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SALE

Bhoomki Believer: Tanya Accone, UNICEF Chief

Posted on June 07 2014

We are delighted to feature UNICEF Chief Tanya Accone as our June Bhoomki Believer.

A futurist, strategic planner and new media specialist, Tanya Accone serves as Chief of the United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) Strategic Planning & Operations.

During her career she has nurtured various innovation and technology for development initiatives, spearheaded the development of Internet businesses and content portals throughout the African continent, was the Internet Editor of southern Africa's largest newspaper and worked at the Washington Post. Tanya has a Journalism degree from Rhodes University, completed her MA in Public Communication at American University on a Fulbright Scholarship, and holds an MS in Studies of the Future from the University of Houston-Clear Lake. We sat down with Tanya a few weeks ago, and she shared what follows on her travels, her background, her community here and abroad, and her global approach to style.

What's your favorite item of clothing in your closet and why?

Far and away it's my Bhoomki Temple Tower Coat. The embroidered design draws from architecture around the world, which resonates with my multi-cultural heritage and the global nature of my work. Wearing this piece of functional art never fails to draw compliments, to the extent that I now keep Bhoomki business cards in the pocket to share with random admirers.

Left: Bhoomki's Temple Tower Coat

As a South African national, you have such an unusual background, can you tell us about it?

I'm fourth-generation Chinese born in South Africa. Most of my ancestors came to South Africa from China to practice traditional medicine and manage trading businesses. Like all non-white South Africans, we gained civil rights and the franchise with the fall of the apartheid government. Three generations of my family voted together for the first time in the 1994 elections. I also have a little German ancestry and am related to the original town planner of Johannesburg, although that family ostracized my great-grandmother upon learning that she secretly had married a Chinese man. And then there is the Italian-sounding last name! My brother's research indicates Accone is the immigration officer's misunderstanding of our family name, Ah-Kwan. I always joke that my background is why working at the United Nations is a perfect fit.

How would you describe your personal style?

Eclectic, ethnic and functional. I don't shy away from color or patterns and I draw inspiration from the many cultures across the African continent. I like to mix things up, like having a classic sheath dress made from fabric painted by a Ugandan artist.



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Who do you admire, famous or not famous?

Nelson Mandela was the most inspiring person I have ever met and he continues to motivate me to strive for a better future for all.

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Children from Katoogo Church of Uganda Primary School. UNICEF's work in Uganda focuses on keeping children alive, safe, and learning – ensuring children and women live healthier lives, protected from violence and exploitation, and that children can access a quality education starting early in life. (Photo Credit: ©UNICEF/UGDA201300072/Nakibuuka)

As a UNICEF Chief, how many countries have you visited?

48. Which seems like a good start considering there are so many cultures and geographies that make up our diverse world.

Where do you want to go where you haven't been?

I have a preoccupation with vanishing indigenous cultures and their rich cultural heritage, as well as locations that are poised on the edge of rapid sociocultural change. This speaks to places like the Amazon, Bhutan, Cuba, Laos, Myanmar, Mongolia and Papua New Guinea.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?

Being able to contribute to and witness first-hand the impact of my organization in the lives of the world's most marginalized children and women.

How does what you learn during your professional travels, influence the ones you make at home and in your everyday life?

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Martin
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We are thrilled to present our July Bhoomki Believer, Jordana Munk Martin, founder and director of Oak Knit Studio. I first met Jorda...

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Lucky Magazine's Managing editor - and one of our favorite customers - Caryn Prime counts Bhoomki as one of her favorite places to sho...

On The Table: Beach Breeze
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Blend into tropical ease with this

Ingenuity and creativity thrive everywhere: Innovation is not the preserve of the wealthy or well educated. I witness the truth of that saying that 'necessity is the mother of invention.' My work takes me to many places of necessity, and I learn from the solutions that communities have designed themselves and share that. For example, I've seen recycled plastic bottles used as solar light bulbs, sprinklers and watering cans, as well as to purify water and build homes.

