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Father Ray Foundation Newsletter

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Written by Derek Franklin

45TH ANNIVERSARY

For those who have never been to Pattaya, today it is a large international city which welcomes millions of tourists each year.

Four and a half decades ago Pattaya was a lot different to what it is today. It used to take several hours to travel from Bangkok to reach Pattaya along the country roads, the sea was clear and dolphins were swimming in the bay.

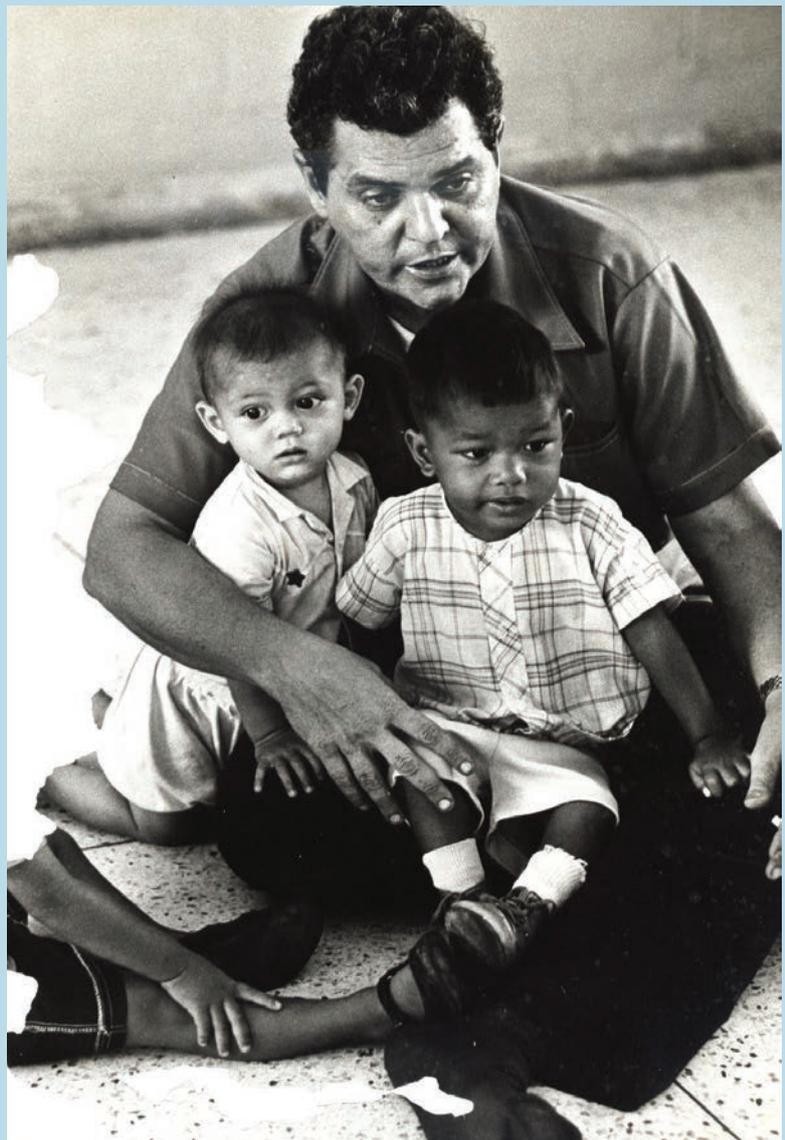
Father Ray had been in Pattaya for a few years but it was in 1974, forty five years ago, that he officially started his social work with the poor and underprivileged in the city.

Like many things in life he started small, with just one unwanted newborn baby. He never planned to spend his life taking care of children but that one baby needed him.

Many of you know what happened next, he never stopped taking in children and he took in anyone who needed help. Those who had been orphaned, the unwanted and the neglected, and runaways who came from all over the kingdom and all hoping for a better life.

He opened schools for people with disabilities, deaf toddlers, blind and visually impaired children and young adults living with disabilities.

I doubt very much that Father Ray would recognise the work he started and the work we continue. Pattaya, he would hardly recognise the little fishing village he arrived in many years ago, it is now a large city with a population of between several hundreds of thousands and a million, and not a dolphin to be seen anywhere.



we never turn a needy child away

Christmas was a busy time for all of us here in Pattaya. Christmas morning I was up early and drove up to the Children's Village for our traditional, once a year, special Christmas breakfast of ice cream and doughnuts; well Christmas is only once a year!



This year every single child received a beautifully wrapped gift, and there were many children who didn't really know what was going on, they'd

never celebrated Christmas before, they'd also never had ice cream for breakfast or taken a Monday off school, but they enjoyed themselves.

Lunch time and I was with all the children and staff from the Children's Home at a nearby restaurant. In previous years we have had our once a year lunch at a seafood restaurant, but this year they wanted to have 'shabu' instead.



For those of you who don't know what 'shabu' is, it is a Japanese way of cooking food in boiling stock. Each table receives a large platter of meat, fish and vegetables and then you dip the food into the stock to cook it, then dip into a hot sauce and then eat it. The kids love it, I hate it, it's like working a shift, cooking all your own food, plus after all these years I still can't use chopsticks properly.



And you can eat as much as you want, but you only have 90 minutes to do so. Now, I know kids eat a lot, but even I was surprised at just how much our children ate for lunch that day.

We gave everyone a beautifully wrapped Christmas present and after one and a half hours we left for home and I doubt there was much food left in the kitchen.

