

## **Bona's First Shopping Trip**

The WIG members who have had been fortunate enough to meet Bona and taken her shopping will most fully appreciate this story. Bona, an 11 year-old girl from Muang Sing in Luang Nam Tha Province stopped walking after a disease about 7 years ago. She stayed at the National Rehabilitation Center in Vientiane for ½ year. After two surgeries and ankle-foot orthotics, she is now able to walk again. During her stay, several dedicated WIG members on the Welfare Committee helped care for Bona and her father.

To put things in chronological order and avoid confusion, let's begin with Bona's last shopping trip. The day before leaving Vientiane for home on the bus, they went shopping with me to the Kuadin Market. At this time, Bona was only able to walk short distances. We rode to the market in a tuk-tuk with the three of us sitting inside, and Bona's father hanging on to her wheelchair precariously sticking out the back. Bona insisted that we push through mud puddles and negotiate any obstacle in the way of her getting inside the shops. Fortunately, Bona is a very picky shopper, so even this last minute power-shopping outing only cost about \$10 an hour. We bought clothes, shoes, and a plastic chicken on the end of a stick. Bona's village is full of chickens running around, but this chicken was special. Bona held it out as we wheeled her around the market. Its plastic wings flapped, and its plastic head bobbed. Finally, almost out of money, we began to work our way out of the market. Then Bona spotted one more thing that she needed. She didn't care if there was no money to pay for the tuk-tuk. Instead, we just pushed her down the busy road without a sidewalk back to the National Rehabilitation Center. She sat in her wheelchair comfortably surrounded with the plastic bags holding her purchases and the plastic chicken walking alongside flapping its wings.

About one month later, we returned to Muang Sing. One morning at 6:30 AM; early, but already more than ½ an hour after sunrise, we awoke to someone's voice calling out from beneath our bedroom window "sabadie." It was Bona's father so we quickly dressed and opened the door for him. He was alone, but when Bona saw us, she walked to us from the road using a stick in one hand for balance, and holding up her pants with her other hand. Bona's father, dressed in his best clothes and his hair perfectly combed, told us that today was going to be

Bona's first shopping trip to the Muang Sing market. Even though they lived only ½ an hour away, Bona had never been there.

We waited by the side of the road for a ride. Soon, a tractor stopped and we climbed into the wagon. After a stop to fill the tractor with diesel, we continued our way to the market. Suddenly the tractor came to an abrupt halt with the engine stopped. The driver jumped out already holding some wrenches. We climbed out to watch and give expert advice; but even before the driver began to take things apart, we noticed Bona had left us. She continued marching alone to the market with a stride showing her determination to make up for 7 years of not being able to shop. We excused ourselves from helping the driver fix his tractor, and ran to catch up with her.

Bona's first purchase was nail polish. Pink of course. We followed her as she selected body soap, shampoo, detergent, toothpaste. She continued to guide us through the market with us assisting by carrying her purchases because she needed her hands to hold her stick and hold up her pants. We suggested that perhaps she might like a belt. After looking in several shops she finally found a suitable one that went almost 2 times around her waist. But it was pink. Now with a free hand to shop with, she continued with even more purpose. She stopped to buy a pair of shoes. This is the third pair we bought for her so she should have many to choose from. The quickest purchase was for a school uniform blouse and skirt. This year she will be able to wear a skirt to school because she doesn't need to crawl there on her knees.

Bona stopped at the bicycle shop. It was time for us to keep our promise that we would buy her a bicycle. She looked at all the bicycles before selecting an adult size model. We selected what we thought to be a more appropriate smaller bicycle with training wheels. She agreed only after shown exactly how to remove the training wheels. Luckily for us, this bicycle unlike the adult bicycle happened to be pink. We promised her a bigger bicycle once she can ride this one.

After 2 ½ hours of shopping, Bona was ready to leave. We waved goodbye as they drove away, and we walked into town. Two days later, we visited Bona in her village for a bacci ceremony held in her honor. As we were leaving, we spotted Bona's pink bicycle next to her house. It didn't have any training wheels.

On behalf of Bona, her family, and her village, we would like to convey our gratitude to everyone who made meaningful financial or personal time contributions. You changed Bona's life.

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