What creative communities have provided you with the most inspiration during your travels?

I am drawn to artisans and artists, and have spent time with mud cloth dyers in Mali and Kente cloth weavers in Ghana. Most recently during a three-month stay in Uganda, I connected with young designer GNaj and we collaborated on a number of pieces that re-envisioned traditional tie dyed and wax-resist fabrics into pieces I wear regularly to work.

Istanbul is a place of particular inspiration for me. I love the design sensibility that reinterprets traditional patterns and crafts with modern applications, that embody its east-west confluence. Whenever I am there I have to spend time in both the souks and the modern boutiques.



Tanya at a community meeting of Pokot villagers in the northern Ugandan region known as Karamoja.

What's the last book you read?

Bright Continent by Dayo Olopade. One of the book's main thrusts is about the creativity and effectiveness of local solutions to local problems. This resonates with my experiences in working with innovators in Africa. I share the view of the continent as being as rich in great ideas as it is in natural resources.

What is one of the best meals you've ever had and where?

Mashwi with tannour bread in Sana'a, Yemen. We bought fish fresh caught from the Red Sea at the fish market and took it to a small restaurant that welcomed a woman eating among men. The fish was grilled and served whole. Watching the bread being made was mesmerizing. The flat rounds are tossed into a traditional tannour oven, stick to the sides and are served piping hot a few minutes later.

Any secrets to balancing your superstar career and motherhood?

It's all about the company you keep. If it takes a village, that village needs to be populated by a supportive spouse and extended family, friends who bolster you even if you see them sporadically, a team of empathetic coworkers and leaders you respect. These fellow villagers help you keep the balance between professional and personal fulfillment. There is no amount of professional achievement that can offset an unfulfilled child, which is why I

light summer beach look. Shirt | AnokhiPants | Organic by John PatrickNecklace | Faire Collect...

Second Hand Clothes, Textile Waste and Choosing Well

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A few months ago, Autumn Newell visited Bhoomki from Ithaca, NY to tell us about her graduate work at Cornell University focusing on la...

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On The Table: Tangerine Punch

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Melania Sandal | Coclico Swing Tank | Indigenous Super Skinny

routinely count the [Manhattan Country School](#) community among my blessings.



How has Bhoomki changed the way you dress and shop?

Shopping at Bhoomki is like bringing the best of many global trips together in a single place. The boutique marries the aspects I care most about:

- i. Unique designs that are fashionable, functional and flattering;
- ii. An authentic and respectful treatment of ethnic influences;
- iii. A production provenance that aligns with my values – ethically sourced, without exploitation of child or other labour, and organic.

The first two are relatively easy to find, but the last one is not. Bhoomki has reinforced my consumer Jiminy Cricket and when I shop I actively question “Who made this?,” “Where does this come from?,” “What did it truly cost to produce?”

What sort of advice would you give to your 20 year-old self?

Stop being concerned that you have never fitted in or that the only time your differences have been appreciated is here at this wonderful university (Rhodes University in South Africa). Not only is fitting in vastly over rated, but the opportunity that will change your life is just around the corner. It leads to a path where diversity -- in more forms than you can currently imagine -- is celebrated. So get ready to pack up your belongings into two suitcases and a hat box! Oh, and always keep that optimism handy, it will see you through the downs and ups that comprise life.

Where do you see yourself in 20 years?

If the past is any predictor of the future, I anticipate I'll be living somewhere quite different engaged in a vocation that doesn't fully exist today... and loving it!

UNICEF promotes the rights and wellbeing of every child. Together with its partners, UNICEF works in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere. Here is a link to a story written by Tanya about the innovative mobile solution UNICEF used to identify and reunite children separated from their families. To learn more about UNICEF and its work, visit www.unicef.org.

Portraits of Tanya by [Jennifer Trahan](#)

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Inspired by the traditional craftwork
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Cabili, a former dancer turned
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