

2010: The year that was for Riemke and Maarten

Our year of waiting

For us, this has been essentially a year of waiting.

Maarten was in the race for a number of environmental management positions and for each of these we had to wait for a decision on the selection process

The most interesting one was the post of global head of environment with Maersk Oil and Gas in Copenhagen, Denmark. Maersk Oil and Gas is a medium-sized internationally operating oil and gas company with a worldwide portfolio of activities. To us it would have been most interesting to set up modern environmental management at Maersk and also arrange for successful succession. In addition, we would have loved to move to Copenhagen for about three to five years and get to know the City and Denmark. An additional attraction for Maarten would have been to get to work with European environmental requirements for the offshore oil and gas industry. In the end, the position did not materialise, as Maersk Oil and Gas decided to select another candidate.

There were also a number of other work perspectives, but in the end they all came to nought.

We are not really bothered by this, as we do not need the work to survive.

In the wake of the big reorganisation at Shell, there was no requirement to lecture at Shell courses on Health, Safety, the Environment and Sustainable Development. In short, a year without income for Maarten's business (Frogs International – Environmental Management and Consultancy).

Family affairs

Our daughter-in-law Carolyn fortunately managed to get back into employment again as an IT-engineer. She has been out of work for almost a year and a half and we have been obliged a number of times to provide support for her, our son and grandson. The social security net in the United States does not provide for much.

Carolyn and Jurjen are active amateur actors and they have used their time off work usefully to learn their stage roles. Every setback also offers positive opportunities, we observe in the spirit of the Dutch soccer player Johan Crujff ...

Our grandson Hendrik continues to grow and grow. Verbally he has now caught up completely and most afternoons he is attending day-care to meet other children. That works out well for him. And he loves ferrets ...

We had intended to visit the Western USA for at least some weeks in this year and spend time with Carolyn, Jurjen and Hendrik then. Our waiting for work has prevented that. That is a pity and we intend to do better next year.

In the meantime, we continue to visit Riemke's parents and her aunt in Friesland and Maarten's father in Amsterdam. In the summer that is no problem but it is a bit more difficult now that the days are getting shorter and snow and ice are making motoring more difficult.

Our ten-year old Volkswagen Passat that we imported from Abu Dhabi to the Netherlands in 2001, keeps us going.

Travel news

Naturally, we did not manage to travel widely this year, as we were waiting for news on jobs ...

In the end, we managed to get away at the end of October for a five-day trip to visit the history of the Great War in Western Flanders and the North of France. Ypres, Diksmuide and

Poperingen in Flanders, and after that the WWI fronts along the River Somme and near Verdun in France. It was a most impressive but equally depressing experience. All these war graves of young soldiers who died without a purpose.

We had arranged to go on this tour last February when we met Riemke's colleague and friend Koen Koch, who has been organising this journey for a number of years already; at first for students but lately also for the public at large.

We really regretted to learn that Koen Koch was not able to direct this tour because of serious health problems. Fortunately, Koen and the travel agency had managed to engage another tour leader, who was well versed to deal with the WWI history in Flanders and Northern France.

Health news

Following Maarten's medical success of last year, there is not much news with regard to his medical condition, which is really excellent. His haematologist and he agreed that Maarten will now only come twice a year for a check-up and that the expression of the BCR-ABL cancer gene will on those occasions be measured in Maarten's blood rather than through painful bone-marrow punctions.

Maarten had suggested this already last year, but his haematologist then was not ready yet to go that way. Maarten continues to appreciate the information he obtains from the excellent website of the American Leukemia & Lymphoma society (www.leukemia.org).

Unfortunately, we were confronted his year with the fate of some of our friends.

Early this year we lost a friend, whom we met in Abu Dhabi. He passed away while working for Total in Angola.

To our great sorrow, our good friend Willem Breedveld, the political editor of the Dutch Trouw newspaper died. Willem had said good-bye to Trouw last February during an impressive and exciting meeting in the old building of the Dutch Lower House in The Hague.

Shortly after this, Willem developed health problems. He was hospitalised at the Anthonius Hospital in Nieuwegein, just South of Utrecht. Following a heart by-pass operation Willem returned home, but soon after that he passed away. We were pleased to be able to provide some assistance by caring for two of Willem's grandchildren here in The Hague, thereby enabling Willem's eldest son and his wife to be with Willem and Margot.

We are looking regularly after these (pseudo) grandchildren of ours and we enjoy their company in lieu of spending time with Hendrik, who is far away from us in Washington State.

Riemke's activities

Riemke has now stepped down as President of the The Hague Branch of the Netherlands Society of University Women. She continued to chair the committee that organised the 80-year commemorative meeting of the The Hague Branch last November. That was a most inspiring meeting.

Riemke is also a board member of the Leyden Society of Political Science Alumni. They organised a "thinking dinner" soon after the Dutch general elections, during which the conundrum of possibly forming a government with the help of the radical Freedom Party was contemplated.

Besides, Riemke remains an active volunteer with local branch of "The Sunflower" society that provides help to the aged and handicapped.

At the end of November we visited Riemke's old school, the City of Utrecht Grammar School that will be moving into a brand new building early next year. This was the final opportunity to say good-bye to the old school building.

Maarten's spare time

Maarten is a board member of the Heimans en Thijssse Foundation. This year he was, as happens every two year, responsible for the selection of the winner of the Heimans and Thijssse Prize. For the first time in its existence the prize was awarded to somebody outside the Netherlands. Mr Willy Vanlook in Koersel-Beringen received the prize for his long-running efforts to conserve and manage the Valley of the Black Brook in the Belgian province of Limburg.

Thanks to the enthusiastic support of the Flemish conservation organisation Natuurpunt and the Flemish Agency for Nature and Forests, there was a festive prize award ceremony in the visitors's centre of the Black Brook.

Maarten is also active in the alumni organisation of the Vossius Grammar School in Amsterdam, where he was a student from 1960 until 1966. For the third year he organised a meeting in the school, where alumni give presentations on their lives after leaving school.

Through the social media Maarten re-established contact with an ex-colleague and friend in Kazakstan, with whom he worked between 1993 and 1996. These unexpected meetings are really great fun.

We wish everybody all the best in 2011.

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Riemke Riemersma

Hanedoesstraat 2-A
2597 XG Den Haag

phone: +31 70 326 8366
mobile: +31 6 1071 3474
email: riemke@smies.org

web: www.smies.org

web: www.frogsinternational.com

Maarten Smies

PO Box 96992
2509 JJ Den Haag

+31 70 326 8365
+31 6 2207 3021
maarten@smies.org



Hendrik in 2010