and thinks, and her limited Creole vocabulary quickly frustrates her efforts. When she's with a friend or two she has been able to pick up new words and phrases, and practice the things she already knows, but in a large group she gets overwhelmed and usually ends up hiding and asking to go home.

I understand why it's so hard for her. People in groups here love to be loud. They all yell over each other at the same time, and there have been many times where I have felt like a fish out of water. But, this is where God has placed our family. This is where He has asked us to raise our children. I want my daughter to stand with me and say, "I have seen God's provision and His power in the hard places of my life, and I know that He is with me."

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The design for the drinking water filter factory and kiln



The construction crew working on the foundation for the drinking water filter factory



Neighbors from Christian, Muslim, and Animistic families, playing Play-Doh with Savannah

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So, we keep going. Together. I walk into the Sunday school class with my four-year-old and encourage her to clap along with the other kids. I take her over to our neighbor's house when I see a new game getting started and we sit and watch to figure out the rules. We enter in.

And then, a few weeks ago, something changed. Our church had a big event with around 30 kids, and Savannah played every game! They were all new, and she didn't always understand what she was doing, but she didn't quit. Two days later she went over to a Friday night kids' church service at a pastor's house in our neighborhood and did great there too. When we went to Sunday school the next week she asked if she could sit with her friends, and during the singing time she jumped right up to be in the circle, dancing, clapping, and singing along (She was a few words behind everyone else, but hey, I'll take it!).

Living in a different culture, being noticed and pointed out everywhere you go because of the ways that you are different, frequently feeling one step behind everyone else – all of those things are so far outside of my comfort zone. But God doesn't usually change us when we're comfortable. He calls us all into difficult places so that He can shape us, little by little, into the people He has created us to be. Not giving up, not hiding inside my safe zone, not avoiding new challenges – those are places where God has been at work in me over the past eight years and I'm so grateful to see Him working in those same ways in Savannah's life. It is my prayer that I, along with my husband and children, will always be able to look back and recognize the fruit of perseverance.

Solar Power, Welding Students, and a Mini Steel Warehouse *by Jason*

This month we've had the opportunity to plug in to the work of the WAVS vocational school in several different ways. The school has grown over the past few years, and as it has added programs, its energy needs have increased. The school has a solar power system (about the same size as the one we installed at Youth For Christ) that is its sole source of electricity. The welding program is now doing more work than ever, and with our shop added to the school's energy consumption, the system has struggled to supply all of the power we need. Fortunately, the school's supporters responded to a fundraising campaign at the end of the year, so they've decided to increase the system's collecting capacity by about 40 percent. Having had a little bit of experience with this type of solar system, they gave me the job of designing the expansion. We got all of the equipment picked out and ordered, and they packed it into a shipping container that left Washington state last month. When it arrives in a few months we'll be busy mounting and connecting it all to keep the school's lights on!

I'm also continuing to work with the welding program's students most days in my shop. Sometimes the students bring projects over that are more easily done on my equipment than theirs, and sometimes they loan me a few students to work on projects that I have going. Overall, I think it has been fun for the students to work on different kinds of projects and work with equipment that's a bit more modern than what they're used to. It's also been a big help to me to have some more hands to get work moved through! This month the welding instructor was on vacation for a week, so I was working with the whole group of students all week. It was fun, but making sure everyone was working correctly and most importantly, safely, was pretty tiring!

With the help of the school's leadership, we also started a little streamlining program at the school. Our steel raw materials aren't available here in Canchungo, so whenever we need new material, we have to send the school's truck to Bissau to bring back steel. Most people in Guinea-Bissau are used to planning one day at a time (the women go to the market each day to buy just enough ingredients for that day's food). However, it's not very efficient to send the truck on the three-hour round trip to Bissau several times a month to bring back what we need for each project. So, this month we cleaned out a spare shipping container at the school, built a nice stout storage tree for steel, and brought back a bunch of steel. Now, when we need material, we just take it from our "warehouse" and record what it was used for! I'm working closely with the head of the welding program to help him get in the habit of planning for future steel needs, and keeping careful records of the steel used for each project. Hopefully this will let us buy steel in big batches and eliminate quite a few unnecessary trips to Bissau.

Please continue to pray for the school and its vision to train tomorrow's leaders in Guinea-Bissau!

Jason + Emily



Our church, during worship on Sunday morning



Savannah (in pink) dancing with the kids in her Sunday school class



Nathaniel and his buddy Emanuel



Our neighbor Carla and Savannah are together everyday.



Teaching the welding students how to paint with a paint gun



Making a new bed for the school's truck - scrap yard steel underneath and new diamond plate on top