

Father Ray Foundation Newsletter



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End of an era

At the end of June, on the final Thursday, the day when students in Thailand perform wai khru, paying respects to their teachers, we said a sad farewell to the founder and principal of the Pattaya School for the Blind who has decided to retire.



Aurora Lee has been blind since birth and after meeting Father Ray in the early 1980's they both decided to open a school for blind and visually impaired children.

Since it first opened its doors, more than four hundred students have received an education.

On this special day many former students returned to the school to pay their respects to Khun Aurora, including a young man by the name of Bear.

I first met Bear in 2001 when he was eighteen years of age, and while he was still living at the school he was actually attending a regular government school not too far away.

Each morning Bear would walk two kilometers to the school, sit in the class with his sighted friends and would regularly come top in the tests and examinations he sat, and he was the first blind student ever to attend that particular government school.

With Khun Aurora's encouragement he applied to, and was accepted to study at the Faculty of Law at

Thammasart University, one of the best universities in the Kingdom.

He graduated with a degree and is now employed as the secretary general of the Blind Association of Thailand.

When I saw him at the ceremony a few weeks ago, he heard and recognised my voice even before I reached him, 'Oh Mr. Teabag, it is so nice to see you again' Mr. Teabag was the nickname he had for me because he thought that us Brits do nothing all day but drink cups of tea!

Bear is famous at the school for what he has achieved, and rather than rush off back to work after the ceremony he stayed behind to talk to all the students who were waiting for him.

During the wai khru ceremony the students present their teachers with floral arrangements and the children this year did themselves proud. Many of the students had grown the flowers themselves. Now you might be wondering how a blind person can grow flowers, but while they may not be able to see the flower grow, they can feel it grow and they can also smell it.

It takes them some time to design their flowers, but they always come out looking beautiful.

Khun Aurora may have retired, but she will not be going too far away. We have built her a small cottage on the same grounds of the school and where she can be called upon to offer advice whenever it is needed.



Come on you Sharks!

We are now the official supporters of Pattaya City FC, otherwise known as The Sharks. They are not Pattaya's most famous or best soccer team, they currently play in the lowest division, but they do have the best supporters in the whole of the country.

We were approached by the owner of the team who decided that all profits made at each home game would be donated to us. With an offer like that how could we possibly not support his team

At every home game the residents from the Children's Home and Children's Village travel to their home ground where they are met by students from our School for the Blind and the vocational school.

Drums of all sizes are carried and banged by the blind students, cymbals clash and all the children have learned songs to sing together to give our team the best ever support.



One recent Saturday afternoon we all arrived at the field, waiting for the game to start. Our youngsters from the School for the Blind were all in position in the grandstand, as were the children from the Home and Village. The students in wheelchairs were lined up along the sideline and we all looked up as the sky went from bright blue to dark clouds in a matter of minutes.

The whistle to start the game had only been blown a few minutes when the rains started. Not just a light shower, but a heavy monsoon downpour. We all ran for cover, all that is except the blind students. They were having so much fun cheering that they didn't want to move and so they remained in the grandstand, listening to their teacher who was giving a match commentary and they were soaking wet. Not just a little bit wet, they were drenched and no amount of persuasion could get them to take cover somewhere dry. That's team loyalty for you!



Thirteen years

I can hardly believe that it is thirteen years since Father Ray passed away. I can still remember it like it was yesterday and each year here in Pattaya the month of August has become known as Father Ray Month.

We have around 850 people living with us at the moment, and I would imagine that only a handful of those children and students here today actually remember Father Ray.

Many of my colleagues were not working here in 2003, but everyone who is now here, student, worker, toddler and school age child knows who he is.

Early one morning nine monks arrived from a local Buddhist temple to receive alms from the students, they walked passed and the students and children offered them food; monks are not allowed to own anything or carry money so they rely on the generosity of believers to provide food. By donating food our students believed that they were making merit for Father Ray in the next life.

At the annual memorial mass at the nearby St. Nikolaus Church, Father Ray's old parish church, most people had to sit outside as there were just too many people to fit into the church.

At the end of the memorial mass everyone paraded past Father Ray's grave and I watched as the blind were led past, wheelchairs struggled along the muddy path, the toddlers were carried and one little boy arrived, nine years of age, bag of dried noodles under his arm and he laid down a single red rose, thank you Father Ray.



Mother's Day

One of the most moving and emotional days of the year here at the Foundation is the 12th of August. The 12th is the day when the nation celebrates the birthday of Her Majesty the Queen and it is also Mother's Day.

This day is also a public holiday so our schools are closed, so we celebrate the day before, the 11th. Most of the blind students traveled back to be with their families, so it was the students at the vocational school who started the first of four ceremonies I attended, and I must admit that a few tears were shed. In fact a lot of tears fell that day.



