



JANNE RITSKES - PROFILE

Janne Ritskes is the founder and director of Tabitha Cambodia. A charitable foundation that works with the poorest people in Cambodia to restore hope and enable housing, education, clean water, health care, and economic opportunities. Over the past 26 years Janne has had an extraordinary impact on the people of Cambodia and inspired an ever increasing number of people to volunteer working with her to make a better life for Cambodians.

She was born in Smilde (Drenthe) in The Netherlands and emigrated to Canada in 1951 with her family. She studied business and earned a BA at in 1980. Upon finishing her education she committed to a life of service focusing on assisting the poor in the US, Philippines, Kenya, and Cambodia. In this period she learned and refined grass roots approaches for enabling the poorest of the poor to break the cycle of poverty. She became convinced of the need to put the people themselves in control of combatting their own poverty and create a positive future.

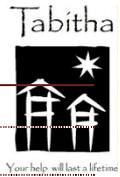
In 1992, Janne moved to Cambodia where she worked in Phnom Penh with World Vision for two years. She immediately noticed that after years of instability, violence and dehumanization by the Khmer Rouge regime most survivors were faltering in their efforts to find self-worth, feel safe, or to allow themselves to trust in the future. It was challenging to find effective practical ways to begin to rebuild a shattered country and society.

Faced with the prevailing view that Cambodians were unable to respond to the development programs provided Janne's response was to double her efforts and find a better way forward that would address the unique needs of people struggling to recover from genocide. She resigned her position and in 1994 after discussions with family and close friends she pulled her savings together and established Tabitha Cambodia.

Janne's unique approach was that even the poorest of people have resources. Not only is it their right and responsibility to choose how those resources should be used but the very act of making such choices should be part of their own solution. Encouraging the poor of Cambodia traumatized by many years of violent conflict to understand and accept this responsibility was (and continues to be) challenging. Janne believes that supporting people to make positive choices for themselves even very small ones at first, is the most effective first step to help those who live in fear.

In her book *Tabitha Snippets* (2005) Janne wrote "Our vision is rather a simple one to help people overcome despair by providing a system of savings which allows them to change their lives. Through savings people actually have to decide for themselves if they are worthy of something — perhaps as simple as a towel or drinking glass. The actual savings process requires their permission, their participation and their decision on whether or not to act on their desires."

TABITHA'S WORK



THE SAVINGS PROGRAM

Through its Savings Program Tabitha encourages families to save a certain amount — say 75 cents — each week. They then use this total of \$7.50 to buy items they need to achieve their initial goals. They then start the process again. Participants are encouraged to invest their savings in a productive asset. They may choose to buy some chicks or seeds for a vegetable garden. To avoid imposing stress or risk on families Tabitha encourages them to set aside any amount for saving no matter how small. This allows even the poorest to participate in the program. The result is tangible and grows a sense of self-worth — essential in restoring and rebuilding a shattered society. On average Tabitha's relationship with a family in the Savings Program lasts five to seven years, long enough to allow a family to become economically self-sufficient. **Over the years, 570,886 families with 4,567,088 dependents have moved from poverty to middle class rural Cambodians.**

CLEAN WATER AND HOUSING

Under the Savings Program Tabitha also provides wells and ponds for clean water as well as homes. To date Tabitha has provided more than 12,138 simple, safe and secure family homes. These homes are built under Cambodian supervision by teams of volunteers many of whom are Dutch. Tabitha Cambodia has installed 21,460 wells and ponds in the period 2011 – 2018. The Dutch Stichting Toetssteen has built over 350 homes for the poorest of the poor Cambodians and provided over 1000 wells and ponds together with partner Stichting Wilde Ganzen.

Before the project, volunteers raised 100 percent of the money required for materials in addition to paying for their own travel, accommodations and food. Once the homes were built each participating Cambodian family contributed a modest percentage of the cost of the house or well with their own savings.

EDUCATION

As communities reach a certain level of development, children's education becomes a priority. In many areas there are no local schools and are no plans to build any. Existing schools usually have no room for extra children. At this point communities often ask Tabitha Cambodia for help to build a school. Over the past 10 years Tabitha has completed 92 schools. In past years Dutch people have donated funds allowing Tabitha Cambodia to develop six-room elementary schools. The impact on the community and on the students themselves is immense. Education opens up a whole new world to them and together these new schools provide an education for over 1,000 Cambodian children.

TEACHING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Under its Cottage Industry program Tabitha trains and employs women and families to produce hand-woven silk products that are sold by Tabitha's volunteer foundations in Canada, the US, the UK, Singapore and Australia. To date, training from Tabitha has enabled 500 Cambodians to develop the skills they need to earn a decent living and work their way out of poverty. Proceeds from the Cottage Industry program finance 80 percent of Tabitha's administrative costs in Cambodia.

HEALTH CARE – THE NOKOR TEP HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN

Janne Ritskes is now finishing her most ambitious and unique project: A much-needed women's hospital (www.nokor-tep.net). The Government of Cambodia has made land available for the hospital of which the Minister for Women's Affairs Dr. Ing Kantha Phavi, is a co-founder. The Dutch had the great honour of the first donation in 2011. To date more than \$5.5 million towards the project has been raised with much more funds still required. The opening of the hospital has been planned on March 18th 2019. The goal is to make health care widely available to many more women who will be asked to pay only what they can.

PARTNERS ALL OVER THE WORLD

Janne's vision and passion inspired support from the Canadian and Australian embassy's, international schools in the region and a few generous individuals. This ensured Tabitha's survival and by 2000 there were regular visits by volunteer building teams from Canada, Singapore and Australia. Tabitha Foundations were established across the globe to provide ongoing support for the program. The seven overseas foundations located in Canada, Australia, The Netherlands, Hong Kong, Singapore, U.S.A and the U.K are run entirely by volunteers. These volunteers raised funds, participated in building homes and retailing of Tabitha's exquisite silk products all over the world sending the proceeds back to Cambodia.

STICHTING TOETSSTEEN, TABITHA'S PARTNER IN THE NETHERLANDS

Stichting Toetssteen is a registered all-volunteer, non-governmental organization dedicated to supporting the work of Tabitha Cambodia to improve the lives of Cambodia's poorest people. In November 2010 the Dutch and their international connections from abroad raised over \$730.000 which was sent by Stichting Toetssteen to their partner Tabitha Cambodia in support of its programs there.

Starting with a few hundred families in 1994 Tabitha's programs have involved 570,886 families with 4,567.088 dependent Cambodian families. These families are saving and working their way out of poverty to achieve economic self-sufficiency powered by a restored sense of pride and self-worth. Janne's leadership in founding and operating Tabitha connects and engages Dutch people in making a difference.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS

In 2012 Janne was presented with a Veuve Clicquot Initiative for Economic Development Award in Paris.

At a ceremony on April 22nd 2013 the Prime Minister of Cambodia, Samdech Hun Sen personally conferred on Janne Ritskes the singular honour of the Royal Order of Sahametrei. This being the highest award given to foreigners to recognize distinguished service to the King and people of Cambodia.

