



DISABILITY AND POVERTY

One of the many highlights so far this year has been the opportunity to travel overseas for the first time since the pandemic began in 2020.

My first trip was to Vietnam, where I visited our longtime distribution partner, Giving it Back to Kids (GIBTK). Through this partnership, Free Wheelchair Mission has distributed 203,105 wheelchairs since 2004, making Vietnam the top country we have served in terms of quantity.

There is a great need for wheelchairs in Vietnam, home to nearly 104 million people. A 2016 National Survey on People with Disabilities found that around one out of every 14 people in Vietnam have a disability, and that more than a quarter of all households have someone living with a disability.¹ These households tend to face more economic hardships than the national average, pointing to a correlation between disability and poverty.

In Vietnam, adults with disabilities are less likely to be employed: a consequence attributed to the lower education rates for children with disabilities. Access to education is often limited for Vietnamese children with disabilities, as it was for Loi, a 34-year-old man who lives in the rural, central province of Thanh Hoa.

¹<https://www.unicef.org/vietnam/press-releases/launch-key-findings-viet-nams-first-large-scale-national-survey-people-disabilities>

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WHEELCHAIR
MISSION**



SMILING THROUGH PAIN

When I met Loi (photo below), one of the first things I noticed were his arms. They were well-developed, muscular, like those of an athlete.

Every morning, Loi and his wife take their seven-year daughter and 16-month-old son from their modest home (which is actually his parents' house, where they live with his widowed mother) to the marketplace where he earns money selling produce. It is a 50-minute trip each way, not because the distance is long—it's only about 200 yards away—but because Loi cannot walk.

When Loi was four, he had a fever followed by a seizure, after which he could not move his legs. After undergoing a surgical procedure on his tendons, Loi was able to stand for short periods and even hobble along by leaning on a stick, but after taking a few steps, he would be exhausted and need to sit down and rest. This is why it would take 50 minutes for the family to get to and from their produce stand. Once there, Loi would use a rope that was strung about four feet high to help him pull himself around their 40-square-foot stall. This is one reason why Loi's arms are so strong.

"IT'S BETTER FOR MY FAMILY"

Loi's new wheelchair means less time commuting and more time earning money to feed his wife and children.



As he would settle in for work each morning, a farmer would come by to deliver a sack of raw, shelled peanuts and trimmed ears of corn, which Loi and his wife would spread out and display for him to sell for a small profit. Once he was set up for business, Loi's wife would take their daughter to school and go home with their young son. Then, at the end of the day, she would come back to the marketplace with the kids to help Loi clean up and make the excruciating 50-minute trip back home.

Loi's infectious grin belies the hardships he has endured since childhood. He had always wanted to attend school but faced discrimination for his disability. The first challenge was simply getting to school. "I wanted to take the bus," he recalled, "but they wouldn't stop for me because the driver was afraid that I wouldn't be able to get on or off." Left to get to school on his own, Loi would walk a few steps, stop and rest, and repeat until he got to school. By the time he would arrive two hours later, class would already be in session and the gates would be locked. He would then have to find a security guard to let him in. "They would let me into the class, but the teacher would make me sit on the floor instead of at a desk." Determined to get an education, tenacious young Loi would do this for five years until he just couldn't bear it any longer and dropped out after fifth grade. "Sad, but nothing I could do to change it," he sighed. "People would say that I can't do anything, that I am useless. They would look down on me like I am less than they are."

For years, Loi would feel the weight of people's stares—some of sympathy and others of disdain—as he crawled, limped, hobbled on a cane, and pulled himself along a rope to get to and from work every day, motivated by his love for his wife and children. As the sole breadwinner, Loi barely earns enough to feed his family. "On a good day, we can eat a meal but on a bad day, we eat instant ramen."

On his meager income, Loi could not afford to buy a wheelchair, but because of your generosity, he received one from Free Wheelchair Mission.

