

Lek Chaiya Chiwong - R.I.P. 2013

(Mama) Lek Chaiya, an important figure in the modern history of nuad boran, and the matriarch of "jap sen" style therapy and herbal healing in Chiang Mai, passed away in April, 2013. She was 74 years old.



Lek Chaiya photo © 2005, Bob Haddad

Before the Nerve Touch school was established on Ratchadamnoen Road, near Tha Pae gate, Lek saw patients and taught at her home and also worked at Wat Suan Dok, treating patients in the community. Khun Lek was a highly accomplished healer, and people from all over northern Thailand traveled to receive treatments from her. Several of her earliest students were deeply inspired by her work and helped to spread Mama Lek's style of working, in particular, her use of medicinal herbs and jap sen (plucking-style) techniques. Here are some observations by Janice Gagnon of her early experiences studying with Lek Chaiya.

Nearly miraculous therapeutic changes took place in her clients. With regular treatment, a man who was paralyzed and in a wheelchair was able to walk and even garden once again. I observed one of her clients, an elderly man hunched over with pain and walking with a cane, become pain free. He was able to stand straight after only two sessions. In another case, a recent stroke victim who was almost completely paralyzed on one side was restored to 100% functioning after just a few months of weekly sessions.

Mama Lek, along with her son Jack, traveled to USA several times to teach workshops. Jack, who has been carrying on in the spirit of his mother, is a well known teacher in Chiang Mai, and has taught in the United States and with the Thai Massage Circus in Laos. He now directs Jack Chaiya Massage in the old city. Mama Lek's oldest son Maew was the director of Nerve Touch for many years, but is no longer involved in Thai Massage. Pikun, one of the long-term teachers at Nerve Touch, has moved on to teach privately.

Witnessing Lek Chaiya and working with her has given many Thai therapists around the world a lifetime of inspiration for our work. She had a fabulous sense of humor and always brought smiles to the faces of people around her. Mama Lek will be sorely missed and deeply appreciated for many years to come. May she rest in peace.

- Bob Haddad