



Update from Tom Johnson April 2021

Dear Friends,

2021 brought a great deal of uncertainty to our home when it debuted in January. In late December of 2020, Aïchatou was admitted to Broadlawns Hospital's Behavioral Health unit as she was suffering from hallucinations and other schizophrenia-related symptoms. This time, the hospital's social workers had to work with me, as her legal guardian, because the shelter in Des Moines would no longer permit her to return. In the past, I was often left out of the loop for her care because Aïchatou would state her desire to return to the shelter after her medical team determined that she was "stabilized." I was not even notified when she left the hospital or where she went after those discharges. No one seemed to care that she was trapped in a vicious cycle since she had no support to ensure that she would continue her treatments while residing at the shelter.

Although this time I was in communications with the social workers, it was not at all clear as to what would happen to Aïchatou since she repeatedly insisted that she did not want to return to her family. We explored placing her with her cousins in Omaha, NE, but it became evident that this would not work for them, as everyone agreed at that time that Aïchatou needed constant care and her relatives were all out of their homes for much of the day. Placing her in some sort of group home was also considered, but that meant pursuing getting her declared disabled so she would have funding (as those homes often require the equivalent of a years' salary for each resident). This type of declaration requires a social security hearing (as she would have applied through my account as a spouse) and a fair amount of paperwork and documentation—some of which was still in Niger. At best, she might get such a declaration in March of 2021.

As January went by, Aïchatou was considered medically stable enough to leave the ward, but hospital rules prevented them from releasing her to the streets in the middle of winter or to a residence that she did not want to go to. This turned out to our advantage as Aïchatou was improving through her lengthy hospitalization, which resulted in her receiving several rounds of treatment through long-acting injections instead of daily pills (which she would stop taking after previous hospitalizations), plus regular doctor and therapist visits. We started having the girls call her each night and we could hear clear and constant improvement in her voice and her thoughts over the weeks. By the second week of February, the hospital social workers told me that Broadlawns could no longer keep Aïchatou and that because I was her legal guardian, they would send her to me on Friday, February 12, using a Lyft driver—regardless of her wishes.



Aïchatou is back with us!

When Aïchatou arrived at our home at 9 a.m., she was first under the impression that I had found some other place in Pella for her to stay. I honestly didn't know what to do and just prayed that everything would work out. And it did. Initially, she was a bit confused as to what was happening, but thankfully the girls were home from school because of a teachers' in-service day. As a result, they spent the entire day with her, which gave her a great deal of joy. By the day's end, Aïchatou had accepted the fact that she had been welcomed back into our lives and realized that we had not rejected her.

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Since Aïchatou came home, everything has been going fairly well. She is getting twice-monthly injections and has already begun working 12 hours/week in the mornings at the local supermarket deli. Slowly, but surely, we're seeing progress but I'm not sure that she yet comprehends that she'll likely need to get those injections for the rest of her life. I spoke with a Christian psychiatrist in Pella who urged me to understand that schizophrenia is a brain chemistry disease that can be controlled with medicine. One of its symptoms is that sufferers are unable to understand how the illness affects them without cognitive therapy to correlate their treatment with their ability to live a healthier life.

The big test as to Aïchatou's new status was the fact that I had scheduled a trip to Haiti for mid-March and I needed to go and would have to leave her and the children. Although Tim Brand of Many Hands for Haiti told me that I could postpone the trip to stay home with Aïchatou, I refrained from doing so because I didn't see any of the worrisome behaviors in Aïchatou that I knew indicated that she was becoming unstable. Likewise, the girls confirmed to me that I should go as they had no concern about their mother while I would be gone. Aïchatou did very well and had no trouble going to work, driving the younger kids to their activities, or running the household during my absence. What a wonderful answer to prayer!

I spent one week in Haiti and conducted several trainings with the six Haitian chaplains that work with Many Hands in Haiti. This time we tackled topics such as, "God is a Missionary God," "God at War (against His enemies)," "The Supernatural Realm," "Movements of People to Christ," "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle" (dealing with syncretistic challenges associated with believers transitioning from a traditional to a modern worldview), and "Three Encounters to Christian Witness" (Power, Allegiance, and Truth). Many of these topics come from the Perspectives Course of the World Christian Movement textbook. We also discussed the Haitian chaplains' progress in making audio recordings on the theme "New Life in Christ" for new believers. Because of new COVID-19 travel requirements, I had to spend my last full day in Haiti driving to a hospital two hours from Pignon to get a negative COVID-19 test to re-enter the U.S. Imagine the frustration and delay if my test had come back positive! I'd still probably be in Haiti!



Tom and the Many Hands for Haiti Spiritual Shepherds (chaplains)

PRAYERS and PRAISES

1. We're profoundly thankful to God for restoring Aïchatou's mental health and bringing her back to our family. She was gone exactly 33 months and her absence was one of the most difficult trials that I have ever experienced. Likewise, we're very grateful for all who joined us in prayer for her and us during this troublesome period. Continue to keep her health and her willingness to continue with twice-monthly injections in your prayers.
2. We give thanks for the new teenager in our home, as Ellie turned 13!
3. I'm thankful for a successful trip to Haiti where everything went according to plan! Please pray for the future ministries of the MH4H Spiritual Shepherds, particularly in digital media creation and distribution.



In Christ,

Tom and family