

Remember 2020?!

In general, 2021 had much in common with '20. In this resum  I will not repeat what I wrote one year ago. That story is on this site and you may wish to (re)read it. All the good things of '20 continued in '21.

The biggest shock last year

On 14 september 2020, H&R's wedding date, the phone rang, it was Ruben, my second son, who calmly said the words most shocking in my life: 'Dad, I have ALS.' A year ago I could not write this, rather concentrated on the joy of their wedding. Having known a few ALS patients, in addition to what one hears and sees in the media, Ruben's declaration left me stunned, shocked me into bitter tears. Close to turning 84 then, I said to Ruben: 'That leaves us with comparable life expectancies son, three to ten years.' The inexpressible sadness lies in our age difference, nearly 32 years and the kind of life likely remaining for each of us.

In this epistle I will not dwell on the life Ruben and his wife Anne-Marie have been and are now leading. They have an internet account where they communicate the experiences they wish to share with those they love, people they have granted the right of access to their account with CARING BRIDGE. R&AM are adults who covet their privacy, as do my other children and partners (all ten of them). I will not write about their lives in 2021, leave it to them to write and publish as they see fit. Only when our lives and theirs touch will I perhaps report here.

Health and healing issues for Harry in 2021

My life has since mid March been complicated -over and above COVID restrictions- by a series of operations made inevitable by intense cancer of the nose: it had to go because it threatened my life. The most challenging choice was the reconstruction of my amputated nose by means of a generously excised area of skin from the forehead, remaining connected to major blood vessels for weeks and formed into a new nose by a specialized plastic surgeon. It involves a series of five operations spread over more than three months, starting mid March, last operation followed by four months of healing under professional home care.

That procedure required daily double wound care by a homecare nurses team. My 'Buurtzorg' team was competent and totally reliable, never missed a day, never caused an infection! By August the nose was showable and now (mid December) it looks like a perfectly normal nose, much better than the old one that had been frozen, burnt, cut physically or chemically over 40 years. All these troubles due to ignorance, sensitive skin and careless exposure to Southern Ontario sunshine in the years 1953 —> 1960.

Well, when all that was nearly over and we prepared the celebration of my 85th birthday, my dermatologist said it was high time to get a biopsy of a persistent sore on the calf of my right leg. It turned out to be a tumor that needed speedy removal. That was done early September, required 15 stitches to close and expected to be healed 12 days later with the appointment for stitches removal.

After two days the leg became very painful and a visit to emergency revealed a serious infection of the leg from ankle to knee: wondroos = erysipelas infection. I had to stay in the hospital, five days on antibiotics infusion and then a full 10 day oral antibiotics cure at home. The wound was reopened ((all 15 stitches removed on day 3), a hellish pain because no way to apply pain killers... Anyway, now I had two wounds to be cared for again (forehead not yet closed), cancel our holiday in Spain and be patient: 'healing will take six more weeks at least'. Tough luck! I could move about, when allowed by COVID rules even go to my fitness centre twice a week again, but when I sat my leg had to be up to maintain good circulation, hence healing of the gaping wound at an acceptable rate.

By the end of October the wound was nearly closed and experts considered me capable of caring for it myself, with Renate's help as requested. This also went for the head wound, that shrank from a diameter of > 6 cm end of May to 1.2 centimeter. The white bandage on my forehead so conspicuous on our Christmas card photo, covered and protected that wound till full closure by mid November. All in all the *forehead lap* operation performed by Professor Mark Mureau and his team at the Rotterdam Erasmus Medical Centre achieved a remarkable end result, for which I am profoundly grateful.

As for COVID, Harry had his BionTech vaccines in February and March, Renate her Astra-Zeneca in May and June. The two of us, working at home and going out little and with caution, remained free of the virus, several of the children did have it but relatively mildly so; advantage of youth. H & R's booster shots came in November and December, with annual flu shots in between. Enough of ill health.

