

## CHRISTMAS 2016

Dear Foster parents and Friends of The Smile,



In April 2003, Montri, a boy of 11, came into The Smile's centre. Of Hmong origin, he had never been to school. It was a major challenge. The government school we work with was ready to accept him in first grade. It was very hard for Montri, as a preadolescent, to meet this challenge. But it worked! He accomplished his primary and secondary schooling successfully, thanks to the staff and his friends at The Smile's centre. The other youngsters his age

supported and encouraged him to persevere, in order to build and transform his future, not as a dreamer but as a practical actor. He gained in self-assurance and developed an interest in mechanics; so we enrolled him in a vocational training school. While he was studying, he was able to put his knowledge into practice by repairing all kinds of machines and motors at our centre. He earned his diploma with high honours! He felt deeply fulfilled and happy, and was appreciated by everyone. Eager to discover the world, he expressed his wish to leave the Centre and to strike out on his own.

In April 2009, we took in the young Lamyong, age 13. She was also from the Hmong ethnic group and lived with her two brothers with their grandmother in their village of origin. Their parents were in prison for drug trafficking. It was a very difficult task for this elderly woman, in weak health, to take care of and educate her three grandchildren. When we heard of this tragic situation, we immediately decided to help this family! When Lamyong arrived at the Centre, she was starting her 4<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school. After secondary school, she continued her education in a vocational training school. This is when the memory of her past history caught up with her. She had never accepted that her parents had been put in prison. When she learned that her father had remarried when he was released, she rebelled and

refused to see, or even to hear about him. She felt her life was ruined and was angry at the whole world. We had many talks with her, but were unable to find a way to help her; we were obliged to give in to her decision to abandon her studies. She left the Centre.

As we place great importance on giving personal attention to each one of the children in our care, they develop close bonds with our centre. We also endeavour to keep in touch with each one of them after they leave. And so we did with Montri and Lamyong. Imagine our surprise and joy to learn they had met up again and... decided to get married! While they were at it, they also changed their names. It is frequent practice in Thailand, especially among members of various tribes, to change their names when they marry and receive official papers for the first time. Their original names are exchanged for Thai names, which guarantees their integration into their new country. Montri chose the name Pithichay and Lamyong is now called Nichada. They were happy when their little boy, Phirat, nicknamed Nong Phi, was born. But the young couple's economic situation was precarious: Nichada was taking care of the baby and Pithichay's low wages were hardly sufficient to cover their living expenses.

We needed more staff. When we heard about their difficult situation, we felt their presence as staff members of The Smile would be beneficial for everyone. And so we asked them to join us. They didn't wait long to answer! A day or two later they arrived with their meagre possessions, happy to come "home" to the centre they had loved, and where they had always had enough to eat! It was a "win-win" situation, since they didn't need any introductory training, because they already knew exactly how the centre functions. Through their experiences in life, they have matured and become responsible adults.

Nichada is very gifted in all aspects of childhood and education. This is most valuable to us in the upbringing of our children. Pithichay is everywhere! He sees everything and is always at the right place when we need him. Truly wonderful! They live in a small staff house with their second son, 11 months, our new "mascot".

Dear foster parents and friends of The Sourire, we are very happy to share this beautiful story with you. It is also "your" story. Your generosity and solidarity make it possible for us to continue increasing our field of action, year after year. And especially to continue changing sadness into happiness. You are all responsible for this! What a beautiful adventure – THANK YOU from our hearts!

Merry Christmas, with our warmest wishes for a peaceful New Year.

