

September 2008

After a struggle with non-Mac-compatible formats I succeed in putting the house in Scheveningen for sale at Marktplaats.nl and Kalaydo.de. The first day I get 38 hits but no e-mails. We worry about effect of the overkill of media attention for the mortgage situation in the States.

On the 2nd of September we have a welcome dinner for the group at the third year of Greek lessons in a Greek restaurant in Hasselt. We meet G. and exchange the latest news. He will leave for Samos soon and promises us to send pictures from time to time about the building progress. He will also make some enquiries about a Daihatsu jeep for us at the car dealer near Agios Kontantinou. After dinner we go “op café”, “on pub” as it is called in Flemish. We return home quite late.

October 2008

The financial crisis hits the Western world in full force. We ourselves are notably caught up in it since we get no bids at all for the house in Scheveningen. Besides that a family crisis makes things even worse. Murphy again?

When our mood is lowest G. sends us pictures of the building activities on our piece of land. It really cheers us up. On a second view we notice that the foundation is different from what we have on the plan from the architect. After some e-mailing and faxing with Takis a new plan is sent. There were “some problems” The master bedroom now is at the side of the house; we barely are able to prevent the bathroom to be built at the seaside. Fortunately it can be replaced with the study.

November 2008

In the darkest days of November we get a new set of pictures from Samos. Our house really starts to look like a house in an olive grove – which particular picture I make the desktop picture on my computers at home and at work. The building makes good progress. We suspect that there is a surplus of unemployed construction workers because of the crisis. And of course the unusual nice and sunny weather of 25°C. But that on the opposite is not good for the olives

As there is no progress in the sale of the house in Scheveningen, we decide to contact a stock broker.

December 2008/January 2009

The winter is mainly spent on supporting the family.

After Christmas we transfer another amount of money to Thanassis. At the same time, just before the New Year, I book a passage on the ferry boat from Ancona to Patras and back for our May holiday to get an early booking reduction. We have decided to take the car since we think we will need all of our camping equipment that first time in our houser. I also book a hotel in Modena since we want to drive the 1150 km from Maastricht to Ancona in two days to avoid the risk of missing the ferry due to traffic jams or a blocked St. Gothard's tunnel. Actually it will be one day and a half since we have to be at the harbour in Ancona at 11.30 pm.

One night when we drive back from Greek class the thermometer indicates -19°C outside the car. 3 metres above the road the air is so cold that it turns in a foggy mist. Fortunately it stays there and does not precipitate on the road where it will freeze over immediately. It also snows elaborately that winter; I e-mail a picture of our backyard to Takis. It is the coldest winter since a long time, as my nice multiyear bush of sage is frozen to death, I discover in spring.

At the end of January the family crisis seems to be solved for the major part and the house in Scheveningen may be emptied. We store the furniture which is relatively new in our living room and in my study in Maastricht, the rest is thrown away. Furthermore I scrutinize our belongings in Maastricht. For example we gathered a very nice set of china from stamps at the Albert Heijn's but it is rarely used. I pack it for Samos together with the surplus of glassware an kitchen utensils that have accumulated over the years.

February 2009

Ikea's has a 20% sales promotion of kitchen design parts so I buy all parts which are planned in our kitchen. Also the corner with showroom and display furniture is visited on a regular

base. We get hold of some chairs for the dining table with a 30% reduction. The shopping is a nice distraction from the visits to my nearby living mother whose health is deteriorating in a rapid way.

When the new charter flight schedules to Samos for 2009 are released on the internet I make a comparison and end up with Air Berlin from Düsseldorf. Favourable flight times, not too far away and guarded parking for a reasonable price. F.'s autumn holiday – his last autumn break in school holiday time before he retires - on the other hand will be in the last week of October when there are no more charter flights so that will have to be by Olympic Airways and/or Aegean Airlines via Athens.

March 2009

The building of the house continues steadily we see on the pictures. The terrace is a bit narrow so some e-mails and faxes are needed to correct it.

The house in Scheveningen still is not sold so after consulting the stock broker I put up an extra ad on Marktplaats.nl – with a lower price. When Takis calls us with a sad story leading up to a request for an early payment we are able to scrape together some money to satisfy him.

When I ask the moving company at work for advice it is revealed that they also do private business. A few weeks later we get a house call and after that we receive a proposal. Since it is about the price we found on the internet we decide to take the plunge – also literally because the container with furniture will be shipped to Athens by boat. July 6th everything will be collected and stowed in a container here in Maastricht and some three weeks later it will be on Samos.

Our friend S. lets us know she booked a flight from Brussels to Samos at the end of August to come and help us with the set-up of the furniture and what remains to be done around the house.

F. joins a visit of our Greek class to the Greek orthodox church in Houthalen in Belgium where a small community of (former) Greek miners lives. I have to work that evening. A few weeks later we attend the festivities for (Greek) Independence Day at the community centre over there. At the beginning it is a bit dull but later on lots of people join the Greek dances. At the end of the month we participate in a wine tasting, at a Greek deli also in Houthalen, where it shows that Greece is really trying to improve the quality of its wines. I'm driving so I only take a small sip of each glass but F. voluntarily offers to finish my glasses as well as his.

April 2008

Our concern about my mother's ill health and our nearing approach changes when my mother dies on Easter Monday at the age of almost 91. I am sad about the decline I witnessed the last six months but also relieved because it's over.

G.'s already left for Samos; he gave us some boxes to take with us in the car since they were too large/heavy for his suitcase on the plane. I stow the camping gear in the car to see if it all fits in. Although Takis has promised us to install a generator in case the electricity would not yet have been connected – a very bureaucratic operation – I assume we will have no power so we'll have to use the car battery and equipment with disposable batteries. The water and the toilet are already in working order, we are assured, so we gather we will not have to dig a latrine between the olive trees Everything fits in if every spare space is used, and I take some pictures to remind me of how things are packed. When F. helps me to take out some heavy things, he strains his back. Fortunately it is cured when we leave at the end of April.

We receive a text message from G. that he is leaving Samos due to family reasons, but his mate H. and his wife J. will still be around.

