

# NEWS Letter

MART-JAN &  
TALITHA

JOY  
MICHA  
AMY



## 'Our First Decade'

The 'First Decade' is the name of an album by Ralph van Manen, and I put it on while writing this newsletter. Almost 2 years back in the Netherlands, after almost 6 years Cambodia, one year Middelburg and one year Bible school. 10 Years ago, in the summer of 2012, our 'missionary journey' started. What an adventure!

We want to testify of God's greatness and goodness throughout these years. Grab a cup of coffee or tea and sit back and relax. Not to find out how well we have done - that is disappointing - but how good our God is. Year after year, season after season.

Actually, of course, our journey started much earlier than that summer in 2012. God had already started His work of formation in both our lives long ago. He

continued this when we became buddies and found each other in our hearts for God's mission, in the desire to follow the Lord Jesus and share Him with others. We were curious to see what that would look like for us together. Step by step He went with us, also in the spring of 2011, when we went together to Cambodia to visit friends.

### WHEN WILL YOU BE BACK?

We left Joy and Micha in the caring hands of grandpa and grandma and off we went. We remember the long journey and the enormous language barrier very well. The taxi was waiting for us with a sign "van der Maas". We got in. No idea where we were going. The impressions on the way. The brokenness in this country after a violent time of suppression. The heat and the hospitality. The authenticity too...

One Sunday, for example, when we sat on the bare floor in church. Of course we didn't understand a word, but the love for

Jesus sometimes needs no words. You can feel it. It is through the Spirit, through singing and through the eyes in which you see the love for Him burning. It binds you together. One sentence in particular has stayed with us from that visit. Sophea - a local believer - asked us, "When will you be back?"

So we got on the plane back to the Netherlands. In Hong Kong, my Blackberry started working again and the e-mails flooded in. Back in the flow, managing, making money. But did we still want that?

Something inside us had changed, and maybe for good. Something happened in our hearts during those weeks, something small, but it was the start of a new season.

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This News is sent out about 4 times a year in order to inform you well about the things that are happening in our lives and enables you to pray with us. Feel free to forward this letter to others.

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## CORNERSTONE

This brings us to the 2012-2013 season when we were going to study at a bible school and were preparing to go to Asia.



On advice, we had enrolled in a bible school in England. But after enrolling, we both felt that we had no peace. No Shalom. And so we searched and prayed again: what is Your intention? Seeking God's guidance, that has been a refrain throughout these 10 years. We remember well that there was a week in which 'cornerstone' came along in many different ways. Cornerstone. Jesus is the cornerstone and the foundation upon which we may build, what an encouragement.

But Cornerstone is also a bible school, in Beugen. And we knew about it because we were in the home front committee of someone who served there. Cornerstone then? We contacted them - we felt at peace with this direction - and were told that there was no room at Cornerstone... Yet we believed we had to be there. We got on the waiting list. Exciting and an exercise in trust and waiting. Had we got it right? It was at a time when I was quitting my job at Mourik. And then, on the day the student list became final, a family with two kids withdrew, leaving



exactly enough room for us. Cool right? God provides! That year at Cornerstone has been wonderful. We look back on it with much gratitude. So formative. So many cultures. So stressful. So good. So

grateful! We still have contact with a number of students. During this year, we experienced together the calling to Cambodia. Our hearts went out to this country and its people, even though we had no idea what that meant. We wanted to serve and the door opened. In the end, it would take another year before we left, because the Lord had a wonderful gift in store for us: Amy Grace.

## CAMBODJA - PHNOM PENH

With much gratitude for Amy's health, we continued to prepare and book our tickets. The plan was to fly with the 'MH17'. From Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, where we would get our introduction and training, and then on to Phnom Penh. That was the usual route. But because Amy was still so small, the team in Kuala Lumpur suggested that it would be better to fly directly to Phnom Penh and meet there. So we booked the tickets to Qatar Airways, and flew via Doha. Goosebumps as I sit here writing this. God has saved us. And in the rush of getting off the plane and all the new impressions in Phnom Penh, we heard "the MH17 has been shot down" - and experienced something of God's greatness. He is in control. It was not yet time to come home. So began our first day in the scorching heat of Phnom Penh.

At Cornerstone, my mentor had given me a text from Isaiah 58. It talks about "arid regions", or in English a "sun-scorched land". That is how we experienced Cambodia. But also the heavy rains. The rainy season is really 'a little thing' (a new phrase for us that we would learn during our first holiday). Getting used to a completely different country.

What a blessing that a new language school started exactly in that season: Gateway2Khmer. How grateful we are for that, and how we have enjoyed - apart from the fact that it was hard -

the learning and the contacts that were made in the process. For Mart-Jan it was very valuable to later serve 4 years on the board of this school and in this way to be able to invest, serve, learn and give advice in a place that was and still is a blessing for so many people. G2K helped us tremendously to connect with people by learning to speak the language of their hearts.

