

Tabitha



Tabitha Cambodia

# BUILDING DREAMS

FOR **20** YEARS



20th ANNIVERSARY REPORT

#239, Rue Pasteur (SL 51)/ Corner of SL 360, Sangkat Boeng Keng Kang 1, Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
Tel: +855 23 721 038 | Mobile: +855 12 811 238 | Email: [tabitha@online.com.kh](mailto:tabitha@online.com.kh)

[www.tabitha-cambodia.org](http://www.tabitha-cambodia.org)



Tabitha Foundation Cambodia



# 20th Anniversary

## Director's Report



by **Janne Ritskes**,  
 Founder/Director of Tabitha Cambodia and  
 Co-Founder of the Nokor Tep Women's Hospital

**"20 years of Tabitha Cambodia – it seems like yesterday, yet it's a short lifetime ago. I have so many memories, so much to cherish. Let me share a few."**

"I remember our first office. My goodness, when it rained it flooded, toilets overflowed... and it always seemed to rain at night. Now we have been in our current location for the past ten years and I now live in a lovely home instead of one of the office rooms. In the early days there was gunfire and grenade blasts every night, now I just hear endless dogs barking at night.

My first staff members were so frightened of everything, but now they are my assistants and managers. Setting up the cottage industry was such a challenge, "we have no skills" they said, "we have no resources". Buying silk and cotton was beyond their grasp and using it to make our very first products, Christmas stockings, almost closed down the program as the staff didn't know about Christmas or stockings. They just believed I had crossed the line and was being ridiculous, and they were not far off! They thought I was going to wear those stockings on the street and people would laugh me out of the country. Now, they design and produce all kinds of products.

I remember our first families in the loans and savings programs. We started with loans because my staff could not comprehend how poor people could save. They thought "lend and all the problems of the poor will be gone". My staff came from poverty too and it was difficult to show them how it could be different. Yet, within two years, they realized that savings gave power and loans caused destitution; one little problem and families couldn't repay what they had borrowed. Borrowers became fugitives and my staff became despondent. Now they won't even talk about loans – savings are everything.

I remember when we inherited an orphanage and thinking "how in the world can I do an orphanage when buying pencils for Tabitha requires a full blown staff meeting?" Prioritizing what we could and could not afford, a new set of struggles each week and yet, in the process of placing these children with families from all over the world, Tabitha became strong. Along the way, several of the parents developed Tabitha Foundations in their home countries and this would eventually bring us out of constant penury and

enable us to help so very many. Lesson learned – help whenever you can as it will come back to you in ways you cannot imagine.

Our relationship with our Singapore volunteers began with Margret Cormack. She always carried huge black bags full of our first products to sell. Her husband Don, who a pastor, was rather skeptical and was convinced we were sending drugs rather than toys! Late one night Margret braved the usual barrage of bullets and grenades and came knocking on our gate to deliver the proceeds from her labors. Her hard work, and the money she brought, saved us as I had been trying to figure out how to pay salaries the next morning when we had absolutely no money. Today, Tabitha Singapore has grown and the many volunteers are the ones, over the years, who have built Tabitha – they are Tabitha.

Our very first house building team was a group of young students sent because they had behavioral problems. I challenged them to take on a different role and they really did - they worked so hard! James, a troubled teen expelled from three schools, was team leader. I was sitting in my office 6 months later when James's parents came in. It turns out that, after house building and without his parents or friends knowing, James wrote to all three schools, apologized for his behavior and asked for forgiveness and a second chance. All three schools gave him that chance. It was at this point that the power of house building began to sink into my addled mind. Over the years thousands of people have come, built, been touched and changed. Today we build 1,100 houses each year and our house builders have changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people through their efforts and their donations.

I remember when Dara, one of our most passionate staff, developed the liver problems that eventually took his life. I remember how he would drag me to families so poor they were starving and how both of us emptied our pockets to buy food. We couldn't use Tabitha's money because, if we did, we would then have to feed everyone. So it was our own money we used. How sad we were when a little one died despite our efforts, but how ecstatic we





were to see those who lived because he cared. On his deathbed Dara kept saying "give them wells Janne, give them water". It was his death, and his passion for the families we worked with, that started the wells program. This amazing gift was drummed into my brain by a man whom I loved and could not save, yet his life gave life to literally hundreds of thousands of people.