Just before we leave we get a phone call from the stock broker that the house in Scheveningen is sold, be it for far less money than we had hoped for. Now it only depends on whether the (young) buyer can get a mortgage.

April/May 2009

The outward journey: Saturday April 25th – Tuesday April 28th 2009

We leave Maastricht that Saturday morning at 6.15 pm with the car crammed full to almost the top; just a small strip left for the rear view mirror to look through. The GPS wants to send us via Liège in Belgium but we enter Germany earlier, at Aachen. The road is busy, it is clear

that the school holidays have started in the NL. We have a breakfast break at a nice viewpoint near a huge bridge across the Mosel. We brought our own food and drink so we don't have to queue in the *Raststätte*.

All the way through Germany till the south border with Switzerland it remains busy, also due to the fact that there are a lot of road works (because of the cold winter?). The delay is only half an hour however, according to the GPS, when we enter Switzerland. We don't have to stop to buy a Swiss toll road tax sticker, we already did that in the NL. I already checked back home that our GPS does not contain any information about Swiss speed cameras, which is strictly forbidden.

When we enter the country I see a sign about the St. Gothard's tunnel and I think it says something about half an hour delay, but it disappears too quickly to read it well. It appears that "half an hour" was very optimistic, for when we arrive at the tunnel the delay has increased to some one and a half hour. When we enter the tunnel we are astonished that it is only one traffic lane in each direction, we had thought there would be at least four lanes in total by now. No wonder traffic gets stuck so easily!

It's half past eight when we finally arrive at the hotel in Modena, tired. I had picked this Holiday Inn hotel because it was close to the highway, but as it turns out it is the other half of a road restaurant with a petrol tank station, separated by a tiny gate. The lady from the reception only appears after some waiting, and wearily tells us in broken English that there is no longer a parking garage available (as was mentioned on their website). We'll have to park the car in the non-guarded parking area in front of the hotel. We don't like it one bit with all the traffic passing along the highway in the middle of the night. We have a bite at the road restaurant and after that try to get some sleep but we are worried about our car.

The next morning we heave a sigh of relief when we find the car undamaged with all its contents in place. After a few hours we arrive in Ancona where we are directed on to the ferry in due time. The parking is tight so I (driver) get out via the passengers seat.

When the ferry sails we relax and have a long lunch break. We have a look around and then I book a cabin in stead of our sleepers seats (G. tipped us off that the left over cabins are sold at a low price when the ship is at sea). We do nothing much but for dining & wining and turn in early.

The next morning after breakfast we pass the huge hanging bridge from Rio to Antirio. We leave the ferry with a bit more than half an hour delay and head for Pireaus, through Patras. The motorway consists of three lanes for two directions. That brings up the principle of survival of the fittest in most Greek cars (and their drivers). Safest is to take the (paved) shoulder of the road although you have to take care not to hit anything at the side.

Nearing Athens the road turns in to a real highway (with toll to be paid – two times 2 euro) so we arrive at the harbour in Pireaus in good time, thanks to our GPS (which decided to take us through the old centre of Pireaus, to the astonishment of the locals).

We sail one hour late due to unclear reasons. Our ferry only has declining chairs which do not decline anymore, so we just hang around.

Tuesday April 28th 2009

We arrive at the harbour in Karlovassi also an hour late, which has the advantage that it is already dawning. Around seven o'clock we turn on to the last stretch of the unpaved road to our house. We now see the house in full glory for the first time. It all looks fine except the silly two young olive trees in cut-away holes on the terrace corners; we'll have to talk about that.

We cannot enter the house; it is locked. Because it's still early we decide to unpack the car first. After that I make coffee with the small camping gas stove and the tiny water kettle. The sun breaks through the clouds so we take our coats off.

At half past 9 we decide it is possible to visit H. and J. to say hello. They are just about out of bed but we pretend not to notice. We hand them the boxes for G. and H. accompanies us to G.'s house to put them there.

After that we drive to Karlovassi where we have an appointment with the lawyer, Giorgos Papakonstantinou, at 11 o'clock. He is not yet in but we wait in front of his door. A man approaches F. while I'm away for an errand, and utters something, but it is unintelligible. At the office of the notary, the lawyer's sister, next door, there is a note that she is away till May 4th. That doesn't help either. Suddenly we see an obituary note pinned to a telephone pole

across the street next to the church. It seems the father of the lawyer died and the funeral is this afternoon. That is what the man probably tried to tell F.. We take on the Greek attitude that we probably will not see the lawyer this holiday and will only be able to continue the tax matters coming summer...

We first have a pizza as an early lunch on the πλατεία and shop in the supermarket on the main traffic road where they have lots of things but little variety in sausages as bread filling. Back in Pevkos we visit the *taverna* where, after some calling out because it is still closed, there is a warm welcome with everybody. As a delayed Easter gift we give them a bottle of Dutch *advokaat*, egg-nogg brandy, with glasses, specifically για τις γυναίκες, for the women only.

After a while Thanassis accompanies us with the keys and we are get inside the house where we are very much pleased with what we see. Thanassis shows us how the generator works and leaves us to bring all the things inside. We take a closer look. The rooms are finished of nicely with different tiles on the floors of the study (shiny), bathroom (antiskid), and master bedroom and studio (beige); the ones in the kitchen/living hall are white/grey as we asked for to match the colours of the kitchen and living furniture. We try all windows and French doors as well as the shutters. Those are a shade darker blue than the ones from the neighbours which is perfect for us as it turns out later that it is almost exactly the colour of the doors from the kitchen cupboards.

I talk a walk to H. and J. to put the freezer packs from our cooler and some other things in their refrigerator as they have offered. On the way I take pictures of all the beautiful flowers and yes, there are orchids at the borders of our plot! In a corner of the road there is a relatively huge canyon and it seems to me that it might be a breeding place for birds of prey, a thing to investigate when we spend longer periods over here. The landscape is gorgeous.

