

# Got Asylum?

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He's called the thai elián. Like Cuba's Elián Gonzalez, Phanupong Khaisri, age 3, is a super-cutie rescued from the jaws of death—in his case, fever and gastroenteritis while in transit from Thailand—only to be ensnared in a geopolitical tug-of-war. But this time the rope isn't post-Cold War enmity. It's AIDS.

The HIV positive Phanupong, nicknamed Got, was intercepted by custom officials at Los Angeles International Airport in April 2000, while traveling as a kiddie decoy. According to officials, the man posing as his father turned out to be a notorious sex-slave trafficker; "Mommy" was the current conquest. Got's birth mom, back in northern Thailand, is a drug-using sex worker with HIV who loaned Got for a price; Dad's dead.

Since a sympathetic federal judge barred the INS from deporting Got, the embattled boy has been cared for first by a Thai-American advocate and then by human-rights lawyer Janet Herold and her husband, Evan Smyth. Now they are fighting to adopt Got and keep him in the U.S.

On their website ([www.ereiam.net/got](http://www.ereiam.net/got)), the couple argues that in Thailand's "primitive medical system... Got would have at most a year to live." But many beg to differ. The comparatively prosperous nation is hardly undeveloped when it comes to AIDS—generic meds are available and both care and prevention have vastly improved.

With Thailand's international image at stake, its government has strongly championed the child's return, appointing Got's grandparents as his foster parents. Still, Smyth and Herold have the parenting bug. At their LA home, they administer triple-combo therapy and TLC to the tot, and recently threw him a birthday party with giant balloons and a cake. Now it's Thailand's move.