

Christmas **1999**

Dear

It has been a number of years that we did one of these communal epistles, as we were “too busy” at the relevant time or some such. However, we have missed these letters for our own periodic referral, a useful thing given our poor memories, and this year we are not too preoccupied with beaches, pools and associated pleasures and in fact have a bit of time to do so.

In order to give this letter a bit of exciting content, we will go back into 1998, when we took off for Europe to join the family for a celebration of the fact that moeder had been born a century ago, a celebration she missed by a mere five years! This was in middle September, when Holland normally manages to put some decent weather together. However, this year it chose to have one of those very cold and wet Autumns not only in Holland, but virtually everywhere we went in Europe. Nevertheless, we had a wonderful time. It was great to meet all the family again and to meet the latest additions to the clan. We also had some very special visits and stays with individual families, giving a better opportunity of getting re-acquainted.

While in Europe, we also went south, spent a horrific time in Sestriere in northern Italy where they plan to have the winter Olympics early next century, and where they already had the golf course closed when we got there because it was far too cold and most of the town was closed as it was too early for the skiers. So we left there sooner than planned and discovered the astounding delights of the Barolo area and wines! We found a fabulous winery-cum-hotel for a romantic room with a great view over the nearby old town. Fantastic day-trips in the scenic area full of old hill towns and vineyards. And, we were there when they were harvesting the grapes. What fun!

From there we travelled to Nice, where we had pre-arranged to stay in a most attractively located home overlooking Villefranche and Monaco in the far distance, just west of the city of Nice. We loved our “headquarters” and the views, above all the two-tier gardens with patio, grass, flowers and a large healthy hedge of aromatic rosemary(!). Inevitably, we made many day-trips into the beautiful surroundings, notably Eze(!), Grasse, and Aix-en-Provence. Nice itself was for the birds mostly because of the traffic problems, yet we visited several interesting museums and enjoyed some excellent if outrageously priced restaurants.

After a week in Nice, we continued further south into Italy for visits to Florence, Sienna, Volterra. In the latter, we overnighted in an old convent that had been converted into a rather modern and pricy hotel, where we looked out over the very old and very wonderful town, one

of our favourite stops. From here we travelled to Perugia where we joined friends as guests at the most unbelievable villa they had rented there, a very large and very old villa in great condition with elaborate formal and informal gardens, vineyards and farmland for animals. Unfortunately, even this far south, Europe had an unusually cold and damp autumn and without heating system the villa felt not nearly as comfortable as it looked and the beautiful and artistically tiled floor was real punishment on the (long) way to the washroom on bare feet during the night. Nevertheless, we had a very wonderful time visiting our friends and making day-trips to the scenic surrounds, including a day in Assisi, that had suffered considerable damage during an earthquake within the previous year. A visit to Deruta was made memorable by its artists doing very distinctive and attractive hand-painted pottery and ceramics. We could not resist a few samples and neither could our friends.

Linda hated to leave Italy and especially Tuscany but the time came for us to return to Holland for a small week with Lourens and Hazien, having had the first week with Leo and Elly. As always, we had a great time together and Henk even had an opportunity to play on the church organ while the women enjoyed some Tilburg shopping!

Once we were back in Canada, we had about three weeks to get organized for our hibernation in Florida, as we had committed to depart by November 11th, so a neighbouring couple that was having their house rebuilt could move in for the period we were away. A lot had to be packed into those weeks, friends to be seen, visits from the children and a very pregnant Marina among them! In fact, she had Matthew (our first grandson) on November 3 a few days after their visit here. Matthew turned out to be a most delightful baby, but for the first couple of months he gave his poor parents a pretty hard time, what with a longish stay in the hospital for unresponsive jaundice, followed by a fairly convincing case of colic!

Our trip south included a nice stay at Linda's parents, where we indulged in some exciting golf and meals with her parents at the country club. Our stay in Florida was warm and wonderful, with more than usual beachtime and golf because of the exceptionally warm and dry weather. Local ponds went from overflowing upon our arrival to totally dry by February. We enjoyed the Florida flora and fauna, and even discovered a to us "new bird", a cute and attractive so-called "green heron" of which we managed to get a neat close-up picture.

