

CHRISTMAS CHRONICLES

YEARS 2010-2019



BY TRADITIONALBODYWORK.COM

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Preface

In search of a better life, I left the Netherlands in 2009, the country I had lived in for twenty-six years.

In this eBook, I recount the way I spent my Christmases in the years 2010 to 2019, which took place in various countries across three continents.

I choose 2010 as a starting point because it was the year the personal and professional changes in my life were perhaps the most profound, or at least most impactful, setting in motion and guiding the years that followed.

I also decided to make Christmas 2019 the last one I write about in this book because it fell just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. I have this feeling that there is a distinct pre- and post-pandemic era, making the Christmases until 2019 more like a “whole story.”

Anyway, some of my Christmases were a bit sad, others instructive, adventurous, happy, awkward, or perhaps even funny. But, I think, they are all a bit out of the ordinary, and I hope you’ll find them at least interesting.

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Title: Christmas Chronicles | Years 2010 - 2019

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Published: December, 2025

Cover image: Depositphotos

Itamaracá image: Depositphotos

Produced by: TraditionalBodywork.com

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About the Author

I initially studied Information Technology in the Netherlands and worked seventeen years in software and database development for a variety of international companies and organizations.

I left Holland in 2009 and discovered the beauty and healing power of Thai Massage and Reusi Dat Ton (Thai Yoga) in Thailand. It changed my life's direction and inspired me to become a massage and yoga practitioner and teacher.

After my return to Europe, I started offering treatments and training, and — for about a decade — regularly returned to Thailand to further my training in the Thai healing arts.

In 2018, I co-founded the TraditionalBodywork.com website as a platform to publish articles, eBooks, and Video Workshops about Thai Massage and Reusi Dat Ton.

Today, I also publish works about other types of massage and bodywork, somatic practices, alternative and complementary therapies, nature, spirituality, and unconventional lifestyles.

In addition, I share essays, poems, and reflections about my personal life and experiences.

You can learn more about my background and about the website through

<https://www.traditionalbodywork.com/website/>

Christmas Chronicles

Huey Naam Rin (Thailand - 2010)



I was in Thailand from October 2009 to April 2010, and I dedicated about five months of that period to learning Thai Massage.

I took my trainings at the Sunshine Massage School in *Chiang Mai* (Northern Thailand), where they teach Asokananda's Thai Yoga Massage style. Asokananda was a well-known Thai massage teacher who co-founded the school.

In April 2010, I finally returned to Europe — first to Germany and later to France — where I started giving Thai Massage professionally. In November of the same year, I had earned just enough money to return to Thailand to further my studies.

That was rather convenient because I didn't want to spend Christmas in Europe. I couldn't be with my family anyway, and in my new "home country" (France) I lacked the type of social connections I wanted to be spending Christmas with.

So, to make a good thing out of a bad thing, I went to Thailand and opted to study at the Sunshine Network's birthplace during the Christmas period, in the *Lahu* village of *Huey Nam Rin* (also written *Huey Naam Rin*). The network was founded by the late Asokananda.

The village, with about 450 inhabitants, is located about 80 km north of Chiang Mai in the *Chiang Rai* province. There, I gathered with eight students (two from the UK, three from France, one from the USA, and two from Italy) to take a twelve-day Thai Yoga Massage training course.

We would have classes from Asokananda's son, Chatchoi. The idea was also to immerse ourselves in a cultural experience with this fascinating Lahu hill tribe in the northern Thai mountains.

At the time, it was only 25 years ago that the village had been part of an opium-valley near the notorious *Golden Triangle*. Of course, when I studied there it wasn't anything like that any longer, but a peaceful, agricultural, Thai-integrated community counting two supermarkets, a coffee shop with a one-bench terrace, quite a number of dogs, beautiful scenery, humble housing, and the origins of a tremendous endeavor spreading Traditional Thai Massage in the Western world.

Anyway, we got there after a ninety-minute four-wheel-drive pick-up ride leaving Chiang Mai and going up north. When we arrived in the Huey Nam Rin village, we were invited to take a look at the massage school. It wasn't a typical "massage school" though, but rather a big (and a bit shaky) bamboo hut on poles, and with a grand view over the surrounding valley.

There was also a kind of "lobby" connected to it with books from Asokananda displayed, agendas of Sunshine Network teachers visiting in the coming period, a "library room" (where I would have my lodging), and some other practical local info about available treks, healers, and so on.

Sometimes, during lunchtime, but definitely in the afternoons and in the evenings after class, we would visit one of the two local “supermarkets.” Most of the time we visited both, which gave us a slightly wider range of choice in products. I would usually buy some sweets and cookies as I desperately craved “raw energy.” I know, not too healthy, but ... I just couldn't resist.

Our vegetarian lunch and break time was usually somewhere between 12:00 and 14:00. It was when we basically just waited for Chatchoi's mother to give us the “you can eat” sign (and yes, you bet — hungry we were).

While waiting, we rested, chatted, relaxed, or we just enjoyed the sun (and the village dogs). After lunch, most of us would take a short nap to get ready for the second part of the day (which was from about 14:00 to 17:00).

On the sixth day of the course, we got an off-day and were invited on a trip to a hot spring and a waterfall in the neighboring region. I didn't go in the hot spring myself because I just wanted to relax on a terrace and have a coffee, but I did visit the waterfall.

Reaching the waterfall wasn't so easy. It was quite a hike walking to it, and we really needed to take care not to fall into a ravine or something. But finally we got to some beautiful surroundings. I skipped jumping into the water as I fancied it way too cold, but many of the other students did.

During the nights (which were cold, by the way, reaching 6°C), some of us slept in the school library, which was located above the sleeping place of some of the village pigs and dogs. The school library was actually a separate room directly attached to “the school.” And to be honest — it took me a few days to get used to the noisy pigs under my bed (the term “snoring” definitely got quite another meaning for me).

Other students slept in little guest bungalows around the school, or alternatively in rooms in the other massage school, which was a secondary practice location neighboring our bamboo hut.

During my daily strolls through the village, I managed to now and again take some nice pictures of the village and valley. And as I'm a real jungle fan, I regularly went up the surrounding mountains and got some peace and quiet.

The villagers had quite some extraordinary habits. For instance, the women, in the midst of talking with another person in the street, would simply lift their skirts, bend at the knees, and urinate, while continuing the conversation with the other person.

I can also remember that — on one of the course days — Chatchoi (our Thai massage teacher) would suddenly urge us to go with him to a house in the village where every villager was amassed around it in a circle. In the door opening of the house was a man with his head bent down, seemingly in repentance, and outside was a woman (I later understood it was the wife of the man) screaming at him.

Chatchoi told us that the guy had cheated on his wife and that it was custom to be humiliated like this in the eyes of the whole village. The villagers were all silent and when the woman stopped cursing after a while, we all left. And, that was it, apparently.

Another beautiful custom was that the whole village would help build a new bamboo home for a couple that had just been married. We went looking at the start of the construction early in the morning, and when we went back again in the afternoon, the home was finished and the couple had moved in.

Anyway, after twelve days of Thai Massage training, on New Year's Eve, we drove back to Chiang Mai. In hindsight, it was certainly an exciting cultural experience; yet, I think I mostly enjoyed the Thai massage course with Chatchoi. I

find that nothing really beats being taught Thai Massage by
a Thai who masters the art.