

Father Ray Foundation Newsletter



December 2015

A Happy Reunion

We are almost at the end of another year and as I think back over the past months I think it has been a good year here at the Father Ray Foundation.

We have welcomed one hundred and fifty five new students to the vocational school for people with disabilities, and also this year we have watched many students graduate and go off into the world with a job and with the confidence to live in society and demand to be treated as equal.

Our fifth resident from the Children's Home graduated from university in nursing, as a former nurse myself I couldn't be more proud of her.

But for me the highlight of the whole year was the 25th anniversary celebrations at the Father Ray Children's Home which took place over two days in early May.

We started with a formal ceremony, including a Thanksgiving Mass, which was attended by many, not only from the local area, but friends arrived from Denmark, Belgium, The Netherlands, the UK and Father Ray's sister, Sharron, flew all the way from Texas especially to attend.

But it was the evening party that for me was the real highlight.

We invited many former residents from the Home, but not everyone could attend. They are now living and working all over the Kingdom, but around fifty former residents did attend, including one young lady who first came to us in the early hours of the morning of December 5th 2006.

You may be wondering how I can remember the exact day someone arrived here, but December 5th is the birthday of the King of Thailand and it is also celebrated as Fathers Day and I had gone over to the Drop-In

Center for the celebrations.

It is the day our children pay respects to the male workers who are helping them and I always feel very honoured to be invited to take part in the Fathers Day celebrations. This particular day in 2006, I arrived at the Drop-in Center to be met by around forty kids and teenagers, who all knew me and I knew them all, except this one little girl who had arrived in the early hours of the morning.

I asked the manager about her and he took me into the office and told me that she had been forced to work before going to school and if she was late for school she was beaten. If she did not finished her work she was

beaten again and her whole body was covered in bruises and whip marks.

Myself and the four male workers at the Center all sat on a bench and the children organized themselves into five groups and they would present us with red roses, and who do you think was the first person who gave me a red rose? Yes, it was the new arrival.

She sat on the floor in front of me with a huge smile on her face and I sat opposite trying to hold in tears; sometimes the

hardest thing about working here is trying to hide the tears.

She came forward, bowed her head and then presented a single red rose to me. I gave her a hug, trying not to squeeze too hard as I knew she was sore, but I wanted to let her know what everything was going to be alright. She eventually moved into the Children's home and stayed with us for a few years.

Nine years after she first arrived she came back to the Home and handed me her little son, who just happens to be the most beautiful baby I have ever seen, and I've seen quite a few. While I was holding her baby I asked her is she was happy. She looked at me, then to the baby and said yes, she was happy, and I knew she was.



Why?

Many years ago I was sitting in my office when the phone rang. Picking it up I heard the gruff voice of Father Ray on the other end, 'Derek, come to my office, there are two agents from the FBI and they want to talk to you' and then the line went dead.

Now, I knew I hadn't done anything wrong, but that short walk from my office to Father Ray's felt like the longest walk I had ever taken. It was worse than being sent to the Headmasters office in school, even when I knew I'd done something wrong.

As I walked into his office he introduced me to the two FBI agents, who stood up and towered over me, I don't think I had ever met anyone taller.

I was invited to sit on the only available seat in the room, which just happened to be squeezed in between these two giants, and my heart was still pounding, even though I kept telling myself I had done nothing wrong. It turned out that the FBI had arrested a man at Los Angeles airport on his way home from a trip to Thailand. In his luggage they found several videos tapes containing pornographic films, all featuring children; this was a time before smart phones and when video cassettes were the way to watch films. They also found tourist shots of Pattaya, as well as receipts from hotels and restaurants in the town.

The videos contained films of children being abused, but unless the FBI were able to identify and find the victims and get a statement out of them then no charges could be laid against the man in the US; thankfully the law has changed since those days.

They showed me several photos, screen shots they had

taken from the videos to see if I recognized any of the children.

These were children, young boys, who, just by looking at the screen shot it was obvious that they were uncomfortable with what they were doing, some looked in pain and there was sadness on their faces.

