If you had told me when I graduated from UAF in 1985 (wow, 30 years ago!) that I would be living in Southeast Asia for more than a decade, I would not have believed you.

My appreciation of cultural diversity grew during my college years and led to a career in higher education working with international students, scholars and medical residents. In 1992, I was selected to participate in Rotary International’s Group Study Exchange program in Brazil. In 1994-1995, I took a sabbatical to travel for seven months in parts of Africa and South Asia. Eight months after my return to the United States, I met my future husband, who had a desire to work overseas. Six years later, in 2002, we moved to Jakarta, Indonesia. In 2006, we moved to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, where we still reside.

Living overseas has been inspiring. Having graduated with degrees in anthropology and sociology, it has been a perfect fit. I travel whenever I can, and my love of photography re-emerged with the first digital camera my husband gave me. I immediately went out and took photos of our Jakarta neighborhood and surrounding kampungs (villages). The ability to communicate with my neighbors by instantly showing them their photos on the camera screen was remarkable.

For this essay, I selected some portraits of devotees who have shared their Thaipusam rituals with me. Thaipusam is a Hindu day of commemoration involving Lord Subramaniam (also known as Murugan). It is primarily a Tamil Hindu religious observation that includes offerings, prayers and blessings, as well as acts of penance and thanksgiving. A very large gathering of devotees occurs annually at Batu Caves, one of the most popular Hindu shrines outside of India, located near Kuala Lumpur. Much of the temple complex is located inside the caves of a solitary karst tower made of Upper Silurian limestone.