



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau with



West African
Vocational Schools

Summer 2017

We purchased a truck
to send over. Details
on the back!

Saying Goodbye by Emily

Many of you remember the completely unexpected and incredibly generous going away party our church threw for us before we left Guinea-Bissau in May. Let's just say that when you're a few days away from flying back to the U.S. for 6 months,



knee-deep in suitcases and boxes, and 40 people surprise you at your house with a live goat to slaughter and roast, you know you're family, haha!

Even though there was a fair amount of craziness as people started arriving, the main thing I remember as I look back on that day was *love*. Our Guinean church family said goodbye by loving us extravagantly with the purchase of the goat and the gift of their time and presence as they spent the whole afternoon and evening celebrating with us.

Lots of people hate goodbyes, and having gone through many rounds of them in my life, I know how emotionally draining they can be, even though each one is worth the

emotional toll. Our life is divided between Guinea-Bissau and the U.S., and even in the U.S. our friends and family are spread out all over. There is no physical place where we can be with everyone we love, so as we travel around we experience the joy of catching up and then the struggle of moving on.

When you get right down to it, *love* is the reason that goodbyes are hard. It's always heart wrenching to leave people and places we love. The temptation for us is to keep relationships shallow and people at arm's length, but that isn't the way we want to live. Because of that, our prayer has always been that God will

enable us to love deeply everywhere we go, and that in every transition He will give us the strength to say goodbye well. Over the years we have seen Him answer this prayer again and again and we are so grateful.



Teaching friends from church how to play tic-tac-toe in the sand with giant sticks.

Things that are weird to the kids about the US

- warm water in the faucets
- how cold all of the stores are
- doors that open when you walk up to them
- driving everywhere we go

Things they love about the US

- family
- the library
- sprinklers and splash pads
- Sunday school
- donuts with sprinkles

New Truck by Jason

We're excited to announce that after much research and shopping, we've found a replacement for our family/work vehicle in Guinea-Bissau! We'd like to extend a great big thank you to all of the individuals, families, churches, and organizations who contributed toward the project. We really appreciate it!

After many hours weighing the pros and cons of different models and configurations, we settled on looking for a Chevy Avalanche. We need a vehicle that can be a family car and a work truck all in one. The Avalanche's strange mid-gate configuration lets you have a small box pickup when you need to seat 5 and then extend the bed into the cabin (folding the back seats down) when you need to haul longer stuff (a stack of plywood fits inside the locked bed in this configuration). A crew-cab long-box pickup would have done both jobs at once, but the $\frac{3}{4}$ ton suspension would have been really rough on the roads of Guinea-Bissau, and it would have been a conspicuously big vehicle to drive where "normal" trucks are what we call mid-size (like a Colorado or Tacoma). We'd also considered a Suburban to allow us to haul short-term teams around, but WAVS has just purchased a people-hauling Land Cruiser that we'll have access to when needed, so we were instead able to focus on the utility of having a pickup bed. It's going to be extremely useful to have somewhere to put equipment like steel from the scrap yard or the gas-driven welder (which doesn't fit in the back of a Suburban and certainly not in the Explorer.)



We had a few particular hopes/requirements for the vehicle that made the search take a while. I was restricting the search to regions where road salt isn't used to make sure we didn't start out with a rusty body and frame. I was also specifically looking for one with a backup camera, because we always have little kids around (ours and neighbors) and though I'm careful, being able to see behind me is going to be a big relief. Though we might not have prioritized them if we were picking and choosing, the package with the camera also came along with some creature comfort features (like cooled seats) that are going to be nice for driving in the heat and stress of Guinea-Bissau roads. We were looking for a light-colored vehicle because of the heat. Lastly, we were obviously also trying to find a great deal.

Last month, I flew to Dallas to check out a candidate that met all of the requirements. It has a salvage title because of an accident in the back that had been fixed, not affecting anything mechanical. The salvage title doesn't matter for export, so we were able to save quite a bit by accepting a vehicle like this with less-than-perfect sheet metal (it's going to fit in great in Guinea-Bissau, haha). There are normal maintenance parts that need to be replaced, but nothing that prevented me from buying it and driving it the 1,000 miles back to Michigan!



So now I'm in the process of replacing all of the broken/worn parts (thankful to be getting some experience working on it here in the States where parts are actually available) and building up a big inventory of spare parts to send over. It's a bit stressful trying to imagine everything that might go wrong with a vehicle over the next few years of rough driving and then find deals on all of those replacement parts, but it will be a big help to have the parts on

hand for whatever problems do develop! We're also doing a few upgrades to make it rural-Africa-ready, including a bull bar, LED light bar, skid plate, and a locking safe for the cash we have to carry around.

The plan is to finish the repairs and outfitting when we return to Michigan in November, then ship it to West Africa. It should arrive after we've returned in December so we're there to drive it down from the port in Dakar, and file all of the paperwork required to import/title/insure/inspect it.



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