After 6 months in Cambodia, something totally unexpected happened and we went through a rough time. The organisation we were working with suddenly ended the cooperation. We really struggled with this. We really came up against ourselves. Everything felt out of our control. What is happening? Where is this going? Can we cope with this? What can we learn from this? Do we dare to let go of what we do not understand into God's hand? What now?

Now, after more than seven years, looking back, we remember how, during that time, we experienced the Lord's faithfulness, the power of your prayers and the connection with brothers & sisters we sometimes barely knew. They came alongside us in various ways when we could not do any more. We noticed

Isaiah 58:11  
"And the LORD will guide you continually; he will saturate your soul in dry places, give strength to your bones; you will be like an irrigated garden, like a spring whose waters never run dry."

how God carried us, despite ourselves. And how everything that happened formed us, prepared us and made us stronger for the time that came afterwards. How good He is!

In a period of recovery, language & cultural studies, further discovering how you live as a family in Cambodia, and how you teach your own children, for example, we looked for the next step. That we had to be in Cambodia was clear to us, but how and where exactly?

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In church one Sunday, we heard about Alongsiders during a prayer time and a first contact was made. We both remember the end of the first conversation with Craig. He said something like, "You know, we have wanted to build a camp site for so long and it seems that after years of praying God is now giving us a piece of land. There is no such land in Cambodia yet. We need people to build this camp. Would that be something for you?" Of course the conversation was a lot longer, but this sentence touched us. On the motorbike back home, we asked ourselves: Is this what God has in store for us? Are we ready to step into it? Is there trust to step into it? And to make a long story short - yes, this was what God had in store for us. And now look what is close to Kep: Shalom Valley. As far as we are concerned, the most beautiful camp site in the world;-)

### KEP - SHALOM VALLEY

We remember the beautiful, but completely barren piece of land. The waiting for permits. The moments of (too) hard work, of endlessly plodding along in the heat, of rain and setbacks, and of wondering "How will this ever be finished?". We also remember the wonderful opening, the happy faces of the first young people and children who enjoyed themselves and were beaming with joy, and how everything became more and more beautiful. We remember the staff members who were hired one by one and serve with heart and soul. The trainings. We remember the deep friendships that arose from this time. Not only in Cambodia itself but worldwide. What an incredibly beautiful period. We are truly grateful, especially for the fact that Shalom Valley continues to be a blessing for so many people. Phearom, Pon & Marea and the team are running things, and almost every day we get great pictures on the app. Great! This is how it was meant from the beginning: "from the

Cambodians for the Cambodians". Pictures tell the Shalom Valley story much better of course. Enjoy!

While we lived, struggled, learned and enjoyed as a family in Kep, we were also allowed to share something of Who Jesus is and what it means to know Him in our neighbourhood. Hanging out with people. A helping hand or a listening ear. Eating together, singing, hearing and sharing stories, telling about Jesus, making a Christmas musical with the kids, taking an old granny to the hospital, going to the beach together, Bible study. We learned a lot, by falling down and getting up again. We have so many wonderful memories of this. I can still see myself with the guitar, all sweaty, but it was great: "Khnjom tjong chueb Preah Jesu" (I want to meet the Lord Jesus).

Then came the moment when Shalom Valley was ready (enough). The big buildings stood, the team stood, there were lots of activities, the bungalows were designed. Our prayer was, "Lord, what will be our role within Alongsiders now?" This coincided with the classic moment of choice around schooling. Do we continue with homeschooling and stay in Kep, or do we switch to international schooling in the city? Do we stay in Cambodia? What is sensible, but above all, "What do you want Lord?" It was exciting to lay this down with open hands before God again.

During our last leave we took the time to think and pray about this. And how beautiful it is to be able to

testify now how God leads. He showed us that a new season was coming, in the Netherlands. But at that time we had no idea what that would look like.

During our leave we talked to many people. We realised, also through our work with Alongsiders, the importance of discipleship and what it means that God is a God of relationship. We asked specific questions about it: "Who do you disciple?", "Who do you disciple?" Often it then remained silent. That stuck with us. Discipleship is at the heart of the great commission and we all struggle with it. This too became a matter of prayer. We shared our question with Craig. Could it be that when we would go back to Holland, we could take Alongsiders with us to Europe?

Several things, which could not be planned, miraculously came together. We believe and know that we are called to shape Alongsiders in Europe. We are happy and grateful with the clarity and direction that the Lord has given us in this. It has helped us and given us peace and stability during that first period of getting used to the Netherlands again.

