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Jason, Emily & Savannah Atkins

A New Machine, A New Sign, and a Trip to the Village *by Emily*

We've had a busy month working on lots of projects here in Bissau and out in the village of Gabu. One of the things Jason likes best about his job over here is the variety of things he gets to do and this past month was no exception.

Jason's been keeping the welder, grinder, drill press, and bandsaw busy in the shop building bunk beds for the YFC discipleship school in the village of Mansoa, and making a new sign for the Youth Center to replace the one that had rusted through and blown down last summer while we were gone.

In between his metalworking, he found out about a small mechanics' school that was closing. After making about five billion trips over there and negotiating with twenty seven billion different people, he was able to purchase a lathe for the shop J. It needed a lot of work, but he got it tuned up and is looking forward to using it to make lots of other needed machines and tools when we come back to Bissau this fall.

We also spent a week out in Gabu, Sinchan Botchi, and Canjufa. We went out to help translate for a car rally that was coming down from Europe and ending in Bissau. That resulted in Jason getting involved in an almost unbelievable situation which you can read about in his article! Jase brought along one of our welders and was able to repair some farming equipment and several doors on our friend's house while we were out there.

A Sad Day *by Jason*

We spent a few days this month helping however we could as the Budapest Bamako car rally ended in Guinea-Bissau. The rally drives down from Europe through the Sahara with 100 or so cars, giving donations along the way. We had fun seeing the different cars that came down, talking to the teams about their adventure, and helping translate for them. Unfortunately, as the rally came in to Bissau from the interior, the journey got a little too exciting. Though you might be tempted to think I'm making this up, here truth is stranger than fiction.

The problems began as 40 or so of the 100 cars had their registration papers taken without explanation at a police checkpoint on the way to Bissau. The cars were told to go on. At the hotel that night, we starting making phone calls to try to get someone with enough authority to release the documents, while we helped the rally organizers decide if they would just leave Guinea-Bissau in the morning in a convoy to go somewhere safer, like Senegal.

Continued...



Unloading the new 1,200 pound lathe from the truck takes a lot of guys!



Using the welder to make some repairs on a hand-operated threshing machine.



The new Youth Center sign Jason made being loaded to go out to its home by the road.



The mighty lathe in action after being safely deposited in the shop.



Repairing a broken pulley with our friend Gilson.



Kristin, Daniel, and Savannah having a ball in Gabu.

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The next morning I drove to their hotel to continue trying to deal with getting the documents back so the group could leave the country when they were ready. The decision about whether to leave straight away or not had been made for them, as they awoke with an armed national guard unit at their hotel, who told them all of the cars had to come with them. We were escorted to the air force base and told all of the cars had to enter. We tried to explain that several of them needed to leave right away to catch a boat up in Senegal. Didn't matter, all of the cars needed to go in, then after being registered they would be "promptly released". We had been joined by a Guinean who was sent to help by the Czech embassy after receiving complaint calls from some of the drivers. This man had lived in the Czech Republic for 16 years, understands what it's like to be a foreigner in a strange situation, and is married to a Czech wife. Now he lives in Guinea-Bissau again.



Jason riding along in the rally car that came to scout everything out in November.

Some of the drivers in the rally drive down and then drive back to Europe; others drive down, sell their cars, and then fly back. After getting the cars organized in the air base, the guards told us they'd brought us there because they wanted to make sure that the cars that were going to be sold were properly taxed. No problem we said, give us back all of the documents for the cars that aren't being sold and let them go on their merry way. Ah, but that wasn't so easy either, now that the cars were all in the military's control. They decided that any cars leaving would need to be escorted to the border by the police, ostensibly so they could make sure the drivers didn't leave the base and then go sell their car.



National Guard troops surrounding the leader of the rally and forcing all of the rally cars into the Air Force base while a crowd of people dressed up for Carnival watches.

"No problem," we said, "you're welcome to send anyone along to verify we leave. We just want to get out of this crazy place."

"We don't have a car to accompany you."

"No problem, we have an extra seat, you can ride along with us."

"Sure, but escorting you is a service we're providing to you, you have to pay."

"We got here without an escort, we can leave without one."

"No, you can't leave and won't get your documents until you pay."

"Ok, how much?"

"Seven cars in this group? That'll cost \$480."

"For one guy to ride with us three hours to the border?"

"Yes, otherwise you can't leave."



One of the rally cars that came down from Europe. This one actually broke an important part on the way and friends of ours in the village loaned them their generator to weld it back together.

At this point, the Guinean guy the Czech embassy had sent to help piped up in Creole, which none of the rally guys understood, "Don't forget about me", he said. So the police increased the price by another \$120 so he could get a little too! He was there to help the rally, sent by their embassy, and he was asking the police to increase the bribe so he could get a cut! Amazing.

The rest of the day went on pretty much the same, brazen bribe requests and ridiculous excuses. In the end, the rally was held under armed guard at the base all day, with no food, so the cars could be sold in a "controlled" environment. After they'd been there an hour, the guards of the base were told not to let any other buyers in because some government officials wanted to get in first to buy what they wanted before anyone else could. In the end I saw one government official buy five cars.

The rally organizer had a meeting the next day with the Guinean foreign minister to hash out what had happened and get some guarantees about next year's rally. The minister didn't even have the good sense to be embarrassed by what had happened, insisting that the whole situation was completely proper and normal.

I don't think we're going to see the rally in Guinea-Bissau again. It's doubly sad, because the rally comes through to have fun, but also to help the countries they're driving through. The rally has only been coming here for a couple of years, and although the country didn't do anything to bring them here, it's already managed to chase them away with a unique blend of greed and corruption. It's a bit disheartening for those trying to help the country to see them chasing away other help for no reason.

In other news, the official "Guinea-Bissau guide to tourism" will be available soon...

Stateside by Emily

We got our plane tickets to fly home in the end of March! I'll be seven-months pregnant so we'll be headed to the doctor first and then all over the US for about a month before we settle down in Michigan to await our little one 😊

Since we've only got about a month left before we head out, we're finishing projects, packing up our house (the Youth Center rents it as guest house space when we're not here), and getting Savannah (and ourselves) ready to go back to the US. She is VERY excited about the possibility of seeing snow 😊



Savannah and her pregnant mommy showing off the new matching shirts mommy sewed.



Our growing two-year old has a healthy appetite!

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