



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau with



West African
Vocational Schools

December 2017

Though the journey
was long, we're glad
to be back home!

traffic control workers' strike in Dakar, Senegal stranded us in Portugal. Though we eventually made it to Dakar, we had literally missed our boat (the overnight ocean ferry) down to the south of Senegal and we had quite a time trying to find another way to get down to our home in Guinea-Bissau.

Every time we make this journey, I am elated and grateful when our suitcases rumble around on the last baggage claim conveyor. Over the past 11 years one or both of us have flown across the Atlantic 21 times, often with a complicated web of layovers, and we've never lost a bag yet!! During this voyage we stopped for few days in Germany, and when we arrived and went to pick up our suitcases, they simply weren't there. I am someone who doesn't like it when plans go awry, but in that moment, all I felt was peace. (In the end we found out that two flights from Reykjavik, Iceland had landed at the same time and the Frankfurt airport has a couple of different baggage claim areas, and we had simply gone to the wrong one.)

Our bags were accidentally checked through from Germany to Dakar, so we didn't have access to them for the two days we waited in Portugal for the strike to end, and when we finally got to Dakar everyone on our flight sat by the baggage claim conveyor for more than an hour before our bags started trickling out (some of them not even on the right conveyors—ours happened to



Finally in Africa, on the bus from the airport into downtown Dakar.

Peace by Emily

Those of you who were keeping up with our travels on Facebook know that our journey back to Guinea-Bissau was a bumpy ride. It started with a few delays on trains and planes, and kids up at all hours from the 6 hour time change, but we expected those things. It didn't really get interesting until an air



The Christmas tree at Union Station in Chicago, 4 suitcases for 5 people - travelling light!

get mixed in with the bags from Brussels!). During all of this I never felt a single moment of worry.

After that we took a bus into the heart of Dakar and spent hours with all of our luggage and our tired, hungry kids on the side of a busy dirt road as afternoon gave way to evening and then to night, first looking for a way to get to Guinea-Bissau and then just looking for a place to sleep, and I had peace. The next morning we loaded up into a battered station wagon and drove 14 hours straight on the worst roads possible, going through three African border crossings and being ferried across a river where there is no bridge; not stopping at all for food (we brought some crackers and oranges) and only once for a bathroom, and I had peace.

The peace was not because I was comfortable, I was not, and it certainly wasn't from being well rested and prepared for the day in front of me. The peace that I felt was the gracious gift of a loving

(cont'd) God who knows that the adventure that He has called us to is too much for me. Way too much. And that's ok, because He is with me every step. Thank you for praying. In every one of those moments it meant more than I can express, and God answered every prayer with the strength to keep moving forward and peace along the way.



The last (still long!) leg of the trip home, a bush taxi.



Welding Training by Jason

After our long trip home concluded on Sunday, I was able to spend Monday afternoon beginning to open my workshop back up and prepare for the next day. Tuesday, I held a training for the Welding department staff to help grow their skills on some more advanced techniques that they haven't spent a lot of time learning. We spent the day working together on the lathe; reviewing machine operation, safety, and making an example set of hinges for a heavy gate. It was really nice to be back in the shop, investing in the development of people that are important to me. I'm thankful for the opportunity to dive back into our house and work, and the ability to help develop a program and staff that are



Before and after! The cast aluminum coolant line connector had undergone an attempted repair at another shop, and when that failed they came to us for a new part. A stainless hose barb pressed into machined aluminum—not bad for next day service!

making a difference in the lives of students! Oh, and a rush job also came in to help get a local carpentry shop's generator back online.



Left: Turning a set of gate hinges from scrap yard steel.

Back in the Classroom Again by Emily

Even though we arrived after 10 pm on Sunday night from an 8 day journey back to Guinea-Bissau, first thing Monday morning I left the kids home with their amazing father and went to the vocational school to lead a workshop for the staff. When I prepared the seminar back in the U.S. I felt led to teach on the ways that God calls us, how He prepares, equips, and empowers us, and, in light of that, how we prepare ourselves and respond with obedience. I didn't know then that I would need to keep those exact lessons in mind even as I stood up to begin teaching! Thank you for praying for the training. I hadn't



spoken much Creole in the 6 months we were in the U.S. and I was dead on my feet, in lots of pain from the car ride, and having trouble stringing sentences together, even in English. By the grace of God I was able to stand and teach excitedly for the three hour morning session, enjoy catching up with everyone during the all-staff lunch, and lead an afternoon seminar with the English, computer, auto mechanics, and welding teachers. Even though I wished that I had had a few days to rest first, it really was a great way to jump back into the work I love and a beautiful reminder that even when I am so very weak, God is not, and He is with me.



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