People matter most

Like most people we went out far less than normally. Because we have a large house with on the South side a terrace, a serre/conservatory/glass-room, the lawn and flowerbeds, sculptures here and there, a waterway with a 30m hardwood dock and sitting space, it is attractive to invite people in the whole period from early spring to late autumn and that is what we did. All the

children dropped in several times in this year, as did sister Rika and husband Grant from Toronto. R&G were on a European tour, staying with us for Larissa's birthday in September and again for my birthday parties.

We typically had lunch- or dinner guests once a week, one to maximally four guests, conforming to the rules. Often we could be out on the terrace, or in the well ventilated glass-room. These guests meant not only kitchen efforts for Renate but also provided interesting conversations, a real need these strange days. Also very special were the repeated visits by Amy & David de Jong from Chicago, accompanied by their son Evan and daughter Sonja, during their Europe tour. With Covid caution they stayed at a hotel in a nearby town, spending time and meals with us for several days. By the way, with this visit, many times postponed, they were the sixth Herman & Stiny de Jong families coming to WbD. Single Paul now has his chance to complete this wonderful sequence!

Evan de Jong, high school graduate last year, is an accomplished organist and knowledgeable musician: he studied the family's European itinerary, found the best organs *en route*, contacted their principal organists and arranged visits to several churches where he not only chatted with the senior colleagues but also played the organs!! In the biggest church in WbD Evan gave a spontaneous 45m concert on our seventeenth century organ!

So all and all our hospitality (and Renate's culinary skills!) made for a rich social year in spite of virus restrictions! It is interaction with those close to us by family ties and cultural interests that makes lives fulfilled.

Holidays ? in 2021

In July, with vaccinations received and COVID incidence low, we ventured out for a 'road trip' through Northern Germany, visiting opa Dieter near the start and 15 days later near the finish. From Rhade we drove to Hamburg to see R's cousins Babs and Jochen who took us immediately to their camping 70 km North on the Plöner See. To camp with them, owning two adjacent roomy caravans close to the lake, was such fun and so relaxing. We saw the lovely town of Plön and made a boat trip on half a dozen lakes, enjoying warm weather and outdoors meals and drinks. After two nights and a swim before breakfast we left for the state of Mecklenburg/Vorpommern and its beautiful capital Schwerin. I found the landscape exceptionally beautiful, hills covered with golden grain-fields, lakes small and large everywhere, pretty lakeside towns and villages. The roads were all perfectly paved with a grey asphalt that never ever had a single pothole: gift of West Germany to East Germany after 1989's reunification!

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Schwerin has a stunning castle (look it up!) as the seat of the state parliament, situated on a land tongue next to the city, surrounded by the fabulous gardens called Burggarten. The one Sunday we spent there was far too short and I wish to return here! Remarkable was the absence of NL cars in this region: the Dutch trek to France, Spain or Italy, are still unaware of Northern Germany, of its natural and cultural treasures.

R had booked a small hotel in the heart of the Mecklenburg Lake district, a Van der Valk golf hotel where we stayed for 5 nights. A fine, civilized place in the middle of nowhere, a golfcourse next door, a weak to absent internet signal, a lake next-door where we swam every morning before breakfast! Perfect place to de-stress. We made a different daytrip each day and so enjoyed the landscape again and again, as well as the sunshine -only one rainy day our whole 16 day journey! If you want to know more about this region, which stretches to Rostock on the Baltic Sea, google it with Mecklenburger Seenplatte.

Our village was only 5 km from the Rostock to Berlin expressway and as we left our hotel we anticipated seeing Larissa and Chris in their home: we had not been there yet. Because that home does not have an optimal layout for sleeping-in guests and is five floors above street level without elevator. Renate had booked us a room in our favourite Berlin hotel, Maritime pro Arte, on Friedrichstraße a block from the famous boulevard Unter den Linden, where we stayed twice before and could park the car in their basement garage. We left it there, used public transport and UBER.