After the usual morning assembly, raising the Thai flag and singing the national anthem, it was Sister Pavinee who opened the ceremony by paying respect in front of a large portrait of the queen.

One of the students, the winner of an essay competition was called forward to read her essay, and tears were flowing after just a few lines.

The theme is always 'My Mother', and with most of our students being far from home they all miss their mother, while some students' mothers are no longer with us and so this is the day which brings happy and sad memories.



Once I had dried my eyes it was over to the Special Needs Center where a large group of mothers had turned up, and who all received a gift from their child. Not just a gift, but their son or daughter knelt on the floor, and bowed so low their head was touching the floor as a mark of respect.

One of our elder teenage boys may think he is a tough young man, and he may have traveled the world representing Thailand at the Special Olympics, but when he was knelt in front of his mother there was no stopping the emotions.

More tears I'm afraid, and that was before I even arrived at the Day Care Center!

With so many mothers out at work there were a lot of children who were motherless when the ceremony started, but there were plenty of volunteers and nannies and some of the other mothers made sure no child was left alone.

On the actual day, Mother's Day, I was up at the Children's Home early evening to join the children in paying respect to the Queen.

Just before seven o'clock the television was switched on, and all channels were showing the same thing, a live-link to Bangkok where the members of the government were standing in front of a huge portrait of Her Majesty.

As the Prime Minister bowed in front of the portrait and lit a candle, here in Pattaya Father Peter lit a candle at the Home which then lit all the candles that the children were holding.

The Queens Anthem was then sung. Not just by the children at the Home, but by the whole nation, more than sixty five million people lit a candle and sang. In homes, stores, town squares, in large cities, small villages, on beaches, sitting in traffic, wherever they were they sang.

Our children sing well, but there were a few gasps of pain from the boys at the back as they burned each other, all for fun of course!



My hero

I have a new hero, in fact many of us here in Pattaya have a new hero. She is a young lady, seventeen years of age and she is a student at the Vocational School for People with Disabilities. She has cerebral palsy, which means that she is not always in control of her movements, and she recently took part in the annual sports competition at the school.



She was in the blue team, and we all watched as she stood alongside her competitors from the yellow, red and green teams, waiting for the whistle to blow to start the 100 meters sprint. The starter made sure all four girls were ready, then it was 'on your marks, get set, go!' and the four girls all started to run towards the finish line

However, after a few short steps this one young lady fell, she came crashing to the floor, but she got up and continued to run.

Then she fell a second time, falling flat on her face and people came running to help her. But she didn't want any help, she wanted to get up on her own and finish the race, on her own, and gain that one single point for crossing the line last.

By the time she had gotten up and dusted herself off the other three racers had crossed the finish line.

The severity of her condition means that she can not run fast, but it didn't matter how fast she could run, all that mattered to this young lady was that she finished and gained a point for her team

I remember watching the Olympics from London in 2012 and again from Rio this year, and a similar thing happened. One racer was much slower than the other racers, but he was cheered by everyone in the stadium, and the cheers got louder as he neared the finish line.

Here in Pattaya this young lady had not only her own team mates cheering her on, but everyone from the green, red and yellow teams, as well as all the teaching staff and the volunteers, they were all cheering her and as she crossed the finish line she may as well have been winning gold at the Olympics and setting a new world record.

As soon as she was finished she was rushed off to the clinic to see the nurse who washed and bandaged all her wounds.

Just goes to show that you don't always have to be the best at everything to be a hero and an inspiration to others.

Rice

Many areas of Thailand have been suffering with drought, a lack of water which has led to bad rice harvests. This has meant that there is a shortage of rice being produced, therefore the price has risen and what rice that is available is not as good a quality as in the past.

Our appeal to you this month is to help us buy enough rice to feed our children and students.

One large sack of rice costs €43, £35, \$49 or 1715 Baht. Thank you.

Sorry for the confusion

I have recently received quite a few messages of confusion, concern and support after an article that appeared in the June issue of our newsletter. The newsletter is written by me, Derek Franklin, and as I am writing it I use the word 'I' a lot. There was also an update in the last issue on the health of Brother Denis. He wrote that update and he also used 'I' which when printed led people to think that it was me that was in hospital being treated for cancer. Thank you for all your messages, but I am fine, and thankfully so is Brother Denis.

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Instagram



As well as having a Facebook page we also now joined Instagram. Each day we put up new photos, not just of our children and students but also photos of the culture, food and life here in Thailand. Please follow us on Instagram at [fr.rayfoundation](https://www.instagram.com/fr.rayfoundation) and also **Like** our Facebook page if you haven't already done so. Thanks.