



# Father Ray Foundation Newsletter

Written by Derek Franklin

## OUR SADNESS

Any death of a loved one, a friend, or even an acquaintance can be a shock. We were all very shocked when Brother Denis died in June last year, even though we knew how sick he was and the doctors had told us there was nothing else they could do.

But nothing could have prepared us for the devastating news we received in early March.

One of our boys, nineteen years of age, was involved in a fatal motorbike accident. A drunken Korean restaurant owner was speeding along the wrong side of the road when he hit a motorbike carrying our boy and his girlfriend.



Pam was seven years of age when he and his two elder brothers came to live with us. It was May 2006, their mother had recently died, and their father was finding it difficult to earn enough money to provide three growing boys with what they needed.

He brought them hundreds of miles across Thailand to Pattaya and to the Father Ray Children's Home. When he told his sons that he wanted them to live at the Home they asked why, and he told them that he wanted them, his three beloved sons, to have a better life than what he could provide, a life where they would have the opportunity to have a better future than he could ever dream of giving them.

Unfortunately he died a few months later and he never got a chance to see his sons grow and become men.

But our home became their home, and while the three brothers remained close to each other they became part of our bigger family. Out Home is not just another children's home, another facility or institution, it becomes a home and we are a family. For some children we are the only family they know, and we are big. Pam may have had his two elder brothers, and his parents had died, but at the Home he had many more brothers and sisters, and adults who he called mum and dad.

When Pam was seventeen he decided that once he finished school he didn't want to go on to college or university, instead he wanted to go and work and share a house with his friends. He lived not too far, and several times each week he would pop into the Home for a visit.

Pam's eldest brother, Pice, is still living with us, attending university and he will graduate later this year, while the middle brother Pae is working in Bangkok.



## OUR SADNESS

Pam was travelling home with his girlfriend when the accident happened. Pam died at the scene of the accident while his girlfriend spent several weeks in a coma.

The funeral took place at the local temple near the Children's Home, and next to the school which Pam attended. All the children who are living with us attended, and many more former residents and staff members came back.

For many of those who attended, those who grew up with Pam at the Home, it was one of the saddest days of their lives. No one could really believe that he had gone and that we would never see Pam again, hear his voice or see his smile.

Six boys from the Home ordained as monks as a way of paying respect for Pam, and also to make merit for him. Two of the boys arrived at the Home after Pam had left, but they ordained because Pice and Pae were unable to as they had to attend university and work.



## CHOCOLATE AND FRIED CHICKEN

My own personal memory of Pam, apart from his smile, his laughter, and his politeness, is of when we used to travel up to Bangkok each Sunday.

At five o'clock in the morning the minibus from the Home containing our soccer team would arrive to pick me up and drive us to the capital for a day's training at the Everton-Chang Football Academy.

It would be pitch black when the minibus arrived and I would slowly open the front passenger door, and as I climbed in I would look in the back and see twelve teenage boys all fast asleep.

Quietly I would close the door and before I had even fastened my seat belt I would hear one word coming from the back, and always from Pam, always whispered and it was always the same word, 'chocolate'.

My big bag of chocolate would be passed back, all the boys would wake up at the sound of the a wrapper being ripped open, and before we had even reversed and left the car park most of the chocolate would have been eaten.

I think back to those days and more than anything else I remember the laughter; twelve boys, best mates, all without a care in the world and all enjoying life. After the training we would have dinner at KFC and some weeks we would also visit an ice-cream shop, and after eating so much they would fall asleep as soon as the engine started and wouldn't wake up until we reached home.

All those boys came back for the funeral, not just for the funeral, but every day and every evening they turned up at the temple to be with their team mate.

Some travelled from across Thailand to be together, but there was no longer any laughter, only shock and sadness as they came together to say farewell to their friend.

Nineteen years of age and killed by a drunk driver, who was so drunk he tried to bribe the police while Pam was lying in the middle of the road.

A life cut so short and yet a life that brought joy and laughter and happiness to all who met him.

Pam may be gone, but he will never be forgotten. Rest in peace Pam.



# CANDLES AND THANKS



On the final day of each school term the graduating students at the Redemptorist Technological College for People with Disabilities have one final ceremony to attend before they are free to leave.

It is an emotional ceremony, one where the students are given a chance to show their appreciation to the teachers, the volunteers and also their fellow students.

They sit in a circle, next to their teachers, all dressed in white and all holding a candle. The lights are

turned off and the candles are lit. A microphone is then passed from one to another and everyone is expected to say a few words.

The students thank the teachers, including the foreign volunteers and they tell of how grateful they are for what the school has given them.

No ceremony would be complete without the tying of blessed string around the wrists of the departing students. They will all be back in early December to attend the official graduation ceremony, but until then they have jobs to go to, they all have jobs, every single leaving student.

We've done our bit, we have given them not just an education, but also the confidence and self esteem to be the person they want to be.



## FIRST OF MANY, WE HOPE



This year also saw the very first graduates from the Father Ray School for Children with Special Needs.

Five young men completed the vocational training course and now all have found employment.

One is working at the School, two are at a nearby shopping mall and the other two young men are working at a fast food restaurant; may have to go and visit to see how good their fried chicken tastes!

## GIRL POWER



Congratulations to one of our young ladies from the Home. Arriving here as a ten year old Boong has worked hard at school, college and university and that hard work has paid off when she recently received her graduation certificates.

She is now working at a local cable television company, earning a good salary and a role model to our younger girls.



More sporting successes for our children, and this time we must congratulate two of our long term residents from the Children's Home.

Sai came to live with us in 2004 and Champ arrived four years later in 2008. Both have special needs and for many years they attended a government boarding school an hours drive from Pattaya and we would only see them during the school holidays.



But once we opened the Father Ray School for Children with Special Needs they left that school and joined our school, living full time back at the Home.

They were recently selected to represent the Kingdom of Thailand at the Special Olympics World Games 2019 which took place in Abu Dhabi. Sai was selected to play Bocce, a game similar to British bowls or French petanque, while Champ, being the brilliant football player that he is was chosen for the seven a side competition.

Sai came home with two medals, gold in the female singles competition and bronze in the team contest. Champ also brought home a bronze medal.

## NOVICE MONKS



April is the month of the summer holidays from school and this year, as with every year, several of our young boys spent a few weeks at a local temple and ordained as novice Buddhist monks.

It is a tradition that goes back centuries and generations of Thai boys and young men will at some time during their lives become monks.

For those few weeks they will have to follow a set of ten rules, ten very strict rules which the boys don't have too much trouble following.

But try getting them not to play football, or want to watch TV or play computer games is not easy. Not wearing perfume is another rule, I doubt any of our boys will break that one, but the hardest rule they have to keep is not to eat after noon. Once twelve o'clock has arrived not a single grain of rice is allowed to pass their lips.

When you are blind and the school you attend only goes up to Grade 9, and you want to study up to Grade 12 what do you do?

Well, you do what three of our blind students do. Each morning they leave our School for the Blind and they walk against the rush hour traffic to attend the nearest local government school.

They are three blind students in a school with two thousand sighted students, and they are doing very well.

They study throughout the day, instead of writing with a pen they use a small digital machine on which they can type. They take part in school activities and are not treated any different to the other students and at the end of the day they walk all the way back home to our school.



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