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Father Ray Foundation Newsletter

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Written by Derek Franklin

GLOBAL WARMING

For anyone who thinks that global warming and climate change is not real, then you should come and spend April and May here in Thailand, I'm sure it is getting hotter each year. But it is not just the heat that makes everyone uncomfortable, it is also the humidity which leaves everyone feeling drained.

The good thing about the hottest months of the year, apart from it being the school summer holidays, is that we celebrate the Thai New Year festival of Songkran. It is a time for celebrations, for getting rid of the old year and hoping the new one will be better.

Water is poured over statues of Buddha, to clean them for the coming new year, and then once that is done it is time to throw water over friends, teachers, parents and anyone else that is passing; it's a lot of fun and a great way to cool down.



THE HOLIDAYS ARE OVER, AT LAST!



After what seemed like the longest summer holidays on record, eventually all the schools across the country reopened in early May.

The first to open was the newly named Pattaya Redemptorist Technological College for People with Disabilities, and fifty five newly enrolled students were welcomed to the school. This is one of my favourite days of the year, watching all these

nervous and worried looking young adults, and knowing that their lives are about to change forever.

On their first day they paraded past all the teachers, volunteers and the old students who applauded them as they made their way to the opening ceremony.



They were given their new uniforms, and helped into them by their teachers, before having small pieces of white string tied to their wrists, a sign of good luck and also a blessing.

Then it was time to clean the school, from top to bottom. They polished windows, mopped floors and hosed out the bathrooms until everywhere was clean. The school doesn't employ cleaners, we can't afford it. Their mothers, sisters and family members are not here to clean after them so the students must do all the work themselves, it is their school and so they must take responsibility for it.



we never turn a needy child away

HE'S MISSING HIS MUM

Two weeks after the College opened, the blind and visually impaired children arrived back in Pattaya.

Most students were excited to be back with friends and happy to be back at school, and once reunited there was plenty of gossip to catch up with.

But not everyone was happy to be at the school. Two little boys and one little girl arrived, three years of age and all three of them were missing their mum.

They can't really understand where they are or why they are here, they just want their mum. They cried for the first few days, non-stop, but slowly they are beginning to calm down. They are getting used to the staff who are taking care of them, getting used to the noises, bells ringing, musical instruments being played in one room, children cheering from the Goalball court and the sounds of more than one hundred children doing what children do.



After a few weeks at the school they are still getting used to being here and away from their family, but they are making friends and smiling again.



WHEELCHAIRS

When the new students arrive at the College, many arrive on wheelchairs that are old, and I mean old. Some are rusty, others are too big, or too small, and for many of those who have severe disabilities affecting their upper body, life is a struggle to get anywhere.

But they do it, and everyday I see these brave young people and I ask myself the same question, 'how do they have the strength to get out of bed each morning?'

I just don't mean the physical strength, but the mental strength, knowing that today is going to be just as tough as yesterday, and tomorrow is yet to come.



We need a few electric wheelchairs.

It's undescrivable just how much they can change a life.

CONTINUED....

Waiting for the school bus to arrive, the new students were trying to remain calm but it was obvious to see how nervous they were.

I apologise for the lack of smiles, or the fake smiles, but who wants to have to pose for photos at six o'clock in the morning?



AT THE SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

From the Home and Village I drove to the Father Ray School for Children with Special Needs, which also opened on the same day.

Now that it has been upgraded to a school all the children had to wear formal school uniform, and while I thought the blind children were excited to be back nothing could prepare me for seeing all the special needs children again.

The peace and quiet of the summer holidays was definitely over and the noise was deafening. They were so excited to be back, and there were not enough mirrors in the whole building for all the children to look at themselves in their new uniforms.

Morning prayers was more like a fashion show, with everyone eyeing each other up, and calling out to friends. One little boy was told off several times as he kept shouting to all the teachers to 'look at me, am I handsome?'



WORLD CUP 2018

The World Cup 2018 starts mid June and will be taking place in Russia, and although Thailand have never qualified (or not likely to do so in the near future) Thai people take football very seriously.

Every four years we have a World Cup draw where all the children get to pick a team, and prizes are given if their chosen team wins, and also if their team comes in second place and even third place.

When the draw took place there were cheers when the top ranked teams like Brazil and Germany were picked, groans when the lower ranked teams were announced and embarrassment when someone picked a team that is the rank outsider; two children picked Saudi Arabia to win and they didn't look happy at all.



BACK TO SCHOOL



At the Children's Home and the Children's Village the children went off to school on the morning of the 15th May, and I have always made a point of being at the Home on the first day of the new school year. There is something very special about seeing the children in their brand new school uniform; most are a perfect fit but some will take some time before they fit properly.

A few of our tough young men who last school year were in the top class at junior school are now joining a new school in the lowest class; going from being the eldest at one school to the youngest at another is enough to humble anyone, no matter how tough they think they are.

Eleven youngsters from the Home and a further nineteen from

the Village, including ten new children, left earlier than everyone else as they have further to travel to their private school. All have received scholarships, and all will have to study hard to stay at the school, but if they can stay at the school until graduation then their chances of being accepted into university is greatly increased.



HOSPITAL CHECK UP

Just before the holidays came to an end we took all our children for their annual medical check-up.

Now, you would think it would be the very small children, the four, five and six year olds who would be scared, especially when it came to give a blood sample.



But no, it was the younger teenage boys who were all sat quietly in the waiting room. Every time the nurse came over to call out a name they would give a sigh of relief that it wasn't them being called.

Eventually there was just one boy left, the tallest and toughest fourteen year old you are ever likely to meet.

This boy can kick and punch like a professional Thai boxer, and he can also take a punch in the ring, but when the nurse called his name I thought he was going to break down in tears.



He walked slowly behind the nurse, then I followed behind him and four of his friends followed behind me, all to watch this one teenager give blood.

Thankfully there were no screams, no tears and he lay staring at the ceiling, not moving,

though I did have to move away as he was squeezing my hand so tight I thought he would break my fingers, and that was before the nurse had even started!

Not only do we take a blood sample, but the children also have to give a urine and a stool sample, which is not always easy. But when you get a group of friends all going to the bathroom at the same time, boys or girls, then there is a lot of laughter and also screams of disgust, but eventually everyone was able to provide what was asked from them.

Glad to say that our children are mostly in very good health. A few of our new arrivals are undernourished, but we will bring them back up to a healthy weight in no time at all; one thing we don't ever stop the children doing is eating, there is always enough food.

UPDATE

Do you remember a while back I told you about a bridge that our students wanted built? To cut a long story short, we asked the local government for a bridge to be built over the highway. When the road had just two lanes it was easy to cross, but now it has eight lanes, a ditch in the middle and an underpass opened in 2016. Our students have been let down many times, they have protested both here in Pattaya and in Bangkok, and when the Minister of Transport visited he told us the bridge will be built.

So we waited, and waited, and then we waited a bit more. But now work has started. At last they are building a



bridge and hopefully soon our students with disabilities will have access to all of Pattaya, not just this side of the road. The photo doesn't show much, but they are building the stairs and also the base for the lift shaft.

But we're not holding our breath until it is ready, the rains have just started so all work has stopped!

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