I remember being so surrounded by poverty and how we collected clothes and food to share with those who had so little. I will never forget one little boy with shining eyes who stood marveling at a bottle of fish sauce (a staple in Cambodia). "I have always wanted to know what fish sauce tastes like", he said. He held that bottle as if it was gold. I often felt sick to my stomach when there was not enough to go around, when I saw young children looking with such envy at those who received and I thought "this is not right!" Today we do not distribute such gifts because we will never have enough. Instead we work harder each day to bring people into our programs.

I remember when I was approached by PACE to build schools. Oh how I resisted! My team was elated though, so we built our first school! As I watched sixteen year olds sitting with the little ones – desperately trying to learn how to hold a pencil and form the letters right, never once being embarrassed to be alongside 6 year olds – their passion to learn taught me how important the gift of education is. Today we build 12-15 schools each year, have educated thousands of children and literally hundreds of thousands more will also pass through those doors.

Both my saddest and my best memories are related to, and integrated with, my family – my clan. I remember having a lunch with my brother John and explaining my vision for Tabitha. He said "go and do it, and I will start a foundation in Canada to support you". Eventually my 2 sisters, a niece, my brother and several friends started what would become foundations in a number of countries, but I will always remember and give thanks to Tabitha Canada for always making sure my personal needs are taken care of, even though none of my family members are involved now.

The best moment of my life, my greatest gift, was my daughter Miriam Rose. 1.2 kilos, born HIV positive and lactose intolerant. She was a scrap of humanity crying in pain and discomfort but she brought fulfillment to my life. I had no money to raise a child but I didn't have to buy her anything for the first two years of her life because of the gifts we received from others. Miriam has touched so many lives without even knowing it. Her life made it possible for thousands of HIV positive children to live in compassionate homes. She taught all of us that someone's illness is not the whole person.

My family and clan adopted her and she is surrounded by love and compassion. She shared the saddest moment of my life, the passing of my mother Tabitha when I was too poor and too busy to go home and say goodbye. Miriam cried – grandma was gone. My brothers and my sister were sad that I never got a chance to say goodbye. I am also sad that I missed so many events and that my family missed things that happened here. They did finally meet Miriam, however, when she was three.

Another low point was being diagnosed with breast cancer. There was no pain, I did not feel sick and, within an hour, all was set for treatment. My first thought was "how inconvenient!". My second thought was "If I was an ordinary Cambodian woman, like the ones we work with, this would be a painful death sentence". That's when I decided to build a cancer hospital. This idea was later modified by my co-founders, Phavi and Sieng, to the building of Nokor Tep Women's Hospital in order to focus the resources we have where they are most needed, and it has become our current project. Like all our projects it has been heralded by some and not accepted by others but it is good and right. Like all areas of our work it involves struggles, but struggles make us strong, struggles make us better.

20 years... A lifetime... such a short time and so much still to do. I thank my God for my life – for His sustaining grace – I thank my God for all of you, for all my staff, for the families we work with, for the Royal Government of Cambodia for allowing us the privilege to carry out our work. It is hard to imagine a better life!





# 20 Year Highlights

## Saving for dreams

Our major focus is on changing the hearts of the poorest so they believe they can live a better life, if they choose to do so. We do this by encouraging the families we work with to save a little money each week for ten weeks. These savings must be inspired by a specific goal or dream; something the family believes would make their lives happier. Often, in the first savings cycle, this is something quite simple like a new towel or blanket. They save for ten weeks and, when we give them their savings back, we add ten per cent in recognition of the courage it took to do this. Our families start with 500 to 1000 Riels a week...

... and, in the past 20 years, they have saved an amazing \$19,735,881.23 USD!



On average it takes between 5-7 years to raise people out of poverty and into a middle class, rural Cambodian standard of living. We now work in 17 Cambodian provinces and, over the past 20 years, 469,926 families, with 3,759,408 dependents, have benefited from the savings program.

### Over the last 20 years

**469,926**

families, with a total of 3,759,408 dependents, have benefitted from taking part in the savings program.

**5-7 years**

is the average amount of time it takes to raise a family out of poverty into a middle class, rural Cambodian standard of living.

**17**

is the number of Cambodian provinces we work in.



Before Tabitha Cambodia's support

After Tabitha Cambodia's support



# Tapping into water resources



During the 20 years we have been operating we have learned that Cambodia has a rich resource – water. The problem is that the water is under the ground and needs to be dug for.

Therefore, over that past 10 years, Tabitha Cambodia has provided 17,821 sources of water, such as wells or ponds. Each water source belongs to two families. Our field wells and ponds can irrigate up to 4 hectares of land all year round. This has enabled our families to increase their income from \$360.00 USD per annum to an average of \$6,000.00 USD per annum.