J. hands us two large pieces of home made cake for tonight. Back home we put the folding chairs & pillows on the terrace and relax while watching the sunset and later on the myriads of stars in the clear sky. When the temperature drops a little bit we take out the flashlights when we go inside to brush our teeth before crawling in to our sleeping bags. We closed the windows and shutters at sunset so the isolated house has remained relatively warm.

Wednesday Arpil 29th 2009

We have arranged with Takis to pick us up in Karlovassi to drive to the Daihatsu car dealer to order a new car. We meet at the parking area near the (almost dried out) river and drive to Kampos Vourliotes in a bit of rain. There the boss welcomes us but it is his assistant Tony the mechanic who – to our surprise - assists us in fluent English with a British accent and likewise politeness. That is so handy when you try to explain that strange noise in the car which you only hear when your turn left and only at 30 kph going uphill We assume he worked in the UK for quite a while.

We finally decide upon a red Terios 4WD with automatic transmission. Outside there is a showroom model, we have a look. It looks okay with enough space in the back. We talk to-and-fro for a while about the price but as it turns out it is about the same price in the NL which we already suspected. We include an all-risk insurance which in its turn is cheaper than at home. For the Greek licence plates it is necessary that we obtain a Residence Permit from the police, which should be no problem since we all are EU. The boss writes us down on a piece of paper how to get one.

Takis drops us of at the parking in Karlovassi. We decide to have F.'s passport photograph taken for the Permit and walk uptown. In doing so we pass the lawyer's office and to our astonishment he is in. He beckons us in and after we express our condolences we talk business. We arrange to meet at the police station after lunch. F. goes to find a photographer for the shots and I go to the bank to pay the next amount of money to Thanassis. The clerk at the bank tells me that I need to pay 43 eurocents as commission. When I reply dryly "I can live with that" he and his colleagues burst into laughing comparing the 5-figure amount I just paid.

We run into H. and J. and Ronnie and Di from uphill on the πλατεία and follow their suggestion to have lunch in a cheap little local restaurant down the road. Now our Greek lessons pay off because there really are only locals who speak little English to explain us the menu of the day. It tastes nice.

At two o'clock we are at the police station. There we learn that our house is in Kampos Skoureika which is part of the municipality of Marathokampos and not Karlovassi, so they cannot help us. We arrange with Giorgos our lawyer to meet us tomorrow at Marathokampos where we at the same time can have a meeting with the accountant, Nicholas Kypraios, about our tax matters. He draws us a map of the little town and points out where we can park the car for we had read somewhere that the streets in Marathokampos are very narrow.

Back home we take a lazy afternoon. The temperature is very agreeable. We try the generator but it makes a hell of a lot of noise so we decide only to use it when we really need it. I read a book J. had borrowed me.

Thursday April 30th 2009

On the road to Marathokampos we suddenly have to drive into the side of the road because an enormous van approaches us, on the way to Skoureika. It seems there are some road works over there. As we drive on we notice there are several spots along the road where you can get out of the way when there is some big car or van coming up.

We park the car at the beginning of Marathokampos where the strange Dutch licence plates are observed with interest. The parking Giorgos mentioned is a bit further on but we don't mind the walk. The narrow streets in Marathokampos are not as narrow as we had expected, obviously the person who wrote that has never been to Koumeika!

The accountant is not in but his assistants are. When I give them the paperwork with prints from the electronic transactions made via our Dutch bank accounts there is some confusion. They had expected copies of transactions by Greek bank accounts only. I point out that I have given them the paperwork that is totally acceptable for the Dutch tax office. After some more talking between the assistants and Giorgos it is decided that we have to go to the bank in Karlovassi and ask them copies of the transactions on to Thanassis bank account. Furthermore it is concluded that the data on our AFM-papers are not correct: F. is supposed to be born on the Netherlands Antilles and we are not married. After we sign a declaration with the correct data we head for the police station.

We arrive at the police station at the same time a minivan full of shabby black people enters the premises. They look like African fugitives picked up at sea, which is exactly the case we learn as we talk to the officer on duty. They are led into the courtyard where they are to sit (handcuffed, F. notices). There is absolutely no time for Residence Permits today. It is agreed that we can go to the police station in Karlovassi.

So we drive to Karlovassi again but the superintendent there can spare us no time today. We have to come back Saturday, since tomorrow, Labour Day, is a public holiday, and we are leaving again Sunday evening. Since we are in town again we visit the bank with the paperwork for the taxes. There an elderly self-important clerk tells us that it is not possible to provide us with copies from Thanassis' bank account because it would violate privacy regulations – which I had already expected. Giorgos assures us he will find a way to sort things out so I hand him our pile of paperwork.

We have lunch on the *πλατεία* and after that we buy Greek prepaid sim cards for the telephone which are provided without registration. I cannot get it to work but the battery of my (old) phone is as good as empty. F.'s one works after a while.

Back home I refresh the cool packs at H.'s who tells me there has been an madman's attack on the Dutch royal family today during the Queen's Day Parade. The royal family is not hurt but several other people are killed. I decline his offer to come and watch it on tv and walk back, relieved that we are in Greece and not in the NL.

Friday May 1st 2009

Today is a day of feast. We drive to Balos, all together six people, via a bumpy stony country road (which might be handy for the moving van when it comes, so it won't have to pass through the narrow streets of Koumeika). For our car it is a bit tricky since the bottom of the car is lower than that from a jeep which the others drive. We decide to take the "normal" road when we go back.

H. has booked us a table in his favourite restaurant. When we are seated we are joined by 3rd generation Greek-American B. from New York who lives in Koumeika in her mother's house for the moment. She also has an apartment in Munich from her deceased German husband. Who looked like F. we learn as she gets emotional....

We notice a car with a garland of flowers on its nose. We are told that is because today is also Demeter's day, the goddess of the fertile lands ... Some people also hang garlands above their front door. Seems like a nice gesture for us to do next year.

Lunch is delicious and we stick around for a long time. The *νύφη*, the daughter in law of the owner, comes around to show us her new baby-boy. When her father arrives and I tell him in Greek that the baby has his eyes "έχει τα μάτια σας", he grins from ear to ear.

