

## The Thai Massage License Dilemma: *One RTT's Story*

By Jill Roberts, RTT

When I first discovered Nuad Boran, I was not a massage practitioner. I was just a middle-aged yogini who loved Thai food and massage. Perusing a spa menu, I thought, "Mmm...Thai yoga massage...that sounds great." After my wonderful first session, I definitely wanted more.

My appetite eventually took me to Thailand, where I trained at four different schools. Once home, I practiced for several months, did further training and received my RTT designation through Thai Healing Alliance. At first I wasn't too concerned about obtaining a legal massage license, as I had convinced myself there were gray areas in the professional regulations of my home state of Delaware, USA. Of the two Delaware Thai practitioners I could find, only one was a licensed massage therapist. Just to be safe, I avoided the infringing words and language and I marketed my offering as "Thai Yoga Therapy."

Initially, it felt awkward explaining its comparison to "Thai massage." If it was the same thing, why was I calling it "Thai Yoga"? While I offered several reasonable responses, it always crept into my thoughts that someone might sense that I was walking a thin line between good intentions and practicing illegally.

As my client base grew, not one client ever inquired as to whether I was licensed, but I continued to feel a bit insecure about my grasp of the musculoskeletal system, something that was not emphasized in my Thai training.

Since Nuad Boran is so comprehensive in its ability to promote healing, my clients were not only seeking relaxation, but also dealing with real health issues. I felt I owed it to them to become more knowledgeable in anatomy, which massage licensing required. But most importantly, Nuad Boran was growing in popularity and I knew that once Delaware became familiar with it and me, I was going to need that license.

So I set my sights on a 300-hour Massage Tech certification (CMT), which seemed somewhat complementary to my interests. I was further empowered by one clause in the regulations: "The Board may, upon request, waive the 'single school' requirement for good cause..." I wondered if I would be permitted to bypass the typical path of attending one school so that I could apply my hours from several Thai schools directly at the source instead. It made sense to me, but what if I was denied? What would I do then?

Well, the Universe usually points us in the right direction, even when the slope seems slippery. As luck would have it, that spring I injured my knee skiing, and after surgery I had nothing better to do than take the required anatomy course and make late night calls to Thailand to request several Thai school transcripts.

I was told that once I submitted my application, it would be reviewed prior to the monthly Board meeting and that I would not be able to directly address the Commissioners. So I attached an addendum to the application pointing out where I felt my courses filled certain requirements. For example, I listed my longer courses such as Old Medicine Hospital, Sunshine Massage School, Loi Kroh and others in order to meet the 140-hour requirement for theory and practice. Shorter courses such as Luk Pra Kob, Foot reflexology massage, oil massage and THAI conference workshops seemed appropriate for the 100 hours of electives. And my 80 hours of anatomy and physiology at Del Tech Community College more than met the 60-hour anatomy requirement. As most of my courses were approved by THAI, I felt that would impart a sense of continuity to the path my coursework had taken.

The day my application was reviewed, one Commissioner said, "You appear to have more training than most CMTs have." "She spoke to me," I thought. "That must be a good sign!" But it was only after the motion was made to approve all the applicants that I was finally able to take that deep breath and smile - something my adventures in Thai healing had well trained me to do.

For those considering licensure without the typical schooling - be curious. Read all your State's or Province's massage licensing definitions and requirements. Be tenacious. Find the right people to interpret the licensing codes to you or consult an attorney. You may just find out that what is written and what is practiced are two different things. And lastly, be confident. You are a member of THAI and your coursework is approved by the world's only non-partisan membership organization to endorse authentic training in traditional Thai healing arts.