

2012: The year that was for Riemke and Maarten

A quiet year

2012 has been quite an uneventful year for us. We had a good time and mixed experiences and continue to try and look after both our fathers, in Heerenveen in the north of the Netherlands and in Amsterdam respectively.

More about that later. On the medical front there have been some interesting developments for Maarten in relation to his therapy for chronic myeloid leukaemia.

Riemke has started to work on a large project in preparation of the 19th lustrum of the Dutch Association of University Women that will be celebrated next year.

Maarten managed another mission for PUM – Netherlands senior experts, this time to Mongolia, which was quite interesting. He also spent time trawling through the catalogues of Dutch libraries in an effort to clean up the collection of journals of a foundation collecting and preserving information on nature, nature study, conservation and education as a social-cultural development since the late 1880s.

And we very much enjoyed the visit of our grandson Hendrik and his parents to the Netherlands in early April. This time they stayed in a bed-and-breakfast in the centre of The Hague, which was a great success. And we enjoyed some quality time with Hendrik.

Last but not least, we spent quite some time with our pseudo grandchildren, who are a great pleasure to us.

Our old fathers

Both our fathers are now widowers. Maarten's mother died in 2005 and Riemke's mother passed away last year.

Riemke's father continues to live in a service apartment in Heerenveen in the province of Friesland. Last April he suffered a minor stroke from which he recovered well and quite quickly. That does not mean that it has not affected his physical and mental fitness but the damage has been limited. We try and visit him regularly and also visit his sister-in-law, who is in a nursing home in Leeuwarden, the provincial capital of Friesland.

We are looking forward to celebrate Christmas with Riemke's father at Riemke's twin sister's home in the northern province of Drenthe, at about a three-quarter of an hour drive away from Heerenveen.

Maarten's father is still living independently in Amsterdam, although that is gradually becoming less sustainable. He is now connected to an alarm system, which he has actually needed (and was able) to use this year after a fall in his house. Fortunately, he has caring neighbours who are willing to jump in whenever help is required.

Maarten's father celebrated his 94th birthday in September this year, which we celebrated with a dinner party at an authentic Indonesian restaurant in the western suburbs of Amsterdam. All his children and most of his grandchildren (and his great-granddaughter) were there, as well his sister-in-law (his younger brother's widow) and her daughter and his brother-in-law (Maarten's mother's younger brother) and his wife. Maarten's father's cousin (the son of his mother's brother) stole the show by bringing a collection of historic photographs. This cousin lives at the Leidscheplein in the centre of Amsterdam in an apartment above a bar, which used to be his father's butchery. In Maarten's younger years, he and his brothers would go there to watch the official arrival of Saint Nicholas (the Dutch version of Santa Claus) in Amsterdam at the end of November.

Interestingly, in late 2011 we met a lady whose mother was called Smies at a party in Leiden on the occasion of the 60th birthday of a friend of Riemke's. Since, we compared notes and found out that we are after all not related. There are three branches of Smies families in the Netherlands, of which two originate from a village in the east of the country. The third branch comes from the south-west and has branched out to the State of Wisconsin in the United States in the late 1800s to establish themselves in the village of Oostburg to the south of Sheboygan on Lake Michigan. On Smies Road in Oostburg there is a cemetery which accommodates the largest concentration of Smies' graves in the world. We visited that cemetery in 2006, when we happened to be in Wisconsin.

Health news

In January Maarten's haematologist found out that Maarten's wonder drug Glivec (or Gleevec in the Americas) against his chronic myeloid leukaemia was after seven years of treatment starting to affect his general blood forming system. These are side effects of Glivec that are only now showing up because the drug has been so successful. So, Maarten continued taking Glivec until his supply ran out at the end of March. His next test of the activity of the BCR-ABL cancer gene in August was inconclusive but fortunately the October test was negative, i.e. positive. So, Maarten remains free of malignant stemcells in his bone marrow as expressed in his blood at the molecular level. We sigh with relief, as you do. Thank you for your messages of support !

