

2013: The year that was for Riemke and Maarten

A historical picture

This year we made a historical picture. Since the fall of 2006 when our grandson Hendrik aged six months and his parents made his first visit to the Netherlands, we always took him and his parents to visit his great-grandparents. With Maarten's father we would take them to dinner at the Italian restaurant "La Galleria" in the Amsterdam-Osdorp suburb. We made a picture on those occasions and almost by accident that photograph was displayed on the restaurant wall. Later it was posted on the wall in a formal picture frame. Last July we made the final picture of four generations Smies having dinner there.

In this letter Maarten's father will take pride of place. We visited him at least once a week and went through the high points and deep points with him this year. On 31 October Maarten's father passed away at the age of 95.

On 9 November Riemke enjoyed the success of the 95th anniversary of the VVAO Netherlands University Women Association at Utrecht in the centre of the country. There were about a third more participants than originally expected and at the last moment extra workshops, excursions and other activities had to be organized to accommodate all participants in the afternoon programme.

Maarten travelled again to Mongolia for his PUM project. Also, he became more active in the General Society for Nature Conservation for The Hague and environs, an 87 year old lobby organization for green interests in The Hague.

2013 was therefore quite a busy year for us.

Our old fathers

Riemke's father, who turned 90 this year did surprisingly well. He has recovered almost completely from his stroke in April of 2012 and he is socially pretty active in his apartment for the elderly in Heerenveen in the north of the Netherlands. He is able to buy all the care and nursing services that he needs there and most of the time it works. He is attending all the activities that are organized in the apartment building and writes up moving reports for the apartment building newsletter.

Regularly Riemke's father joins Riemke's twin sister to visit his demented sister-in-law at her nursing home in Leeuwarden. She likes that because he tells her stories of the past that she is still able to recognise.

In addition he regularly visits his elder brother and younger sister and the widow of his younger brother.

Maarten's father did not do that well, as already indicated. Last June he repeatedly fell in his apartment and medical help did not always reach him timely. His family doctor proposed that he would temporarily move to a nursing home to recover physically and mentally. He stayed there for six weeks and his condition recovered well. However, it was clear that he would not be able to go back to live independently (with home help) in his apartment in Amsterdam.

Maarten's eldest brother and Maarten himself started looking for a place for their father in a care home for the elderly and Maarten's brother miraculously found a beautiful apartment at a care home in a green environment in Overveen in the Bloemendaal municipality just west of the city of

Haarlem, some 20 clicks to the west of Amsterdam. But Maarten's father did not attempt to socialize there and at the end of October he fell unexpectedly and passed away four days later.

A month earlier Riemke had collected Jan to have lunch with an American friend of us, whom he had met in 2006 when he travelled with us to the western USA to visit his first great- grandchild Hendrik. That luncheon meeting went well.

We said farewell to Jan at the Westerveld Crematorium and Maarten spoke there on behalf of his children.

Splendid health

Much to our surprise and relief Maarten stayed "clean" this year: his three-monthly tests of the activity of his leukaemia cancer gene remained negative and for us positive. So, we are drinking champagne four times a year.

Maarten's blue nose has cleared up completely and he delivered his monthly pictures of his nose clearing up to his haematologist.

Family visit

Now that Hendrik is really at school, he and his parents can only come over during the official school holidays. Therefore they came for two weeks to the Netherlands at the end of June. And as last year they stayed in the Bed & Breakfast "The little Binnenhof" in the centre of The Hague.

After their arrival at Amsterdam Airport we took them to see Maarten's father in the nursing near Amsterdam. Later we also went with Jan and them to "La Galleria" to take this "historic" photograph.

Naturally we visited Riemke's father as well and did not forget to go and see Riemke's twin sister Wiek and her husband Wim. Hendrik used that occasion to climb a Neolithic stone grave monument.



Our visit with Hendrik to the national natural history museum Naturalis in Leiden was most exciting. Hendrik was really impressed and he enjoyed the dinosaur skeletons on display, although that certainly was not the only thing that caught his imagination. It was a big success.

Hendrik has experienced the demise of some of the ferrets that they keep at home, so technically he could work out what happened to Maarten's father. But his mother told us later that he had started mapping out all his family relationships and apparently that helped him cope with the loss of his great-grandfather.

Dutch University Women – 95th anniversary

Riemke had worked on this with her organising committee for over a year. One of the things they did was to go around the country and interview a great variety of members to ask them their opinion on the Dutch University Women now and in the future. Later they made a video of the most

interesting and enjoyable interviews and showed it at the anniversary meeting where it was enthusiastically received.

Instead of the expected 150 participants 250 showed up and for some time was a waiting list because of the fire safety requirements for the meeting hall

In short, the 95th anniversary of the VVAO Netherlands University Women Association was a huge success that Riemke looks back on with great satisfaction.

Again to Mongolia for PUM

In August Maarten went again to Mongolia for PUM – Netherlands senior experts. It was a follow-up visit for his project with an environmental consulting company in Ulaanbaatar. This year he also visited the city of Darkhan in the north of the country close to the border with Russia.

Nature conservation in The Hague

Since 2011 Maarten has been a board member of AVN, the General Society for Nature Conservation for The Hague and environs. This is an 87 years old lobby club for green interests in The Hague and the surrounding municipalities.

This year he worked on more AVN projects and was more active in policy matters and in the editorial board of the society's journal. One of his projects dealt with a rather disastrous plan for major maintenance in a public country estate near own home. This danger has now been avoided and there is further consultation with the Municipality of The Hague, which is the owner of this park, to arrive at a more realistic management plan aimed at maintaining the park's natural values.

We wish you all a very happy New Year.

The Hague, December 2013

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