



A happy reunion in Cambodia & so many opportunities...

This smells like, feels like, tastes like ... We are at the airport in Phnom Penh and - wow - how good it is to be there again as a family! It is February 2024 and we have a great program ahead of us. Meeting friends, seeing Shalom Valley, witnessing, sharing, enjoying, encouraging, reflecting. It all feels so familiar....

We enjoy sharing another piece of our lives with you in this letter. We look back on the past period with much gratitude!

Ever since our return to the Netherlands - 4 years ago already - we had the desire to go back to Cambodia as a family. This was also recommended to us because it helps in the transition back to your homeland. 'Funny' fact: often returning to your home country is much more

complicated than leaving it. So good to take that into consideration. And so this trip was on our prayer list. For a long time we were unable to fulfill it, but last February it was there! #ThankYouLord!

'THIS FEELS SO MUCH LIKE COMING HOME...'

... we said directly to each other as we walked out of the airport. The sultry heat, the smells, the streets, the people. Extraordinary how smells, the heat, the streetscape do something to your memories, including language. Joy said, "It's like there's a box in my head with a flap that flies open. All the words suddenly come back up that way."

In addition to all the experiences, this trip also helped us experience that our house in the Netherlands has really become a "home" as well. That took time. It is special to have two places that are so

familiar and "home," and yet never quite. Somehow a beautiful picture of spiritual reality for each of us. We live here as "sojourners". Everywhere a little home, always on the go, but our real home is somewhere else. With Jesus himself. And sometimes you need to be "away" for a while to see and experience that clearly again. Paul said that being with Jesus is the best thing (amen, Paul!), but God gave him another task here (Phil. 1). Similarly, we too now know we are called here and are eager to work for God's Kingdom.

Speaking of "home," we find that "being home" is in places (what is your favorite chill spot?), but much more so in people (who do you feel at home with?). When we arrived in Phnom Penh, we joined the local team. And they did what they always do - immediately include us in the Alongsiders family: "Welcome!"

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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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They in the middle of a team day, we tired from traveling. But the team day stopped for a moment and our tiredness disappeared for a moment. We enjoyed meeting together. A cup of coffee, a Dutch stroopwafel for everyone, and then exchanging stories. Sharing, meeting, and feeling that life together is good. Could that be a piece of what Jesus meant in John 10 with that He wants to give life in all fullness?

IT'S NOT ABOUT US

There is a danger that as a "missionary" (and who isn't...?) you build up a work in which you are an essential part. So essential that without you the work stops or collapses....

From the beginning we tried to be alert to that. Our starting point was, "We come and will also go again one day, but the local people stay." And so we tried to equip them, to push them forward: *"We're outsiders, helping insiders to become Alongsiders."* Another great saying that helped and helps us keep the right focus.

We saw something of that when our trip soon went from Phnom Penh to friends in Kep. Again that hospitality, that warm welcome. So too at Shalom Valley. To new team members, we were introduced as "family". A laugh and a tear - and that recognition that goes through the boundaries of culture and language: we love each other and we



pull together, even if at a distance. It is so beautiful to see Shalom Valley becoming more and more "mature". The grounds continuing to develop of course, the plants and trees, but above all the team and processes. Meanwhile, this beautiful place has been a blessing to 10,000-thousands and camps are held every week. It makes us immensely grateful that without us, Shalom Valley just keeps running. Running great even. #ThankYouLord!

Another thing that encouraged us. Since we returned to Holland, several staff members have come to faith - WOW! - and together with them we visited a local church on Sundays. Very cool to now be able to meet as brothers and sisters in the Lord and worship together and hear God's Word. Two of them showed the pictures from when they were baptized on the beach last year. #ThankYouLord!

That Sunday afternoon we would go swimming at Shalom Valley with the kids from "our" neighborhood. A relaxing afternoon together, meeting each other, and of course sharing a meal. Some of the Shalom Valley team also joined, but one of the staff members told us that unfortunately he could not be there. He already had a full afternoon: Bible study, guitar lesson and more Bible study!

When we struck up a conversation, he explained why. After we left, the children's work in our neighborhood had stopped. We had tried our best to transfer it, but it had not worked out well. This young brother, who lives in "our" old neighborhood, but did not know the Lord himself when we lived there, told us that he longs for the children's club to be there again. So that children in his neighborhood will again

have a place where they can get to know and follow Jesus (better) together.

No one had told him to do this. We knew of nothing. The Lord Himself gave him an eye and a desire for all those kids in his neighborhood. How cool! How special! We stood there and listened: This is God at work. It makes us wonder what else He has in store. #ThankyouLord!

We ended the day with a delicious meal. Super local - and our stomachs did not protest. Playing soccer together, praying, singing a song. One of the girls, Joy's friend, said, "Just like old times!" She has an open heart and already knows a lot about Jesus. Pray that right through her teenage years all those seeds planted in her heart will germinate and grow.

After a long day, we lay in our bed under a typical Cambodian thatched roof. Counting blessings. Thanking God. We also experienced some really difficult things during our years in Cambodia, but what a privilege it is to be able to look back like this and count the blessings God has given.

And about those difficult seasons: isn't it often the case that it is precisely during those hard times that the Lord forms us and teaches us things we would not otherwise learn?