Imagine the scene. It's the following day, and more than one hundred and twenty round tables, all identical, all with eight chairs around them, eight glasses, eight bowls, eight sets of chopsticks and two bottles of soda, all set up and ready for our annual Christmas party. The caterers had arrived several hours earlier and were preparing all the food. There would be more than one hundred plates of fruit, bowls of noodles, fried fish, braised ducks and huge woks of fried rice.



All the tables are laid out in lines and are the same, except one. On this one table are two big boxes, covered with the photos of two boys from the Children's Home.

These two boys didn't know that they had boxes waiting for them, and when everyone started to arrive there was a lot of excitement from their friends but the two boys were a bit confused to see photos of themselves on such big boxes.

One of these boys had been asking for the same thing for several months before Christmas. Every time he opens his mouth he asks for the same thing, goalkeeping gloves. When he received his Christmas present at lunch the previous day he kept looking at me, smiling and saying that it was the gloves he'd always wanted. But discovering there were no gloves he looked happy but I knew that inside he was a bit disappointed, because I knew what he really wanted.



Also the previous day the second young man had opened his present to reveal a large tin of cookies, and this must be one of the few kids who doesn't like this particular brand. He too seemed a bit disappointed, especially when he was watching his mates open their presents.

A few months earlier I bought the second boy a pair of goalkeeping gloves, but someone had stolen them and he didn't want to ask me for another pair, but I knew that's what he really wanted.



So back to the Christmas party and these two huge boxes are sitting there and the boys who photos are on the boxes have gone from being confused to being excited. And I mean really excited, I don't think I've ever seen fourteen year old boys so excited and they hadn't even opened the boxes.

The boxes were huge, and every time they opened one box there was another smaller box inside, wrapped tightly with so much tape that they had to get their friends to help them tear it apart.

Eventually they reached the final box and inside there was a pair of goalkeeping gloves. For a split second there was silence as the second boy looked at what was in the box and open mouthed he lifted out the yellow gloves, to cheers from the large crowd who had by now gathered.

Meanwhile the first boy was still trying to tear open his boxes, knowing, and hoping that there was also a pair for him and there was, a bright purple pair.

It is times like this when I love my job even more than usual. Christmas doesn't have to be about buying huge amounts of expensive gifts, it's about seeing two teenage boys who are happy with a pair of gloves.

NATIONAL GAMES

Every two years our blind and disabled students take part in the National Para Games. This year the competition took place in January and was held in the northern city of Chiang Rai, and apart from taking part in various sports they were also trying to keep warm.

January is our coldest month and Chiang Rai being the most northerly city the temperature does dip to single figures on the Celsius scale.

But the cold weather must have spurred them on as they did very well, bringing many medals back to Pattaya.



BUILDING BRIDGES

The iconic Tower Bridge in London took eight years to build, while the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco to just five years to construct.

A little foot bridge over a road in Pattaya has taken more than thirteen years to build. The bridge is adapted for people with disabilities, complete with a lift to take wheelchairs up to the upper level.



Several governments, local and national, made promises that the bridge will be built, then the promises were broken.

Students over the years have protested for their right to be able to cross the road, and now it is ready, almost!

MORE FOOTBALL

I'm sure that most of you get junk mail, whether it is through the postbox at home or in the inbox on the computer.

In November I was about to delete what I thought was another junk mail when I decided to open and read an email, and I am very glad I did.

It was a competition, and to win the prize all I had to do was explain what was so great about our soccer team.

Well, they don't win much, in fact the older boys hadn't won a game all year, but they train so hard and they want to win so much and they have such a passion for the game so this is what I wrote.



A week later I received a reply, I'd won. And then I rushed up to the Home to tell the twelve boys what I had won, and none of them believed me. I promised them I wasn't playing, and even asked for their shirt and boot size.

Right up to the last minute they didn't believe it was happening, but then they talked among themselves and realised that I wasn't playing or telling them a lie, they were really going to be taking a day off from school and traveling up to Bangkok to attend the Real Madrid Soccer Clinic.

Seven o'clock in the morning we set off and arrived at the SCG Stadium several hours later where they received new soccer boots, a brand new Real Madrid kit and met former Real Madrid player Alvaro Arbeloa.

They worked hard that day. Seven hours in the sweltering heat they trained and yet they had the time of their young lives, and each of them slept all the way home to Pattaya.

Two days later they played in a local competition and not only did they play well as a team but they won. They won 5-2, they actually won a match, the first time in the whole of 2018 that they won, and I don't think I've ever screamed so loud when the final whistle was blown, it was as if they had brought the World Cup back to Thailand.



NEW MAN IN TOWN

This year we have several changes to the management of the Foundation, including a new President.



Father Paul Sukhum will be taking on the position of President of the Father Ray Foundation from Father Peter, who has been with us for the past eight years.



Father Peter is not moving too far, he's staying in Pattaya, and his new office is just across the road. He will now be President of the Redemptorist Foundation for People with Disabilities, overseeing all our projects which are helping and supporting people with disabilities.



There is also a new priest overseeing the children's projects, the Children's Home, the Children's Village and the Day Care Center. Father Prasit is his name, and we hope he is ready to be the father of several hundred children.



All three priests have known each other for many years as they were all classmates when they were young boys in the seminary.

Welcome also to Father Thanu, who will be in charge of all the finances and accounts.

FATHER RAY FOUNDATION

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

Tel : +66 38-428-717 Mobile : +66 91-717-9089
Fax : +66-38-716629

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

Bangkok Bank Ltd.

1. Banglamung Chonburi Branch
Current Account: 342-3-04125-4

2. Seacon Square Bangkok Branch
Current Account: 232-3-02275-2