We wind up in the little *καφενείο* in Koumeika where an old *γιαγιά* (grandma) runs the place (actually the Greek call such a person "auntie", "θεία"). B. and the Belgians know her for a long time and worriedly inquire after her health. She's in a lot of pain in her tummy, so she tells, the doctors don't want to do surgery but just gave her pills. Our *παρέα* (group of friends) concludes that it might be something terminal considering her age. Deep in my heart I hope she won't pass away while we're here at summer because according to G. a funeral is a real Greek tragedy with loud lamenting which lasts more than a few days ...

(As it turns out she suffers from gallstones which are removed successfully just before we arrive the next time.)

The mail is delivered in this *καφενείο* and everybody sighs when they open unintelligible letters from bureaucratic offices. Our mail is supposed to be delivered in Skoureika but if we wish it can also be delivered here in Koumeika.

It is already dark when we drive back. In the fields we see some animals run away from the road. They look like a sort of cats but when we are able to take another look we decide they must be the jackals we heard about. They disappear too quickly for a picture. Their habitat stretches out from above the Sahara to Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and Samos as one of the few Aegean islands. They now partially feed on the remainders left at the garbage containers.

Saturday May 2nd 2009

We start the day by measuring the house thoroughly from top to toe. I draw the outlines of the kitchen and living on the floor with some chalk to estimate the space that is left between the furniture. The tv-connection is at the opposite corner from where we had planned the tv so we change the design of the living a bit. Outside we have a look at the surrounding "garden" as where we would like a swimming pool and a garden house next year when we have saved enough money again.

We have a light lunch for tonight there is a dinner at the *taverna* with the mayor of Skoureika in honour of his birthday for which our *παρέα* is also invited. At two o'clock we present ourselves at the police station in Karlovassi again, with Giorgos. We hand him a pile of papers concerning our credibility (literally) and F. has to answer some questions about his income when he is retired. Giorgos is perplexed as he hears what is the difference between his gross and nett income, but understands it as we explain how much unemployment or welfare benefit a person receives in the NL. Since formalities are finished now he also wants to know how we deal with our old parents when they become ill or disabled. We explain the system of private nursing homes whereupon he tells us that when his father got ill his sister took him into her house, as is the tradition in Greece. But since Maria has a career of her own, she hired a nurse for 24 hours a day who also came to live in her house, so she could continue her notary.

We visit a store which sells gas cookers, which Ronnie recommended us. When we tell Dimitris, who speaks a few words of English, that we are friends of Ronnie's and that we want to buy a gas cooker with a gas oven from him, he is all service. The price of a refrigerator seems a bit high to me however. He gives us his card and we agree to send him a fax a few weeks before we arrive this summer to definitely order the stove which he will connect with a gas bottle at our house.

We spend another lazy afternoon on our terrace. At five o'clock we get a phone call from Takis that the dinner tonight is cancelled because of an important football match which is broadcasted live tonight. And if we could be so kind as to come to the *taverna* because there is something with money his father wants to discuss. Since we did foresee that we already have determined our strategy concerning the issue. We listen to the sad story with an attentive look on our face and sigh a lot when we agree to pay some more a bit earlier than planned. Subsequently we are invited to attend the baptism of Thanassis' second grandson, the son of his daughter Soula, tomorrow at the church in Karlovassi.

H. drops by and invites us for a dinner in Balos but since we already had some wine we decline the offer as we do not want to drive anymore. We eat some leftovers and pack up things for tomorrow.

Sunday May 3rd 2009

We pack the car with the rest of the things and present ourselves at the church in Karlovassi a little bit before 11 o'clock. The church is decorated festively (blue, a boy) with an enormous bunny at the entrance. Inside we present our gift to the mother and then the spectacle starts.

First there is an endless story by the *pope* of which we understand nothing. The godfather and godmother take care of the baby during the whole ceremony, the mother and father stand second-row. The godfather pays everything by the way. Finally the baby is undressed, and, aproned, the godfather oils the whole baby (including genitals). Then he hands the boy to the *pope*, who, after naming him Stavros according to the grandfather on the paternal side, as is tradition, immerses him completely in the (warmed) water in the font, upside down, for several times. Of course the baby starts to cry on the top of his voice, and at one point I see him standing up in the water, clinging to the rim of the font desperately, with a look of total bewilderment in his eyes while the tears roll over his cheeks. It's a good thing the mother is not there to witness it otherwise she would have snatched him out of the tub.

The baby is changed into new clothes at a table at the side, behind the pillars, by the loving hands of his mother. When the boy is carried back to the *pope* at the font, the baby starts to cry again, but there is no more skinny-dipping for him. Afterwards we congratulate everybody (men kissing men as well) and get a little present (a small airplane, because it's a boy?) as souvenir. We also get a little pudding which we are supposed to eat on the spot.

We have lunch with our *παρέα* at the quai near the harbour of Karlovassi. It is being renovated to become a sort of boulevard for (local?) tourists. When we have finished we say goodbye to the Belgians and slowly drive to the part of the harbour where the ferry will arrive. There we park the car and have some cappuccinos to pass the time.

The journey back – Sunday May 3rd – Tuesday May 5th

After spending the night on the no-longer-declining chairs of the ferry, we drive into Pireaus early Monday morning, just before the rush hour. We don't want to drive through the old city centre again so we decide to follow the main road alongside the harbour, in order to find the highway to Corinth and Patras. At the end of the harbour we get lost but a nice truck driver beckons us to follow him and after a short while we are on the right track again. We want to stop for coffee somewhere but there is no road restaurant in sight, so it happens that F. has to shout at me in order to keep me awake when I become sleepy.

Only at the outskirts of Patras we stop for a piece of chocolate and a fill. Boarding the ferry causes no problem; we have to park tightly at one side of the deck although there are not many cars to join us. F. wants to rest so he books a cabin straight away instead of waiting till we are at full sea so we pay the full price as well. On second thought it seems a good idea for we are exhausted and have a nice nap before dinner.

