



The Atkins Family

Jason, Emily, Savannah,
Nathaniel, and Miriam

Serving in Guinea-Bissau with



July 2018

We have no snow and no mountains, but we're expecting an Avalanche!

Lessons in Community from the Women at our Well *by Emily*

There is a well just a few feet away from our house where many of our neighbors come several times a day to draw water. When the women come they bring large, 10 gallon basins and pull up bucket after bucket to fill them. When they are full the women carry them back to their houses balanced gracefully on their heads. The problem is the basins are too heavy for them to lift onto their heads by themselves, and when they get back to their houses they can't lower them without help. You might think they solve this problem by coming in groups or bringing a helper, but they don't. They come confidently expecting that anyone working outside or walking by will be happy to help them lift the basin, and when they reach their house another friend, family member, or neighbor will help them take it down.

The women expect this ready help, because that's the way community works in Guinea-Bissau. People are never too busy to lend a hand, and because of that, people confidently assume that help will be there when they need it. They are unafraid to attempt things that they can't do alone. Watching this process, basin after basin, day after day, has made me grateful that I have the opportunity to participate in this kind of community. It's not easy. I have to be willing to go out of my way for other people, to need and ask for help when I knowingly attempt things that I can't do alone, and to leave space for interruptions in my often over-scheduled life. Thankfully, with so many patient teachers and excellent examples, I am slowly learning how.



My dear friend, Titina, carrying water home from the well.

The Avalanche (Finally) Begins Its Voyage *by Jason*

Living in Guinea-Bissau for more than a decade has taught me a lot of patience. Things work on a different schedule over here, and there are (drastically) different expectations about how quickly things should get done. There is about a 50% vehicle import tax in Guinea-Bissau—your \$8,000 used car costs another \$4,000 in taxes. Fortunately, as a non-profit, we're entitled to bring work vehicles in and only pay a much more reasonable 3%. When I was here last October we began the process of applying for this exemption, with the plan that we would ship the truck over once we knew the exemption had been approved, to avoid the possibility that the truck would get here and then, once it was too late, they would arbitrarily assess a huge chunk of taxes on it based on a subjective valuation. I expected the process of the exemption to be done before our family came back in December so that we could ship the truck out before we left the U.S. and it would arrive shortly after we did. This, however, was not how things went.



The kids and I took our school work outside to take advantage of the days before the rains made everything soggy.

The Avalanche (Finally) Begins Its Voyage (cont'd) by Jason

The already cumbersome process of government paperwork in Guinea-Bissau was made even more complicated by a bunch of transitions in government ministries in 2018 as the government re-formed itself several times. In a shocking number of cases in Guinea-Bissau, things can only be approved by the director himself, not by staff. With people coming and going from the Finance ministry every few months, a few things fell through the cracks. The situation has also been magnified by the fact that the international community has sanctioned the sitting president, which has impacted the aid money coming into the country, which usually makes up about half of the government budget. It appears that in order to try to make up for some of the void left by the aid money, the government has begun to deny legitimate exemption requests made by many non-profits operating in Guinea-Bissau.

Though we're still working hard on the exemption, the good news is that the valuation came back low, so even if we eventually have to abandon the exemption, we'll be paying the taxes based on a much lower value than it could've been. So, with the valuation in hand, we requested the truck be picked up from Michigan this month, and it's scheduled to arrive September 8th! We're still hopeful (one way or the other) to have the paperwork taken care of by then, so that once it arrives it won't be more than a few days until we're able to bring it home and start using it. In the meantime, we're thankful that after a few repairs and a new tire, our trusty Explorer is still working well enough in the meantime. (Although, for the last month there has been no gas in the country, just diesel, so we've been using our organization's diesel-powered Land Cruiser!)

Although we still don't have it over here yet, there have been many times since coming back in December that I've thought, "what I'm trying to do right now would be a lot easier with the Avalanche!" So, even though it's still not here, our excitement about getting it over here, documented, and putting it to work are undiminished! Thank you again to all who gave toward its purchase, outfitting, shipping, and documentation!

Renewal by Jason

In the end of June we finished our school year and said goodbye to our 2017-18 welding students (and the students from all of the other programs as well). We now have a few precious months to be able to get around to many projects that we haven't been able to make time for during the school year. Having deliberate time to fix broken equipment, work on curriculum, do preventative maintenance, and make improvements for the coming year is critical. It's a rhythm that often isn't intrinsic here, partially because of the habit of the effort for daily survival. Things that aren't being periodically maintained and improved, however, are degrading by definition, especially in a place where the extreme dry and dust of the dry season and drenching humidity of the rainy season are so hard on equipment in open buildings.

The three months are pretty chopped up because the department employees stagger taking a calendar month off during the break, and the heavy rains sometime limit what we can do at any given time, but with lots of cleaning, fixing, and improving to do, there's always something productive to accomplish-and it's nice to have some blocks of time with fewer interruptions to be able to focus.



This saw should be able to lower itself automatically after beginning a cut, but someone broke it, not understanding how it works, several years ago, and it's had to be hand-held since. It's nice to have it automatic again and get that checked off of the to-do list!



A team brought this tube bending machine over in pieces in their checked luggage several years ago and it's gotten a LOT of use, but can only bend 1" square tube because each size/shape of tube requires its own form. Using metal from the scrap yard, I'm making some new bending dies to let us use the machine for even more kinds of projects!



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