

# Father Ray Foundation Newsletter



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## *Message from Derek Franklin*

Following a twelve hour shift as a paediatric nurse on a very busy, and short staffed, children's ward in a large North London teaching hospital, I was relaxing at home, flicking through the TV channels and came across a programme called Bangkok Bound.

It was all about people who came to Thailand, some for a holiday, others to start a new life and one of the stories was about a lady from the UK who came to volunteer with an American priest, and I liked what I saw.

The next day I posted a letter, addressed to 'Father Ray. Pattaya. Thailand', and didn't think I would hear back, but a few weeks later I received a reply, inviting me to visit the next time I was in Thailand.

A year later I took my annual holiday from work and traveled to Thailand, making my way to Pattaya to meet this American priest I had seen on the TV.

I sat in Father Ray's office and we chatted for about an hour, he showed me the work he was doing here for the poor in Pattaya and then invited me to come back as a volunteer.

The following year I took six months leave from work and arrived in Pattaya.

From the very first day I arrived I was impressed by what I was seeing and all the people I was meeting. Orphaned children, and those who had been abandoned, abused as well as runaways and street kids, seeing them so happy even after all they had been through in their young lives.

I met young adults, some with the most deformed bodies I have ever seen, and yet they smiled all day. I was introduced to blind children and deaf toddlers, and while at first I felt pity for them I soon realised that this is not what they wanted.

I was only planning to stay for six months, but as my time to leave was approaching I asked Father Ray if I could stay a while longer, he agreed and then he asked me if I would take on the job as Volunteer Coordinator. I didn't need to think about it, I accepted straight away and fourteen years later and I am still here.

I no longer look after the volunteers, and today part of

my job here is to promote the Father Ray Foundation and raise awareness of the work we are doing, and I never get tired or bored talking about our children and students. In fact some days I talk so much that I am left with a sore throat at the end of the day.

When I show visitors around our projects they all have lots of questions. They want to know everything; who are our children, where do they come from, what do we do for our students, where does our money come from and what happens when the children leave us. But there is one question that I have been asked more than any other question, and that is, why do I stay here?



The answer is simple, I love my job, and I think I have the best job in the world. The thing about my job and where I work is that every day I see people's lives changing.

Talking about 'changing people's lives', I used to think saying that made me sound like an old hippy, but it's what we do and I really do see it taking place every day.

## *Lovable rogues*

Of all the different jobs I have had here at the Foundation in Pattaya, my favourite, without a doubt, was when I ran the clinic at the Father Ray Children's Home.

In those days it was still known as the Home for Street Kids and I was advised by many not to go and work there. I was told that the children were dirty, rude, they were always fighting and they would steal anything they could get their hand on.

What I met when I first arrived was a group of the most wonderful kids I have ever met.

Yes, they were dirty and they were rude. There always seemed to be someone fighting and the language they used, well, it could never be repeated in this newsletter.

But you see, they knew nothing better.

Before coming to live with us they lived with relatives who used bad language, it was part of their normal way of speaking. The en-

vironment they lived was one of violence, drug abuse and alcohol, fighting was a normal part of their life.

Lack of proper sanitation and clean running water in the poorer areas of Pattaya meant they never learned to wash themselves properly.

And they were always hungry, so they stole what they could to survive.

But look beyond that and they were normal children, just a bit down on their luck and trying to survive.

I would travel up to the Home twice each day, arriving at 5:15 in the morning and again exactly twelve hours later for the evening clinic.

Each time I arrived I would pass through the gates to be met by two young six year old boys, even in the monsoon rains they would be there waiting for me.

Once I had parked my motorbike they would take

my keys, unlock the clinic door and then one of them would sit in front of me complaining about how sick he was, pointing to any small cut, or even a freckle on his arm, and the whole time, thinking I didn't know what was going on, his mate would be quietly climbing up the shelves behind me to reach the large box of orange flavoured vitamin C tablets.

Not long after meeting these two boys I named them 'the naughtiest boys in the world'. They were lovable rogues who always seemed to be in trouble. If a window was smashed or one of the pigs escaped, it was more than likely one of these two boys who was involved. If

there was a fight or an argument, it was guaranteed that one or both would be right in the middle of things.

One day in the clinic they were picking fights with anyone and everyone who came to see me, big kids and little kids. Eventually I had had enough of all the noise so I picked them both up, carried them outside and told them not to come back.