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Saying goodbye in Cambodia was difficult. So many people we love, so many precious memories, beautiful places, so many flavours, smells. The children grew up there for a large part of their lives. We as a family very consciously took the time to say goodbye. A road-trip through the country. One last visit to these people, one more dinner here, one more visit to this place, one last time to Shalom Valley. A last hug for the boy next door. A touching moment when the children of the Bible Club prayed for us. We had done it before: we placed those who were leaving in the middle of the circle and prayed for them, and now they did it with us. So special, we received a blessing. Lord, thank you!

### ALONGSIDERS EUROPE

Do you remember the first press conference about corona on 17 March 2020? We had booked our tickets long before anyone had ever heard of corona: the departure date on 15 March with an arrival on 16 March. Had we booked 3-4 weeks later, we would not have been able to travel into the Netherlands. We really want to testify of the provision of the Lord in all this. No doubt about it, He is directing and has our lives in His hand.

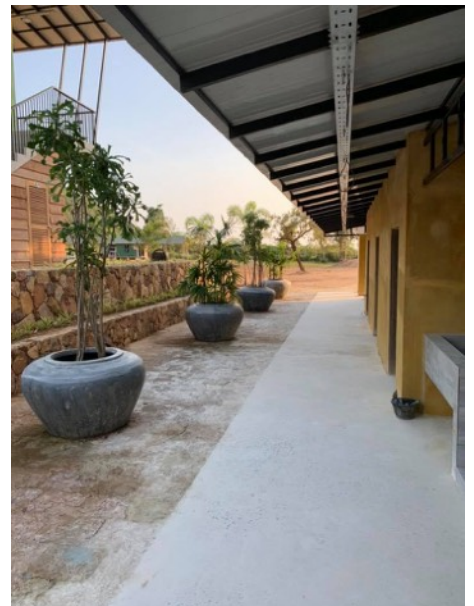
Now that I write this, we are already almost 2 years in the Netherlands. We live, get used to, struggle, enjoy, learn. Old friendships are strengthened, new relationships arise. It is quite intensive. Even though we still look as Dutch as ever, we don't feel quite Dutch anymore, and that's a good thing: it reminds us time and again that we're just passing through. We miss Cambodia, and at the same time, we live right here. Alongsiders Netherlands runs and grows. It's remarkable how the one-on-one relationships that characterise Alongsiders so well have remained possible over the past two years, right through all the corona-periods, and are perhaps even more necessary than ever.

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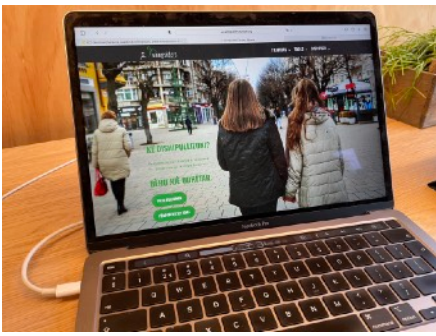




SHALOM VALLEY - PHOTO REPORT:







Our work, despite all measures, has never stopped. Doors are opening in other countries in Europe. We are happy with the wonderful team in Albania with whom we are working to make everything ready for Alongsiders Albania. We pray that a movement will arise there as well: Christian youth walking alongside a younger brother or sister.

As we write this way through time, we keep reminding each other of Who the Lord God is and what He has done. It is He who leads us step by step. Directs. Encourages. Corrects. Listens to our questions. Shapes us, so that the image of His Son becomes more and more visible. Helps us, by trial and error, to live more and more as He intended. So that we fall away more and more, and He receives all the honour through our lives. We may always put our hope in Him and follow Him in confidence.



We conclude dear people. Through all these years we testify of His faithfulness. We are thankful people and want to have open eyes to see His hand in everything. We are also thankful to you as newsletter readers, intercessors, givers, encouragers, alongsiders - any kind of support - how incredibly valuable it is. Thank you so much!



As our friends from New Zealand always say:

**"AROHA MAI, AROHA ATU".  
"LOVE RECEIVED, LOVE GIVEN".**

Blessing and kind regards,

Mart-Jan & Talitha,  
Joy, Micha and Amy

## Practical information

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### Financial support:

Alongsiders does not pay us a salary.

We're very grateful for those who want to support us financially.

If you want to do so, please use the Dutch bank details as stated below:

Foundation: Nehemia (ANBI)  
Please note: Project church-work  
Cambodia

IBAN: NL66 SNSB 0931 7011 39  
BIC: SNSBNL2A

God's story continues. It is not finished yet! We can all be a small part of it and show the world around us how great He is. And ... who knows, maybe a report about 'Our 2nd Decade' is no longer necessary! Jesus is coming! :-)

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