I did recognize two of the boys, but these were street kids, no one knew their names, where they were or even if they were still in Pattaya.

We sat there for quite a while and I have never forgotten that day, watching these two giants of men with tears in their eyes looking at the photos of young boys being abused.

I don't know why, and I don't think I will ever understand how anyone can do something to another person, especially a child and knowing that that person is in pain, is crying and is uncomfortable because they don't want to be where they are and doing what they are doing. I just don't get it, what do these people get from hurting a child? I hope I never will understand.

In the last newsletter I mentioned that I sometimes think about our children when they first came to us, many of them following years of abuse, it's a sick world out there for many people, even sicker when you are a child being abused and with no one to save and help you.

If I can't forget what has happened to our children, I sometimes wonder, how can they? But as I watch our children grow I do think that they are stronger than us adults often think they are, and they just get on with life. I think that apart from giving our children a roof over their heads, a safe place to live, a full belly and an education we also give them something that is just as important, we give them back their childhood.

Blaming Others

I love to visit the School for the Blind; most people think a school full of blind children is going to be a sad place, that couldn't be further from the truth.

One of my jobs here at the Foundation is to welcome the many groups of school students from around the world who come and spend a few days or weeks with us. They visit all our projects and meet and spend time with our children and students, but one favourite place to visit is the School for the Blind.

On their first visit to the school the visitors take part in visual awareness training, learning the correct way to guide a blind person and we also get them to wear a blindfold and walk around the school, just to give them the experience of not using their sight but relying on their other senses.

They also visit the local beach with our younger students, who like nothing better than getting out of the classroom for a few hours to have some fun.

The blind students get very excited and even before



the visitors arrive the youngsters can be heard shouting 'Ta-lay ta-lay', the Thai word for going to the beach.

We pair one sighted visitor with one of our students, but before leaving the school grounds the students are

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year



One 15 year old girl still has most of a bottle of cheap cologne we gave her last Christmas. She tells me it's only for very special occasions. Whatever the children get, they will treasure. It is a joy to watch their happiness as their faces light up with the opening of each gift. It is especially at Christmas that we pray for you and the others who help our kids. I wish you could visually see what you have helped. The seeds you helped nurture are turning into wonderful people.

From Father Peter, Father Michael, Brother Witthaya and Brother Denis

A Magic Drum kit

Every two months we organize a big party to celebrate the birthdays of our children. It used to be just the children from the Children's Home who celebrated, but the youngsters from the Children's Village and the Drop-In Center now join in the fun. They have dinner before the entertainment starts, which usually includes several song and dance performances which the children organize themselves.

At the last party, held at the end of October, every child, teenager and staff member who had a birthday in September or October received a gift. They also gathered around the numerous birthday cakes where they listened to all the other children sing Happy Birthday to them before blowing out the many candles which were placed on top of the cakes.

For many of our newcomers it was the first time they had ever celebrated a birthday; poor families are too

told by one of the senior teachers 'do not to go into the water, just take a walk along the sand', to which they all agree.

Holding on to their guide they walk down towards the beach, talking non-stop. Once they reach their destination they throw off their shoes and drag their guide into the water, fully dressed, in their school uniforms, and for the next hour nothing can get them out of the water. The walk back to school takes longer than it took to walk to the beach as they are wearing clothes that are soaking wet.

As they arrive back at school the teacher asks them 'why did you go into the water? I told you not to', to which comes the same reply every time they go to the beach 'but they made us go into the water', knowing full well the foreign visitors don't understand a word of Thai or that they are being blamed for getting the students wet.

busy trying to buy enough food to eat than think about buying a cake and celebrating a birthday.

But this party was a bit different than previous parties as we also invited many of the students from the School for the Blind and they arrived carrying their musical instruments, including a brand new drum kit. Not just any drum kit, but an electronic drum kit, something most of our children had never seen before.