We have another nice dinner and after that chat with a Dutch couple that owns a sailing boat at Levkas near Ioannina. Tuesday morning we leave the ferry at Ancona well-rested and go north. Roads are busy around Milan, where drivers spontaneously decide for you that you can move over to the third lane since they want to overtake a car in the first lane, just as you want to overtake them. The St.Gothard's tunnel gives us no problem since the traffic is really slow.

We enter Germany at 8 o'clock in the evening, when it starts to get dark. It also starts to rain heavily. At one point the rain is so bad that we can no longer distinguish the white stripes on the asphalt. We decide to follow a truck at a safe distance; all that brings down our speed to 90 kph. It is only at Aachen, 30 km from home, that the rains stops. With considerable delay we arrive home early Wednesday morning, where we turn on the electric blankets as we roll into bed (côld.....)

May/June 2009

The first thing we do in our spare time is ordering the kitchen cupboards and top at Ikea's and the rest of the furniture, after we filled in the exact sizes of the house in our plans. We also park the furniture of my mother's which we want to re-use in our house in Maastricht. At one

point there is hardly room to move in several rooms. We also pay the promised amount of money to Thanassis.

During the weekends of Ascension and Whit Sunday and Monday we study Greek for the exams are approaching. It really is difficult with all the various tenses and reciprocal and reflexive verbs. During the exam J. has an attack of cardiac arrhythmia and although his implanted defibrillator works perfectly he has to be taken to hospital. We all have a fright and find it difficult to concentrate after that. But we all pass but K. who claims he really has had no time to study – and of course J. who has recovered so far but hasn't been able to finish the exam. It's a pity we cannot attend the "proclamation" (presentation of the diplomas) because of other appointments.

We have a look at several sales promotions for a roll-up sunshade at the façade of our house, but finally decide not to buy it because – we are advised - the hollow stones of our house, built in for isolation, do not support that much weight. Instead we buy two large suspending parasols.

After some delay the money from the house in Scheveningen comes through and we can make the urgently awaited deposits. The car dealer calls us from Samos that they are awaiting F.'s residence permit. Giorgos our lawyer cannot collect it for us so we'll have to deal with that the first day we arrive on Samos being July 21st. We already booked a rental car through Sandy's just to be sure. Before we forget we also book a parking place at Düsseldorf Airport. F. orders a new high-tech telescope from a firm in Hasselt and since the software is only Windows-compatible we also buy a new Mac Book Air on which you can also install Windows XP. His 3-year-old iBook G4 is sold in no time for a good price to a colleague of mine at the university.

I send an e-mail to the Mathematics Department of the Aegean University in Karlovassi if they can offer me wireless internet facilities as a visiting colleague from the Maastricht University, but I get no answer, nor when I send the same message by fax a month later.

Ikea's call that there has been a delay with the delivery of our order. My heart misses a few beats but it turns out that it only concerns a few small items which I can take in the hand luggage on the airplane. I wish they had told that at the beginning of the conversation ... I arrange that they are delivered after August 3rd, when I am back from Samos.

I call Takis to inquire after the electricity connection and the removal of the olive trees out of the terrace. The answers remain vague but I make the mistake of mentioning that the selling of our house in Scheveningen has been completed. And of course the next day he calls again with another sad story of how badly they need the remaining sum of money really now and not in several weeks and so on. We decide we are willing to pay the remaining money but for a last symbolical amount, which message is received very badly. It comes down to us not trusting them and that after all they did for us .. I hang up and we stick to our plan. We send another fax to Giorgos and ask him to explain the European way of doing business to Thanassis and his short-tempered son Takis.

After I strain my back which is cured in time fortunately and some harassment with the fabrication of covers for the club chairs of my mother's, we prepare for the next step: the shipment of the furniture to Samos.

Juli 2009

After three idle attempts to order an adjustable shower cabinet with the "aid" of an uninterested staff at the Hornbach's in Kerkrade, we give up and instead drive to the Hornbach nearby across the border with Germany, where we are politely assisted with our purchase.

We spend the weekend of F.'s birthday and our wedding anniversary with organizing the furniture. The carton removal boxes are a bit bent-in at the sides because of the long time they have been standing on top of each other, but nothing is broken so far. I fill them to the brim with the last items. We also sticker every item as to where it should be put. F. hauls the bulky mattresses downstairs. As a reward we treat ourselves to a dinner downtown together with our German friend RS.

The next Monday morning, July 6th, the moving van arrives at 7.30. The men wrap up everything in carton, new EU-regulations. They also take out the kitchen furniture of Ikea's which has been parked at their place, in order to pack it all in the sea container which is to arrive at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Everything is stowed and at the end it seems we have 8

cubic metres left of the 30. We could have bought a little moped then, but perhaps it is better to buy it on Samos because of the service you might need. The driver tells F. that the container is taken to Born where it is transferred on to a barge and sailed to Rotterdam via the Meuse. Then it is transferred to a seaworthy vessel to Athens/Piraeus where it is put on a van which will take the ferry to Samos. That fits, we have seen so while we were on that ferry.

I do not witness the last parts of this episode since I had to go to work. I keep on fearing that some major items may have been forgotten and am only (partly) reassured when I have inspected every room, the garage and the backyard on my return. But I still have visions of the beautiful glass tops of our tables which will break on the stony bumpy roads on the island

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As a last item before we leave I send e-mails with our Greek gsm numbers to Takis and the moving company and print a list of the contents of all the boxes and the shipped furniture.

July/August 2009

The 21st of July we arrive on a hot and windy Samos. After collecting the rented car we head for our house. Inside it is a bit warm although Thanassis had opened some windows for ventilation. After a short visit to the supermarket in Pythagorion we stop by the *taverna* to say hello to everybody. When I ask about the container Takis mumbles something vague with “August” in it, which we don’t understand.

The next day we go to Karlovassi for some more shopping and to see Giorgos the lawyer. He tries to help us with the container but all he accomplishes is that we have to fill in some forms at the police station which have to be send to Athens by messenger. Calling the Dutch removal firm doesn’t seem to help either.

