

CLASSROOMS FOR THE PHYSICALLY-CHALLENGED STUDENTS

The first encounter of FtH to assist physically-challenged students was during the early years of FtH in 1993. FtH received a donation of Braille books and tapes from the Carlos Alberto "Chuckie" Family. I was surprised when the US Post Office accepted the mailing of three boxes of books and tapes FREE of stamps. The story of Chuckie is a miracle by itself. Chuckie was born prematurely at two pounds, blind at birth, to a friend of mine. Chuckie started playing the piano when he was two years old. Chuckie, at age 28, is a very stocky, "pogi" (handsome) accomplished pianist, singer with a tenor voice, fluent in seven languages and has traveled and performed extensively around the world.

We donated the books and tapes to the School for the Blind in Pasay City. The principal was very appreciative of the donation and indicated that the tapes are very important to the blind kids. The only problem -- the school did not have a tape player. With no more funds available during the later part of the FtH missions, we left the school with a promise to the principal to do something for them. We then went to Philippine General Hospital in Manila to donate some hand sanitizing soap dispenser to the hospital. While waiting for the hospital to certify the donation, I called my friend Martin G. to say goodbye, as we were returning back to US soon. A miracle happened when Martin said that he was really going to call me to give a donation to FtH. With a pledge of P5000, a BIG sum at that time, we went to the Harrison Plaza Mall and bought a tape player, exactly the same amount as the donation. We went back to the School for the Blind and presented the tape player to the principal who was in disbelief as her prayers were answered on the same day. Was it a miracle or just a coincidence? Martin has been our consistent supporter ever since. He said he has been lucky in business after supporting FtH.

The second encounter of FtH in helping physically-challenged students was in 2005 when the classroom donated by the Fil-Am Association of Manassas in Rosario, Cavite was designated a special education building for blind students in Cavite. During a visit by FtH volunteers in 2006 to inspect the classroom, the principal requested a donation of a Braille machine for use by the students. Upon return of FtH volunteers in the US, FtH announced the need to the community and an alumnus from the Rosario Elementary School, Ms. Luz H., came forward and donated the machine to FtH. The machine was impounded at the Philippine Customs Office in the airport for tax duties of Php8, 000 but was released some days later through the intercession of CFO and a former Philippine Embassy official who was assigned in Manila at that time. The brand new Perkins Braille Machine was formally turned-over to the school by Bing B, during a ceremony at the office of CFO on September 1, 2006. The speed with the answer to the school's prayer of getting a Braille machine is exceptional. Was it another miracle or just another coincidence? FtH has kept continuous relations with the students by treating them to lunch and giving them school

supplies every year. Some FtH volunteers like Luz H., Cesar and Fely P and Larry P. have roots in Rosario, Cavite.

When we donated some school supplies to the students in Feb 2008, they requested another Braille machine to avoid long waits in using the machine. The need was mentioned to an FtH volunteer, and Larry P and Mila N, without any hesitation, are donating another Braille machine to the school, which Carl A. will personally hand-carry to Manila this Feb 2009. The Braille machine will be sold to FtH at half the price by the manufacturer but the shipping to Manila will cost \$175 for an 11 pound weight. During the recent visit of the Philippine President to the US, I happened to meet Atty Ollie, a blind Filipino White House Official and we discussed the need of the blind students in the Philippines. Ollie introduced me to the President of Perkins Braille machine and after several email messages; Perkins agreed to sell to FtH the Braille machine at discounted price. FtH will be able to buy the machine at half price of what we paid last 2006. It appears that whenever the physically-challenged students requests something, HE always come with a solution and manifests it on FtH.

The current encounter of FtH in further helping the physically-challenged studentns started in September 25, 2008. when CFO transmitted a letter dated May 20,2008 from the Principal of Indang Central Elementary School requesting for a classroom specifically to serve the fast learners, learning disabilities, visually impaired and mild mentally retarded students in Indang, Cavite. FtH has discussed this issue with Nonoy M of TOF A and Dr. Mark A, TOFA 2008 awardees. They promised to assist FtH in this endeavor.

FtH has an architect board member who has already drawn the plan for the classroom. Another Filipino architect from Maryland modified the plan to meet the requirements of the American Disability Act (ADA). On another FtH classroom project in Cebu, FtH requested the assistance of another engineer to draw the graphics of the classrooms. All these volunteers have willingly assisted FtH in preparing these classrooms for the physically-challenged students.

As if Someone is trying to guide FtH to achieve this goal of building a classroom for the physically-challenged students in Indang, Cavite, another event suddenly happened towards the realization of this goal. I recently switched my email provider to yahoo.com and automatically, yahoo sent the notice to ALL my contacts that I switched to yahoo and forwarded my yahoo address. A long lost friend I met during a wedding in 2007 replied to the yahoo announcement that she retired and expressed interest in the FtH projects. After a couple of email communications, Anita S. donated \$7,000 towards the classroom in Indang, Cavite, in memory of her husband's brother who was physically-cahllenged. FtH is now seeking another donor to match this donation to be able to build the classrooms. **Do you know anybody who can help?**

Pablito Dec 14, 2008