Just setting up the drum machine became difficult as a large crowd had gathered to get a better look at this new 'invention'. Eventually the young drummer was ready to play, he sat on his chair, made himself comfortable, picked up his sticks and then started to play. It sounded exactly the same as a regular drum kit, but how?

One of our younger boys wanted to know how it could sound like a 'proper' drum kit when it wasn't a proper drum kit!

After a few songs the musicians went off to eat, but I watched as this one young boy just stood looking at the drum kit. Eventually he sat on the stool, picked up one of the sticks and started to gently tap the drum, but nothing happened. So he banged again and still nothing happened, so he banged harder and still nothing.

He then asked one of the elder boys why it wasn't making any noise, to which came the teasing reply, 'this drum kit is only for blind people!', and the young boy believed him, because a few moments later the blind student sat back down, picked up his sticks and started to play, making sounds just like a 'proper' drum kit, to the amazement of this one young boy who now thinks there are musical instruments that only blind people can play.



Message from Spencer

My uncle, Father Steve Wilson C.Ss.R. is, like Father Ray before him, a Redemptorist priest and it is he who introduced me to the Father Ray Foundation.

I was a student at the University of Oregon in the United States when my uncle started encouraging me to consider volunteering. He told me about his long time connection with the Foundation and the work it did in Thailand and I continued to learn about the work in Pattaya through its newsletters, website, Facebook page and the films they have on YouTube.

By the time I graduated from university I had already decided that I wanted to be part of the work in Pattaya, and I am so glad I did. Traveling half way around the world to an unknown place was both scary and exciting and it took a leap of faith to do so. But once I arrived all my fears were eased by the warm welcome I received.

The first morning I arrived I joined my fellow foreign volunteers on their weekly visit to the Drop-In Center. From the moment I arrived the children met me with their amazing smiles and with the younger ones wanting to climb all over me; in just a few minutes I went from feeling nervous to feeling happiness and acceptance.

This was a very special moment for me as I knew right there and then that I had made a great decision to come to Thailand. That first day we played games and I gave many piggy-back rides and we also laughed a lot, even though I speak no Thai and they speak no English. By now I know most of the names of the children and we have a bond that I will hold on to forever.

Most days my mornings are spent at the Father Ray Center for Children with Special Needs while in the afternoon we travel across town to the School for the Blind.

The abilities of the children with special needs range widely and I have found it fun and interesting to develop different exercises that challenge them at whatever level they may be. It is encouraging for me to see that the children are responding well to the exercises, but it is not all one way as they are teaching me Thai; so sometimes I am the teacher and at other times I am the student.

I also assist in the English classes at the Vocational School for People with Disabilities, something I look forward to each day and many students have told me that they are thrilled to have the opportunity to study at the school.

As each day passes I continue to

learn more about the Foundation; today there are around 850 children and students living or being educated here. I am impressed with the size of the Foundation, all the projects and I am also impressed with the amount of work it takes to make sure the children and students can study and grow at their own pace in an accepting and loving environment.

Having been here for only two months I feel completely settled, yet the excitement I feel about the daily activities has not diminished. I love the variety of things that I am able to do and the different ways in which I can contribute. So far I have been able to teach and to learn, to make the day brighter for children at the Drop-In Center, to help at the School for the Blind, to encourage the special needs students and to have a lot of fun playing with children during the two weeks of summer camp. Being involved in so many different projects allows me to explore and experience the heartbeat of the Foundation.

Every day I witness the children and students grow in new ways and I am experiencing my own personal growth in equally new ways. No matter how much you or I give, it does not pail in comparison to what we receive in return.



Father Ray Foundation

440 Moo 9, Sukhumvit Road,
Km 145, Nongprue, Banglamung,
Chonburi 20260, Thailand

Tel : +66-38-716628 , 428717

Fax : +66-38-716629

info@fr-ray.org www.fr-ray.org

Bank Account: Bangkok Bank Ltd.

1. Banglamung Chonburi Branch

Current Account: 342-3-04125-4

2. Seacon Square Bangkok Branch

Current Account: 232-3-02275-2