Via Giorgos we get in touch with a lady at an insurance office where we get an insurance for the house. To insure the house against earthquakes is very expensive so we leave that out. She fills out some forms for us and in a few days we may collect the application.

In the meanwhile we continue camping in our house. Especially sleeping on the air mattresses tells us that we are not young anymore. During the day we clean the house inside out and from top to toe. The generator is used for activating the vacuum cleaner – there is a lot of sand due to the wind. At night we study the sunset and the stars and the moon. Inside we find our way with flashlights and candles. Some scorpions and a gecko appear on the terrace and provide diversion.

Thanks to the efforts of the car dealer our car is delivered within a few days. We had collected F.’s Residence Permit the next morning after our arrival on Samos at the police station in Marathokampos and immediately handed it over to the boss of the Suzuki car dealer for the licence plates. So from that first Friday we are the proud owners of a fire-engine red Daihatsu Terios 4WD. We don’t have to extend the contract of the rented car which is returned the same day.

Also dear Dimitris from Elektrochora in Karlovassi delivers our gas cooker as promised right on time, together with a gas bottle. He even rememberes to bring a hammer drill to drill a hole in the kitchen wall for the gas tube to the gas bottle outside.

When we drive to Karlovassi to collect the insurance papers, a small bush fire has started on the shoulder of a hill near the *taverna*. The fire brigade arrives with heavy equipment and of course we are just in the narrow streets of Koumeika when we run into them. With sweaty hands we are able to manoeuvre our car out of the way. The fire is extinguished quickly but it did give us a fright. Later on we (re-)discover the bumpy stony country road around Koumeika, where you can turn off to an ever bumpier, very steep road to R & D’s house. R & D by the way decide to finally insure their house too, after the bush fire.

At night we get regular visits by a young, very thin tomcat which we christen “Skinny” on the spot. We feed him some bites but not too much since he is supposed to take care of himself and to catch mice and rats. He doesn’t visit us every day so we suspect he also visits the small weekend houses on the pebbly beach for food as well (the houses being only occupied in the weekends). But, after a few weeks, our Swiss and Flemish neighbours on the hillside next to us arrive, and they feed him lots of cat food, we hear through the grapevine. One day as he stops by we notice he is really fat, so we rename him “Spekkie” (“Spe(c)k“ being Dutch/German for very fat pork meat or blubber and a Dutch sort of candy) instead.

In the meanwhile we wait and we wait. Mornings we sometimes drive to Karlovassi to see if there are any new developments. We discover more specialized stores (paint, electrical

supplies, plumber supplies) and the cheap Chinese clothes shops, where the staff talk in Chinese between them and in Greek with a Chinese accent to the customers. In the afternoon we have a siesta inside on the uncomfortable air mattresses or in the reclining camping chairs. With the shutters closed and all the windows ajar the temperature is just bearable. Around 6 o'clock in the afternoon there is shade again on the little terrace outside the master bedroom so we sit there and read some freshly bought detective stories until dinnertime. Sunday afternoons there is live music at the *taverna* as a diversion. I take on a do-it-yourself course on land surveying and lay out the contours of a future swimming pool and an observatory for F.'s telescope on the lower plateau with stones.

After two weeks of waiting there is still no sign of the container. It's the same old song: everything that can go wrong, has gone wrong. After much pushing and pulling the Dutch removal firm admits that it is not true that 2 times a week a ship leaves for Athens from Rotterdam but only once every two weeks. And of course it had just left when our container arrived. Then the container seems to have been unloaded in Thessaloniki instead of Athens. And when it was shipped to Athens again the paperwork went missing. And then we had to pay an extra 500 euro as deposit for the container to ship it to Samos. I leave Samos after two frustrating weeks for I have to get back to work, leaving F. to camp until I return. Or until the container arrives.

After another two weeks with lots of text messages between us I return to Samos with big bags of useful things like spare bulbs for flashlights.

August/September 2009

After endless delays (holiday season Ma'am, there is no room on the ferry to Samos) the van with our container finally arrives one morning at the end of August. It is truly an emotional moment. The Athenian employees of the removal firm are really uncomfortable on such a laid-back island. They grumble about the narrow streets in Koumeika like we predicted (2 cm space under the old balconies overhanging the streets) and now they cannot make the last turn to the terrace so they have to carry everything for some 50 metres to put it inside the house. They grumble even more when they see that we had packed a transport trolley but it comes out of the container as one of the last items. Within three hours they have unpacked everything and hurry back to the harbour – via the bumpy stony country road we are told later, not via Koumeika. R. happens to be at the harbour when the van manoeuvres back onto the ferry and takes some pictures.

First we collect the parts of our bed and assemble it. I consult my list to dig up the linen out of one of the boxes and that afternoon we have our first real siesta; what a luxury! We also sleep like a log that night and awake as fresh as a rose.

We keep up a steady pace the two weeks F. has left of his Summer holiday. When the sun peeps over the mountains we get up, we have a small coffee- and lunch break and we eat at dusk, after which we roll into our bed exhausted. One afternoon we have to evacuate our house because of the smoke of a nearby (third) bush fire. The fire brigade works their butt off so there is no real danger. One of the rumours that go around is that there is an arsonist opposing building houses for *pensionados* instead of maintaining the olive groves.

When Thanassis comes to visit us one morning he is perplexed by the progress we have made with the kitchen which we assembled with just the two of us. We briefly discuss the possibilities of making a swimming pool and a concrete base for the observatory next winter. We also promise him to pay for the extra work he (voluntarily) did on making the lower plateaus. He points out a piece of land in the corner of our plot which formally belonged to some neighbour but which he has bought from him and that we can buy from him so we really have a square plot from the upper road to the lower beach road. He doesn't ask much so we agree.

