

2009: The year that was for Riemke and Maarten

Our first full year in retirement

This was the first full year, in which we were completely free.

There was still some work in the form of course lecturing for Shell, but that was for a very limited period of time. In April Maarten was headhunted for the position of HSE manager for the Dutch branch of an Abu Dhabi oil and gas company, but in the end that came to nought.

We travelled quite a lot this year and Maarten was able to add country number 40 (Ukraine) and country number 41 (Portugal) to his list of countries visited.

Family affairs

Our daughter-in-law Carolyn, son Jurjen and grandson Hendrik came to visit the Netherlands for four weeks at the end of July.

Hendrik continues to grow rapidly and he is a very big boy for his age. However, his verbal development is a bit slow. But he is a born actor and plays complete scenes in front of any surface that will act as mirror, so that he can see what he is doing. And he picked up some Dutch while he was here: “good day”, “good bye” and “holy mackerel !” were integrated parts of his Dutch vocabulary.

Hendrik loves anything that turns and he could be busy turning the lid of a lettuce drier for hours, which was useful on our trips to visit his Dutch relatives. He finds windmills very interesting and when spotting a windmill he would always determine whether it was “on” or “off”.

We very much enjoyed the visit. There is now a new photograph of four generations Smies at dinner on the wall of Maarten’s father favourite Italian restaurant in Amsterdam.

Throughout the year we made regular (almost weekly) visits to Riemke’s parents and Riemke’ uncle and aunt in the north of the Netherlands. Last June Riemke’s uncle mercifully died. Also, we try to visit Maarten’s father once every week. He is now 91 and continues to work two afternoons per week as a remedial reading teacher at a primary school close to where he lives. He was very pleased and proud to learn that the reading score at the national tests at his school rose from below the national average to above the national average.

Travel news

At the end of April we went on holiday to the Veneto in Italy, where we looked at architecture in and around Venice, and especially at the buildings designed by Palladio. For us that was a closed book but we are more familiar now. We stayed in a small hotel just outside Vicenza, a small palace in an idyllic setting. The trip included a number of lectures and while we enjoyed those, we felt that we did not need to travel to Italy for those. They could have been given in the Netherlands. But it was a very nice and interesting journey and we had a week of beautiful weather.

At the end of June we went to Saint Petersburg for a week. That was a splendid experience. One can visit The Hermitage for weeks on end and one would still not have seen the entire collection. Also, the palaces around Saint Petersburg are very worthwhile to visit. So, it was a great trip, organised by our favourite travel agency for cultural trips. You pay a bit more, but you get a lot in return ...

This year Maarten joined PUM – Netherlands senior experts, a voluntary group of retired managers that run projects abroad. The Dutch Ministries of Economic Affairs (international trade), Development Cooperation and Housing, Physical Planning and Environment provide financial support for these projects. In September Maarten went on his first mission to Ukraine to help a green NGO to develop an environmental management system and certification scheme for hotels. It was an interesting and very enjoyable mission, although

Maarten had to express his concerns with regard to road transport safety in Ukraine. Both the client NGO and PUM were enthusiastic about the results of Maarten's mission.

In November we went to northeastern Portugal, where (over a period of ten years) the Portuguese Association for Transhumance and Nature (ATN: www.atnatureza.org) has established a private nature reserve of about 650 hectares in the valley of the River Coa with predominantly Dutch money. The River Coa empties in the River Douro, which runs from Spain to Portugal and flows into the Atlantic Ocean at Porto. Maarten has joined the board of the Dutch Foundation for Transhumance and Nature (STN: www.transnature.org), which is the Dutch joint-venture partner of the Portuguese association. STN is busy trying to arrange finance to buy another 150 hectares of land in the valley of the River Coa. STN is also concerned about the capacity of the Portuguese partner to manage this nature reserve of almost 1000 hectares and has included a capacity programme in its finance proposal. We were in Portugal to lay the basis for this capacity building programme.

Health news

This year Maarten's haematologist and he celebrated the fact that they knew each other for five years now and reflected on the fact that this would have been unlikely in the pre-Glivec era.

Riemke's activities

Riemke is active on the board of the Leyden Society of Political Science Alumni, where she arranged a number of things. She also enjoyed being a pseudo-grandmother of two lovely children here in The Hague. And she is now in her final year as president of the The Hague branch of the Dutch Association of University Women.

She managed to invite Prof Rudy Rabbinge, a distinguished university professor in Sustainable Development and Food Security at Wageningen University and Research Centre, to come and address the Christmas meeting of her branch. That was an absolute hit: a very inspired and positive lecture on the development opportunities for food production in the world. And on how to get Africa to join this race.

The Hague, December 2009

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Hendrik in Amsterdam, August 2009