Arriving at L&C's place was like coming home: they managed to create an atmosphere warm and bright, like Schoener 18. Even two cats contribute to that atmosphere as Giulia and Luca do at home..! Given both young people's work duties, we found our activities as decided earlier: we spent a day in the Jewish Museum, where we had not yet seen the new wing added by the genius architect Liebeskind. We found both the new wing and the whole museum's rearranged, partly new contents so impressive and also very moving. That evening the six of us dined in a good Italian restaurant, on the street terrace.

The next day we went with Larissa and Kolja plus Yip, a friend from Utrecht, to a cinema lightshow about Van Gogh. While it was impressive, we found it could not match our Bordeaux experience a year earlier. After the show the boys were off to a festival in Poland; there Kolja found his lovely girlfriend Rike (see the Xmas card). We did not get to see Kolja's abode...

Germany's expressways are usually busy, with thousands of lorries occupying the right lanes. On Sundays, no lorries are allowed, which makes for much easier driving. We often take advantage of that state of affairs and so this time also. On Sunday morning 25 July we headed WSW to Rhade and after an evening with Dieter we headed home on Monday afternoon. There we noted that the Tokyo Olympics were in full swing: we had been 16 days without television..!

Harry's 85th birthday celebrations

Every five years we celebrate my birthday with exuberance (is called a *lustrum* birthday) ever since I became 60, so this was the sixth time. We invite close family and many friends, astronomy colleagues and other scholars, to celebrate, each time in a different, interesting venue. This time we found a beautiful park, paradise in sunshine called Arboretum close to us (www.bomenmuseum.nl) on the Sunday before my birthday because on 3 October it was already booked. We took a chance on the weather and were rewarded with perfect conditions as well as excellent catering. The whole *vrolijke* event was for just 40 people, 15 family members and 25 friends; that is fewer than earlier *lustra* due to COVID caution.

The following URL shows you who was there and where we were: son Vincent took all the photos; ten years ago Ruben had that chore!

The following link may not be active; if not it can be accessed by copy/paste into your browser.

<https://www.albelli.nl/onlinefotoboek-bekijken?widgetId=b5a9942f-6e28-498a-8f13-00be2850e84b>

This album for me marks the most joyful day of 2021!

A week later we celebrated my actual -3 October- birthday; it was cool and rainy but our spacious house with conservatory (serre, wintergreen, glass room) made it possible to enjoy each other's company and Renate's elaborate and tasty food. The same family members -except Rosita and Juliette, Larissa and Chris who had left for work, but now including Ruben and Anne-Marie as well as my cousin Ina Bousema and her son Ekke-Jan, were there for a very memorable day of laughter, bantering and serious talk. Larissa and Chris, Kolja and Friederieke (Rike for short) as well as Grant and Rika were our full 'room and board' guests for about a week, wonderfully 'gezellig' but tough on Renate, who is a generous and multi-talented hostess! We are blessed!

Concluding

The year 2021, an annus horribilis medically speaking, with beloved Ruben's diagnosis as the worst prognosis. On the other hand Harry's care and healing were optimal, Renate's daily sport-twice tennis, three times fitness of three

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kinds were only briefly interrupted by COVID rules, the other children and partners were active and fit. Opa Dieter turned 97 and continues twice weekly tennis! One of 2020's highlights -the Bordeaux experience- could have been repeated with a new -impressionists- program but for reluctance to fly in virus times. Renate's translations continued albeit at a slightly lower pace, Harry spent less time with politics, especially interest in the inexplicably banal developments in the US are waning. More time was spent on reading superb books, especially biographies. German politics unfolded the way they should in a democratic society, hooray!

Our garden and terrace became riots of colour again; how we love the seasons of our latitude! What we missed most were our weeks in Spain, the sun, the beaches, the sea, the friends, the food, wines and cava... Here's hoping for a lot of Spain in 2022! Otherwise, reread 2020 for our routines.

Harry

WbD, NL 17.12.2021