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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 Alongsiders
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ENJOY THESE PHOTOS WITH US:

>> From left to right, top to bottom:

Doing 'quiet time' together with Amy // Shalom Valley is beautiful // Enjoying a coconut together // Having a meeting at Shalom Valley somewhere in between // Going out to a waterfall together // What a gift that we could use a fellow missionary's car.

*(We still have a few hundred photos...
Feel free to stop by for a cup of coffee if
you want to see them all;-))*



ALONGSIDERS WORLDWIDE

From Cambodia, we take you briefly into the global movement: There are many wonderful developments for which we are grateful. At the same time, we notice how leadership within the movement is "under attack" in different places and in different ways.

>> Will you join us in praying for protection for the leaders, their families, the teams? That all of us, right through it all, will be close to the heart of Jesus, close to the heart of Father?



ALONGSIDERS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Back to the Netherlands. Quite a lot has happened since our last newsletter. We'll take you through it.

As of the third quarter last year, we have **expansion on the team**. Jonathan Wolters has stepped in, working with us 4 days a week. How grateful we are with him! We have prayed much and long for more hands and more shoulders to carry the work and, as we pray for even more strengthening, we can testify (again): the Lord provides. *#ThankYouLord!*

>> Are you praying with us for further team expansion? Feel free to ask us for more concrete info on this!

As a team, we had a period of prayer in November '23 (and again at the end of this month) in which we sought the Lord for direction and insight. After all, Alongsiders is His movement, His work.

In fact, we noticed that while young people in the west are really excited about Alongsiders, they often find it difficult to stick with being Alongsiders themselves.

Often there is no community they are part of, and our culture "disciples" them in a completely different direction than the ways of Jesus show them. So how



do you keep standing? And who helps you do that? Whereas in many non-Western countries community is a "given," here it is often not. After the period of prayer, and in consultation with the international teams, we decided to create a "journey" that helps build community and helps young people step out further in discipleship: **"The 180"**.

"The 180" because the material is for 180 days (six months). "The 180" because the themes that come along call for a 180-degree turn: a conversion, a reversal. Themes like "From Loneliness to Community," "From Distraction to Purpose" or "From Fruitlessness to Fruitfulness". Themes encountered in the teaching and life of Jesus. We take young people into this and challenge them to go into the depths together. We help them get out in concrete ways. Walking up in pairs.

A pilot is currently running in Almere and in Emmeloord, and what beautiful testimonies we are receiving so far! After the summer we want to start in 5 new places and thus expand the pilot. If you think right now, "This would be something for the (young) people I walk alongside!", please get in touch. We would love it if "The 180" may also be a blessing to you/your youth.

>> Are you praying with us for a rich blessing on "The 180" and for the time of prayer at the end of this month? That we will be alert to His directions?

In early 2025, we will take another group of young people to Cambodia for a vision trip! It is cool to see the Lord bringing a new group of young people together and we are looking forward to seeing what He will do through this group. *#ThankYouLord!*

>> Are you praying with us as we prepare as a group for this trip?

At the annual conference 'Opwekking' ('Revival') in Biddinghuizen with the

theme "Closer to Heart," Mart-Jan had the opportunity to **share something about discipleship**. "Discipleship Closer to the Heart." A valuable time from which beautiful conversations arose. Also during the youth program there was room to share about mental health among young people. Vulnerable & close to heart with a desire to help and give direction. We pray that the Lord continues to work it out. *#ThankYouLord!*

ALONGSIDERS AND THE CHURCH

We are grateful for opportunities to pass on, inspire and build up congregations. To be able to combine word and music during a speaking engagement. To complement each other and use our gifts together for Him. We experience an open door, and it is great to see the Lord touching people. While we experience that we ourselves are still learning, we want to remain available: "Lord, here we are, just use us..."

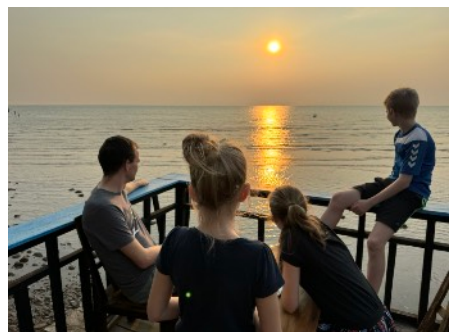
We are also thankful for the small congregation (Silo - de Ontmoeting) in Hilversum that we may be part of. How good it is to be part of a community where love dwells, where we may walk together and where the Lord Jesus is central. *#ThankYouLord!*

Of course you have long since figured it out: we write to you with a #thankful heart. Grateful for the journey, for Alongsiders, for the team, for opportunities to "be" and share. Grateful for each other. Grateful for the things we get to learn.

We are also immensely grateful for you. For your prayers and encouragement. For your support. For the contacts and relationships. Blessings to you where you are!

With warm greetings,

Mart-Jan & Talitha, Joy, Micha and Amy



>> On the road together // Meeting American friends // 'Our' old house and neighbors // Sak, our househelper // We love each other // This cool guy - Micha // With Pon & Srey An at Shalom Valley // Enjoying friendships // Phnom Penh street scene // In the tuk-tuk // Eating with the neighborhood kids //

Day trip to a nearby island // The Shalom Valley team // One of our favorite spots.