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Office of University Communications

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GWU Alum Helps Raise Money for Clean Water in Rwanda After Life-Changing Wreck

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – When Ryan Jones graduated from Gardner-Webb University in May of last year, he made plans to tour the country with a friend before starting life in the ‘real world.’ He never imagined that a car accident would change his plans and perspective forever. A year later, he is fully recovered, but is now motivated to make life better for those without access to the basic necessity of clean water.

“My story is not meant to be a sob story, and I don’t want anyone to feel sorry for me,” said Jones, who now lives in Durham, N.C. “I hope to use this unfortunate event as a platform to emphasize the value of life and to help those in need.”

On Aug. 30, 2011, Jones and a friend were about 15 minutes from Flagstaff, Ariz. when the unthinkable occurred. Their vehicle careened off the roadway, flipping several times. Unbuckled and asleep in the backseat, Jones initially thought the movement was part of a dream. He woke up to the sounds of shattering glass and crunching metal, and began to realize that it was no dream.

“When we finally stopped, it took a few seconds for me to understand what had just happened,” he said. “I was alive, wasn’t feeling much pain, and my friend seemed fine too. However, when I went to lift myself up, I quickly discovered that was not the case.”

His left arm was completely broken; he also broke his knee and his right leg had been scraped raw. He suffered separated ribs and internal bruising. Jones spent the following week at a hospital in Flagstaff and the next four and a half months recovering at his family’s home in Statesville, N.C. Typically an on-the-go guy, he said being homebound was extremely difficult.

“Despite my amazing family and my friends who helped keep me sane, it was incredibly tough for me to be confined to one location,” Jones shared. “With so much time on my hands, I was able to reflect on things in my life, and I learned so many important lessons.”

This year, on Aug. 30, Jones wanted to commemorate the one-year anniversary of his terrible accident and celebrate his full recovery. While spending months recuperating, he gained a new appreciation for achieving even the most basic of tasks. “When I was unable to do simple things, such as walk, I started to think about how we often take things for granted,” he said. “That is why I decided to help raise money to provide people with clean, safe water, which is a necessity that is taken for granted by most people.”

During the month of September, Jones is working to raise funds for Charity:Water, a non-profit organization that works to bring clean, safe drinking water to people in developing nations. Currently, Charity:Water is holding a \$1.7 million campaign to provide 100 percent clean water in two sectors of Rwanda's Rulindo District – Shyorongi and Ngoma. Jones is hoping to raise \$5,000 toward the cause.

“I went through a traumatic incident, struggled through the recovery period, and then emerged with a new lease on life,” he said. “The people of Rwanda have experienced a much greater tragedy and now they are working through reconciliation and recovery – how could I not help?”

To help Jones achieve his goal, supporters can visit www.striveandbe.com. Although he still has a couple of weeks to raise funds, he is hoping that his terrible experience will ultimately have a worldwide impact.

“Meeting the goal of \$5,000 would give 76 people in Rwanda the gift of clean water,” Jones said. “I am fully recovered and better than ever. While I don't exactly know where the new trajectory of my life is leading, I am happy to follow it based on a few simple principles: be appreciative; pursue what moves you; and enjoy and help others.”