



This boy's fear of imminent surgery is transformed into joy with his big red elephant buddy!



Chiang Mai ToyRide president and co-founder Robert Straghan with a happy child at Maharaj Hospital



Vice-president and co-founder Richy Wilson sharing a smile over a new stuffed buddy.

Everybody Needs A Buddy

Chiang Mai ToyRide gives stuffed animals to hospitalized children

Off the road and room-to-room, Chiang Mai ToyRide committee members and guests gave elephants, bears and bunnies to ailing children and their families at Maharaj Hospital on 30 April. After meeting with hospital directors who received nurse bears, we rolled two carts brimming with animals into the lobby and split into four small "teams" which personally presented stuffed buddies to children in several wards: cancer, kidney/chronic disease, heart disease, liver disease and ICU. Helpful and gracious, the hospital staff and nurses assisted cheerfully with our charitable task.



The experience for us was very emotional, somewhere between deep joy and deep sadness. Although some smiled widely, overcoming their shyness of strangers bearing gifts, many children were obviously subdued with medicine, just out of surgery or wide-eyed with fear and confusion as they waited with family members before treatment or an operation. Half the size of their pink elephant buddies, babies laid in beds with tubes attached to their miniature arms and legs, heads under breathing apparatus, physically helpless and lacking any understanding of what was happening in their new, tentative lives. With tears in its tiny eyes, a one-year-old looked up as a stuffed buddy was set on his/her bed as we, on the verge of tears, wondered whether the child was wordlessly trying to say, "Thank you" or "Why don't they just let me go?" Though the buddies were brought for the afflicted children, the reality in many cases was grim: the single mothers, fathers or parents would not bring their little loved one home. They would only leave with a stuffed animal to remember a few traumatic moments of life and death.



Above: Hill tribe family waiting for their child's turn in the operating room



Left: Twice as big as the patient, a brown bull watches over his little buddy in the cancer ward.

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www.giveandlive.org • www.chiangmaitoyride.com

America • 11700 Live Oak Drive, Minnetonka MN 55305 • [1] 612.220.1184 • Email: info@giveandlive.org
Thailand • 48 Moo 6, Ban Poo Doi, A. Sansai, Chiangmai 50210 • [66] 087.188.8487 [Intl: omit zero]

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VP Richy Wilson's mom joins to help spread the joy.



Impoverished families can receive expert and inexpensive care for a cost of only 30 baht per year at Maharaj.



Though he can't hold him, this boy's new buddy will stay awake all night and greet him in the morning.

Founded in 1939, the Maharaj Nakorn Chiang Mai Hospital, locally known as Suan Dok, is the largest hospital in northern Thailand that helps less-fortunate folks through incredibly inexpensive governmental health programs (as little as a 30 baht payment per person for a year) and additional financial support from charitable donations

from an affiliated foundation. Here needy people are treated in modern facilities by top notch local doctors, many of whom are on the Faculty of Medicine at Chiang Mai University. In accordance with Chiang Mai ToyRide's new mission of finding children who are "under the radar", Maharaj Hospital is an ideal place to give individually to poor children and families, Thai or hill tribe, who have nowhere else to go for necessary, life-saving medical services.

The ChiangMai ToyRide committee presents an annual charity ride the second Sunday after New Years Day to collect toys and raise funds to bring joy to impoverished children, in partnership with the nonprofit Give and Live, which handles the charitable disbursement for many donation events in northern Thailand. On Sunday, 18 May, you're invited to be a part of our next ToyRide event: ride around the mountain to the Samoeng School playground to help present toys, warm blankets, athletic equipment and food to seventy-some children with family members from Mai Lan Kham, a poor Karen village about 30 miles beyond in the mountains. We'll probably leave around 10 a.m. from Chiang Mai, but check out our web site for more info, photos, other events in the works and a detailed account of our fund-raising and donations: www.chiangmaitoyride.com. Please join us on May 18th. (Written by Scott Jones, May 4, 2008)



Chiang Mai ToyRide committee, guests and directors from Maharaj Hospital before buddy delivery to the children



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