## Over the past 10 years

**17,821** water sources, such as wells or ponds, have been provided by Tabitha Cambodia.

**\$360** is the average income of each family before having year-round access to a water source.

**\$6,000** is the average income of each family after having year-round access to a water source.

Each water source provides clean water for daily use and generates income for our families. The families develop their skills to a point where they have 5-7 diversified sources of income – for example, income derived from growing rice and vegetables year-round, from raising animals, such as chickens, pigs and cows, or from catching or farming fish, frogs or insects. The families are also often able to open a small store to sell their produce and other goods of various kinds.







## 20 Year Highlights continued

# Building futures



In order to fund our programs and to encourage the very poorest of our families, we invite volunteers to come from all over the world to build starter homes for some of our families. Over the past 14 years more than 12,000 volunteers from all over the world have come and they have built 9,222 houses.

What has been even more gratifying is that 349,617 of our families have built their own houses using the resources they generated themselves from their savings and income. What a privilege it is to be a part of that.

## Over the last 14 years

**12,000** volunteers from all over the world have built houses for some of our poorest families.

**9,222** houses have been built by these international volunteers.

**349,617** families have built their own houses using the resources they generated themselves from our savings and income schemes.





# Educating the next generation

Once our families have met their basic needs, their attention usually turns to educating their children. They often ask Tabitha to help rebuild derelict schools or to build schools in areas where there are no schools.



To facilitate this, the villagers and local village chiefs donate land, help bring in materials and clean the ground for the children to play. Once Tabitha Cambodia builds the school, it becomes the property of the Government of Cambodia and is administered by the Ministry of Education. In the past 4 years Tabitha Cambodia has built 66 schools in the various provinces where we work.

## In the past 4 years

**66** schools have been built by Tabitha Cambodia in the various provinces where we work.

# Sustaining livelihoods

In order to help pay our administrative costs and to build Cambodian pride in Cambodian made products, our Cottage Industry Program has provided full-time employment for 180 women whose lives were affected by prostitution, half of whom live with AIDS. Our women earn an average of \$250 USD per month and are able to live decent, independent lives.



The Cottage Industry Program is focused around the Cambodian silk industry. Our efforts have revived silk weaving skills in Takeo province, where over 300 weavers not only earn a steady income from their work but have also learned to take pride in the beauty of the products they produce and the skills they use to make them.

**180** women, half of whom are living with AIDS, are provided with full-time work making Cambodian cottage industry products.

**\$250** is the average monthly wage earned by our cottage industry workers.

**300** weavers are earning a steady income from the Cambodian silk industry.



## 20 Year Highlights continued

# A vision for the future... is becoming a reality

“Three years ago, I developed a vision, shared with the Minister of Women's Affairs, Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, and the Vice Governor of Phnom Penh, Trac Thai Sieng, that we believe will provide for the health needs of the women we work with, health needs that are very personal to our women and that cause great sorrow and poverty.”

**Janne Ritskes,**

Founder/Director of Tabitha Cambodia and  
Co-Founder of the Nokor Tep Women's Hospital



## Making it happen

This vision has led to the development of the **Nokor Tep Women's Hospital**, a hospital that we are building in order to treat women's health issues, particularly cancers.

The hospital will welcome women of all ages, from every walk of life and all classes and will help them without them having to sell all that they own to fund the treatment.

This project is already underway and the foundations of the hospital have just been completed.







**នគរតេព**  
**NOKOR TEP**  
THE WOMEN'S HOSPITAL



For more information, please visit [www.nokor-tep.net](http://www.nokor-tep.net) or  Nokor Tep Women's Hospital





## 20 Year Highlights continued

# Financial summary

Over the past 20 years the **total income** for Tabitha Cambodia has been **\$50,745,753.19**.

This staggering amount has come from donors all over the world through our volunteer house builders, our customers and our partners. Without the facilitation of the Tabitha Foundations in Canada, Australia, Singapore, the USA and the United Kingdom, the logistics of managing these donations would have been very difficult.

One very exciting point to note is that savings from the families we have supported contributed \$19,753,881.23 of the total income received. This is a massive achievement for all concerned.

Our **expenses** during the same period totaled **\$50,317,322.63**.



**Tabitha Cambodia wishes to thank all of our supporting Tabitha Foundations, our donors and our volunteers for their phenomenal support throughout the years.**

**Each and every one of you has contributed to the building of Tabitha Cambodia!**

# Tabitha



## Celebrating 20 years... ... a lifetime...

“20 years is so short and there is still so much to do. What a challenge!”

Janne Ritskes, Founder/Director, Tabitha Cambodia