

Janice Vitavec, ardent promoter of *jap sen* Thai massage in the West

The following are excerpts from a longer interview by Bob Haddad with Janice Vitavec. Mama Lek and Khun Jack will be teaching again in California in September, 2010. For more information, contact www.spiritwinds.net

How many times have you brought Lek to California? Since when?

I have brought Lek to California, and we have co-taught here at Spirit Winds 5 times prior to this 2008 Special Event. The first year was 2002. Lek and Jack will be teaching

What gave you the idea to bring Jack this time?

I asked Jack to come this year mainly because he has been developing his teaching skills and his own techniques based on Lek's work to an Advanced level. It was Jack's first time travelling outside of Thailand (except to Laos a couple of months ago). Lek was having some health issues over the last couple of years and so has gone into retirement more so than before. The last couple of trips here, Lek was also in "retirement" in Thailand, but she was strong and she thrived so much on teaching and by doing her work in sessions. It boosted her energy levels and she worked really hard. We would often co-teach the trainings. On the last trip it just became too much for her and her health became a very serious concern.

Having built her strength back, we decided that we would have her and Jack come together. Jack and I could do the hard work and Lek could be free to be "the queen and the goddess" and to walk around telling people what to do, ha ha.

Why is *jap sen* (as opposed to straight northern style) important to you in your personal practice and teaching? What would you describe as the particular attributes and benefits of nerve touch work?

Nerve Touch style as developed by Lek Chaiya is a unique approach to Thai Bodywork, and different than northern style. It is unique in the way that it focuses each technique on the tendons and nerves, more than the muscles. It is very therapeutic for joint function and mobility, as the tendons are where muscles attach to bones and where muscles can be tightest.

There is also a "twanging" or thumb rolling into the sen lines and over the ridges of muscle. This creates a deeper release from blockages in energy flow and a resonating affect through large or dense muscles, tendons and nerves. The intention of Lek's style is a very focused approach to relieve uncomfortable, painful and even debilitating conditions (as can be seen especially with her work with paralysis). It is specific and deep.



Janice Vitavec, RTT

When did you first study Thai massage? Was Chongkol Setthakorn your first teacher, or Lek Chaiya? Have you studied with any other influential Thai massage teacher?

My first trip to Thailand was in 1997, I stayed in Thailand for over 6 months the first time. I studied with Chongkol first at ITM and took the "Teacher training courses" for 8 weeks, then later went to live with a Thai friend on the outskirts of Chaing Mai away from the tourist areas and that is when I met Lek. I lived one block away from her clinic. I started to learn with her by working (that is studying) while she worked on Thai clients that came into her clinic each day. She worked on a wide range of conditions, and this is when I started to see and to understand how intuition and therapy really work in Thai massage. It was invaluable and a very precious time to me. I have continued to study most astutely with Lek one-to-one over the past 12 years and by teaching together with her when she comes to California.

I am always building new skills and expanding on my learning and teaching by continuing to study in Thailand every year. I returned to ITM and repeated all of the courses again to polish my materials for my own classes in Levels 1-4 which are a "sister program" to ITM. I have also studied at the Old Medicine Hospital a few times and have some great material from an interview with Achan Sintorn which I will be distributing soon.

I like to learn by receiving too...aahhh...I go for Thai bodywork sessions almost every day when I go to Thailand and I like to go all over the country to do that, travel and get Thai massage, a wonderful way to learn!

How long have you been practicing and teaching in Nevada City?

I have been practicing Thai massage in Nevada City since I moved here in 1998, and I started my school, Spirit Winds School of Thai Massage in 1999.

What were the high points of the recent workshops with Lek and Jack in California?

So many people came to take the workshops. Lek and Jack were really well received and were loved throughout their entire time here - I am really pleased about that. I also 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 again after her illness, and such an honor to be with her.

Other highlights were our Grand Opening of our new Thai Therapeutic Spa called "Jindana" meaning "vision or dream of the future with heartfelt purpose". Having Lek there was very special to me and substantiated the foundation that we are building at the spa. Another highlight was the dinner/dance that we had at the end of the trainings and watching Jack learn salsa dancing !

Which other activities do you coordinate for Spirit Winds?

International training retreats in Bali, Canada, and Costa Rica. I provide an annual self development and Thai bodywork workshop at Sierra Hotsprings each year called "Dare to Dream". I also teach at spas providing training for staff. I host and study with Maori healers from New Zealand.

Tell us about Jindana, and why you started it.

"Jindana" is the name that was given to me personally years ago by Thai friends in Thailand. I have been dreaming about a Thai Spa for years, and I took a leap of faith and signed a lease before I even had the team of therapists together. With the number of years that I have been teaching, I was able to select advanced and skilled Thai massage therapists who have trained with me and also in Thailand. We are now co-creating our vision of an authentic and community healing space together. I am very grateful.



Jack demonstrates on a student in California.