

# HOPE HAVEN INTERNATIONAL

**"Let us love, not in words or speech, but in truth and action." - 1 John 3:18**

I have been very blessed in my life and have had the opportunity to see many parts of the world. However, more and more, I found myself wanting to give back to the countries that I had visited and loved so much. I found Hope Haven International, through the old fashion way of course, the internet. It had a good reputation and incorporated many core goals that I hold and that is the desire to help people with disabilities all over the world through the gift of hope, dignity and mobility.

Fourteen people from across Canada and the US took part in this wheelchair distribution to Long Xuyen, Vietnam. We had a doctor, a nurse, rehab specialists, mechanics, IT Managers and a retired professor. Though we differed in backgrounds and ages, we had all come together for one purpose and that was to help distribute and fit approximately 400 wheelchairs to the deserving people of Vietnam.



The night before the distribution, we all went to the gymnasium where the equipment was stored. When I walked through the doors, I was left speechless. Rows upon rows and stacks upon stacks of pediatric chairs, adult chairs, wheelchair cushions, bath benches and crutches were there. I could not help but feel in awe, knowing that caring people and manufacturers donated all these equipment and toys for the children. It was not lost on me, that it also took hard work to maintain and pack the equipment and have them shipped and unloaded safely to this location.

The conditions were hot and humid and everyday situations was made more amusing by the fact that only one person in our group was able to speak Vietnamese. However, there was no need to ask for a translator when you got to see the smiles and tears on people's faces the first time they are able to move on their own. The relief on the families' faces were palpable, when they realized that they no longer had to struggle to carry their loved ones around. Wheelchairs are luxuries that most people in Vietnam cannot afford. One wheelchair alone could cost a family an entire years salary! I was delighted that through Hope Haven, we were able to give the equipment to them for free. I know for some, it would provide them with the means to make a living, to be able to play with other children and to make life easier for their parents and loved ones.

By the end of the distribution, my knees were screaming and my back ached but as I wrote in my correspondences back home—"I have never felt so alive." I looked forward to everyday and to meeting its many challenges with my new found friends. I was not prepared for how emotional this experience was to be--I think all of us at one time or another shed tears. I had never done anything like this before. I had never gone out of my way to volunteer, let alone fly half way across the world to do so. But it felt right. As I recount my tale, I feel nothing but pride in choosing to come to Vietnam with Hope Haven International. I hope that our actions in some small ways have helped to bring more hope, dignity and joy to their life.

Submitted on March 21, 2006 by: Natalie Chan, Occupational Therapist, Vancouver, BC