

My Ongoing Journey with Nuad Boran - By TJ Martin

In February, 2009, my journey with *nuad boran* took me from my home in North Carolina to Minneapolis. As I stepped off the plane and walked through the jet bridge, I watched my breath blow clouds of steam into the cold winter air. Minneapolis greeted me with freshly fallen snow and temperatures hovering around zero. Clearly I wasn't in the sunny south anymore, but the bright sunshine and my excitement about the upcoming workshop kept my spirits warm. I had received a partial scholarship from THAI to further my Thai massage training, and I was very excited.

Riding the light rail into the city gave me some time to reflect on the previous year. The training I was about to participate in ran from February 19th – 22nd, exactly one year since my introduction to this practice. On the same weekend of the previous year, curious but knowing next to nothing about it, I attended an introductory workshop given by Bob Haddad at a local yoga studio in North Carolina. In just a few hours I moved from almost complete ignorance about the practice to a certainty that I wanted to delve deeply into this work. I continued to study with Bob, and to receive regular Thai massage from him, which was transformational. With his guidance, I began to develop a foundation for the practice. Like any beginner, I focused at first on the mechanics and techniques themselves, and I often felt clumsy and confused. It seemed that each position and movement was a unique experience, and each body that I practiced on brought about an unpredictable nuance. But Bob is a very patient and perceptive teacher, and I soon realized that there is so much more to learn than technicalities. I began to understand the energy body, how to develop and follow my intuition, how to practice from my *hara*, and from my heart.



Bob Haddad working on me



Tanya Sowards, me, and my host Marnie See

Tanya Sowards was my teacher in Minneapolis, and during her workshop I added to the foundation I developed with Bob, first as my personal Thai therapist and later as my teacher. A beautiful part of my experience with Tanya was beginning each day's study by gathering before a puja table (altar) that the group had created to spend a few moments honoring the ancient lineage of the practice. With Tanya's skillful teaching, I added more positions to my repertoire, and further developed an understanding of the energy body, its role in this work, and how to incorporate healing energy techniques, always with metta.

In November of 2009, my continuing journey in Thai massage took me across the ocean to the motherland, where I studied at Sunshine Massage School and at Baan Hom Samunphrai - both schools are members of THAI. After several days of recovery from jet lag, I arrived at Sunshine to begin a two-week Beginner's Course along with 8 other students. The school is in a beautiful building, constructed with traditional Thai architecture and infused with an energy that immediately makes one happy to have arrived there. Dot Po was our teacher, a native of Thailand. She taught from the depth of her extensive knowledge of Nuad Boran, and demonstrated positions with the grace of one who had studied and performed traditional Thai dancing for many years. I quickly began to experience a disintegration of everything I had learned to that point, but over the days that followed, I began to integrate the new learning with the old. By the end of the two weeks, I felt that I was beginning to practice with a broader and richer base of knowledge.

After finishing the course at the Sunshine Massage School, I went to Baan Hom Samunphrai for private study with Homprang Chaleekanha. Homprang, who grew up in a small village in northwestern Thailand is credentialed by the Thai Ministry of Public Health in several areas, including Thai Massage, Herbal Pharmacology, and as a Traditional Midwife and Doctor of Traditional Medicine. With Homprang's guidance I felt that I touched the heart of the practice of Nuad Boran in a way that I had not yet done. Homprang led me through three days of intensive study and it seemed that through her, several generations of practitioners poured their wisdom into me. I began to see and understand more clearly what distinguishes the practice of Nuad Boran from any other.



Dot applying a gold leaf blessing to my forehead

I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had to study with Bob and Tanya, and with my wonderful Thailand teachers. Their passion for this practice is a continuing inspiration. My teachers have refined my understanding of what elevates Thai massage beyond the mere application of properly placed arms, legs, feet and hands. Beyond all that, important as all that is, Nuad Boran is a practice of metta, a practice of the heart.