What leads to more discussion is the access road on our property to the plot next to us. Thanassis insists that it is common use here to build the access road like that, but we point out that it really is our property and that we do not like it to remain open after the building on the neighbouring plot has been finished. There is a junction from the lower beach road on to that plot which must be used. We get the impression that Thanassis is involved in a fight about on whose land the lower access road is. Eventually Thanassis remarks that we have to make a deal with the future neighbours then. Since they are D&L who now live the house next to Swiss C&R we raise the subject next time we see them. They understand the situation and

have no problem by using the lower access road. D. even suggests putting up a stone wall on the upper access road across our land but we decide to tolerate it for as long as there are construction activities going on. Although that might be a long time since D&L have trouble selling their “old” house on the hilltop, partly due to the worldwide crisis.

Around the 23rd of August we attend the feast of the Παναγία, the All Saints of the little church in Pevkos. In the evening there is an hour of singing by the *popes* and some villagers, after which the parish goes to communion and has a meal. Since we do not know if we also are supposed to go to communion as non-catholics, we return home.

And on we go with the work. Besides from one broken cocktail glass and the door of the glass cabinet, everything has arrived undamaged. The wind is quite strong at times, so one day we must climb down the land to pick up all the pieces of carton which have been blown away from under the heavy stones we put on top of them. Reversing the hinge of the refrigerator takes half a day because the unusual sized bolts won't come loose. With a lot of sweat and swearing we finally succeed. We are able to fit the 80 cm wide shower cabinet on the 78 cm wide ceramic shower floor after solving some technical riddles. After we filled all the garbage containers in the area repeatedly with our debris the end of F.'s holiday nears. In the evening we sit on the terrace with light of the solar lamps we dug up from the boxes, since the date of the electricity connection still remains wrapped in a cloud of mystery. For now we pass along H.'s house every day to refresh the cool packs for the cooling box and take out the food of the day from the refrigerator over there. The heat of summer is really over its peak, it started decreasing somewhere around half August.

I drive F. to the airport on the last day of August. Then I visit Manolis' Summer Time bar for a cappuccino with a fresh Dutch newspaper and after lunch at good old Stelios' and Jade's and some shopping at the Lidl's I pick up my friend S. from the airport. She arrives from Brussels as the sun sets. We hurry back home but when we are at the steep narrow unlit junction I decide to drive on to the other, not so steep and broader junction since it is already dark. Via the stony bumpy country road we get home.

In the 2 ½ weeks of S.'s stay she assembles most of the remaining furniture and equipment while I unpack some 50+ boxes. We find a firm where we buy some paving stones as reinforcements for the holder of the satellite dish and the feet of the suspending parasols. We make some leisure trips in the surroundings but during the day it still is too hot to take long walks. Except for the 1 ½ day that it rains, but then you can hardly get around because of the big puddles everywhere. When Thanassis comes to fix the leaking toilet we have to use lots of floorcloths to keep the mud outside.

After the rainy days we take a walk to Skoureika. The first part leads us through the burnt hills from the last bushfire. In Skoureika we have a drink in a *καφενείο* where we are eyed curiously by the always present old men. Only one of them speaks some words of German. It is also the post office, a elderly lady explains us in clearly audible Greek (later on I think she must be the school teacher being able to understand that for foreigners she has to articulate and speak slowly). The big church is closed so we only take a picture of the façade. On the way back I discover a break in the overgroundwaterworks near the little church of Παναγία, the water spills over the road. I call Thanassis to report it, he is also a sort of deputy mayor of the community. But to my utter frustration I cannot find the word for “broken” in Greek. He understands however and the moment I put away my cell phone I remember the word, “*χαλασμένος*”. We say hello to G. and Dian when we pass their house, they just arrived from Belgium.

The Sundays practically everybody from the *παρέα* is present in the *taverna*: We, Swiss C&R, American B. and the Flemish G&D, R&D and D&L. Only H&J will arrive in the second half of October, and of course poor F. is missing - he is preparing to start his last year in school. The table next to us is regularly occupied by a group of Austrian/Hungarian/German people who have houses in Kokkari – the Double Monarchy I call them jokingly. One of them is a retired opera singer and sometimes she sings along with Makis. Although for some Greek country songs I find her opera voice not so suitable. Y&N only were present at the beginning of the summer, we haven't seen them since. One day B. brings along her ill-looking stepfather and her friend sweet M., who obviously has had a complete silicon work-over. S. indulges in the Greek dances, on her first day she combines it with too much wine (or too little water) and rolls in her bed completely dressed after we return home at 7 o'clock in the evening. I do join some dances but I rather sit and watch after those weeks of hard work.

We make a trip to the valley of the nightingales but apart from the fact that they mainly sing in springtime, the atmosphere is disturbed by the loud noise from a chain-saw in the vineyard nearby. The beautiful landscape with wild cyclamens and the view from the mountain village of Manolatis compensate the disturbance.

In Mytinili we visit the museum of natural sciences which has expanded with a room showing displays on traditional Samian costumes (?) and, more interesting, on artefacts from the time of the Turkish reign. They do not sell books on Samian flora and fauna, but those I find in the bookstore in the mall at Vathi (Samos-Town).

The house nears completion when I drop S. at the airport. Only the electricity connection is postponed several times due to urgent other matters. On the way back from the airport I collect the new glass door for the cabinet from the glass factory in Karlovassi (G. tipped me off). It is only wrapped in a newspaper so I set up a new record in slow-driving back home – not via the country road but through the narrow (paved) streets of Koumeika for a change. The door fits.

The last Saturday of my stay I invite the παρέα over for coffee with μπάκλαβα to have a look at the new design of the house. G. gives me some pepperplants and a cutting of a wild succulent as a beginning for the garden; he promises to water them while he's still there. C&R had already invited me over for dinner the night before as goodbye, they leave for Zürich around the same time as I fly to Düsseldorf. R&D will leave a few days after me. D&L already have gone.

Sunday morning I put all the gear outside the house inside, in the studio and in the study. Thanassis offers a proposal for the costs of a swimming pool and the concrete base for the observatory; it sure doesn't get cheaper each year. In the *taverna* Makis' band performs live for the last time of the season and at the end everybody says goodbye to everybody wishing a “καλό χειμώνα”, “good winter”, already.

Next morning I leave early and honk the horn as I pass the houses of our friends. At the airport I disconnect one pole of the car battery as advised. Inside the departure area I say goodbye to an agitated C&R for of course their taxi did not show up and they had to call G. to get a ride to the airport.

