

Father Ray Foundation Newsletter



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They have a bright future

I recently traveled up to Bangkok with a group of our students from the School for the Blind to attend a conference. We packed into the back of a minibus and as we set off one of the boys asked me what type of phone I had.



Fortunately a few days earlier I had bought myself a new smart phone, not that I really wanted or needed one, or even had the money to buy one and I know I will never fully understand all the workings of it but whenever my old phone started to ring all the kids at

the Children's Home laughed at me for having such an ancient piece of equipment.

One of our nurses was shocked to see that I was still using an 'old fashioned' phone and the toddlers at the Day Care Center were constantly looking confused when I took my old phone out and it didn't take photos or have a screen to scroll.

Back on the bus to Bangkok, and I told this student what brand of phone I had and as he has some sight I passed it to him to look at. But as I passed it to him I noticed that every single student sitting on the bus also had a smart phone and I was a bit confused.

With the old style phones the blind students could feel the phone and feel the number they wanted to press, but on a smart phone there are no buttons and there

they were, talking to friends, listening to music and one boy was even playing a game, all on a phone with no buttons!

They did explain to me that they can use the same phone as I use, just modified so that the phone 'speaks' to them as they scroll the screen from left to right or up and down. Apparently it's simple!

On the way home from Bangkok we stopped to eat at a famous noodle shop, and while we were all on our third bowl of the most delicious noodles I had ever tasted, the students were telling me that the following day they would be training to work in a call center; now that I had to see.

And the very next day there they were, all sitting in front of a computer, wearing a headset and receiving the training they need. Once again I asked how it all works and once again they explained, slowly, that using a special system means that the computer talks to them and they can easily follow the instructions and deal with customers when they are fully trained.

Isn't it amazing what they can do? Years ago their future would have been sitting at home and relying on family members to do everything for them. But nowadays they want to work, earn their own money, live apart from their families and it seems that nothing is going to stop them.



No water to throw

Songkran, the Thai New Year which takes place in April, was a quieter than usual event this year, mainly due to the water drought that is affecting large parts of the country. We have had the hottest hot season for more than fifty years, leaving many parts of the country with no water and this has led to a bad harvest for rice farmers, so it didn't seem right that we should spend the day throwing water over each other.

Also, a road tunnel is being constructed just outside our main office and with the four lanes reduced to



two the local constabulary sent a message to say that no water was to be thrown, but how do you tell several hundred children that Songkran is cancelled? We tried, but if they couldn't throw water at the main entrance, there was always the back entrance.

Once the official and traditional Songkran ceremony was over there was a race to the back gate by several hundred children and staff, all wearing their brightest and most colourful shirts and carrying

water guns and buckets; nothing was going to stop them enjoying the most fun day of the year.

Ordained again

While Pattaya, and the rest of Thailand, as well as neighbouring Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, were all celebrating Songkran, several young boys from the Children's Village, together with around one hundred local boys, were at a nearby temple where once again they ordained as Buddhist novice monks.

For me it is always a wonderful ceremony to watch and be part of. I arrived at the temple at the same time as hundreds of family members were arriving to watch the ordination ceremony, and being the only foreigner there I did attract a lot of staring.

The boys were in the main meeting room so I stood in the baking midday sun with all the families who were waiting for their sons.

The doors opened and the boys came rushing down the stairs, and one of our boys noticed me, grabbed my hand and dragged me into the big tent. He made sure I sat on one of the chairs and he knelt in front of me, just as the other boys were doing with their family and on the command of the Abbot the boys waied and bowed three times as a mark of respect.

Then it was his turn to sit on the chair and I stood behind as being an adult it was my job to cut his hair, not the full head of hair, just a few snippets which we collected, wrapped in a large leaf and later we buried in the garden.

I wrote in a previous newsletter that I wasn't a very good English teacher, well, I'm not a very good barber either, but on this day style didn't matter as a few minutes later I took the boy around the corner where a monk shaved his whole head and his eyebrows.

When the head and eyebrow shaving was over the boys received their robes which, thankfully, the monks help the boys into; one year the boys did ask me to help them and it seemed to take forever!