As a result of quitting taking Glivec, the bluish discolouration of Maarten's skin, which was particularly prominent on the tip of his nose, has almost disappeared. So, he no longer has to explain, as he was apt to do when speaking in public, that he had not rubbed his nose through an ashtray. He has been sending his haematologist a photograph of the tip of his nose every month to document this cosmetic change.

Family visit

At the end of March Carolyn, Hendrik and Jurjen came to visit for two weeks. As the holiday cottage in Noordwijkerhout was not so convenient, they had found a bed-and-breakfast in the centre of The Hague. This also meant that we did not have to hire a car for them, as they could make all their visits to friends by public transport.

We made a joint visit with them to Riemke's father and to her twin sister Wiek, who is a favourite of Hendrik and the other way around.

Hendrik took us to see Maarten's father, who was impressed by how well he behaved and by the standard of our great-parenthood. He had forgotten that we practise that throughout the year with our pseudo grandchildren.

Naturally, we managed to have dinner with Maarten's father and with Carolyn, Jurjen and Hendrik at Maarten's father's favourite Italian restaurant near his home in the Amsterdam Osdorp suburb. We show our fourth photograph of that now almost annual occasion. It has replaced last year's picture on the wall of the restaurant.



This summer Carolyn, Hendrik and Jurjen moved from Auburn to the south of Seattle to Bothell to the north-east of the city to be much closer to Carolyn's job. Jurjen has acquired a job with a consultant to Microsoft and now works on Dutch language manuals for Microsoft products. So, that has been all to the good.

It meant that Hendrik had to move school, but his new school district is very good. After the summer Hendrik enrolled in grade 1. We show his first school photograph elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our pseudo grandchildren

This year it has been five years since Riemke (and later also Maarten) started to look after our pseudo grandchildren Isa and Roemer Breedveld, who are nine and seven at present. While we are not on a regular schedule to be with them, we are always prepared to step in if the regular caretakers cannot manage or if exceptional circumstances arise.

Since some years we are even invited birthday party guests and we then have to make sure to be present at what their mother calls the “cake moment”. Naturally, we are duly honoured.

This year will be remembered as the “drumming lessons” year, as Roemer has been taking drumming lessons on Wednesdays, when we have quite often been looking after him and his sister. When delivering Roemer to his drumming lessons for the first time, his teacher asked us if we were his grandparents, and she was highly amused to find out that we were just pseudo grandparents.

Dutch University Women

Riemke joined the national board of the Dutch Association of University Women and is now working on making its 19th lustrum in 2013 a success. She has embarked on an extensive programme to interview members across the country to find out their allegiance to the Association.

The project is a great success and it will provide valuable leads to pursue and work on the association's progress in 2013 and beyond. Riemke is still working to turn her project into a video as a more vivid demonstration of the involvement of members.

Besides, Riemke remains active in a volunteer organisation that organises activities for the sick and the elderly. She regularly visits an old lady living in our neighbourhood and accompanies her during such outings.

Another PUM project; this time in Mongolia

In 2009, Maarten went on a mission to Ukraine for the PUM – Netherlands senior experts programme to help an environmental and cultural NGO to develop an environmental management system and certification procedure for “green hotels”. This scheme is now in operation and the first hotels have been awarded “salamander” certificates in one of three grades of environmental performance.

This year he visited Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia on another PUM mission to work with a local environmental consultancy. Their original question was to guide the company to prepare and apply for an ISO 14001 environmental management system standard certificate. This they saw as a way to develop an ISO 14000 consulting proficiency.

Maarten worked with them to foster their understanding of the value of standard management systems in general, focussing on ISO 14001 and on ISO 9001 (quality management system standard), on impact assessment of projects and on the company's business development intentions.

We wish you all a very happy New Year.

The Hague, December 2012

Riemke Riemersma

Maarten Smies

Hanedoesstraat 2-A
2597 XG The Hague
(the Netherlands)

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

web: <http://smies.org/years.html>
web: <http://frogsinternational.com/>

PO Box 96992
2509 JJ The Hague
(the Netherlands)

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



Hendrik's first school picture (Autumn 2012); is not he a cuty ?