F. picks me up when I arrive in Düsseldorf in time – no four hour delay like he had on his return due to a strike. His senior day off had been switched to Friday but fortunately he had been able to arrange something so I did not have to carry the heavy bags on and off several trains.

September/October 2009

In the meanwhile the fourth year of the Greek course has started – 10 pupils. Only G. is not yet present – he will return in November from Samos. I scan my notes every week and mail them to him. For a Christmas present I collect all the songs we have learned in the last 3 ½ years plus some popular ones from the *taverna* plus the lyrics and the translation in order to put them on a CD for all of the group. A. informs us that Dalaras will go on tour next year through Europe, he will visit Amsterdam, Brussels and Düsseldorf exactly in the period F. has his (last) school holiday in May when we are staying on Samos. Pity!

After a few e-mails Takis informs us that the electricity will finally be connected in the middle of October. We had heard from G. that the men from the company have been around earlier but did not have the right cables so they left ... The price is three times as high as we first calculated but we want it desperately so we pay again. We definitely skip our plans to visit New York next Christmas holiday – been too busy during summer - and instead we book a one day trip to London by Eurostar train from Brussels to visit a special exhibition in the British Museum.

Just before we leave for Samos in F.'s autumn break I see that the flight schedules for next year have been released. I do some research for the May holiday next year – F. has two weeks off then. Sunweb, the Dutch tour operator, offers the earliest charters to Samos as from April 30th, when the May holidays start, but only for one week return trips. German wings offers cheap early morning flights from Cologne to Athens where you can get a connection to Samos the same day, but there is only a very expensive guarded parking area there. Finally I find an offer from Lufthansa from good old Düsseldorf to Athens via Munich early mornings so we can get to Samos on the same day. There are only a few cheap seats left so I book right away.

October/November 2009

We leave from Düsseldorf in pouring rain and arrive likewise in Athens. At the metro station I manage to have a clear conversation with the ticket salesman in Greek as about what our best ticket is from and to “our” metro station in Athens today and tomorrow. We get there rather quickly and my memory proves to be correct: there is no escalator the last stretch up so we have to carry our bags upstairs. Some nice Greeks help me. We leave the luggage in the hotel and hurry to the new Acropolis Museum through unlit streets – break down? I had booked 1 euro tickets for each of us via the internet when it opened in April. We have a look around but only for half an hour before it starts closing. We eat at the Plaka and turn in.

The next morning the rain is as heavy so we arrive on Samos with some delay. Our Terios awaits us loyally and the battery is connected again in no time. We drive to Pevkos where a few extra poles on our plot are the proof that the electricity indeed has been connected, hooray! We try out everything and switch on the refrigerator. What a luxury! The isolation keeps the house warm at night so we don’t need the electric heaters; during the day it is a comfortable 22°C in spite of the cloudy sky. We empty some cans for dinner since the supermarkets are closed on Sundays.

We start the next day, Monday, by shopping in the supermarket in Karlovassi after which we visit Giorgos the lawyer. He frowns elaborately when he tells us that there is a complication in the tax matters according to the accountant in so far as that the contracts are in Takis’ name and all the payments have been made to Thanassis. We don’t understand a thing but promise to contact them. Matters should be solved before the end of December. Also Giorgos has not been able to get back the 500 euro deposit for the container, the number I gave him was a fax number and not a telephone number??

We drive back home where I try out our electric bread machine; it gives a rather decent loaf of bread. The laundry machine also works perfect; the water tubing is connected to the warm water installation so I get a shiny white result. Must remember to connect it to the cold water in summer!

We spend the week mainly by handling the last jobs in a relaxed way. For instance suddenly we get inspired as how to solve the problem of the missing suspension hooks for the hood in the kitchen: we take some strips of wood with hand-made notches and attach those to the inside of the kitchen cupboard. Et voilà! A big vacuum cleaning also never fails to make things look better. F. performs miracles by succeeding in the intricate job of suspending the big fans with illumination to the ceiling, with my aid, by the trial-and-error method. I attach all the plugs to the coax cables for the satellite television but after we connect everything we get no signal from the satellite. Perhaps we are too impatient or too inaccurate in positioning the dish; we decide to call in an expert next time we are here. So at night I watch the DVD’s of “Who pays the ferryman”; the 70’s setting is really outmoded (which will become nostalgic), but the story itself really is nice so I watch interestedly.

The sealing of the holes between the façade and the roof tiles and the deposition of some poison so far has had the result that we do not hear any more animals running around above our heads. Just to be sure I attach some extra gauze in front of the opening under the porch above the front door and put some extra plaster in some last remaining holes. F. repairs a few patches of broken plaster inside.

In the meantime we immensely enjoy our beautiful house. I bought some flower bulbs which I put in the ground in front of the terrace. We’ll see. The weather has improved so when Takis and Thanassis visit us we have an ouzo on the terrace to celebrate our contract on the swimming pool and the concrete floor for the observatory. Takis, like us, doesn’t understand a thing about Giorgos remarks about his name on the contracts and claims everything is on his father’s name. When Giorgos calls us again I try to explain this to him and ask him to contact Thanassis again. Giorgos promises to call us back but does not do so before we return to the NL (I fax him from work afterwards and also send him all the receipts of the container by normal registered mail). We return the cables and all other accessories from the generator to the *taverna*; nobody is in so I leave them in a corner of the yard near the beer crates.

Skinny regularly passes by – he really is skinny again; hasn’t he got used to catching mice and rats by now? – sometimes accompanied by his sister/ girlfriend Skippy with thick angora tail. F. picks the ripe olives. He pickles around a pound in a little bucket with salted water in the kitchen and takes home some 2 kilos. When we talk a walk in the direction of Skoureika

to check the area where the bush fire was – already getting green – we pick the rest of the little peppers from the plants in G.'s yard and dry them inside our house on some paper towels.

It is with some heartache that we close up the house for the winter and fly back to the Netherlands. We'll be back in six months – it seems like eternity.