

Beneath the Rice and Potatoes: An American Nurse in Thailand

Nicole Matheson '01 is nearly 24 hours away by air from the University of Evansville, but she constantly remembers the nursing education she received while at UE and compares it to nursing at her current location. Matheson is in Thailand completing a 10-month Fulbright Grant for Graduate Study and Research Abroad, one of five students worldwide to do so.

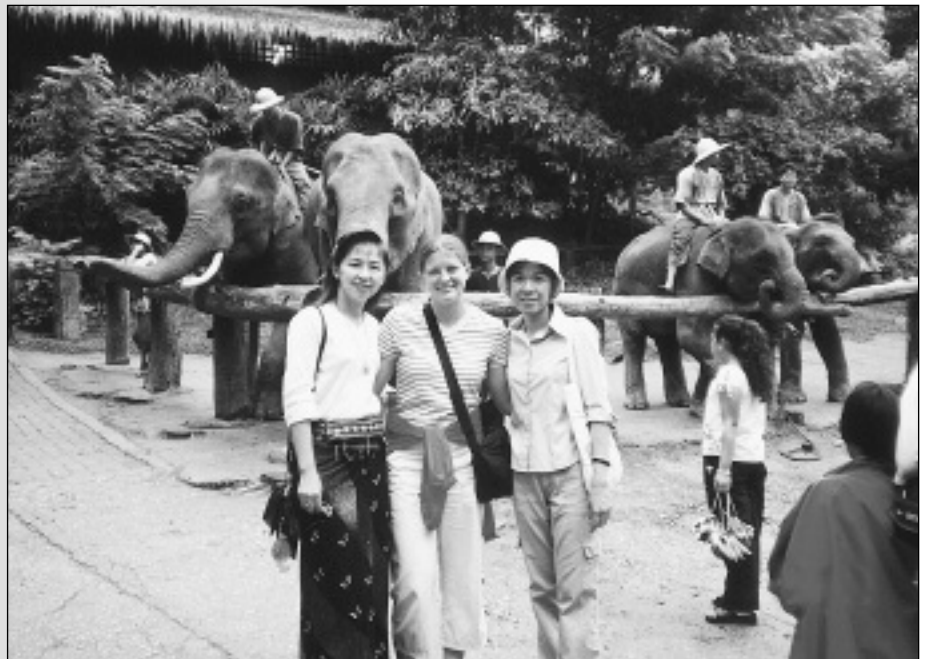
Matheson's primary research is with the cultural practices during a postpartum period of confinement. Matheson says that the Thai's beliefs in spirits teach that women "have to stay in a room for a month, wear certain clothes and eat certain foods during this time. Otherwise they may get sick or something may happen to them later in life." She adds, "This is very different and interesting to me."

In addition, Matheson has participated in clinical rotations at a prenatal clinic, in a hospital maternity unit, a labor ward, and in midwifery, antenatal and postnatal units. Most recently Matheson worked on a community health nursing rotation. "This has given me an opportunity to go into a variety of Thai homes, mostly ones from the lower economic status," she said. "The Hmong village was my favorite community experience because it is so different from anything I have ever seen."

"Being in the Thai community with its people, has opened me up to what it really means to 'care' for clients," she said. "I love going into the community because it deals so much with culture and how to give the best possible care without much funding and using the best of your resources."

Regarding the Fulbright opportunity, Matheson says, "I think that I have, to the best of my abilities, met the goal of the Fulbright program – 'to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.'"

Matheson's future goals include nursing, teaching and furthering her education. "I really love nursing ... hopefully I



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Matheson said she has learned a lot about the Thai culture and language, but even through the differences, she believes people are basically just people. "Thais eat a lot of rice and we eat a lot of potatoes, but underneath it all, we are all just people who can have great relationships and learn so much from one another."

PHOTOS

Above: Nicole (center) with two Thai graduate students at an elephant camp outside of Chiang Mai

Right: A Hmong mother carrying her new baby in a way that keeps the baby warm and protected while she works