While we were there, Henk also got a pair of high-tech "in-the-ear" hearing aids that work well even if they did not return his hearing. However he is now virtually without any hearing unless he wears them, so we cannot complain. The problem now is that, because they are invisible, people assume he has normal hearing and has to explain that he does not.

So after a very enjoyable hibernation, we returned to our Toronto home to catch that precious time when nature bursts forth in fresh splendour and the garden begs for more attention than us "oldies" and especially Henk have the body to provide. However, the garden muddies along fine without us and for our big deck we buy lots of planters of bright flowers for us and our guests to delight in.

We had a hectic catch-up life upon our return. There was our grandson, the children, our friends and, of course, all our doctors for teeth, eyes, skin, stomach and what have you! It was very special to meet up with a 6-month old Matthew, who looked absolutely wonderful and of very happy disposition. Our several get-togethers with all the children were as always very special too and have become a nice tradition. Our deck saw a great deal of “traffic” this past summer, both because here too we had exceptionally warm and dry weather to permit us to entertain outdoors some two times per week!

Early on, Linda decided to proceed with her treacherous scheme to “go yellow” for our bedrooms and bathroom, with individualized yellows for each room! Now yellow is not an easy colour to do right the first time, but Linda’s extensive research and consultation did pay off. And even Henk likes the results! Except for the basement, we are now wallpaper-free.

We received some sad news from the Dutch family, where Gerdien and Hazien have run into some serious health problems. Everyone hopes and trusts that they will conquer these problems and that their discomforts will be manageable and quick in passing. There was also good news, in that Elly’s hip replacement operation was successful as expected and that she has not used a cane for a long time.

As this is being written (the second week in November), we had originally planned to be in Florida, looking forward to a visit there from Styneke and Stine Mooy-Felius for a couple of weeks. Unfortunately, all that had to be postponed as Henk ran into a diagnosis of angina pectoris that required early attention with an angiogram and treatment with a beta-blocker and nitro-glycerine (Henk always associated this with the excitement of neat but dangerous explosions, but it and nuclear science have found a role to play in the type of medical problem Henk is currently experiencing) In the meanwhile the angiogram has established the extent and the degree of a problem we face leading to the need for a minimum of a quadruple bypass operation. As we understand it, this fortunately has become a relatively routine operation, that should lick the problem through some basic re-plumbing. In other words, after a period of discomfort and recovery, we should still be able to get away from the worst of the cold and snow problems for some leisurely golf near our other abode.

Linda has singlehandedly been pushing the local medical establishment around to the point that surgery scheduled for some time in January, 2000, has now been moved to a third surgeon of top rank who is planning to do it some time during the week starting November 15th.

Well, Henk was hospitalized on Nov. 12th to stabilize him for the bypass operation on Nov. 16th. The surgical team did a great job and Henk looked remarkably good afterwards in spite of the major surgery. After another week under close supervision on the cardiac floor, it was back to home under Linda’s ongoing and loving care. Throughout, Linda has been indispensable and tireless, spending most of her time in the hospital, chasing staff to stay on top of Henk’s condition and needs, hiring a private nurse for daily close care, spending hours

on the phone back home in the evenings, advising relatives and friends, and once back home looking after Henk's all-day needs which were and are plenty. Henk's recovery has been steady and almost amazing, even though he has a long way to go before we can go to Florida and / or play golf!

As is common apparently, Henk developed some strange and hard-to-deal-with post-operative phobias that affected sleep and well-being and appeared to originate in the mind, but discontinuing the strong painkiller gradually resulted in a "return to normal", even if greater awareness of pain. The children have been wonderfully supportive during this difficult time too and will be visiting with the whole gang for Henk's forthcoming birthday. We may miss Florida and its warmth, but are happy now that we see that much more of the children and grandson Matthew! Expectations are that we can go South some time in late January,2000!

So it has been another eventful and exciting year in the lives of these two retirees. By the time the happy season nears an end, we hope to have our affairs in order for the southern trek, and to be of sufficient good health and cheers to help all of you welcome a new year of above-average hype. **BE WELL AND HAPPY THROUGHOUT!!**