

Arthur Lambert - Pioneer teacher of Thai massage in the USA

By Rose Griscom

Arthur Lambert was a musician, teacher, intellectual, and lover of *nuad boran*. Raised in the Midwest United States, he taught music in Japan for many years before settling in San Diego. He was a music professor, he also composed and performed on the piano, and had a vast assortment of indigenous musical instruments.

After a personal health crisis he became interested in alternative medicine. This culminated in receiving a Holistic Health Practitioner certification after 1,000 hours of training. With his curious and intellectual approach, he studied many types of treatments, including various massage modalities, hypnosis, reiki, the indigenous medicine of Peru, and shiatsu. Then he was introduced to *nuad boran*.

Arthur was introduced to Thai massage when he was in his late 60s, during Chongkol Setthakorn's inaugural teaching at IPSB in San Diego in 1991 (which was the first class taught in the US by a native Thai teacher). He resisted taking the class, although everyone else at the school thought he should. There was room for only one more student in the course, so he decided to sign up. He liked to tell the story of driving home after the third day of class when he realized that his foot moved differently as he pushed the clutch on his old Chevrolet. He realized that his whole body moved, and felt, differently than it had before. That is when he made the commitment to learn all he could about Thai massage.

Arthur spent every day he could with Chongkol for the six months he was in San Diego. He became enthralled with the work. After Chongkol left, Arthur went to Thailand at least twice a year to continue studying with him, as well as with a number of other Thai teachers. Arthur was one of the first westerners certified from the Old Medicine Hospital in Chiang Mai. Chongkol encouraged him to open a teaching institution in the US, and in 1992, ITM-USA was born in his home in West Palm Beach, Florida.

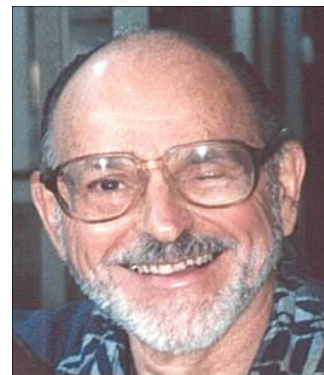
Being one of the first Thai teachers in the US, Arthur did much to spread the knowledge of *nuad boran*. He gave many demonstrations at national and local bodywork conventions, wrote the first book about Thai Massage in English co-authored with a native Thai. He produced a number of teaching and demonstration videos, did research on the history and philosophy of Thai massage, and generously gave of his time and energy to anyone interested in learning about the work.

Arthur fell in love with Thailand, and he felt most at home there. After teaching in the US and traveling back and forth many times a year, he finally made arrangements to make a permanent move to Chiang Mai. It was at that time he gave his teaching materials to me, sold his house in Florida, and said goodbye to his children scattered around the USA. Despite the sudden and rapid appearance of a serious illness, Arthur moved to Chiang Mai early in 1997. Friends who saw him a few months later said he seemed at peace. One of his wishes was to have a traditional Thai burial, and that wish was granted when Arthur passed away in Chiang Mai in August later that year, just a few months after he moved there.

I was blessed to be Arthur's protégée, to experience him as my teacher, mentor, and friend. He led me to the work that I love. He gave me the gift of his Thai massage practice. He shared mountains of wisdom about *nuad boran*, and about life in general. Whenever I had a confusing session, or reactions from a client that I didn't understand, he would listen closely, nod his head, and often utter a simple concise observation, which made it all so much clearer. Once I remember telling him about a session—"When I felt the spine, it seemed so different as I was thumb pressing down compared to how it had felt seconds before as I thumb-pressed up." He smiled, nodded, and said, "You're starting to come along."

At times, he was an unexpected task-master in class, like the time he shocked everyone with a sudden burst of "STOP!" — when he spotted a student doing a move dangerously. For the most part, he taught with clear directions, encouragement, and sensitivity. He was never afraid to respond to a complex question by saying he didn't really know the answer. He was incredibly knowledgeable and experienced, but he remained open and curious, and always ready to discover something new.

Arthur Lambert's body has been gone for years, but his spirit lives on in many ways. Not only through the things he wrote, but also through the people he touched. I am glad I was one of them.



Khun Jack teaches in the West (continued from page 1)

Over a ten day period in September, 2008, Jack taught workshops in Thai Foot Massage, Basic Nerve Touch and Advanced Nerve Touch (*jap sen*). Mama Lek and Jack were well received and loved throughout their entire time in the USA, and THAI hosted a reception on the first day of each workshop.

Janice added: "I think it was a great confidence builder for Jack in his teaching abilities and a wonderful stepping stone towards more international teaching for him in the future. Of course it was a blessing to have Lek come here gain after her illness, and, as always, a real honor to be with her. It was fun to have them both staying in my home with me and my 5 year old daughter. It was a nice blend of work, family and fun."

In his first teaching trip to the West, Khun Jack demonstrated a great knowledge of subject matter, a willingness to teach variations of techniques, and a great sense of humor, which kept the students interested and happy. Perhaps most importantly, it signaled a new beginning for Jack as an important teacher of *jap sen* style Thai massage. The torch has been passed from Master Mama Lek.

Photo right: Mama Lek doing morning yoga alongside students in their twenties. (photo: Bob Haddad)