Along with a team from GIBTK, we fitted Loi with a new GEN_3 wheelchair, which folds for ease of storage and transport. We lifted him into



READY FOR DELIVERY

Free Wheelchair Mission's network distributes wheelchairs throughout Vietnam, where more than one out of every four households has someone living with a disability.

the seat and he took to it in no time, wheeling about effortlessly with his strong arms, smiling ear to ear. Then, it was time for him to go to work. With his youngest child in his lap, he confidently wheeled himself towards the marketplace with his wife and daughter by his side and me running to keep up with them: the excitement was that high. As we drew closer to the marketplace, I began to hear growing applause. Then, I saw a wave of vendors rising to their feet as they witnessed Loi's inaugural commute in a wheelchair. They clapped and cheered as Loi wheeled himself to work with a newfound sense of pride and independence. No longer was he serving a life sentence, imprisoned on the ground that held him for three decades. That day, Loi was set free.

"I'm so happy that when I go to the market, I don't have to spend a lot of time commuting and I can sell more merchandise to make more money," glowed Loi. "It's better for my family. I don't know what to say... Thank you so much."

"WELL DONE"

Later, while our team was preparing to leave, Loi saw me sitting on a bench with my arms crossed, reflecting on the day's events. He came over, took a seat next to me, and folded his arms, too. It was his way of connecting with me through the language barrier. We didn't need words. We understood one another. We just sat together, taking it all in for a moment.

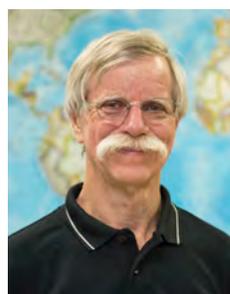
There was enough room for three on that bench, and when I noticed the empty space next to me, I was overcome with the astounding feeling that Jesus was sitting there with us, smiling with us, saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

These weren't just words for me. They are words for you, too.

Loi's story is just one account of lives transformed by a single wheelchair. Because of you, there have been more than 1.3 million stories of lives changed by the gift of mobility. Every single one of these stories is powerful for all involved. Every single wheelchair you give makes a difference, like it has for Loi and his family.

As you reflect on the tremendous impact you are making across the world, one wheelchair at a time, I would like to echo the words of Jesus: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

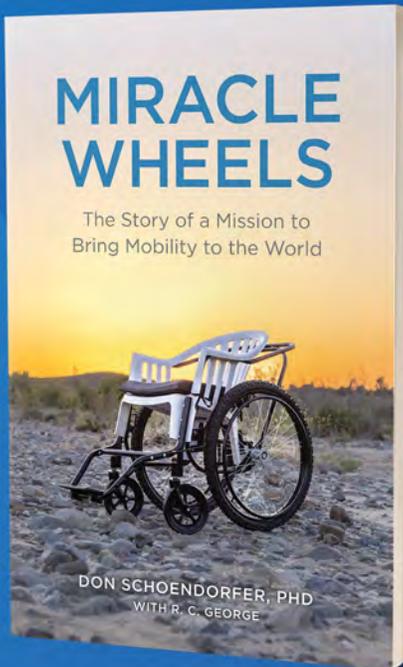
Thank you for choosing to partner with us in this mission.



Blessings,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Don Schoendorfer'.

Don Schoendorfer, Ph.D.
Founder and President
Free Wheelchair Mission



MIRACLE WHEELS NOW AVAILABLE!

A new book by Free Wheelchair Mission Founder and President Don Schoendorfer is now available at MiracleWheels.org and will be at retailers upon its official release on December 6, 2022.

Miracle Wheels: The Story of a Mission to Bring Mobility to the World is the compelling story of Don's journey, from his humble beginnings in the Midwest to his innovative work in the biomedical field and the founding of Free Wheelchair Mission. "While we have shared many individual stories of the transformation that takes place when someone receives a wheelchair, this book shares the overarching story behind these stories," said Don. "Our supporters have been so inspired by our work that they have encouraged me to write this book about how it all began."

The book includes 16 pages of color photos, with scenes of Don's childhood through key milestones in the organization's mission. *Miracle Wheels* also features a moving foreword by Super Bowl MVP quarterback Nick Foles and endorsements from leaders at the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, humanitarian organizations and partners, and churches from around the globe. "My prayer is that this story of the triumph of the human spirit will inspire others to imagine how they, too, might contribute to building a better world for those in need," wrote Richard Stearns, president emeritus of World Vision US.

Order your copy while supplies last at MiracleWheels.org!

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