For four weeks they stayed at the temple, following the strict rules, one of which is that no food can be eaten after twelve noon, something which is not always easy for such young boys. The day after they came out of the temple I took them down to the nearest fried chicken restaurant and made sure we arrived to eat just a few minutes after twelve!



we never turn a needy child away

Getting bigger every year



In my early days here at the Foundation, I would have to stand on a different side of the driveway each morning and all the kids would hang out of the window and high-five me as they

went past on their way to school.

In the afternoon I would wait at the entrance on the main road and I would see the bus coming along the road and the children would be hanging out of the windows shouting across the road to me.

In those days the main road was just four lanes, two either side, but today there are eight lanes, a new flyover and directly in front of our main office a road tunnel is being constructed, I can barely see across to the other side of the road, there always seems to be a long traffic jam.



Pattaya continues to grow, and it seems that everywhere you look there are new buildings being constructed; shopping malls, department stores, water parks and every spare piece of land seems to have a brand new 'boutique' hotel being built on it.

From my desk I can see a continuous stream of coaches carrying Chinese and Russian tourists, and early evening in the middle of the city the traffic comes to a standstill.

But as the city grows, and the numbers of tourists increase so do the number of Thai people arriving from all over the country to earn a living and hopefully improve the lives of their family.

Next to the big five star hotels, the newly opened condo buildings and the posh department stores there are families



still living in squalor. Children are starting their early years living in huts built from scrap pieces of wood, which leak during the rains and are sweltering hot in the summer.

Many of these young toddlers attend the Father Ray Day Care Center.



For the first few days they are with us there are tears, more tears and even more tears. For most, coming to us is the first time they have been separated from their mother or family member so it is quite traumatic for them. Watching them arrive in the morning I wish we could also offer the parents a meal, some of them look like they haven't had a good feed in a long time.

But if you come and visit our children you may think to yourself that they don't look poor or under nourished. Well, we feed them two meals a day, plus snacks in between, we provide them with clean uniforms and once a month a nurse comes to check all the children. We even have a member of staff whose job each day is to squeeze several kilos of oranges so that the youngsters can have a cup of fresh orange juice each morning.



But we must not forget just how poor some of these children are, and how much of a struggle life is for their parents. We just hope that while the children are with us the parents are trying to improve their current situation and that the future will be better than the present.

Back to School

After what seems like the longest holiday on record, the first day of the new school year has arrived and the children are finally back in school. Not only did it seem like a long holiday, but it was also the hottest summer for more than fifty years.

But we think the children enjoyed themselves. They spent a few days at a military camp and they enjoyed the Songkran Thai New Year festivities. They were allowed to sleep late, play computer games and use the pool table. They organised two big parties, one for the birthdays and another on the final day of the holiday and many of the children at the Village and Home spend time visiting relatives; we think it is very important for them to keep in contact with family members.

When the first day of the new school year arrived most seemed happy to be going back to school. Everyone looked very smart in their new school uniforms, each of which has to have the name of the student embroidered onto the shirt or blouse. As we watched all the children climb on board the pick-up truck, the coach and the minibus they were all smiling, except one little girl, who was entering school for the very first time.

She didn't want to go, and there were a few tears and at one point she was half carried and half dragged into the minibus to take her the short distance to her new school. In the end she calmed down, and said that she will 'go today, but not tomorrow'! Little does she know, but she has another twelve years before she finishes school.



Update

Since November, when I was first diagnosed with cancer, I have received a total of eighteen sessions of chemotherapy.

I regularly traveled up to a hospital in Bangkok and stayed there for several days while I received the drugs and was observed for any side effects. Hospitals are never the best places to be, especially when you are not feeling your best and you want to be at home, but during my final session I had a lovely surprise when nine children from the Children's Home and Children's Village came to visit.

I have known each of these youngsters for many years and once the news came out that I was sick they had made several requests to visit me. The day they visited was also the day I received the final dose of chemotherapy and I was allowed to return to Pattaya.

In April I went back to Bangkok to see my doctor who, after taking several blood samples and sending me for scans, informed me that the treatment has destroyed all the cancerous cells in my body.

Not only that, but he was surprised at how well my body had coped

with such large doses of chemicals, how well I responded to the treatment and how quickly my body has recovered.

As my energy levels increase so does my workload, but I am able to pace myself and work at my own speed.



In mid June I will travel over to Rome to host a course on accounting before flying over to Canada to visit family and relax for a few months, before returning to Thailand in September.

Thank you for all your prayers, your messages of support, your visits and your kind words of encouragement. God bless you.



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