

GIFT OF HAPPINESS FOUNDATION REPORT

PROJECT VISIT TO MAE SOT, TAK 20-22 JULY, 2015

In July 2015, Gift of Happiness Foundation (GoHF) returned to its old stomping ground in Mae Sot for a short and somewhat unexpected project visit – unexpected in that it had been planned to concentrate on things closer to home in July ahead of a major trip in August. However, GoHF simply had too much in store by way of clothing, toys and a couple of larger, bulky items. That is not a bad position to be in, but we needed to mount a short trip (visiting a few places and simply distributing goods rather than doing the usual accompanying fun shows) to clear out the warehouse so we can restock for the next trip in August or possibly September.

Director Eddie Haworth took his van (packed to the rafters as usual) and our good friends at Jirakorn Company provided a second van for additional bags of goodies as well as a complete hospital bed, wheelchair and zimmer frame!

Participants on this trip were:

- GoHF Founder and Director, Edward Haworth;
- GoHF Assistant/Translator (driver of the second truck), Khun Amarin Nissasoka; and
- Project volunteer recorder and reporter, Gary White.

After a bit of a hiatus with the packers, so I understand, all was stowed away and the vans set off around 10am, Khun Amarin going ahead whilst Eddie made a small detour to kindly pick me up near my home. We linked up again at our usual first pit stop on the Asia Highway and then travelled more or less in tandem all the way to Mae Sot, arriving just before 6pm.

But not without incident! Not too far before Kamphaeng Phet town the tyre tread on a back wheel of the van Khun Amarin was driving blew off, just in front of us. We had to crawl along for several dozen kilometres, in pouring rain – this incident seeming to happen at just about the only lengthy stretch without garages, and at the only time we got rain all day. Sod's Law I guess! We did manage to find a tyre shop further up the track and the two lads in residence there changed the offending tyre in no time, replacing it with a somewhat dubious retread (albeit the best we could get). Fortunately our kind truck sponsor advised us to get a full set of new tyres when we reached Mae Sot, as the remaining three were not in that good a condition either. This we did the next day.

So, having surmounted that little setback we settled into the very comfortable Poonnargun Hotel, then set off for dinner ahead of our task of distributing happiness the next day.

At around 9am, after the usual hearty Poonnargun breakfast (amazing range and standard for a small hotel in a small town like this), we set off for our first call, at the Rocky Mountain 2 Learning Centre. This school, situated in a village called P`Yan Naung ("Buddha's Mountain") is the place where the Foundation last year donated and built a block of 6 new toilets, and this year installed a deep water well pump, pipes and storage tanks so that the children no longer need to waste a good part of every day carting water uphill for use and consumption.

Here we were greeted by the Headmaster, Saw Lar Bar Tun and some of his charges. Eddie inquired about the status of the pump, pipes and tanks, and it was good to learn that all are in working order. One of the tanks fell over when its concrete base eroded, and the tank cracked a bit – but only at the top and it is still usable. Otherwise all is in good order and I must say that, whilst the school and village were demonstrably poor, it as a delightful spot with a good “feeling”. We left here 11 bags of teenage clothing, a bag of toys, a box of bamboo pencil holders, a bag of bags, 1 set of plastic filing drawers and two used laptop computers.

Then it was on to the famous Mae Tao Clinic, where we were met by Simon Dickinson, Deputy Director, Operations and Aung Hty (Aung), Public Relations Coordinator, as we unloaded the bed, wheelchair and zimmer frame, plus around a dozen bags of assorted clothing, 1 of shoes and another of medical supplies. We also met the (relatively) new Fund Raising and Grants Director, Kevina Maddick. She and Eddie discussed Clown Eckie delivering a mad buffoonery show at some stage in the future.

Lunch was at the famous grilled chicken restaurant near the airport, book-ended by getting the tyres replaced on the second van Then it was off to the Social Action for Women (SAW) Health Care House. The SAW has a number of arms – this one is for women and girls with HIV/AIDS. The Centre Director, Dr Htin Zaw arrived just a few minutes after us and was very pleased to receive our donations of bags of assorted clothing, shoes and toiletries, a suitcase of girls clothing and one of toys. Unfortunately we arrived when the women were having their afternoon nap, but they soon gathered around for a group photo and to wave us off as we departed for our last port of call.

This was to the Agape Orphanage, back on the north side of town – although a bit closer in than Rocky Mountain. This used to also be a school, but now just provides accommodation for 50 orphans and abandoned boys and girls, ages 3-18. Late in the afternoon all the children arrived home from school and it was easy to see they not only recognized Clown Eckie in his civilian garb, but were also delighted to see him again. More bags of toys and clothes issued from the backs of the vans, along with some bedding, shows and toiletries.

Plus ... the biggest stuffed bear you have ever seen!

Plus, plus ... one spick and span electronic keyboard that the older boys were already making tuneful use of by the time we left. Which we did to the strains of the keyboard and cheers of “Eckie! Eckie!” – and a promise of a show from Eckie and a musical bracket from the Agape All Stars next time we visit!

We did note a small store of goods on display in the orphanage office, including a few of the Gift of Happiness uniforms from last Christmas, for use by the kids when they need them!

And that was it. Back to the hotel, an early dinner and turn in, before the long trek back to Bangkok on Wednesday. We made good time and managed to thankfully beat the peak hour traffic!

Another great job well done by the **Gift of Happiness Foundation**. Many thanks to all of those who donated goods distributed on this trip.

Written by: Gary White, Retired Banker, Past President and Honorary Member, AustCham
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