

2011: The year that was for Riemke and Maarten

A moving year

For us 2011 was a moving year dominated by two major and contrasting events. At the end of October Remke's mother passed away after a long period of illness that started in January. That is also the reason that this message is a little bit later than usually.

But earlier this year we celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary (a year late) with a splendid party at the Schaep en Burgh estate in 's-Graveland in the centre of the country. As it happened, it was the most beautiful Saturday of the year

A slow and lengthy farewell

In January it became clear that Riemke's mother was approaching the end of her life. Her body had stopped making red blood cells and she survived by regular blood transfusions and other treatments in hospital. At the end of January her condition became critical and we asked our son Jurjen to come from Seattle to the Netherlands in order to see his grandmother when she was still alive. To us that appeared to make more sense than asking him to come for the cremation.

Eventually, the condition of Riemke's mother improved and when Carolyn, Jurjen and Hendrik came for four weeks on holiday around Easter, they were still able to visit their (great-)grandparents in Heerenveen a number of times.

In September Riemke's mother decided that she did not want to continue with life-supporting medical interventions and with the support of her husband, her children and the family doctor started on the road with "tender loving care" towards a natural death. That was supposed to take a week or two, but it became five weeks after a gradual loss of vital functions. For the greater part of that five weeks we stayed with Riemke's twin sister and her husband in Drenthe at an hour's drive from Heerenveen.

The cremation was an impressive ceremony with a great number of family members, friends and acquaintances. That was for all of us a great support and consolation.

Riemke's father naturally had a hard time but he was also relieved from long-lasting care tasks that were both physically as psychologically demanding. He has coped well with the help of his daughters and of many of his neighbours in the home for the elderly, where he lives.

We shall see how things develop but our outlook is a positive one.

Grandson Hendrik and his parents on a visit from the USA

We enjoyed the visit of our grandson Hendrik, our daughter-in-law and our son in April. We had arranged accommodation for them at a holiday home in Noordwijkerhout, about 30 km north of The Hague along the North Sea coast.

Carolyn, Hendrik and Jurjen had their own as well a programme combined with us during their four weeks' stay. The combined part mainly comprised the visits to their three (great-)grandparents in Heerenveen and Amsterdam. In Amsterdam we had another photo shoot in Maarten's father's favourite Italian restaurant and the latest photograph of four generations Smies now adorns the wall. We hope that we shall be able to do that again this year.



Our pseudo grandchildren

Isa and Roemer Breedveld are the grandchildren of our good friends Margot and Willem Breedveld. Willem sadly passed away in 2010.

Isa and Roemer live in The Hague and Grandmother Margot suggested that, in the absence of an own grandchild in the Netherlands, we should be allowed to look after Isa and Roemer from time to time. This arrangement has been in place now for a number of years and we really enjoy our time with these kids.

We take them to the Children's Museum in The Hague. Or we collect them from their swimming lessons in Leidseveen, a new suburb of The Hague. It is great fun, as they are intelligent and lovely children who are fun to be with.

It is not without its dangers though. Last autumn we took Isa and Roemer to Madurodam, the Dutch miniature town in The Hague. On our way back to the parking garage Roemer and Maarten fell. Fortunately, Roemer escaped unscathed; Maarten's big concern when he fell over Roemer. But Maarten suffered permanent scars from wounds on his hands, although these have not caused lasting harm.

Forty years of married bliss



Last year we had to postpone the celebration of our 40th wedding anniversary, as friends of ours wanted to have their party, but had to cancel that because of illness.

But on Saturday 21 May 2011 we were successful. The Dutch National Trust let us their staff restaurant and terrace at the Schaep en Burgh estate in 's-Graveland and there we received our two hundred guests from the various phases of our lives. As already indicated, it happened to be the most beautiful Saturday of the year and the entire event took place outside. As a ranger of the National Trust led two excursions across the estate during the afternoon, we had a good mix of the various groups of visitors.

In short, a tremendous success !

“Class of 1966” biologists reunion

In spring Maarten received an email from a couple of former students from the time he read biology at the University of Amsterdam. The idea arose to try and find as many classmates as possible and then organise a reunion.

Somebody suggested also to publish a reunion bulletin with information on the reunion and life stories of some former students. We made four issues before the reunion took place and one thereafter.



The reunion took place at the old Hortus Botanicus in Amsterdam; hallow ground indeed because in the 1960s the botanical garden was still in use by the university. There were over thirty (almost half of the original number of first-year students) at an animated meeting and sixteen of them also had dinner together afterwards. Absolutely delightful.

Riemke a member of the national board of the Dutch University Women

Following her departure as president of the The Hague branch of the Association of Dutch University Women, Riemke has now been asked to join the national board. The current board is a good one, consisting of nice women, so that will be a good experience.

Reunion Vossius Grammar School

In December there was a reunion of past pupils and past teachers of the Vossius Grammar School of Amsterdam that Maarten attended in the 1960s. Through the alumni club of the school Maarten was closely involved with the organisation of this event. There were almost a thousand participants who enjoyed a varied programme of different activities.

We wish you all a very happy New Year.

The Hague, January 2012

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