Walking back into the clinic I could hear them shouting

obscenities at me and to everyone in sight, but after a few moments it all went quiet and I carried on seeing my patients. That is until a little girl came in and told me that the two boys were trying to steal my motorbike! Impossible, I thought, they're only six years of age. But as I looked through the window there they were, two boys trying to kick start my motorbike, which was taller than they were. I rushed out of the clinic, took the stairs two at a time and running across the grass I shouted at them, asking what they were doing and where they were going.

They knew they had been caught red-handed, and they could see I was annoyed. But as I stood in front of them, their eyes darted between the pair of them until one of them announced that they wanted to go to the 7-Eleven to buy me some chocolate; I could never stay annoyed





at them for too long.

If you had asked that day what I thought the future would be for these two boys, and many of the others who were living at the Home at that time, I'm afraid to say that my answer would not have been positive; maybe they would run away and join a gang before spending time in prison. Or worse, maybe even no longer with us.

But they are still around. Kaitoon is now living and working in Bangkok. He has a partner and they have recently become parents, and I just know that this young father is doing whatever he can to provide for and protect his new family and give them everything his own family never gave him.

Tom is still living at the Children's Home. A few years ago he received a scholarship to study at a private school, he graduated after completing grade 9 and is



now studying Industrial Mechanics at a nearby vocational college.

Kaitoon and Tom are just two of the many children I have had the pleasure to meet, to help and to work with and I am very proud of them all.

Writing that five letter word, proud, doesn't really justify just how I feel about them. I am proud of what they have achieved and I am also proud of the people they have become.

When I am at the monthly birthday party or watching them play sports I can see how happy our children are, how much fun they are having and that they are enjoying their childhood.

But as I watch them I often think about the reason they are living with us. I wonder what the lives of our children would have been like if they had not come to live with us, but then I have to tell myself that there is no point in thinking about it, they came to us and their lives are better for it.

## ***Girl Power***

I remember many years ago seeing a young eight year old girl arrive, and I don't think I have ever, before or since, seen such a sad looking child. Her mother had not long died and her step father was unable to look after her, there was no one else to care for her, so she found a home at the Father Ray Children's Home.



Nine years later and she has just started her first year at King Mongkhut University, studying Business Administration. She is one of 21 residents from the Home who are attending university, and, something which I think is great, the majority of our university students, 14 in total, are female.

## ***Our Volunteers***

As I wrote earlier, I used to be Volunteer Coordinator and over the years I must have met and welcomed more than six hundred volunteers from countries all over the world. I know many receive our newsletters so I would like to say thank you to every one of them for the time, enthusiasm and support you gave to our children and students. Our volunteers are the unsung heroes of our work here in Pattaya, and I thank them all.



## Our biggest ever intake

I used to teach English at the vocational school, and although English is my first, and only, language I must admit that I was a better nurse than a teacher.

The vocational school is our largest project and the students never cease to amaze me.

Every six months we welcome a new group of students to the school; the last intake in May was 81 new students, the highest ever, and on the first day of term I never miss the welcoming ceremony.

We watch as these new recruits walk or wheel themselves with their heads looking towards the ground, very nervous about being so far away from home, not knowing what the school will be like and they all lack confidence.

But as the days go by they soon



realise that they are no different to the other students at the school, they make friends and they start to smile and enjoy life.

## An inspiration

I was recently watching one of these new students, a nineteen year old young man who lost both his lower arms in an accident and he was playing basketball.

Now, we all know that to play basketball you need your hands to throw the ball, but this young man only has two stumps and this was not going to stop him. With a lot of energy he is able to throw the ball through the net. He holds

the ball in his arms and crouches as low as he can before pushing himself up, he seems to fly several feet into the air, letting go of the ball and watching it go through the hoop.

Neither does his lack of hands stop him from playing sitting volleyball, and while he may not have as much power as when he had both hands, I certainly wouldn't want to be on the receiving end when he serves the volleyball.



## Early morning wake-up call

I live on site and my alarm goes off every morning at 5:30 and each new day I can lie in bed for a few minutes and listen to the sounds of the birds singing outside. Or at least I could until recently.

We have a new member on our security team, a young man who lived for many years at the Children's Home.

As a young boy he was known for his singing, he had the most beautiful voice and you would always hear him before you saw him, he never stopped singing.

But then he reached puberty, his voice broke and he didn't quite sound the same ever again. Did this stop him singing? No, and he continues to sing.

When he is on night shift his final job is to turn off all the night lights around the complex, and as he does so he sings, at the top of his voice.

Whereas I used to listen to the birds singing each morning, now I don't know whether to buy some earplugs or scream out the window to shut him up, but most mornings the sound of his voice makes me smile knowing that I am not the only one who has had an early morning alarm call.

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