

2007: The year that was for Riemke and Maarten

An uneventful year

2007 has been a rather uneventful year for us, certainly compared with recent years when we faced big downsides and upsides. However, we had some difficulty finding the time to go on holiday and only managed to do that in October.

Family affairs

Naturally, our primary concern has been to watch our grandson Hendrik's progress. Fortunately, he is probably the most photographed child in the world, although digital technology means that most children in the developed world are now endlessly pictured in photographs and videos.

Although we had some Skype sessions with Hendrik and his parents, which went well from the technology point of view, these are as yet not fully satisfactory. Hendrik is really still too small to realise what was going on, let alone to understand his relation to the people on screen. Nevertheless, it is exciting to be able to have a personal video-link across the world at no real cost.

Maarten was very fortunate to be visiting San Francisco in the beginning of April and therefore to be able to travel on to Washington State to deliver a big wooden toy fire truck at Hendrik's first birthday.

In October Maarten had to be in Houston on business and we then decided to combine that with some weeks of leave in Washington State, for which Riemke flew directly from Amsterdam to Seattle and back. And we had some days of quality time with Hendrik and his parents both at the beginning and at the end of our break.

Hendrik is growing up quickly and he is a big boy for his age. He is generally good natured and not all shy and it is fun to spend time with him. He loves playing on a swing during which he utters loud, almost supersonic cries of delight. He generally loves to be outside and is already a great walker. While we were visiting, we went for a stroll in the Nisqually Wildlife Refuge, just north of Olympia and Lacey and Hendrik managed to walk about a kilometre, which we felt was quite an achievement for an 18 months old toddler.

He is obviously well looked after, because he is pretty slow developing his vocabulary. He had found that he has other ways to make clear what he wants and as he is attended on hand and foot, he does not feel a need to start making real conversation.

Just after we left, Cabela's ("The World's Foremost Outfitter") opened a retail shop in Lacey. This is a massive 17,000 square metre collection of outdoor paraphernalia. In the centre of the shop there is a display of almost all Northwestern game animals as well as an underground aquarium with local fish. From the store's ceiling hangs a Piper Cub aircraft, of which the propeller spins. Naturally, this is now one of Hendrik's favourite indoor haunts.

While Maarten is doing fine health-wise, Riemke needed to go to hospital last February for a big operation. Fortunately, this went well and we are now really back to normal.

Maarten continues his quarterly visits to his haematologist, but everything is under control. The treatment of CML with Glivec that Maarten is taking is now the treatment with the largest percentage of survivors after five years. Maarten's haematologist tells him that this drug has made all the difference.

A travelling circus

Maarten developed a course on impact assessment, which was felt was needed to be able to implement the global procedure for impact assessment that Shell's exploration and production business has adopted.

During this year, the course ran five times including exports to Kuala Lumpur and Houston. Maarten has been the course director for four of the five courses, but for next year the course has been moved to the Shell Learning & Development organisation. It is however likely that Maarten will stay closely involved.

There was further globetrotting for the meetings of the Executive Committee of the Joint Industry Programme on Sound and Marine Life. At the meeting in Adelaide in September Maarten stepped down as chairman of this Committee, which he has been leading for almost two years. He is currently focussing on the outreach and education activities, which will become more important now that projects, funded by the programme, are starting to deliver results.

Breaks from the daily grind

In September we made an unexpected short trip to Southwestern Ireland, as Maarten found himself with a non-refundable air ticket for a business trip to Cork that fell through. Riemke then also booked a flight to Cork and back and we made a four-day trip enjoying good weather.

During our trip to Washington State we travelled the Cascade Loop through the Cascade Mountains in the North of Washington State and enjoyed magnificent fall colours. Later, when we became a little tired of the rain, we crossed the Cascades to the South East of the state and then followed the Columbia River downstream on the trail of Lewis and Clark, who at the beginning of the 19th Century made an expedition for the US Government to find a way to the Pacific Ocean.

In November we found ourselves on the island of Menorca in Spain for a meeting (with partners) of Maarten's team at Shell. One of his colleagues has a house there and showed us over the island. Of course, all team members paid their own airfares. We flew to Menorca by Air Berlin, which conducts daily flights from twelve destinations in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK to twelve destinations in Spain and Portugal, using Palma de Mallorca as their transfer hub. Again, we enjoyed great weather.

Looking after parents and relatives

Riemke has been driving to the North of the Netherlands almost once a week to visit her parents and aunt and uncle, who are in a home for the elderly. Also, we try to go and visit Maarten's father in Amsterdam every week to have dinner with him. That keeps us well occupied.

Acquiring a genuine Hanedoes

While we were at Menorca, one of our neighbours who is a retired art-dealer, called us to tell us that there was a painting by Hanedoes for sale at an auction house in The Hague. When we came to live here in 1994, we had wondered who Hanedoes was and Maarten's mother found out that he was an unknown and also not very successful painter from the Hague School of impressionist painters.

In 1997, just before we left for Abu Dhabi there was also a painting by his hand for sale, but that was not a very nice one and we did not want to go through the hassle of trying to acquire the painting and then having to put it in storage.

The painting currently for sale, was a smaller, nicer and in a better condition than the previous painting. As Riemke could not attend the auction, she placed a bid by email and much to our surprise we were the highest bidder. In fact, the painting was auctioned at a price well below our bid, so that we paid the price that the painting made at the actual auction.

The painting and the frame now need to be restored, but we are quite pleased that our house will boast a genuine Hanedoes. We praise ourselves lucky that we do not live in the Rembrandt street !

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The Hague, December 2007

Riemke Riemersma

Maarten Smies



Riemke, Jurjen and Hendrik at Nisqually (October 2007)